The Transition Experiences of African American Males Who Participate in Dual Enrollment

Kenderek Harris

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THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO PARTICIPATE IN DUAL ENROLLMENT

by

Kenderek D. Harris

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Higher and Adult Education

The University of Memphis

May 2023
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing wife, Taureaun Harris, to my son Grayson Harris, my late mother Deborah Lynn Harris, and my grandmothers Hilda Redd, Carrie Harris, and Elnora Hasberry. This dissertation is also dedicated to the entire Harris Family!
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my Heavenly Father God! Thank you for all that you’ve done for me. Thank you for aligning my steps throughout this journey.

I would also like to thank all members of my dissertation committee who were critical to my success. This research would not have been possible without my advisor and committee chair, Eric Platt. I am grateful for your guidance, wisdom, and openness throughout this process. Thank you to Dr. Happel-Parkins, Dr. Steven Nelson, and Dr. Eric Bailey. I am grateful to you for your reading recommendations, assistance regarding the IRB process, and your general support in getting this body of work across the finish line.

I want to thank my amazing wife Taury Harris. I could not have made it through this program without you. During COVID and with a toddler running around, you provided encouragement and support which pushed me to continue throughout this doctoral program. Thank you for your patience through the long nights over these last three years. You are my rock, my best friend and most importantly, I love you!

I want to thank the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and the State of Tennessee. As an employee, I had the pleasure of utilizing fee waivers through the Educational Assistance program. Much appreciation is owed to the many professors and student affairs professionals who supported me as a first-generation student. This support ultimately inspired me to enter the field of student affairs as well as to pursue advanced degrees. I also want to thank my fraternity brothers, friends, and colleagues who have served as sources of support during this journey.
Abstract

Dual enrollment continues to expand nationally, allowing high school students the opportunity to enroll simultaneously in college courses while earning credits toward graduation requirements. Despite the positive outcomes of dual enrollment, African American males remain underrepresented and less likely to participate. The problem addressed in this study involved the need to give African American males a voice to elucidate their experiences as they completed dual enrollment coursework. This case study aimed to understand the experiences of African American male students that participated in dual enrollment and transitioned to college upon graduation. The study was guided by two research questions: 1) What are the lived experiences of African American male students who participated in a dual enrollment program? 2) How do African American males who participated in dual enrollment describe their transition to college? This study employed Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory to explore the transition experiences of African American males.

Data collection occurred through interviews, a document review, and demographic surveys. Participants reported an overall positive dual enrollment experience. Findings from this study suggest that despite experiencing an unfamiliar environment, participants were portrayed resiliency and completed their dual enrollment coursework, and then seamlessly transitioned to college. This study contributes to the limited literature on African American males participating in dual enrollment. Future research is needed to understand more African American males participating in dual enrollment who transition to a four-year institution upon graduation. 

Keywords: African American males, dual enrollment, transition, community colleges, experiences
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Chapter 1

Introduction

“I am convinced that in large part it must be me, a professional African American male, who takes action to help solve the educational crisis facing young African American males.”

As a young African American male professional in higher education, I felt compelled to use my influence to positively affect African American males to pursue education beyond high school. I started my professional career as a college recruiter who had the opportunity to inspire hundreds of young students by influencing them to attend college. Because I am an African American male who graduated high school underprepared for college and then navigated the university system, it is vital to highlight this population's brilliance and resilience while pushing for change that can impact future generations. Therefore, I must take the lead as a professional in higher education by contributing to the gap in the literature regarding African American males in higher education.

Today, we live in a world where a high school diploma is not enough. The Drive to 55 Alliance (2018) estimates that jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or credential within the workforce by 2025. Because education plays such a significant role in the economic outlook of an individual (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010), investment in postsecondary education will continue to pose several benefits. As a result, it is imperative for both colleges and school systems to effectively collaborate by establishing pathways that offer early postsecondary opportunities in an effort to increase postsecondary credential attainment.

Research shows that early postsecondary opportunities increase the probability that high school students transition successfully to the postsecondary level after graduation (An, 2013). An
example involves dual enrollment, which offers high school students the opportunity to simultaneously earn high school and college credit while being exposed to the rigor of college (An, 2013). Nationally, dual enrollment programs have grown in popularity as legislation emphasizes college readiness. As the college population continues to grow in the United States, so have dual enrollment programs nationwide. However, African American males remain underrepresented in dual enrollment programs. On a national level, less than five percent of African American males earned dual enrollment credit compared to their white counterparts represented 11 percent (Dalton, Ingels, & Fritch, 2015). As a result, strategic coordination and recruitment into dual enrollment programs have the potential to create a successful pipeline of African American male high school students who participate in college courses while in high school, graduate from high school, and matriculate into higher education (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009; Bush & Bush, 2013).

Although attending a postsecondary institution is deemed a noteworthy accomplishment, for many African American male students, the transition is not as routine as assumed (Rall, 2016). The most significant leak in the pipeline from high school to higher education for African American males involves the transition after graduation due to the unfamiliar process (Jones, 2001; Hairston, 2013). These steps can be overwhelmingly difficult to understand, resulting in a missed attempt to enroll in college. More specifically, this unfamiliar process significantly affects African American males (Baber, 2014), which could contribute to low enrollment numbers nationwide. However, intentional implementation of dual enrollment could serve as an opportunity to expose and mitigate some of the challenges faced by African American male students.
Despite stagnant dual enrollment growth in Tennessee, a small percentage of African American males enrolled in dual enrollment programs throughout the state. There is also an inherent link between African American male enrollment and graduation rates (Viesca, Bianco, & Leech, 2013). As a result, it is essential to increase access to dual enrollment coursework for African American male students. Although there are studies that focus quantitatively on dual enrollment, there are very few qualitative studies that obtain student experiences. In addition, fewer studies focus solely on African American males participating in dual enrollment programs. Furthermore, there is a lack of deep qualitative research on the transition experience of African American male students. Consequently, there was a need for qualitative research to give African American males a voice to provide their perspective, which could lead to the further development of strategies that increase participation in dual enrollment and create a seamless transition into postsecondary.

**Theoretical Context**

Through the application of the theoretical frameworks of Schlossberg’s (1989) Transition Model and Bush and Bush’s (2013) African American Male Theory (AAMT), this study explored the lived experiences of African American males who participated in dual enrollment as they transitioned from high school to college. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory contextualizes the experience of individuals and how they move through and adapt to transitions within their lives (Schlossberg, 1981). Many factors influence the transition into higher education for African American male students. For that reason, African American Male Theory was used to focus on the experiences of the African American male population. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory fits seamlessly into African American Male Theory, which looks at the aspects of the individual as they transition through environmental factors that may contribute to an outcome.
Schlossberg’s Theory of Transition

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory provides an in-depth method for exploring the transition process of students. Schlossberg (1989) defines a transition as any event or nonevent that results in a changed relationship, routines, assumptions, and roles. Key elements of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory include: (1) the type of change, whether unanticipated or a nonevent; (2) the transition process of moving in, moving through, and moving out of the transition and (3) coping factors, including the 4 S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981; Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011).

Existing transition literature focuses primarily on the traditional student population transitioning from high school to college. However, there is a very limited amount of information specific to the experiences of African American male students as they transition to life beyond high school. This transition from high school to college for African American male students can be an unfamiliar and overwhelming experience due to the lack of knowledge and resources necessary to cope (Rall, 2013). As a result, this theory can be intentionally applied in a college context to understand the experience of transitioning from high school to college. For example, an ideal scenario entails a student graduating from high school, enrolling in college, and graduating from a postsecondary institution. However, many students have a significant enrollment drop-off between high school graduation and the first year of college. The Schlossberg model allows higher education staff to understand how to meet the needs of students as they transition effectively. Barclay (2017) posits that students constantly experience transitions, beginning with graduation, enrolling in college, and entering the workforce.

Schlossberg’s transition theory model identifies three types of transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. Anticipated transitions include any event that a student views as
forthcoming. In terms of this study, anticipated events would involve an African American male student graduating from high school. *Unanticipated* are any events that might have caught the student off-guard. An example of an unanticipated transition would include a student being told that they were not awarded a Pell Grant due to mistakes made on the FAFSA application, which prolongs the admissions process. Lastly, a *non-event* is any event that a student initially planned for but did not transpire. For instance, instead of the aforementioned Pell Grant, a student might take out a loan due to a lack of funds when attending a postsecondary institution.

Furthermore, Schlossberg’s theory highlights the factors that influence transitions, known as the “4 S’s system”: situation, self, support, and strategies. Schlossberg et al. (1995) acknowledge that a person’s “assets and liabilities” can determine how to cope with a transition. Additionally, each transition is a unique experience contingent upon an individual’s response. To cope well with an experience, the individual must address the 4 S’s by asking evaluative and analytical questions. Chickering and Schlossberg (1998) provided further details by describing the 4 S’s process as “taking stock,” which involves the individual examining resources about their situation.

Despite the specific transitional experience, all individuals deal with their transitions differently using these factors. Although Schlossberg’s model has not been widely used to frame empirical work on the student’s experience from high school to college, this could potentially identify the experiences needed to push to increase the enrollment of African American male students.

**African American Male Theory**

African American Male Theory is incorporated into the framework to understand the African American male population. AAMT was developed and introduced by Bush and Bush
(2013) to assist practitioners with understanding African American boys and men. The fundamental foundation of the AAMT’s design is “to articulate the position and trajectory of African American boys and men in society” (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 6). The development of this framework focuses on the experiences, environments, structures, and systems that affect and shape African American males. For the purpose of this study, the first tenant of AAMT is utilized to study African American males as they transition from high school to college. The first tenant draws from the foundation of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory of Development (1979) to explain the environmental factors that impact African American men. Bronfenbrenner (1979) divided a person’s environment into five main systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. AAMT expands Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system by dividing the microsystem into the inner and outer microsystem.

This study focused on the combination of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory to understand African American males' perceptions and environmental factors as they transition from high school to college. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory presents a framework that explains how an individual experiences a transition while African American Male Theory intentionally highlights the experiences and environments of African American males within education. Within the ecological system, several factors can inherently affect a student’s transition experience. As a result, semi-structured interview questions were developed from the various ecological systems to understand the factors that may influence African American male students as they participate in dual enrollment.

In addition, Schlossberg’s 4S Coping Model fits well into AAMT’s ecological systems because it explores how an individual copes with a transition. While AAMT highlights internal
and environmental factors specific to African American males, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory looks internally at the individual. The 4 S’s (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategy) fall under both the inner and outer microsystems. A conceptual model was adopted and further developed to provide a helpful visual for this research study.

