

# The Role of Supportive Relationships in Facilitating African American Males' Success in College

Terrell L. Strayhorn



*Drawing on Sanford's notions of challenge and support, coupled with Tinto's theory on retention, this quantitative investigation sought to measure the association between supportive relationships and success in college for a sample of Black men. Results suggest that supportive relationships are associated with higher levels of satisfaction but not academic achievement as measured by grades. Implications for future policy, practice, and research are discussed in the context of academic and student affairs.*

Research findings have consistently indicated that the educational outcomes of African American<sup>1</sup> students are not on par with those of their White and Asian counterparts (Carey, 2004; Chubb & Loveless, 2002; Fleming, 1984; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Grissmer & Associates, 1998; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan,

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Dr. Terrell Lamont Strayhorn is assistant professor of higher education and special assistant to the provost at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he also serves as adjunct assistant professor of sociology.

This research was supported by funds from the ACPA's Commission for Academic Affairs Administrators research grant program. Opinions reflect those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the granting agency.

1. The terms "African American" and "Black" are not used interchangeably in this article, as are the terms "minority" and "ethnically and culturally diverse."

Klebahov, & Crane, 1998; Strayhorn, 2008). Educational disparities are most pronounced among Black men who lag behind their White and Asian counterparts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and college entrance exams. Scholars have provided both anecdotal and empirical evidence of the precarious predicament of Black men throughout the educational pipeline (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Jackson, 2007; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Kunjufu, 1986; Lee, 1994; Majors & Billson, 1992; Roach, 2001; Strayhorn, McCall, & Jennings, 2006). For instance, while most racial/ethnic subgroups have seen significant progress in their postsecondary enrollment, there has been little to no progress in increasing participation rates among Black men over the last quarter of a century. Today, Black men represent the exact same proportion of all students enrolled in American colleges as they did in 1976. Of approximately 15 million undergraduate students in the United States, less than 5% are Black men (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Indeed, Black men face a number of difficult and, arguably, unique challenges that may inhibit their success in college (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Noguera, 2003). Black male youth often do not have access to or are discouraged from participating in college preparatory curricula and activities (Polite & Davis, 1999). For instance, Polite (1999) studied 115 Black males who enrolled at Metropolitan High School and found that teachers and counselors often fail to direct Black male youth to college prep opportunities such as advanced math courses. As a result, he found that not more than 1 out of 15 were actually prepared for college-level work. Also, parents of Black boys often lack a college education or the requisite knowledge to understand their role in supporting their son *to* and *through* college (Hrabowski et al., 1998).

Finally, Black men are often viewed as an at-risk population in education (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Moore, 2000) and tend to be described with words that have negative connotations such as uneducable, endangered, dysfunctional, dangerous, and lazy (Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Mincy, 1994; Parham & McDavis, 1987). Ascribing such qualities to Black men is troublesome and the problem is exacerbated by the fact that disparaging words can perpetuate negative stereotypes among educators (Bailey & Moore, 2004)

which, in turn, can become self-fulfilling and “self-threatening” to Black men (Steele, 1997, p. 614).

The consequences of such challenges are nontrivial. Without support, these challenges tend to compromise the academic achievement of Black men and often lead to dissatisfaction with college. Dissatisfaction is an important predictor of and precursor to leaving college (Bean, 1982; Tinto, 1993). This is severely problematic as national reports indicate that only 30% of all Black men who enter college persist and ultimately earn their degree within 6 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Therefore, challenges faced by Black men in college can undermine our efforts to increase student retention and attainment rates.

Moreover, disproportionate numbers of Black men earning a college degree has significant implications for the society and families in general in terms of future employment prospects (Carter & Wilson, 1993) and future earnings (Strayhorn, 2008). Thus, understanding the factors that influence the academic achievement and persistence of African American men in college is an important and timely research focus. The present study grew out of this context.

## Review of the Literature

For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to review the literature on factors that influence the success of African American males in higher education.

Comparatively few studies have examined the role that academic and nonacademic factors play in facilitating the success of Black men in college. Hamilton (2005) employed qualitative methods to study the achievement experiences of 12 African American men at multiple schools in Southern California. He found that several nonacademic or noncognitive (Sedlacek, 2004) variables were perceived to be instrumental to their success, including attachment to college, personal/emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and a strong support person.