**Statement of the Problem**

Dual enrollment has expanded nationally, allowing students to enroll simultaneously while earning credits toward graduation requirements and college (Karp et al., 2007). Dual enrollment programs present several benefits to students, including enhancing students’ likelihood of graduating from high school and enrolling in college and strengthening students’ college readiness skills to provide early exposure to the academic rigors of college (An, 2013). These well-documented benefits of dual enrollment programs can be applied to African American male students to improve the transition experience into college further. Despite the positive outcomes of dual enrollment, African American males remain underrepresented and less likely to participate. Dalton, Ingels, and Fritch (2015) reported that five percent of African American students earned dual enrollment credit while in high school compared to 12% of white students. Despite the low dual enrollment numbers, there are success stories of African American males who have completed dual enrollment and transitioned into a postsecondary institution. Therefore, the problem addressed by this study was a need for researchers to give African American males a voice to elucidate their experiences as they completed and obtained dual enrollment credit while also transitioning to postsecondary upon graduation. Recognizing the environmental experiences of African American male students participating in dual enrollment could result in two-fold benefits. For example, results may encourage more African American males to participate in dual enrollment, leading to increased enrollment numbers, which could
lead to increased matriculation of students. Also, results can assist postsecondary institutions with practical solutions that improve support systems for African American male students.

Research has traditionally discussed the disparities of African American males from a deficit model. However, this study will focus on the successes of students. Although there is a robust body of literature on the impact of dual enrollment programs (Bailey et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 2012; An 2013), there is scant research about the experiences of African American male students who participated in dual enrollment. Additionally, there is a lack of research studies that utilize a transition theory of students as they move from high school to college. As a result, having a better understanding of the transition experience of students will allow for the creation and implementation of practical solutions on both sides of the spectrum, K-12 and postsecondary.

**Purpose Statement**

This qualitative case study aimed to understand how the experiences of African American male students who participate in dual enrollment improve their transition from high school to college. African American males have a unique voice and perspective to share about their experiences regarding the impact of dual enrollment. Utilizing African American Male Theory and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, I interviewed six African American male students who lived in a large metropolitan city in the midsouth to learn about their experiences as they completed high school and transitioned into a postsecondary institution. Understanding these factors from the student’s perspective could help institutions improve their recruitment efforts and retention of African American male students. This study also aimed to understand the impact that early postsecondary opportunities like dual enrollment have on the transition experiences of African American male students. This population is both underserved and underrepresented in
dual enrollment at the postsecondary level. Although access has improved and increased enrollment, African American males remain stagnant in enrollment and educational attainment.

A recent report by Grubb, Scott, and Good (2017) revealed that although Tennessee has a 20% African American population, only 9% of individuals take advantage of dual enrollment coursework. This report did not capture the specific percentages of African American males versus African American females. There has been minimal exploration into the experiences of African American male students through the lens of African American male theory. In addition, Schlossberg’s transition model was used to understand students transitioning between high school and college. Research by Correa and Kouzekanani (2011) reveal that the exposure students received from participating in dual enrollment led to an easier transition into college life.

**Research Questions**

Guided by a theoretical framework and extensive literature review, the research questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American male students who participated in a dual enrollment program?
2. How do African American males who participated in dual enrollment describe their transition to college?
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory Enrollment in College

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: This qualitative case study aims to understand how the experiences of African American male students who participate in dual enrollment improve their transition from high school to college.

Type of Change
- Anticipated
- Unanticipated
- Nonevent

Transition Process
- Moving In
- Moving Through
- Moving Out

Coping Factors 4 S’s
- Situation
- Self
- Support
- Strategy

Ecological Systems Model for African American Male Theory

Significance of the Study

Although a considerable body of literature demonstrates the advantages of dual enrollment (Andrews, 2000; Marshall & Andrew, 2002; Hoffman, 2005), the literature regarding the transition outcomes of participants in dual enrollment programs is unfortunately sparse (Orr, 2002). In addition, the research within this study identifies a gap in the literature that focuses on the perspectives of African American males who participate in dual enrollment and their transition experiences. This case study is significant because very little qualitative data explicitly involves African American male students enrolled in dual enrollment programs. Due to this lack of research, this study will contribute to the body of literature that focuses on the academic and postsecondary transition outcomes of participants in dual enrollment programs while also adding the experiences and perspectives of African American male students. The lived experiences of dual enrollment students will provide insights into how participation in dual enrollment may influence the transition and their decision to enroll in a postsecondary institution.

This study also uses the lens of African American male theory (Bush & Bush, 2013) to take an alternative approach by focusing on an anti-deficit framework derived from Harper (2012). In contrast to the deficit approach, which highlights the failures of African American students, an anti-deficit approach focuses on success. The study will benefit future African American male students participating in these programs and increase student participation. Findings from this research may inform administrators at postsecondary institutions on how to create specific dual enrollment programs that support African American male students, leading to a seamless transition into college. Furthermore, strengthening dual enrollment could serve as an opportunity to enhance partnerships between K-12, postsecondary institutions, and the community by creating a more robust pipeline to college. Policymakers may understand how
education policies affect student experiences and increase the promotion and implementation of dual enrollment.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, I assumed that each participant would be truthful in the responses provided during the communication regarding their experience with dual enrollment. I also assumed that participants could describe their situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg’s 4 S’s model. In addition, I assumed that the information gathered during participant interviews was accurate and forthcoming.

This study applied a constructivist worldview as a practical approach to qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Utilizing this worldview helped to create this case study design. Creswell (2014) concludes that a case study describes the lived experiences of individuals about the phenomenon as described by participants. This case study intends to understand participants’ lived experiences as they recall significant past events while attending college. For this study, the assumptions are that the participants were able and willing to describe their dual enrollment experiences and experiences prior to enrollment.

Limitations

This qualitative study aimed to understand better how dual enrollment affects the transition of African American male students. A case study approach allowed the transition experiences of each participant to emerge from the research through a small sample size. Consequently, a small sample size could be considered a study limitation. The scope of this study is limited to students who participated in dual enrollment. Because the individuals are from one institution, most of whom reside in a specific city, these findings may not be generalizable to
the overall African American student population. Another limitation involved the lack of available resources due to the scarcity of prior research on African American male students’ experiences with dual enrollment.

### Delimitations

Creswell (2014) defined delimitations as factors that address narrowing the study in scope. The study is narrowed drastically due to several factors:

- The participants only included African American males
- The participants enrolled as dual enrollment students at a selected postsecondary institution

### Definition of Key Terms

**Access:** The accessibility of higher education, and the ability to gain admittance, especially for minority students and students of low socioeconomic status.

**Transition:** Any personally perceived event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles of the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

**Nonevents:** Expected transitions that do not occur. There are four distinctions of nonevents, personal (related to individual aspiration), ripple (felt due to the nonevent of someone else), resultant (caused by events), or delayed (remained anticipation of an expected event yet to occur) (Schlossberg, 1989).

**Unanticipated Transition:** A transition that is unexpected and often sudden (Schlossberg, 1981).

**Postsecondary institution:** A postsecondary institution was defined as an accredited four-year college, university, or two-year community college (Jenkins, 2008).
African American: Defined as people with ancestry from Sub-Saharan Africa who are residents or citizens of the United States. (Livingston, Pierce, & Gollop-Brown, 2013).

Anticipated Transition: Transitions that are predictable or calculated.

Dual enrollment: Students that are concurrently enrolled and receive credit in both high school and college (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009).

Nonevents: Initially expected transitions that do not occur (Schlossberg, 1989).

Postsecondary Institution: An accredited four-year college, university, or two-year community college or technical college.

Transition: Any personally perceived event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles of the individual (Schlossberg, 1989).

Unanticipated Transition: A transition that is unexpected and often sudden (Schlossberg, 1989).

Summary

Chapter one provided the background, context, problem statement, purpose, research questions, and significance of the study. The problem statement highlighted the disproportionality of dual enrollment between Black males and all other racial and ethnic categories of students in K-12 and higher education in the U.S. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of African American male students and the effect that participating in dual enrollment has on the student transitioning from high school to postsecondary. Chapter one also introduced the theoretical frameworks and definitions of key terms used throughout the study.

The theoretical framework used in this study is from Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, developed by Nancy Schlossberg, and African American male theory (AAMT), developed by
Lawson V. Bush and Edward C. Bush. This theory encompasses six tenets that allow users to specifically study African American males and make sense of their experiences. The overarching research question for the study was to inquire about African American males’ experiences as they participated in dual enrollment before transitioning to college. Chapter two will provide a comprehensive review of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory and provide examples of each theory practiced in research. It will also provide a review of literature related to dual enrollment in higher education. Chapter three outlines the qualitative methodology used in this study. Chapter four presents an overview of the findings. Chapter five discusses the study's summary, findings' implications, and future research recommendations.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This chapter begins with a review of the literature on this study’s theoretical framework, including Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory, and why these are applicable theoretical frameworks. The main theoretical perspective for this study utilizes Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1989), where the term transition defines an event or nonevent that alters our lives. Secondly, this study connects Bush and Bush’s (2013) African American Male Theory as another theory for understanding the environmental factors in which students experience during their college experience. The literature review continues with a discussion of the role of dual enrollment, providing a historical perspective, benefits, criticisms, and the need for more African American participation in dual enrollment. Lastly, the topic of dual enrollment in Tennessee provides further details on the gap in the literature about African American male students, which leads to the economic impact of African American male students and the need to incorporate more collaboration and participation amongst K-12 and higher education institutions. This study addresses the gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of African American male students who participated in dual enrollment programs as they transitioned from high school to college.

Schlossberg’s Theory of Transition

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is a theoretical research model that provides insight into students’ factors as they transition from high school to college. Schlossberg (1989) defines a transition as “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). Schlossberg’s theory provides a framework to help individuals understand and connect to the process of living. Schlossberg (1989) adds that an individual’s ability to cope
during a transition can significantly impact a student’s life. Although Schlossberg’s transition theory traditionally focused on adults, it is recognized and widely used to understand the experience of college students (Barclay, 2017). For example, an ideal postsecondary scenario would involve high school students graduating, enrolling in college, and graduating. As a result, the Schlossberg model provides a visual guide that allows higher education staff to understand how to meet students’ needs as they transition beyond high school.

Schlossberg’s (1981) early work began as a concept used to analyze adulthood, where she described the model as a “vehicle for analyzing human adaptation to transition” (p. 2). The Schlossberg model introduces three factors influencing adult transition: type, context, and impact (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg (1984) followed up her findings by publishing “Counseling Adults in Transition,” expanding on the model by focusing on ways to respond to transitions. She introduces a “systematic framework” consisting of three major parts: 1) Approaching transitions, which involves the identification of the transition and how it will change a person’s life during the transition process. 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources, which introduces the 4 S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies, individuals with coping resources during a transition. 3) Lastly, taking charge introduces the terminology of “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out,” a transition. Schlossberg has consistently revised her theory, applying it to an ever-evolving world. Schlossberg later collaborated with other researchers to update several editions of “Adults in Transition,” incorporating theories from other scholars (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory breaks down the various aspects of a transition by identifying three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent. Anticipated transitions include any event that an individual views as forthcoming. Anderson et al. (2012) provide an example of
expected events such as marriage, starting a job, or a child leaving home. An anticipated event would involve an African American male student graduating high school. As students graduate from high school, they face a critical decision to attend college, the workforce, or the military, to name a few options (Herr & Gray, 2006). An individual typically prepares for an anticipated transition compared to an unanticipated experience.

Unanticipated transitions are any unexpected events that may catch an individual off-guard. An example of an unanticipated transition would involve a student who is not awarded a Pell Grant due to mistakes made in the financial aid application. Unanticipated transitions create a crisis that disrupts an established plan from moving forward (Anderson et al., 2012). Other examples of unanticipated transitions include individuals encountering work termination, job illness, or the death of a loved one. As an individual confronts an unanticipated event, they often lack the opportunity to have adequate preparation time, which may also lead to a rash decision. The aforementioned student who did not receive a financial aid award may decide to give up on enrolling in college.

Lastly, a nonevent is any event that an individual initially planned for but unfortunately did not transpire (Anderson et al., 2012). An example would include a student expecting to attend the college of their choice but unable to enroll due to a lack of familiarity with the admissions process. As students encounter barriers that inhibit enrollment into college, it is essential to understand the types of nonevents that may impact an individual differently. Anderson et al. (2012) highlight the importance of viewing the components of a transition: perspective, context, and impact. As African American male students experience a transition, they may view each event as positive, negative, or neutral. How an individual responds to a transition is contingent upon the triggers and variant levels that result from such events. Students
may perceive the experience as positive, which creates an opportunity for development. On the other hand, individuals may also view an event as negative, promoting significant stress or loss (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

**Schlossberg’s 4 S’s Coping Model**

Schlossberg (1995) also outlined four factors that affect how a person can manage a transition, also known as the “4 S’s system”. The 4 S system links theory and practice by providing a method and strategy for consulting individuals to cope with transitions – this system consists of situation, self, support, and strategy. Schlossberg et al. (1995) acknowledge that a person’s “assets and liabilities” can determine how they can cope with a transition. Additionally, each transition is a unique experience contingent upon an individual’s response. Chickering and Schlossberg (1998) provided further details by describing the 4 S’s process as “taking stock,” which involves the individual examining resources about their situation. Lastly, the impact of an event or nonevent is essential because it alters one’s daily life (Anderson et al., 2012). Events that an individual experience has a lasting impact on relationships, finances, and routines. For example, job loss could impact a person’s family by being unable to provide due to the loss of funds.

**Situation.** A practical approach to addressing the 4 S’s begins with an individual examining the situation. Schlossberg (1981) acknowledged key variables that impact a successful transition: the trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, stress, and assessment. Each transition varies according to what triggers an individual’s experience. An individual can perceive a transition as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired, or dreaded. Schlossberg (1981) also notes that individuals who may view a transition as either
positive or at least neutral may be better adept at handling a situation than those who perceive it negatively.

The situation explored in this study involves the transition of African American males as they graduate and matriculate into college. This transition usually begins during the summer after graduation. Students typically submit documents and participate in enrollment events at the postsecondary institution of their choice. However, African American male students remain underrepresented in transitioning from high school to postsecondary. Rall (2013) suggests that the transition from high school to college for African Americans is not as straightforward as it may seem. The transition from high school to college may be a challenging experience due to the unknown, unfamiliar process, requiring students to adapt to the postsecondary culture. As students graduate from high school to college, African American males may encounter several challenges that may affect a student’s aspiration to attend college. Kelly and Dixon (2014) mention that economic and social inequalities affecting African Americans ultimately contribute to a negative transition.

**Self.** Self involves an individual’s personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources, such as how individuals view their lives. This category also includes socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, health, and ethnicity (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Self also encompasses prior experiences that an individual brings to the transition. Goodman et al. (1995) reference the coping mechanism of self as the person’s inner strength for dealing with a situation, citing optimism and resiliency as essential characteristics to deal with the transition.

It is important to note that African American male students bring a unique perspective compared to other populations (Bush & Bush, 2013). Researchers have found several challenges that African American male students experience throughout the education pipeline. For example,
Jackson and Moore (2006) argue that African American students have disproportionately more negative educational experiences than their white counterparts. African American boys also frequently experience stereotypes and are stigmatized as lacking academic aptitude (Ladson-Billings, 2011). These negative experiences may mentally affect African American males during the transition to college. However, the benefits of dual enrollment can contribute internally to increasing the confidence and motivation of this population. For example, Bailey et al. (2003) found that dual enrollment positively assists the academic transition and psychologically supports students.

**Support.** Support includes intimate relationships, family, friends, and institutions/communities surrounding an individual. These social supports are individuals or structures that aid or hinder an individual’s transition (Schlossberg, 1995). Social supports are integral to an individual’s ability to handle stress. Support systems, or lack thereof, can provide individuals with the necessary feedback to improve as they progress through transitions. For incoming students, the transition from high school to college often requires family and college staff support to navigate the admissions process effectively. Schlossberg (1995) cites the functions of a support system as having the ability to “affect, affirm and aid” (p. 85), which can serve as negative or positive feedback for an individual.

As students of color navigate from high school to college, they lose access to key staff members who were previously influential in the transition process. At the same time, African Americans may also lack family support to properly assist with the college transition. Schlossberg et al. (1995) also describe how men tend to have more difficulty forming intimate relationships, ultimately leading to an unsuccessful transition. Another contribution to the lack of support could be family structure. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) research shows
that African American males are more than three times more likely to live in a single-parent household. Family members of students may also be unfamiliar with many of the admissions processes, often leading to summer melt. As a result, early exposure opportunities like dual enrollment could assist students with obtaining the necessary network and support to transition from high school to college.

**Strategies.** Strategies refer to the final stage, which entails a plan of action designed to cope with a transition. Schlossberg et al. (1995) identified three coping responses based on an individual’s ability to: modify the situation, control meaning, or manage stress in the aftermath. Strategies consist of a set of actions as a response to transitions. During the transition from high school to college, it is important that each student has and executes an effective strategy to enroll seamlessly. It is also important for high school and college staff to collaborate to assist students with a successful transition. By intentionally exposing African American male students to the rigors of college through dual enrollment coursework, postsecondary institutions may see more students due to increased familiarity with the college enrollment process.

Schlossberg’s Transition and Coping Model is a practical resource for students as they encounter the transitional experience from high school to college. This resource is also usable for family, support staff on the high school side, postsecondary staff, and faculty as they assist students during a transition. Modifying, controlling, and managing students’ transition experiences requires a collaborative effort between the student, family, high school, and postsecondary institution. Although empirically, the Schlossberg model has not been widely used to frame the student’s experience from high school to college (Evans et al., 2010), this research could further discuss resources needed to assist African American males during their transition
from high school to college. Guiding research questions focus on the 4’S factors presented by Schlossberg (1995) to analyze the experience of African American male students.

**Application of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory applies to many scenarios within higher education. Postsecondary institutions are responsible for being an important intersection for students as they experience several transitions. For example, Neber (2018) used Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to understand how nontraditional students experience the transition to college. Findings from this research indicated the importance of participants having adequate support from college staff in the form of a specialized orientation process to ease the transition to college. Kelly and Dixon (2014) used Schlossberg’s transition model on African American student-athletes as they transitioned to a predominantly white institution, finding the mentoring technique as an innovative approach to ease the transition process of students. Rall (2013) applied the transition theory to high school students citing several factors that contribute to summer melt, such as inadequate support, limited college knowledge, and failure to meet requirements. Although existing transition literature has focused primarily on adults, research on college students transitioning from high school to college continues to grow.

Higher education plays a crucial role in the development of students as they grow into adults (Evans et al., 2009). Schlossberg’s Transition model applies to postsecondary staff, faculty, and administration as they assist college students transitioning from high school. For example, academic advisors may use the framework for one-on-one student meetings. The 4 S’s model could also allow postsecondary and higher school administrations to provide more resources to assist students as they experience and cope with the transition. Consequently, the collaboration between high schools and postsecondary institutions can effectively expose
students to the academic rigors of college culture, which could ease the transition process. The Schlossberg transition model allows educators, faculty, and support staff to recognize and assist students transitioning from high school to college. Professionals can use this framework to understand students better as they go through transitions while also connecting those individuals to resources to cope with the process. In addition, by integrating Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, postsecondary staff can effectively provide coping resources specifically to African American male students during their first-year experience to assist with persistence.

A study by Powers (2010) explored nontraditional males who dropped out of college through the lens of Schlossberg’s transition theory. Utilizing the 4 S’s Model examined participants’ perceptions of self, support situation, and strategies throughout the college process. Powers’ study found that participants demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy as they coped with the transition to a postsecondary institution. Powers (2010) also found that by analyzing data through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, instigative characteristics overlapped with the concept of self and strategies in the 4 S’s Model.

In an interpretive study on first-generation minority community college students, Murphy (2018) used Schlossberg’s Transition theory to analyze the meaning of barriers to developmental education. Through her research, she found that Schlossberg’s Transition Model was a useful resource for examining, navigating, and breaking down barriers created by developmental education. Murphy (2018) found that participants experienced systemic barriers in terms of economic stability. Results from this research present an opportunity to apply the 4 S’s Model, focusing solely on the African American male population utilizing an aspect of Bronfenbrenner's Theory.
Applying the 4 S’s system to African American males who participate in dual enrollment intends to aid in increasing opportunities and resources specifically for this population. The benefits of African American males participating in dual enrollment programs include but are not limited to increased persistence, reduction of coursework needed to graduate, and easing of the transition process. These early exposure experiences are key to improving the educational outlook of African American males. Unfortunately, high school education is insufficient for African American males to remain sustainable in an ever-changing environment. The college enrollment gap within the U.S. justifies why the educational attainment of African Americans, among other ethnic minority groups, needs to be prioritized by educators and policymakers (Powell & Scott, 2013). Since this theory places emphasis on an individual’s perspectives, the perception of the transition that student experiences are contingent upon the coping strategies that the individual uses to alleviate stress. Although Schlossberg’s Transition Theory presents an appropriate framework, African American Male Theory was selected to recognize African American males’ experiences specifically.

**African American Male Theory**

African American Male Theory was developed and introduced in 2013 by Lawson Bush and Edward Bush to assist practitioners with understanding African American boys and men. Bush and Bush (2013) argued that “there had been no comprehensive theory that developed and analyzed the lives of African American boys and men” (p. 6). As a result, the fundamental foundation of the AAMT articulates the position of African American boys and men in society. The development of this framework focuses on the experiences, environments, structures, and systems that affect and shape African American males.
As research began to expand on the African American male, many scholars chose to use Critical Race Theory as a framework to explain the circumstances of African American male students. However, Bush and Bush (2013) argued that CRT gives too much credit to racism and oppression for producing outcomes. The use of AAMT as a framework offers the opportunity to investigate phenomena in the lives of African American males through its tenets. AAMT consists of six tenets.