Other studies yield findings that are consistent with Hamilton's (2005) conclusions (Harper, 2003; Strayhorn, McCall, & Jennings, 2006). For instance, Harper studied the experiences of 32 high-achieving

(i.e., grade point average > 3.0) Black men and discovered the benefits that accrue from active involvement in clubs and organizations. They reported that leadership in student organizations added value to their collegiate experience by enhancing their practical skills (e.g., time management) and offering various perks such as meeting dignitaries and key administrators. Taken together, the weight of evidence suggests that noncognitive factors play an important role in promoting Black males' success in college.

While the existing literature is useful, it may obscure important nuances in the story. First, the mass of studies follows a structuralist argument in which African Americans are treated as a monolithic entity (Fleming, 1984). Second, the literature consists of a number of qualitative studies (Berry, 2005; Bonner, 2001; Carter, 2005; Hamilton, 2005; Harper, 2003) but relatively few of these findings are well-documented or supported by empirical quantitative evidence. The few studies that have explored the impact of noncognitive variables on student success combine Black men and women (Fleming); compare students of color to Whites (Arbona & Novy, 1990); or yield inconsistent results (Arbona & Novy; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). This study seeks to add a missing component to the student success literature base by applying quantitative methods to a relatively large sample of Black men to test the importance of supportive relationships on grade point average and satisfaction with college as correlates of retention.

## Guiding Frameworks

Sanford's (1966) notions of *challenge* and *support* served as the conceptual framework for this investigation. In college environments, challenge refers to encounters with new situations, people whose background differs from one's own, and ideas that cause cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) or the stimulus for growth and development (Creamer & Associates, 1990). Support, on the other hand, refers to aspects of the human and material environment that provide students with security, sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and information needed to succeed (Rogers, 1961). Taken together, Sanford's explanation posits that academic and social development is a function of challenges (in the environment) balanced by an appropriate level of support. Such support often is found through meaningful relation-

ships with others on campus, including one's peers, faculty members, and staff persons.

To add to Sanford's explanation of student outcomes, the present study was grounded in Tinto's (1993) interactionist theory of college student departure. This theoretical framework provided "a set of inter-related constructs, definitions, and propositions . . . specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon" (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 9). In other words, Tinto postulated that the extent and magnitude of a student's academic and social integration experiences are important predictors of their satisfaction with college (Bean, 1980) which, in turn, influences their decision to persist in college. Thus, theoretically speaking, students who engage in educationally purposeful activities and report positive, frequent supportive interactions with others are more likely to succeed in college. This study was designed to test this hypothesis for African American males.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to measure the relationship between academic achievement (as measured by college grades), satisfaction with college, and students' supportive relationships with major socializing agents on campus including peers, faculty, and staff. Three research questions guided the present analysis:

- (a) What is the relationship between supportive relationships and academic achievement in college for Black men?
- (b) What is the relationship between supportive relationships and satisfaction with college for Black men?
- (c) What is the relationship between supportive relationships and satisfaction with college for Black men, controlling for differences in background (i.e., age, marital status, classification, parent's education, aspirations) and college grades?

## Method

This study employed an ex post facto survey design to study the relationship between supportive relationships and African American males' academic achievement and satisfaction with college using a relatively large sample of men who participated in the 2004 administration of the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* (CSEQ) (Pace, 1984). This analysis is part of a larger, ongoing research program focusing on the experiences of African Americans in college. While the larger project consists of both quantitative and qualitative data, this report presents information from the survey analysis only.

### Instrumentation

The CSEQ consists of 191 items designed to elicit information about the quality and quantity of students' experiences in the collegiate environment. The CSEQ was developed based on the notion that "the more effort students expend in using the resources and opportunities an institution provides for their learning and development, the more they benefit" (Gonyea, Kish, Kuh, Muthiah, & Thomas, 2003, p. 14). At present, more than 500 colleges and universities use the national questionnaire.