The first tenet states that the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and the trajectory of African American boys’ and men’s lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach. Because of its roots in African philosophy, AAMT integrated Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) five interconnected environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. AAMT divides the microsystem into the inner and outer microsystems. The inner microsystem describes an individual’s biology, personality, perceptions, and beliefs. The outer microsystem focuses solely on aspects such as family, peers, and the overall environment (Bush & Bush, 2013). The mesosystem connects the microsystems to the exosystem, indirectly impacting an individual’s development. The exosystem also consists of elements that do not have an active role in the setting, such as parents’ employers, parents of friends, or administrators at a child’s school. The macrosystem consists of cultural or economic factors in a person’s life, such as politics and the experiences of racism. The chronosystem consists of sociohistorical conditions such as events or transitions over an individual’s life. In addition to dividing the microsystem, AAMT adds an extra subsystem component, allowing the opportunity to explore the influences of the supernatural realm.
The second tenet is that there is something unique about being male and of African descent. AAMT helps explain the distinctions of the population while also breaking down the individual distinctions within the group. African American males bring to education their very own unique experiences, perceptions, and worldviews that impact their societal interactions. How these individuals express themselves is uniquely connected to the first tenet and the generational makeup. Because of this uniqueness, Bush and Bush (2013) posited that the distinctions are necessary for scholars to create educational programs, pedagogies, and curricula. As a result, specialized programs that complement their uniqueness can assist African American male students beyond education.

The third tenet suggests that there is continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African American boys and men. The third tenet highlights the need for more research on African American males to be grounded in the knowledge of African culture. Bush and Bush (2013) argued that research that does not take into account the impact of African culture and consciousness among African Americans risks producing inaccurate results. By viewing the lives of African American males through this lens, educators can understand that the lack of African culture within school curriculum can significantly affect students.

The fourth tenet simply states that African American boys and men are resilient and resistant. AAMT postulates that African American males have an innate internal trait of self-determination and an unlimited capacity for morality and intelligence. Bush and Bush (2013) connected this tenet with resilience theory to oppose the views of the African American male. Additionally, Bush and Bush (2013) argued that the African American male experience with
social and educational challenges stemmed from socially constructed systems rather than the thought of biological deficiencies that were innate or cultural.

The fifth tenet discusses how race and racism, coupled with classism and sexism, profoundly impact every aspect of African American boys’ lives. Like Critical Race Theory, AAMT views racism as an omnipresent societal force. However, AAMT identifies how class can gain some African American males’ privilege in some spaces. Being of a particular class can either provide access or hinder students academically. In addition, the lack of early postsecondary opportunities within school systems based on socioeconomic status can also contribute to the success of African American males.

The last tenet states that the focus and purpose of study and programs concerning African American boys and men should be the pursuit of social justice. Undermining oppression by drawing upon historical and current culture, consciousness, and community can ultimately contribute to social justice (Bush & Bush, 2013). Targeted programs are essential to addressing some of the many factors that often perpetuate the deficit narrative of African American men. As a result, AAMT accounts for cultural hegemony rather than responding to it (Bush & Bush, 2013). A call to action by Bush et al. (2009) urges community college educators to create initiatives, programs, and spaces for African American male students.

Currently, no research literature specifically focuses on African American males as they transition from high school to college. As a result, the use of AAMT and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is an appropriate theoretical framework to view lived educational experiences of African American males. After reviewing the literature, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1981, 1984) and African American Male Theory (2013) provided a lens through which African American males can be better understood throughout this research. Furthermore, the current
literature on African American male students transitioning from high school to college is sparse and rarely examines the factors contributing to the successful transition upon completing dual enrollment coursework. Similar to Powers’ (2010) research, which combined Schlossberg’s Transition Theory with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System, this study effectively emphasizes and demonstrates that AAMT is also applicable. Even with the growth in the research regarding African American males in college, untapped theories still have yet to be explicitly applied to this population. This study will address this gap in research regarding the African American male. In this review of literature, I will cover the aspects of dual enrollment by first providing an overview. I will then provide a historical background of dual enrollment, benefits, and criticisms of dual enrollment; I will then tie in dual enrollment to African American males in Tennessee and the Economic impact of a college-educated African American male student.

**Overview of Dual Enrollment**

Dual enrollment programs have been in existence for decades, offering high school students the opportunity to enroll simultaneously in courses while earning credits for graduation requirements and college (Karp et al., 2007). Karp (2013) then coined dual enrollment as a “social intervention” in which potential college students in high school can learn about the norms, interpersonal interactions, and behaviors expected at the college level. Through dual enrollment, high school students gain preemptive exposure to the rigors of college life before attending college. As a result, this early exposure experience allows students to feel comfortable in a college environment (Karp, 2013). Kilgore and Wagner (2017) state that dual enrollment participation increased by 75% from 2002 to 2011, from 1.16 to 2.04 million nationwide. The growing demand for dual enrollment programs presents a paramount opportunity for students to gain an edge in pursuing their interests in higher education (Boswell, 2001). Dual enrollment
programs between school districts and colleges continue to expand nationwide. Although it is essential to understand dual enrollment from a national perspective, this study will focus on the impact of dual enrollment in Tennessee.

Tennessee is one of many states recognizing the importance of education and college success. Higher education in Tennessee has been in the spotlight over the past decade due to several initiatives to push for more student completion within the state. Legislators recognized the importance of citizens attaining postsecondary credentials to become workforce ready. In 2015, Governor Bill Haslam launched the drive to 55 initiative that created a rather audacious goal for the state to equip 55% of the population with a degree or certificate by 2025. This initiative introduced two critical programs: Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect. Today, Governor Bill Lee continues to carry the torch by committing to focusing on education. In addition to offering scholarships upon graduating (Palais, 2009), the state also invested heavily in dual enrollment courses (Karp, 2013).

**Historical Perspective of Dual Enrollment**

Dual enrollment has existed since the early 1970s. The first credit-based transition program documented emerged at Syracuse University, where the local high school partnered to challenge high school seniors while resolving senioritis among high achievers (Fowler & Luna, 2009). From a national perspective, dual enrollment was first adopted in California in 1976. Through statute, California Education Code legislation required K-12 and the community college system to collaboratively award credit for courses completed by high school students (California Education Code, 1976). Similar efforts emerged nationwide, fostering collaborations between postsecondary institutions and K-12 partners. A notable collaboration between Kingsborough Community College and the City University of New York intentionally focused on recruiting
average achievers (Fowler & Luna, 2009; Hoffmann, 2012). Shortly after, other states passed their respective state policies, increasing the presence of dual enrollment. Mokher and McLendon (2009) reported that 39 states, from 1976 to 1990, adopted some form of dual enrollment policy. As a result of this trend, lawmakers sought to push for change by designing laws that addressed educational equity and improved students’ academic outcomes.

On a national level, policymakers continue to seek to improve educational outcomes by supporting dual enrollment. Struhtl (2013) acknowledged that states are turning to performance-based funding as a strategy to create more opportunities for dual enrollment, which ultimately leads to an increase in educational attainment. Many states that have elected to adopt a performance-based funding approach have seen a significant increase in dual enrollment participation. For example, Louisiana saw a sharp increase of 46% in seven of nine schools within the University System (Struhtl, 2013). The implementation of dual enrollment practices continues to spread throughout higher education institutions through the adoption of performance-based funding. As a result of several years of research, dual enrollment has increasingly shown several benefits, including increasing the educational outlook for students and institutions.

**Benefits Of Dual Enrollment**

Research has highlighted several benefits of dual enrollment programs that impact underrepresented students. A report by Hughes et al. (2012) indicates that students who participated in dual enrollment programs were more likely to graduate from high school and persist in postsecondary education. Completing dual enrollment courses allows students to transition to postsecondary with an accumulation of credit, reducing the coursework needed to obtain a degree. These positive outcomes correlate to students’ transition into postsecondary
institutions (Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; An & Taylor, 2019). Bailey et al. (2003) add that dual enrollment facilitates the academic transition and helps students psychologically. Dual enrollment can mentally prepare students for the rigor of college, which could improve confidence. Research shows that early exposure activities like dual enrollment positively benefit students. For example, An (2013) argued that dual enrollment exposes students to the rigor of college coursework while providing realistic college expectations.

An established dual enrollment program allows high schools to partner with colleges, resulting in several benefits symbiotically. For example, partnering postsecondary institutions benefit directly from the tuition revenue of students who enroll in a dual enrollment course. Institutions can also benefit from the rapport established with each student, which may increase the chances of enrolling upon graduation (McCarthy, 1999). As students earning college credit become familiar with the process, colleges can gain an edge in recruiting high school students. Today, postsecondary institutions have modified dual enrollment programs to meet school systems' demands by offering various courses. There is no “one size fits all” approach to collaboration between schools and institutions. Postsecondary institutions can provide several options to partnering high schools, including courses taught at the college campus, an instructor teaching at the high school, or online offerings (Hoffman et al., 2009).

A significant increase in dual enrollment participation now requires effective collaboration between high schools and institutions to provide students with early postsecondary opportunities. Dual enrollment programs have continued to grow as legislation emphasizes college readiness. More than 1.2 million high school students enrolled in postsecondary courses nationwide from 2011 to 2012 (Marken et al., 2013). A study by The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) measured the number of high school students in college-level
courses and found that 25% of the students who entered a postsecondary institution in 2012 reported completing a college course while in high school. Due to exponential growth, dual enrollment has captured the attention of several state policymakers, which trickles down to higher education (Zinith & Taylor, 2019). As a result, adhering to state policies has required collaboration between postsecondary institutions and K-12 schools to ensure student success. As dual enrollment programs strengthen, experts have created guidelines for optimal cooperation between school and college.

Hoffman et al. (2009) provide insight on five principles of a well-designed dual enrollment program: (1) increases the pool of historically underserved students who are ready for college, (2) provides practical information to high school students about the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education. (3) improves motivation through high expectations and the promise of free courses. (4) decreases the cost of postsecondary education by compressing the years of financial support needed, and (5) creates a feedback loop between K–12 and postsecondary systems around issues of standards, assessments, curriculum, and transitions from high school to college. If executed correctly, both the student and the partnering institution can benefit tremendously. However, despite past practices and offerings of dual enrollment, very few minority students take advantage (Xu et al., 2021).

**Criticisms Of Dual Enrollment**

As dual enrollment increases in popularity, so has the amount of criticism amongst scholars. Researchers identified several concerns regarding the quality and consistency of dual enrollment. For example, Speroni’s (2011) results suggest that taking a dual enrollment course does not significantly impact college access or success. Another study by Jones (2014) found no significant differences in retention between dual enrollment participants and non-participants,
which ultimately questions whether efforts to increase dual enrollment participation make a difference.

Another concern of dual enrollment involves the disconnect between faculty from both the secondary and postsecondary sides regarding the rigor of instruction. Philosophically, faculty from high school view dual enrollment differently from postsecondary faculty (Jones, 2014). High school faculty often compare dual enrollment to advanced placement due to the similar college credit-earning model. Jones (2014) posits that secondary educators are concerned about dual enrollment because it creates competition for advanced placement coursework students. However, both programs serve different purposes and student populations (Karp et al., 2012).