### Sample

A nationally representative random sample of undergraduate students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds ( $N = 8,000$ ) was drawn from the population of respondents to the CSEQ. For the purposes of this analysis, I restricted the sample to include African American men only ( $n = 231$ ). Nearly 52% of the sample was 19 years or younger; 35% of the sample was 20–23 years. An overwhelming majority was single (93%). Finally, the sample consisted of a large number of first-year students (51%), 13% sophomores, 20% juniors, and 15% seniors.

### Measures

The dependent variables used in this study were calculated using items from the CSEQ. First, academic achievement was measured by the respondent's grades in college. Responses ranged from 1 ("C, C-,

or lower”) to 5 (“A”). Second, satisfaction with college was a composite variable estimating the degree to which students’ college experiences matched their expectations. Student satisfaction reflects “the favorability of a students’ subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education” (Elliott & Shim, 2002, p. 198). Following recommendations provided by Gonyea et al. (2003), I calculated a composite variable using two items from the college environment scale of the CSEQ ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ). An example of one item is, “If you had it to do over again, would you attend the same institution?” Responses to each item were placed on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (“no, definitely”) to 4 (“yes, definitely”). Added together, the composite variable ranged from 2 to 8 with higher scores indicating higher levels of satisfaction with college. This procedure is consistent with suggestions offered by Pace (1984) and Gonyea et al. for assessing student satisfaction in college using the questionnaire.

The main independent variable was operationalized using 14 items from the survey. Items measured the availability of a strong support person in various situations and circumstances (Sedlacek, 2004). An example of one item is, *Talked with a faculty member or staff member about personal concerns*. Response options for this single item ranged from 1 (“never”) to 4 (“very often”). To test the underlying structure of these 14 items that were purported to be related to each other, I conducted factor analytic tests. Results of a principal components factor analysis, with varimax rotation, revealed that items loaded on a single factor, which accounted for approximately 46% of the inter-item variance. Thus, the items were combined to create a single composite variable ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) ranging from 14 (“never any support”) to 56 (“very often, a lot of support”). Table 1 presents the model’s specification.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to calculate means and standard deviations for all independent and dependent variables included in the analysis. Second, ordinary least squares regression tests were employed to measure the simultaneous relationship between “supportive relationships,” academic achievement, and satisfaction with college among African American men. Finally, hierarchical linear regression tests were conducted to test whether statistically significant linkages between sup-

**Table 1**  
**Model Specification**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Code key</b>
Outcome	Satisfaction*	2 = not at all satisfied 8 = highly satisfied
	College grades	1 = C, C-, or lower 2 = B-, C+ 3 = B 4 = A-, B+ 5 = A
Predictor	Supportive relationships*	14 = never, no support 56 = very often, lots of support

\* Code key shows maximum range of scores for variable (e.g., satisfaction ranged 2 to 8).

portive relationships and satisfaction with college persist in the face of statistical controls. By accounting for potentially confounding influences, I adjust the estimates of effects downward, thereby increasing my ability to isolate the true, net effect. The next section presents results from the final analysis.

## Results

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 2. Exploratory correlation analyses (not shown here) reveal a number of important linkages. For instance, the *supportive relationships* variable was positively related to satisfaction with college ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ). Grades were positively correlated with satisfaction with college ( $r = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ). These estimates justify the use of regression to measure the magnitude and

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	1.74	1.00
Marital status	1.11	0.48
Classification	2.02	1.19
College grades	2.76	1.13
Parent's education	0.52	0.50
Aspirations	0.80	0.40
Satisfaction with college	5.90	1.60
Supportive relationships	34.03	8.74

direction of these associations simultaneously. That is, regression analysis permits analysts “to estimate coefficients showing how changes in an independent variable affect the dependent variable” (Toutkoushian, 2005, p. 89).

Multiple regression procedures were employed to measure the relationship between the supportive relationships index and respondent's grades and satisfaction in college. Ordinary least squares regressions suggest a statistically significant linkage between supportive relationships and *satisfaction* with college for Black men,  $F(1,213) = 14.96$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R = 0.26$ ,  $R^2 = 0.07$ . No statistically significant association was uncovered between supportive relationships and grades; therefore, my discussion will focus almost exclusively on findings with respect to satisfaction. Regression results are summarized in Table 3.