At the postsecondary level, research conducted by Andrews (2000) found that college professors believed that dual enrollment programs lack rigor and fail to prepare students for the realities of college. Critics also point out that courses taught at the high school and by high school-based instructors do not compare to those led by college faculty (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Kim et al. (2003) add to the notion that high school faculty may lack the needed experience in teaching younger students, which may promote an ineffective dual enrollment experience for students. Furthermore, establishing an effective dual enrollment program requires competent instructors provided or credentialed by the institution. As a result, the success and credibility of dual enrollment are contingent upon meaningful and effective instruction provided by a strong collaboration between participating high schools and institutions (Roberts et al., 2001).

Funding courses for dual enrollment continues to concern lawmakers and postsecondary administration. Although critics may view dual enrollment as a ‘cash cow’ for institutions (Gehring, 2001), states like Tennessee use the dual enrollment headcount for state formula funding. As a result, postsecondary institutions often experience a loss in revenue due to the
discounted rate offered to students. In Tennessee, for example, public postsecondary institutions, by law, do not charge additional expenses or fees outside of tuition. Another concern involves access to postsecondary institutions in terms of underserved students like African American males. Admissions standards and requirements of institutions could potentially serve as a barrier for students of color who may ultimately become excluded from an impactful postsecondary experience (Pretlow & Wathington, 2014).

Despite criticisms from scholars, dual enrollment continues to increase in popularity, demonstrating an opportunity to increase collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary institutions. As dual enrollment continues to expand within higher education, colleges need to make strides to provide resources that lead to an increase in more minority students like African American males. Despite the numerous benefits of dual enrollment programs, white and high-income students proportionately represented the majority of participants compared to black and low-income students (Museus et al., 2007).

**Dual Enrollment and African American Males**

Despite the data-driven success that results from dual enrollment, there remains a need for more representation for minority and low socioeconomic status students (Museus et al., 2007; Xu, 2021). For example, Karp et al. (2007) found that underrepresented students in higher education, including males, benefit from experiencing a dual enrollment course as much or more than advantaged peers. The benefits of exposing African American male students to the college environment bring awareness of the expectations required to succeed at the college level and promote educational aspiration. Research by Medvide and Blustein (2010) add to this notion by examining the academic and post career plans of minority high school students participating in a dual enrollment program. Results of the study indicated that students who participated in dual
enrollment had aspirations to either attend college or expressed future goals that required a postsecondary education. Findings from the study support the need to create an academic environment in which students have the opportunity to develop clearly articulated educational and work-based goals before attending college. When it comes to the educational desires of African American male students, a study conducted by Brooms (2021) identified dedication, drive, and resilience as contributing factors that led to African American student success. These students also saw themselves as part of a social movement to uplift and statistically motivate black boys and men.

Despite the significant progress in increasing access to colleges, many minority students do not benefit from the same rewards of postsecondary attendance and degree completion (Museus et al., 2012). A study by Pretlow and Wathington (2014) further indicated that even with an increase in dual enrollment participation for all subgroups after policy changes, minority groups remained underrepresented. Young et al. (2013) also contribute to the growing body of literature by analyzing students in Texas who saw a decrease in black student dual credit enrollment. Despite the decline in participation among African Americans, data indicates the advantage of participating in dual enrollment. For example, An (2013) found that the effect of dual enrollment increases the probability of earning a bachelor’s degree by 7%. This research also revealed that first-generation students were 8% more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than non-dual enrollment students (An, 2013). Although the opportunity exists for all students in Tennessee, there is a minuscule percentage of African American male students. As a result, more strategy implementation can attract students from diverse backgrounds to participate in dual enrollment Meyer (2004).
Dual Enrollment in Tennessee

As a result of Tennessee’s plan to increase the number of young people who earn a postsecondary credential (Karp et al., 2012), legislation has passed several laws designed to address the need to prepare students beyond high school for career attainment properly. In 2007, Tennessee statute TCA § 49-15-101 was enacted, granting the opportunity for students to take advantage of dual enrollment. TCA § 49-15-102 defines dual enrollment as “A program in which a secondary student is enrolled in a postsecondary course creditable toward high school completion and a postsecondary diploma or certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree (p. 5)”. In addition, the State of Tennessee P-16 Council (2009) further detailed dual enrollment as postsecondary courses that are taught either at the postsecondary institution or at the high school by the postsecondary faculty (credentialed adjunct faculty), which upon successful completion of the course allows students to earn postsecondary and secondary credit concurrently.

Research conducted by Advance CTE (2021) highlights Tennessee as one of few states that have made investments that enable programs like dual enrollment to continue expanding while resisting transitions. Dual enrollment headcounts have significantly increased since the Tennessee Community College System implemented performance-based funding (Struhl, 2013). As a result, Tennessee has proven to be a true leader in K-12 practices such as dual enrollment across southern states (Finney & Leigh, 2019). Under Tennessee Code Annotated amended 49-4-930, dual enrollment program funding comes from Tennessee Lottery funds distributed through Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation. In 2021, legislators amended the law to fund students up to four 3-hour dual enrollment courses at $543, which amounted to $2,712 (THEC, 2021). In 2022, Tennessee legislation once again increased the amount of funding from four to ten dual enrollment courses while reducing GPA requirements to 2.0 (THEC, 2022). Students who take
full advantage of the dual enrollment grant could graduate with at least 30 credit hours at a two or four-year postsecondary. Despite the groundbreaking accomplishments and investments within the state, Hunter and Wilson (2019) posit that postsecondary institutions must continue to implement best practices that encompass various populations to meet the economic demands of the workforce.

**Success Strategies Outside of Dual Enrollment**

Outside of dual enrollment, Tennessee offers several programs designed to prepare students for college, also known as early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs). Currently, there are eight EPSOs available in Tennessee that schools could offer to students which include: Advanced Placement (AP), Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB), Local Dual Credit, Statewide Dual Credit, Student Industry Certification. A major benefit of EPSOs entails a student both high school credit and the opportunity to receive college credit before obtaining a high school diploma. Some programs offered in schools require an end-of-year exam to receive college credit. Also, Student Industry Certification offers students the opportunity to advance into the workforce with a credential. Fees are associated with 7 of the 8 EPSOs, making. The availability of EPSOs may vary by school due to the availability of teachers, instructors, or location. For example, one school may have a qualified teacher who is credentialed to teach a dual enrollment course, while another school may not have any instructors credentialed to teach. Despite the various offerings, African American males remain largely underrepresented (James et al., 2017) and had the lowest AP course-taking rate at 27% (Malkus, 2016).
A significant advantage of dual enrollment compared to other EPSOs entails the opportunity for students who might not be considered high achieving to participate. For example, although a student may not qualify for

**The Economic Impact of College-Educated African American Males**

There are opportunities for postsecondary institutions to increase African American male enrollment by effectively partnering with local education agencies. Further, the mere graduation of African American males in high school can have tremendous social effects. Levin et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative analytical survey that generated three significant increases in tax revenues, public health costs, and criminal justice costs to better understand the impact of African American male graduate students. The public benefits of increasing high school black male graduates could lead to the national saving of over $3.98 billion in returns (Levin et al., 2007).

Unfortunately, high school education is insufficient for African American males to remain sustainable in an ever-changing environment. The college enrollment gap within the U.S. justifies why the educational attainment of African Americans among other ethnic minority groups needs to be an important topic for educators and policymakers (Powell & Scott, 2013). There is an even greater need for African American male students to pursue and obtain a postsecondary degree to have a competitive edge within the workforce. Research indicates that the effects of obtaining a postsecondary credential can lead to economic success and an increase in labor market outcomes such as earnings and job security (Ehrenberg & Rothstein, 1994). Accordingly, research conducted by NCES (2014) reported that in 2012 young adults with a bachelor’s degree earned more than twice the earnings of those with a high school education. Despite these statistics, African American males continue to lag behind their peers and
counterparts in college degree attainment, highlighting economic implications for our nation (Anumba, 2015). Research has shown that more than two-thirds (67.6%) of black men who start college do not graduate within six years (Harper, 2006). However, intentional dual enrollment initiatives can potentially address worker shortages, increase levels of educational attainment, and increase economic competitiveness for African American males (Morrison, 2008). The connection to economic impact returns is even more significant for students who successfully navigate and graduate from college. The impact of African American males who graduate from college poses several benefits. It deserves the attention of lawmakers to increase resources and funding to assist students with a seamless transition.

**The Transition from High School to College**

As students graduate high school, they are faced with a critical decision to attend college, the workforce, or the military. Transitioning from high school to college can be incredibly challenging for African American students. In addition, a student’s environmental factors can also impact the transition process. Upcraft (1993) references that transitioning from high school to college requires an inviting college environment, especially for underrepresented students. These students often experience an absence of role models during the admissions process and a lack of familiarity with the higher education processes (McCoy, 2014). This phenomenon ultimately leads to a missed opportunity to enroll in a postsecondary institution. However, dual enrollment poses benefits that can contribute to a more prepared student, leading to a better transition into college. The dual enrollment experience for African American male students can mitigate the many dilemmas that might negatively impact the transition process. Therefore, the use of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory provides the opportunity to analyze students’ experiences in dual enrollment. As students transition from high
school to college, Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggest that the process requires simultaneous analysis of resources. Subsequently, the 4 S’s Coping Model is used in this study to make sense of the transition from high school to college. However, there is a limited amount of information specific to the experiences of African American male students as they transition to life beyond high school. This transition from high school to college for African American male students can be an unfamiliar and overwhelming experience due to insufficient knowledge, assistance, or coping tools (Rall, 2013). As a result, to understand the transitional experiences of African American male students who participate in dual enrollment, it is important to implement a framework that recognizes the factors related to students’ transition.

**Chapter Summary**

This literature review explores dual enrollment’s impact while identifying the need for more African American male participation. Dual enrollment can potentially play a significant role in the lives of African American males as they transition from high school to college. Schlossberg’s transition theory as a framework assists with understanding the transition to college and the intentional application of African American Male theory to relate to the variety of issues faced by this population. Schlossberg’s transition theory assists with making sense of the transition from high school to college. Combined with African American male theory, it provides a comprehensible framework of African American male students' various factors during a transition.

Participation in dual enrollment prepares students for college’s academic challenges while easing the transition from high school to college. Additional benefits of participating in dual enrollment programs include but are not limited to increased persistence, reduction of coursework needed to graduate, and easing of the transition process (Hughes et al., 2012; An,
2013; Bailey, 2003). Early exposure from dual enrollment experiences may support and influence students transitioning from high school to college. As a result of dual enrollment, African American male students may be able to improve their academic outcomes while they are in high school. These early exposure experiences are key to improving the educational outlook of the African American male. While a significant body of literature highlights the advantages of dual enrollment programs, very few studies have provided insight from the students’ perspectives who have participated in these programs. Despite dual enrollment programs existing nationally for more than 30 years, questions still have yet to be answered from a student perspective.