Hierarchical linear regression tests were employed to measure the relationship between the supportive relationships index and satisfaction with college, controlling for an extensive array of potentially intervening variables. Results suggest a statistically significant association

**Table 3**  
**Regression Results for Predicting Satisfaction from Supportive Relationships**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>
Constant	4.26	0.44		9.75
SR	0.05	0.01	0.26	3.87*

*Note.* SR = supportive relationships

\*  $p < 0.01$

between supportive relationships and satisfaction with college for Black men, controlling for an array of intervening variables,  $F(7,197) = 5.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R = 0.40$ ,  $R^2 = 0.16$ . That is, the linear combination of factors (including a set of statistical controls for grades and background factors) account for approximately 16% of the variance in satisfaction with college for Black men. Having frequent and supportive relationships with others on campus adds significantly to the power of the model to explain Black males' satisfaction with college ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.06$ ); the supportive relationship variable alone accounts for approximately 6% of the total variance explained. Significant predictors included: marital status (approached significance), grades, and supportive relationships. Table 4 presents a summary of the hierarchical regression results.

Finally, given the study's design, I conducted follow-up tests to check for multicollinearity. Multicollinearity exists when two or more independent variables are highly correlated or when "one independent variable is a near linear combination of other independent variables" (Keith, 2006, p. 1999). This makes it difficult if not impossible to determine direct effects on the dependent variable. Results suggest that collinearity is not a problem for this investigation as all tolerance values approach "1" indicating complete independence (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to measure the relationship between academic achievement (as measured by college grades), satisfaction

**Table 4**  
**Regression Results for Predicting Satisfaction from Supportive Relationships,**  
**Controlling for Background Variables and College Grades**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>
Constant	3.19	0.57	
Age	0.06	0.16	0.04
Marital status	0.98	0.52	0.15
Classification	-0.15	0.12	-0.11
Grades	0.30	0.10	0.21
Parental ed.	0.27	0.22	0.09
Aspirations	0.36	0.27	0.09
SR	0.05	0.01	0.26

*Note.* Parental ed. = parental education. SR = supportive relationship;  
 \* $p < 0.06$

with college, and students' supportive relationships with major socializing agents on campus including peers, faculty, and staff. Using data drawn from the CSEQ, multiple statistical tests were used to uncover the relationship between supportive relationships and satisfaction with college for African American men. In addition, hierarchical linear regression procedures were used to test the extent to which the linkage between supportive relationships and satisfaction persists in the presence of controls for differences in age, grades, aspirations, and parent's level of education, to name a few. Findings provide empirical evidence to advance scholarly inquiry about Black men in college, and they augment and shift our collective understanding of the various supports that can powerfully impact the success of Black male collegians.

That having a strong support person(s) was positively related with satisfaction in college for Black men has theoretical significance. That is, this finding generally coincides with previous theoretical arguments for an appropriate level of support to match the challenges faced by students in college (Sanford, 1966). Results from the present study provide empirical support for the application of Sanford's concepts to

Black male collegians. Additionally, the impact of strong supportive relationships—individuals upon whom Black men rely for support and advice—is grounded in the social integration literature from college student retention theory (Tinto, 1993). Tinto explained that retention is a function of the degree to which a student becomes academically and socially integrated or “tied” to campus life. Supportive relationships may facilitate students’ social adjustment to college and enhance their sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) which, in turn, increases the likelihood of retention.

This is an important finding for at least one other reason. Results of this analysis may point to a potential source that can be leveraged in terms of educational policy and practice. Based on the results of this study, any opportunity that provides students a chance to establish important relationships with major socializing agents is potentially powerful in terms of altering student outcomes. For instance, precollege, summer bridge, and federal TRIO programs may prove useful in increasing the satisfaction levels of Black men in college as they are superior to other outreach strategies in their ability to facilitate meaningful, lasting relationships between students and members of the campus community. Indeed, precollege bridge programs have been shown to assist minority students in navigating their way *to* and *through* postsecondary education (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997; Gladieux & Swail, 1999). It may be that relationships formed with faculty and peers during the program are nurtured and sustained while in college; such relationships then provide the social capital needed to become affiliated with the university community, and positive affiliation breeds satisfaction. Therefore, precollege programs have the potential to make an important contribution to the improvement of postsecondary success rates among Black men.