This study will benefit both postsecondary and secondary administration as they work together to increase dual enrollment opportunities for African American male students and work collectively to create a seamless transitionary experience. Due to the low number of African American male students currently participating in dual enrollment, obtaining valuable data from students’ successes is important to help persuade more students to get involved. Schlossberg’s transition theory provides context on students’ experiences transitioning from high school to college. Further information will foster a better understanding of how the dynamics of African American male student experiences, attitudes, and perceptions affect the organization and the success of a dual enrollment program. Understanding student perceptions and experiences can ultimately contribute to an improvement in high school and postsecondary quality. As a result, the implications presented in this study are an important addition to the literature related to student transition.
The next chapter will detail the research methodology for examining the transition process of participants through the theoretical lens of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male theory in this case study.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This qualitative case study aimed to understand the experiences of African American male students who participate in dual enrollment as they transition from high school to college. This study seeks to expand the knowledge about the experiences of African American male students and the impact of dual enrollment as students transition. African American males possess a unique voice and perspective. By allowing African American males to tell us their stories, we may be able to better recruitment efforts and retention of African American male students. Historically, African American males are underserved and underrepresented in dual enrollment, highlighting the need to focus on this population (Dalton et al., 2015). Although college access has improved over time and has led to enrollment increases, African American males remain stagnant in enrollment and educational attainment in higher education (Museus et al., 2007; Karp et al., 2007; Xu, 2021).

Through the combined lenses of African American Male Theory and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, I can understand the experiences of African American male students transitioning between high school and college. Therefore, this study provides insight into the experiences of African American males who participate in dual enrollment, complete high school, and transition into a postsecondary institution.

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the research methodology and includes discussion in the following areas: (a) research questions, (b) research design methods/data collection, (b) trustworthiness and ethics, (c) positionality statement, (d) ethics, (e) site selection, (f) participants, (g) data analysis, (h) a chapter summary.
Research Questions

Guided by a theoretical framework, utilizing Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory and an extensive literature review, the research study questions are:

1. What are the experiences of African American male students who participated in a dual enrollment program?
2. How do African American males who participated in dual enrollment describe their transition to college?

Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is a descriptive and explorative process where the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research provides detailed and thick descriptions of a phenomenon unique to a population. This research intends to gain an understanding of the perceptions of participants. A qualitative research design allows the voice of participants to be explored as the research co-constructs knowledge in cooperation (Merriam, 1998). A significant benefit of utilizing a qualitative approach is that it produces detailed information versus discussing generalizations from quantitative research. The experiences obtained from participants are expected to provide insight into unaddressed challenges impacting African American male students.

I utilized a descriptive case study design for my methodology to understand the lived experiences of African American male students as they transition from high school to college. A case study is a popular qualitative research methodology that is used across a wide variety of disciplines. Creswell (2007) defines a case study design by stating that it is the study of a
bounded system over time through detailed data collection involving several sources while also involving rich context. Yin (2002) highlights a case as a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context that occurs when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear. For the purposes of this study, transition experiences represented the definition of a contemporary phenomenon. The researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context. Yin (2002) contends that a case study is an appropriate strategy when “how” and “why” questions are the focus and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Merriam (1998) further indicates that a case study is designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved. A compelling feature of case study research includes a bounded or fenced-in case intended to specifically understand a particular phenomenon resulting in the capturing of a thick description. These boundaries assist by focusing on a single entity within the study.

Although case studies can be traced back to the work of LePlay (1879), both Robert Yin (2002) and Robert Stake (2005) are credited as significant contributors to case study research in education. Creswell (2014) and Merriam (1996) also made substantial contributions by defining the characteristics of case study research. Due to differing philosophical orientations, researchers must decide on the approach based on the intent of the research. For example, Yin’s (2002) research is situated on a postpositivist paradigm, emphasizing control, predictability, and rationality (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). On the other hand, both Stake (2003) and Merriam’s (1996) epistemological beliefs are aligned with a constructivist approach which encourages the philosophy that truth is relative and results from perspective (Boblin et al., 2013). As a result, this philosophical approach aligned closely with my epistemological beliefs because of the
utilization of constructivism to explore meaning. The constructivist perspective also aligns with both theories because it encourages the exploration of multiple participant perspectives.

**Rationale For a Case Study Approach**

Merriam (1994) provided characteristics of qualitative research that fit in this study which include: (a) it is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, (b) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, (c) usually involves fieldwork, (d) primarily employs an inductive research strategy, (e) the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Therefore, a qualitative approach was most appropriate for this research study based on Merriam’s (1994) notion that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed by making sense of their worlds and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). In contrast to quantitative research, which is based on deductive reasoning by developing hypotheses, qualitative research focuses on inductive reasoning, which occurs in the natural setting of the participants.

Although there are several types of qualitative research types, a case study approach was appropriate because it allowed the investigation of participants in a real-world setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, Merriam (1988) argued that case studies assist in presenting basic insight into areas of education where there is a lack of research. Although there is information on transition theory and dual enrollment, little information examines African American males transitioning from high school to college. This case study approach was designed to capture a bounded system that included African American males who participated in dual enrollment and transitioned to a postsecondary institution in a large urban metropolitan area. As a result of my interests, it was imperative to hear the voices of African American male students. I intentionally focused on gathering information-rich data from a small sample by narrowing the scope of the
case study. Therefore, in this qualitative case study, I explored the experiences of African American male students through Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American male theory as a framework. Schlossberg’s transition theory provided a basis for this case study, while African American male theory provided a lens that allows the exploration of the perspectives of African American male students.

**Site Selection**

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to collect data in the field where participants may have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. The experiences of African American male students that participated in dual enrollment and transitioned from high school to college made a postsecondary institution an ideal location to collect data. As a result, the research site for this study was conducted at a public two-year community college in a metropolitan area in the midsouth. The site location received a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the students. For the purposes of this study, the pseudonym used was Midsouth Tennessee Community College. The high percentage of African American male students and the emphasis on partnering with local school districts made Midsouth Tennessee Community College an ideal site for this study. In the fall of 2021, Midsouth Tennessee Community College had an approximate dual enrollment student count of 1,023 and a total enrollment of 7,377 (institutional website). As a result, working with an institution with an adequate number of African American male students who participated in dual enrollment is essential. The demographic breakdown of the institution by ethnicity includes 61.8% Black, 23.8% White, 8.26% Hispanic, and 6.06% Other (institutional website). This study will focus specifically on African American male student population.
Participants

The dual enrollment grant offered to all Tennessee students allows the opportunity for local high schools to partner with postsecondary institutions throughout the academic school year. Students who participate in dual enrollment must meet the qualifications of both the school district and the college admissions. Each postsecondary institution has various admissions requirements for dual enrollment students. In particular, the admissions requirements for Tennessee Community College vary by course. Some courses require minimal sub-scores on the ACT, which are English (18), Reading (19), and Math (18). In order to effectively accommodate students and increase equity in dual enrollment, Midsouth Tennessee Community College offers students to enroll in several introductory-type courses. For example, students may enroll in courses like Academic Success (ACAD), Introduction to Criminal Justice (CRMJ), and Introduction to Business (BUSN) because there are no ACT sub-score requirements. As a result, dual enrollment participation may represent a wide range of academically prepared students.

For this study, I selected participants who met the following criterion: actively enrolled as a student in a college degree or certificate program, being over the age of 18, completing at least one dual enrollment before enrolling in college, male, and self-identified as African American. Because I want to understand how dual enrollment impacts the transition from high school to college, it was important to intentionally obtain participants who completed a dual enrollment course and transitioned to college. I used purposeful sampling to understand the lived experiences of African American male students. Purposeful sampling was used to identify information-rich cases effectively (Patton, 2002). Although there are several types of purposeful sampling, I used both homogenous and criterion sampling to ensure reliability. Criterion sampling involves participants meeting a common criterion, while homogenous sampling
involves participants sharing a common experience (Creswell, 2014). The shared common experience for this research included participants identifying as African American, enrolling and completing a dual enrollment course, and transitioning from high school to college. Creswell (2014) suggests that a qualitative case study should consist of eight participants. As a result, the sample size for this research study utilized six participants in total. Participants also received a $10 gift card upon completing the interview.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, an application for approval to use human subjects was made to the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board. Once granted, I reached out to Midsouth Tennessee Community College. Initially, I utilized my professional network to obtain participants by contacting the Office of Admissions and the Office of Dual Enrollment. I contacted office staff via email and a follow-up phone call. However, I was instructed to reach out to the Community College Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IE). After submitting an application and receiving approval, I obtained a list of eligible participants from the institution. I reached out to participants via email to complete a brief questionnaire to determine an appropriate fit for the study. After failing to obtain a reasonable response rate, I contacted participants via phone. If the participant met the questionnaire criteria, I sent a confirmation email along with an interview invitation. Midsouth Tennessee Community College has several locations throughout the metropolitan area. I invited the participants to choose a meeting location at the nearest campus based on the participant’s location or via zoom. As a result, interviews were held at multiple campus locations within the library.

I conducted interviews over the spring 2023 semester. Introductions were made along with casual conversations to ease each participant. Next, each participant was given a copy of the
Informed Consent (Appendix D) to read over and sign. Participants who interviewed via zoom were emailed a Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix D) and then asked to review and sign. After reviewing the letter, I asked permission to record and obtain their transcript. I provided a pseudonym to each participant to protect their identity. Once documentation was complete, the interview commenced.

Each interview consisted of open-ended questions and lasted between one hour and 90 minutes. Open-ended interview questions and probes were used to encourage participants to talk about their experiences in dual enrollment and the transition from high school to college. The questions were grounded in literature and were created to understand the critical aspects of the participants’ experiences. Participating students selected an interview location that was convenient and comfortable for them. All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of each participant.

**Data Collection**

Case study research typically calls for several data sources instead of a single data source. In using an intrinsic case study approach, Merrian and Tisdell (2016) contend that there are no data collection constraints on case studies. As a result, data collection methods used to gather for this study included: document review, demographic data forms, interviews, and journaling. A document review was completed as a foundational step to further understand African American male student participation in the state of Tennessee. Demographic data forms were used to gather the demographics and characteristics of potential participants. Interviews served as the primary data source for the study. Upon completing each interview, I took time out to journal about my experience.
**Document Review**

Document review as a data collection method was used in this qualitative study to understand the research context of dual enrollment and the transition from high school to college. Documents serve as accessible sources of data for the researcher, designed to understand participants further (Merriam, 2009). These data sources were public documents that were retrieved via the internet. Two public documents were used to corroborate information from other sources (Yin, 2014). The primary public documents examined in this study included the Tennessee Board of Regents Dual Enrollment Report (Table 4) and the Dual Enrollment Grant Eligibility policy in accordance with Tennessee Code Annotated §49-8-104.

The EPSO report is an interactive digital tool that detailed the total number of credits obtained by students during the following academic years: 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2021-2022, the types of courses taken, the success rate for those courses, and a demographic breakdown of students participating in dual enrollment. The Dual Enrollment Grant Eligibility policy provided award information, the application process, and eligibility requirements for participants. This document was obtained from the Tennessee Department of Education’s website.

**Demographic Data Form**

A demographic data form (Appendix B) was used to determine if an individual met the criteria of being an African American male and previously enrolled in a dual enrollment course. Participants were asked to complete the form within five days upon receipt. The demographic data form included questions related to transition experiences, ACT scores, and high school GPA. The demographic questionnaire assisted in gaining a better understanding of the participant’s experiences before the interview. Additionally, the survey asked if the participants were willing to be interviewed further about their dual enrollment and transition experiences.
**Interviews**

Data collection for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews, allowing for a more in-depth process (Seidman, 2006). Smith et al. (2009) mention that interviews produce detailed stories, thoughts, and feelings from the participant. The use of interviews in a case study is a common practice. Rubin and Rubin (2005) also add that interviews consist of a “conversation in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (p. 4). This research process allows the opportunity to gain more concrete details of the participant’s lived experiences. Interviews were designed to capture African American males’ life experiences and perceptions of those who transitioned from high school to college. Consequently, a semi-structured interview design provided an opportunity to gain knowledge about participants’ experiences during their transition from high school to college.

Semi-structured interviews, in comparison to structured interviews, offer the flexibility to probe based on the response of students by including a predetermined set of questions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Within each interview, it was important to establish the context of the participant’s experience as it relates to the transition from high school to college. The interview questions asked participants to provide background information, including previous experience in high school, dual enrollment experiences, college experiences, and their transition to college. An interview schedule was executed by asking the participants to provide background information and concrete details of their lived experiences. The focus of the second interview will consist of questions asking participants to reflect on the meaning of the experience by focusing on the participant’s understanding of the transition experience. After the interviews, participants were asked to review transcripts and verify that transcripts are accurate.
Participants were asked to complete an informed consent form describing the study's purpose and procedures. Before meeting with participants, Smith et al. (2009) suggest constructing a semi-structured interview schedule to facilitate a comfortable interaction with each participant. Establishing rapport with each participant by starting with a warm introduction and a casual conversation is essential to put the participant at ease. Using Schlossberg’s Transition model and African American Male Theory as a framework, the responses to the questions will help to understand the participants’ experiences.

**Trustworthiness and Ethics**

Establishing trustworthiness to add to the knowledge within the higher education field effectively is important. Consequently, the need to establish trustworthiness while gathering and analyzing data to ensure the protection and respect of participants was essential throughout the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). Nowell et al. (2017) explain that trustworthiness involves persuading the reader that their research findings are worthy of attention. The following steps were taken to ensure the study establishes trustworthy results. Member checking, positionality, thick descriptions, audit trail, and methodological coherence ensured trustworthiness during the research process.

**Member Checking.** One method used to establish trustworthiness involves member checking. Member checking allowed participants to correct any misinterpretations that might have been inadvertently created (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). After meeting with each participant, I sent an email with the interview transcript attached, with instructions on how to view the PDF document. The email also consisted of directions explaining the purpose of the member check. To ensure accuracy, each participant was asked if the data accurately represented their thoughts. All participants responded back with “yes.”
**Thick descriptions.** Engagement with participants during the interview process offers the opportunity to obtain detailed descriptions. Thick descriptions were captured and included through the retrieval of direct quotes from interviews. I executed this by journaling after each interview, providing a detailed account of each participant.

**Audit trail.** I created a journal of detailed data collection descriptions from the beginning to the end of the process. One of the benefits of utilizing an audit trail is that it helps the researcher remember important events throughout the process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I made sure to maintain a journal that included important dates, reflections, and the decisions made during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the research (Merriam, 2009). Within my journal, I also reflected on ways in which I could improve the interview experience for participants.

**Methodological coherence.** It is essential to ensure congruence between all aspects of the study, including the research question, methods, data, and analysis. Poucher et al. (2020) suggest that researchers be aware of their philosophical assumptions while carefully selecting the appropriate methods for the research aims. Therefore, acknowledging my ontological and epistemological assumptions to establish quality guided each decision during the research process.

**Positionality Statement**

Another method of establishing trustworthiness and documenting quality is through researcher positionality statements. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggest using a positionality statement to develop the researcher’s role in the process. A critical issue of case study research involves the positionality and experience of the researcher. As a result, it was imperative to acknowledge potential biases and my role in the research process (Merriam,
2009). As a result, I openly share the context of my positionality by openly acknowledging my preconceptions while also reflecting on how my subjectivity played a part in the analysis process (Neubauer et al., 2019).

I am aware that my social and professional identities influence my role as a researcher in several ways, including my race, socioeconomic status, and first-generation status. I am a first-generation African American male who graduated from a predominantly white institution. I also grew up in a middle-class household, which allowed me to attend a top-tier school. Although my immediate family members were not college-educated, I was highly encouraged to attend college. As a first-generation college student, I understand the many challenges that students face, including difficulty navigating through the admissions and financial aid process. I also found myself not knowing what to expect from college and did not know how to navigate through the many college processes. As a result, identifying research participants who are classified as first-generation further enhanced connectedness to the research.

My first professional position began in higher education as an admissions counselor and then as a dual enrollment coordinator, where interaction and awareness of the state’s dual enrollment program have been continuous. My daily involvement in dual enrollment has driven me to want to know more about the students’ experiences. Although I did not take any dual enrollment courses, I firmly believe that participating in dual enrollment can be a positive experience for all high school students. However, I want to specifically focus on African American male students because I share some of the same characteristics and understand the value of education. As a dual enrollment program coordinator, I worked with several schools to expand dual enrollment coursework throughout the county. I have also had the opportunity to see the benefits of establishing a partnership between colleges and the school district. For example,
students not only receive the amenities, but they also have the opportunity to receive an exclusive tour designed to encourage enrollment. As I moved into another role, I continued to work with postsecondary institutions and secondary schools to encourage and expand dual enrollment programs within the region. Witnessing the impact that dual enrollment has on a student’s life and seeing the success stories of students has made me passionate about this research topic.

Ethics

The researcher must consider ethical issues that might occur during the study's design and process planning phase. Ethics within qualitative research involves respecting the participants while minimizing risks. I followed the University of Memphis’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) instructions to obtain consent and maintain confidentiality. I took necessary precautions by obtaining IRB training on properly protecting participants' confidentiality. I also received a certification of completion, which was included in my proposal.

Before each interview, each participant signed an informed consent form which provided an overview of the research goals, procedures, assurance of confidentiality, and safety from harm. To preserve anonymity, participants used pseudonyms that were used throughout the study. In addition, a pseudonym was selected and used for the postsecondary institution. Additionally, all data obtained was stored on a password-protected computer.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis process provides the opportunity to transition from collecting raw data to analysis by making meaning from the data. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) describe qualitative analysis as a process that consists of breaking data into significant parts to investigate them. Data from interviews were transcribed verbatim. I chose a manual
method of coding. After transcribing the interview, I began the data analysis process by formatting the pages line by line so that each line was numbered and there were spaces to the left of the page for writing notes/coding. Interviews were read several times first to make sure the transcriptions were correct. I manually coded my data by printing several copies and writing directly on the transcripts with several colored pens. I also printed off multiple copies as a precaution, ensuring that I had a backup in case a mistake was made on a page.

**Coding**

Coding is a method used by researchers to organize research information in segments or categories. It consists of labeling the information into terms based on the participants’ actual statements (Creswell, 2014; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Rosiek and Heffernan (2014) discuss the process of coding as what is said and not what isn’t. Before trying to code my data, I first reviewed Saldana’s (2009) Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers, which also served as a helpful guide throughout the process. Saldana (2009) discusses the importance of breaking down the coding methods into two sections: first cycle coding and second cycle coding methods.

Coding was executed first by creating line-by-line formatting on each individual page of the interview transcript. The coding of transcripts was completed in the order of each interview conducted. Each transcribed interview was read several times to grasp developing themes and concepts. I chose to conduct the coding process by hand, utilizing various colored pens and highlighters. Transcripts were classified and data were grouped into meaningful categories for analysis.

The first cycle coding method used was “in vivo,” which refers to a “word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). In vivo coding was the most appropriate method because it allowed me to focus intentionally on each
participant’s voice. The words that came directly from the participant were impactful and helped answer my research questions. These direct quotes were highlighted and color-coded. In vivo codes discovered were then validated for meaning. Next, I used “focus coding” as the second cycle coding method. Saldana (2009) mentions focus coding as a method that enables the researcher to compare new codes to further assess participant comparability and transferability. These constructed codes formed categories that were used to create themes.

**Thematic Analysis**

This study used thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns of meaning across a data set in relation to the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006). A theme is a unifying idea or pattern found within data. Braun and Clarke (2016) contend that thematic analysis benefits novice qualitative researchers. Thematic analysis breaks down into a six-step process which I followed accordingly. In the first step, I familiarized myself with the data by reviewing the transcripts several times. Reviewing transcript data, I highlighted and identified codes within each participant interview. After reviewing each transcript for codes, I identified patterns within participant transcripts. Based on the theme's description, I grouped these connecting patterns from participant responses into categories. After reviewing themes and categories several times, I condensed, defined, and refined the descriptions. The themes established described the experiences of participants, providing a glimpse into the lives of African American male students.

**Summary**

This chapter described the methodology proposed for this study by explaining the research design, site and participant selection, and analysis. This qualitative case study aims to explore the lived experiences of African American male students as they transition from high
school to college. The problem addressed by this study involved the need to give African American students who participated in dual enrollment a voice to highlight how dual enrollment affected their transitionary experiences. The in-depth semi-structured interviewing will allow each participant to share first-person perspectives about their experiences regarding dual enrollment and the transition from high school to college. The findings from this study could contribute to the improvement of dual enrollment and the recognition of the need to strengthen partnership collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary. The next chapter will present the findings from the participants.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the experiences of African American male students who participate in dual enrollment as they transition from high school to college. American Male Theory and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory were used within this research to explain participants’ experiences. In addition, I used both theories to structure interviews, demographic surveys and a document review. The study revealed several emergent themes through Schlossberg’s 4’S model. This chapter presents each of these themes and their effect on the participants. This chapter discusses these research findings by addressing the following guiding research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of African American male students who participated in a dual enrollment program?
- How do African American males who participated in dual enrollment describe their transition to college?

As described in Chapter Three, the data analyzed included transcriptions of participant interviews, interviewer journaling, and a review of documents describing dual enrollment participation and grant funding relevant to this study.

Participants

A total of 6 African American male students participated in this study. These students all previously participated in dual enrollment prior to high school graduation. Students in the study identified as full-time students at the selected community college. I chose pseudonyms for each participant instead of their real names to protect their privacy. The personal information about their families, education, and interests was generalized to prevent participants from being
identified. Each profile provides accurate information about each student’s dual enrollment coursework, ACT scores, and interests.

Table 1

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>JOSEPH</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>DAVID</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NOAH</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Elijah.** Elijah is a first-generation, 20 year old African American male student who participated in dual enrollment during his senior year in high school. As a high school student, Elijah enrolled in two dual enrollment courses, PSYC 1030 (Intro to Psychology) in fall 2019 and SOCI 1010 (Intro to Sociology) in Spring 2020. Elijah traveled to the campus after school to attend his dual enrollment course each semester. He graduated from high school in 2021, transitioned to Midsouth Tennessee Community College [pseudonym], and is currently a sophomore. Elijah wore a plain white t-shirt and jeans. His black hair had rope-like strands that throughout his head. His voice was deep; when asked a question, he took time to think carefully before speaking. He is very artistic and plans to attend Savannah College of Art and Design.