The results of this study provide substantial support for scholars who have argued for the central importance of meaningful relationships (e.g., with peers, faculty, etc.) in shaping the nature and direction of developmental outcomes. This study shows that having supportive relationships with faculty and peers is associated with higher satisfaction levels for Black men in college. Given prior conclusions drawn from White and mixed-race samples, these findings generally simplify those found in earlier research (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004;

Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). In essence, I found that what works well for *others* (e.g., White students) can also work well for Black men.

However, this conclusion must be tempered by a number of important caveats. First, it is important to note that a number of studies have shown that Black men (especially those who attend predominantly White institutions) face significant obstacles when trying to establish meaningful relationships with others on campus. Negative stereotypes about Black men (e.g., dangerous, uneducable) often impede their ability to find mentors, advisors, and confidants. More efforts are needed to remove these harmful perceptions and to build campus environments that engender Black male success. Diversity workshops, faculty diversity training, cross-race interactions (Bennett, 2006), and self-reflexive activities (e.g., journals, dialogue) that prompt individuals to question their unexamined assumptions about others may be useful in removing or buffering the effects of stereotypes. Also, predominantly White institutions are encouraged to formulate and implement aggressive faculty hiring policies to increase the number of Black and historically underrepresented professors on campus.

Second, some sociological research focuses on inequalities in education and the persistence of racism and discrimination in American colleges and universities. Social psychologists and others have found that Black students report feeling isolated and alienated on campus and turn to others for support (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Tatum, 1997). Others posit that Black students experience such feelings because of the lack of a critical mass; that is, a sufficient pool of Black faculty and students from which to draw potential role models. So while this study stresses the importance of supportive relationships to the success of Black male collegians, it says little about the challenges they face in establishing such relationships. This issue may be studied in future research.

Results from this study show that having supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers on campus is associated with higher levels of satisfaction with college for Black men, despite differences in age, marital status, year in college, and grades. That means, with “all things equal” on age, marital status, and parent’s level of education, for example, an African American male who reports frequent, positive relation-

ships with individuals on campus has a higher level of satisfaction with college on average. That is, the predicted level of satisfaction with college for Black men with infrequent and generally unresponsive relationships is approximately 3.24; however, the predicted score for Black men with frequent, supportive relationships is approximately 5.99. These calculations illustrate the impact that supportive relationships can have on student satisfaction for Black male collegians.

In summary, similar to previous researchers (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978), I found that supportive relationships are positively associated with educational outcomes, namely satisfaction. However, my work relates to Black men exclusively while previous studies have focused largely on White students or samples that include members of all racial/ethnic backgrounds. Results suggest that positive, supportive relationships can have a compensatory effect on ethnically and culturally diverse students whose background may be different from the dominant campus milieu. Still other questions linger; this study focused on Black men and did not explore the impact of campus racial composition (e.g., Flowers, 2003). Future research might employ quantitative or qualitative methods to explore the role of supportive relationships on success indicators such as educational aspirations, grades, retention year-to-year, and degree attainment for other minority students including Asian Americans, Latino males, and students from low-income families who attend predominantly White, historically Black, or Hispanic-serving institutions.

This study explored the differences in satisfaction between students who had positive, frequent relationships with others on campus and those who did not have such relationships. Future studies might examine the differential impact of peer relationships versus faculty relationships. Which is “more influential” in terms of student satisfaction with college? Such a study would expand the information available about Black males in college and its findings may hold promise in terms of future policy and educational practice.

The potential applications of this research to practice are many. The study’s findings should be of particular interest to constituencies who have a vested interest in improving student satisfaction with college or raising retention rates such as directors of student success centers and

enrollment management professionals. This research identified “supportive relationships” as an area for possible intervention. Thus, increased efforts to design and implement faculty-student mentoring programs, peer-mentoring programs, and living-learning communities (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003) that bring students in contact with faculty and staff are likely to reap rich dividends in terms of Black men’s success and their eventual persistence to earn a degree.

Academic advisors may benefit from these findings. The study provided data about the effect of supportive relationships on Black males’ satisfaction with college. Findings suggest that those Black men who reported having frequent and varied supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers were more likely than other Black males to be highly satisfied with college. Advisors may consider this finding when trying to understand the role that they play in facilitating the success of Black men. For some Black men, having strong support of an advisor (e.g., encouragement, advice) can offset the socioeconomic disadvantages (e.g., inadequate academic preparation for college, lack of rigorous courses in high school) that may threaten their odds for success in college. In one of my recent studies, a low-income, first-generation, African American male said it best: “My academic advisor is all I’ve got—she’s my advisor, my mentor, my guide, my friend.”

Housing professionals also may benefit from the results of this study. The results of this analysis stress the importance of frequent, supportive relationships to Black males’ satisfaction with college. Housing staff might use these results to examine the extent to which current housing configurations (e.g., residence halls, residential colleges, living-learning communities) encourage deep peer-to-peer or faculty-student interactions. Housing configurations may be re-engineered to foster frequent, supportive relationships amongst students and faculty. For instance, housing officers might create “scholar in-residence” programs that consist of full-time faculty members living in residence halls on campus and engaging students in educationally purposeful activities such as book/journal clubs, service learning projects, or experimental research. In exchange for their investment of time and energy, faculty may receive on-campus housing at no cost to them and a small budget or stipend. While it may be difficult for senior faculty to consider this innovation, junior faculty and new hires might find

this a suitable arrangement for the first few years of their career. In the end, both faculty and students benefit.

Finally, the study was significant in terms of future theory. Earlier in this paper, I outlined how several conclusions relate to Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support as well as Tinto's (1993) college student retention theory. Beyond this, the present study offered insight into the role of supportive relationships for Black men while they are in college. These data might be used to expand existing college impact theory or build upon notions from socialization theory that explain the process through which individuals become part of a group, community, or organization (Van Maanen, 1983; Weidman, 1989). Those interested in studying how both faculty and students benefit from supportive relationships might adopt social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) in future work as it posits that individuals form relationships with those who provide valued resources; in exchange for resources, individuals reciprocate with tangible and intangible benefits.

## Conclusions

The complexity of the issues surrounding Black male success in college defies solutions of a singular nature. In other words, merely increasing the number of supportive relationships available to Black men is unlikely to yield substantial gains in terms of their enrollment, retention, and eventual graduation. A multifaceted institutional response that brings together professionals from academic and student affairs represents the optimal condition for effective intervention. For instance, collaborations across the historical divide between academic and student affairs can be designed to take into account the academic (e.g., tutoring, supplemental instruction) and social (e.g., clubs and organizations) supports shown to be critical to students' persistence. That such work should occur in the space between academic and student affairs is further justified by the fact that even the causes and consequences of student attrition have both academic and social roots (Tinto, 1993). Thus, understanding factors that influence Black males' satisfaction can assist us in structuring collegiate environments and learning opportunities that engender student success.

It is important to note that supportive relationships were not statistically associated with academic achievement in college, as measured by college grades. These findings may point to the fact that other variables influence the academic achievement of Black men in college. For instance, Cuyjet (1997) found that Black women spent more time studying than Black male collegians. Other studies at the K-12 level have emphasized the importance of time on task (Good & Beckerman, 1978) and opportunity to learn (OTL) a skill or subject. Future research might explore this issue in-depth and study the impact of study time, time on task, OTL, or noncognitive variables (e.g., self-efficacy) on Black males' academic achievement in college.

There are a few limitations of this study. First, one of the dependent variables is a complex abstraction (satisfaction with college), which is difficult to measure using a single item. Therefore, I used two items to create a more suitable proxy for satisfaction with college. Precedent for using such items was set in previous studies (De La Rosa, 2002; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Still, the resulting composite may only partially reflect that complexity. To the extent that this is true, the present study's findings are limited and should be replicated using additional items to estimate students' satisfaction overall.

Second, this study was largely based on self-report data. While self-reports are open to challenges about construct validity, growing evidence shows that self-reported measures are reasonable proxies for standardized measures (Anaya, 1999; Pike, 1996). Future studies might be designed to test for differences between self-report data and standardized measures using samples of Black men. Despite these limits, this study represents an important contribution to our literature. It extends our understanding about the way(s) in which nonacademic variables, such as supportive relationships, facilitate African American males' satisfaction with college and may provide clues to effective strategies for improving their enrollment, retention, and success.

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