**Matthew.** Matthew is a first-generation, 20 year old African American male student who participated in two dual enrollment courses during his senior year in high school, ENGL 1010 (English Composition I) in Fall 2020 and ENGL 1020 (English Composition II) in Spring 2021. Matthew’s dual enrollment courses were online during the high school time frame. He graduated high school in 2021, transitioned to Midsouth Tennessee Community College [pseudonym], and is currently a sophomore. He works 30 hours per week at a shoe store and participated in the interview during his off day. Matthew wore bright and flashy clothes to the interview, wearing a
red Bape brand sweater with two chains around his neck. He had a very thin frame and was short in stature. Matthew wore a clean cut, dark fade in which the haircut tapers on the sides and back. He is very soft-spoken and mild-mannered. His goal is to become a physical therapy assistant upon graduating from college.

Abraham. Abraham is a first-generation, 20 year old African American male student who participated in two dual enrollment courses during his senior year in high school. He enrolled in CRMJ 1010 (Intro to Criminal Justice) Fall of 2019 and CRMJ 2020 (Introduction to Corrections) Spring of 2020. Abraham transitioned to Midsouth Tennessee Community College and is currently a sophomore. During his interview, he wore a gray hoody, a brown beanie, and gold-framed glasses. He mentioned that both of his parents were immigrants from Nigeria who traveled to the United States to seek better opportunities. Abraham mentioned his fascination with computer engineering despite taking two dual enrollment criminal justice courses. In the future, he would like to work for either Google or Tesla as an engineer.

Joseph. Joseph is a first-generation, 20 year old African American male student who participated in two dual enrollment courses during his senior year in high school. He enrolled in ACAD 1100 (Academic Success) Fall of 2019 and CRMJ 2020 (Introduction to Corrections) Spring of 2020. Due to the proximity of his high school, his high school transported him to the college campus as a dual enrollment student. Joseph transitioned to Midsouth Tennessee Community College and is currently a sophomore. During his interview, he was very energetic and mentioned that one of his hobbies involved weightlifting. He wore a white hoody and an afro that he combed out throughout the interview.

David. David is a first-generation, 22 year old African American male student who participated in three dual enrollment courses during his junior and senior years in high school.
He enrolled in ACAD 1100 (Academic Success) Fall of 2017, INFS 1010 (Computer Applications) Fall of 2018, and CRMJ 2020 (Introduction to Corrections) Spring of 2019. David was transported to the college campus by his high school as a dual enrollment student. David is tall, slender, and has a dark-skinned complexion. He wore a blue collared work shirt with a trucker hat. He transitioned to Midsouth Tennessee Community College and is currently a sophomore. David is a business major working as a forklift driver at a distribution center.

Noah. Noah is a 22 year old African American male student who participated in dual enrollment at two different institutions. He enrolled in ENGL 111 (Writing About Literature) and ENGL 1010 (English Composition) at a private four-year institution. He enrolled in two additional courses at Midsouth Tennessee Community College. Noah participated in BUSN 1305 (Introduction to Business) in spring 2017 and MATH 1530 (Probability and Statistics) in spring 2018. He currently works full-time at a large distribution center as a product picker. He will graduate this spring and transfer to a four-year institution. The company he works for incentivizes its employees through a program that pays for the tuition of students pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Noah came to the interview dressed comfortably in a matching jogging suit. He is tall and wears a curly hair flat top, where his hair is longer on top and gradually fades close down the sides and back. Noah is very ostentatious; he smiles and laughs and uses several hand gestures while speaking. During the interview, he took time to process his thoughts before speaking about his experiences.

Document Review

The primary document examined in this case study included the Tennessee Board of Regents Dual Enrollment Report and the Dual Enrollment Grant Eligibility policy in accordance with Tennessee Code Annotated §49-8-104. The Dual Enrollment report is an interactive digital
tool that captures all data from the Tennessee Board of Regent’s 13 public community colleges. The report also detailed the total number of dual enrollment credits obtained by students during selected academic years, the types of courses taken, the success rate for those courses, and a demographic breakdown of students participating in dual enrollment. According to the report, in 2012, there were 148 African American male dual enrollment participants compared to 3,527 white male dual enrollment participants. In 2022, that number increased to 531 African American male participants compared to 4,017 white males. Out of 531 total African American male participants, 279 enrolled at Midsouth Tennessee Community College, representing 53% of the portion of the total population statewide.

![Table 2](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dual Enrolled</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Time at College</td>
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<td>2,095</td>
<td>2,008</td>
<td>2,233</td>
<td>2,027</td>
<td>2,096</td>
<td>2,104</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>1,359</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>1,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Students</td>
<td>3,330</td>
<td>3,280</td>
<td>3,007</td>
<td>2,656</td>
<td>2,475</td>
<td>2,514</td>
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<td>2,398</td>
<td>2,067</td>
<td>1,835</td>
<td>1,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,603</td>
<td>5,578</td>
<td>5,234</td>
<td>5,168</td>
<td>4,758</td>
<td>4,942</td>
<td>5,051</td>
<td>4,836</td>
<td>3,833</td>
<td>3,722</td>
<td>3,584</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Dual Enrollment Grant policy provided award information, the application process, and eligibility requirements for participants. I obtained this document from the Tennessee Department of Education’s website. According to the TN.gov website, students must be classified as a high school junior or a high school senior, complete the dual enrollment grant application each semester, and meet the requirements of the selected postsecondary institution. Currently, no minimum high school GPA or ACT/SAT requirements are associated with the dual enrollment grant.
Demographic Survey

I created and distributed a Microsoft Forms Demographic survey (Appendix B) to students who fit the criteria, asking for their responses via email. The survey questions captured the number of dual enrollment courses taken, the college enrolled, high school GPA, and ACT scores (Tables 1 & 2). When it comes to dual enrollment, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. High schools are limited to the contingencies of postsecondary institutions. Moreover, several types of dual enrollment offerings include students attending the college campus, a college instructor teaching at the high school, a qualified high school instructor teaching on behalf of the college, or online. Participants experienced several dual enrollment offerings depending on their high school and college proximity.

Table 3
**Participant Majors, Dual Enrollment Course number & DE Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th># of DE Course</th>
<th>DE Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Physical Therapy Assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Physical Therapy Assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Logistic/Transportation Management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>General Studies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
**Participant ACT Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>ACT Composite</th>
<th>ACT Best English</th>
<th>ACT Best Math</th>
<th>ACT Best Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

This study utilized Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as a framework to explain participants’ experiences as they went from taking dual enrollment coursework while high school to transitioning to college. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1989) defines the term transition as “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). During a transition, an individual is moving in, moving out, or moving through a situation. Additionally, this concept, along with Schlossberg’s 4 S’s: situation, support, self, and strategies, were used to answer the research question. The participants in this study spoke freely about their dual enrollment experiences in relation to their effects on their transitions to college.

Introduction of Themes

After reviewing and analyzing data, five themes from this study summarized the experiences of African American male students that participated in dual enrollment and transitioned to college. I extracted direct quotes from interview transcripts to ensure that participants’ voices and perspectives were portrayed accurately by obtaining thick descriptions. These themes were selected in part because they directly related to the research questions in the study. These themes were:

• Theme 1: The Importance of Active Recruitment for Dual Enrollment While in High School
• Theme 2: Strong Institutional Support and Personal Encouragement
• Theme 3: Optimism About College
• Theme 4: Early Exposure Led to The Creation of Success Strategies
• Theme 5: Resiliency in Students
The Importance of Active Recruitment for Dual Enrollment While in High School

Throughout interviews, participants mentioned not knowing about dual enrollment opportunities. However, students revealed several ways in which they became aware of the dual enrollment program. The common discussion topic involved high school staff, such as teachers and counselors, who actively recruited or recommended them for the dual enrollment program.

For example, when asked, Joseph stated:

It was a counselor, I forgot his name, but he was a young African American. And he wanted us to do dual enrollment just to get the college experience mainly.

Another participant discussed his counselor hand-selecting him to take part in the dual enrollment program:

Matthew: She [counselor] came up to me and selected me, I felt that she believed that I could be successful in this class and I could do big things with it.

Matthew’s counselor selected students that she thought would be capable of enrolling and excelling in the course. This made Matthew feel special and encouraged him to succeed in the dual enrollment course. Similarly, another participant discussed how during study hall, he was recruited by a teacher:

Abraham: At the time, I didn't know what it was and I wasn't planning on going to do it. But I remember I was in study hall and one of our teachers was assigned to get people to do it. So he was explaining to us how this could really help you for any college credit that you might wanna do, especially if you going to community college.

Another participant mentioned that multiple attempts were made within the high school to raise awareness of dual enrollment:
David: At first, there was an announcement that went on off of the intercom in regards to taking dual enrollment classes at that time. The first time it came around, I wasn't paying too much mind to it. The second time it came around was actually in the classroom. They had flyers going out, and then also recruiters came out to the school as well.

According to David, there were several attempts to get students to participate in dual enrollment. The first attempt came in the form of an announcement which initially did not catch the attention of many students. The second attempt consisted of a combination of college representatives and high school staff who came together to announce the dual enrollment partnership to students.

Contrary to the other participants who learned about dual enrollment through their school staff, another participant learned about dual enrollment through his parent:

Elijah: My mom did. She is, well she used to be a teacher, but she quit because I guess the conditions got worse over time. She's a nurse now, but I guess she knew of all the potential educational opportunities for my future.

Because of his mom’s previous role and background as a teacher, she was aware of the school-based grants, which influenced Elijah to consider taking dual enrollment.

**Strong Institutional Support and Personal Encouragement**

Participants highlighted several examples of meaningful institutional support experiences as high school students who participated in dual enrollment. Some participants mentioned that the college campus staff treated them like young adults and provided them with the autonomy to explore the campus. This institutional support and encouragement made participants feel welcomed while on campus.
Joseph: So yeah, we even got the full access to the campus as well. So that was pretty huge for a high school student to go roaming on a college campus, even if it was community college. But yes, we got to go to all the floors, if we wanted to. But mainly we just journeyed to the cafeteria or the concession stand most of the time.

The experience of being away from their respective high schools and at a college campus provided participants with the exposure needed to understand the potentiality of life as a college student. The postsecondary institution also provided participants with college IDs as well as access to exclusive college email logins.

Abraham: I remember they gave us [name] tags and stuff like that to recognize where we were, who we were. They gave you your own ID too. So it was something that they [the college] helped prepare us for, they made sure that we needed to make our email and password.

The dual enrollment participants that went on campus experienced the early treatment of feeling like a young adult. They were provided with IDs and usernames, which they were expected to use and communicate with their professors. Participants also described finding support in several people and places as dual enrollment students. These support systems developed into a sense of belonging to the college while in high school.

Elijah: I think in terms of being a good campus, I can’t complain about needing help anywhere except maybe not knowing where to go. But even then, campus has pretty much whatever you need. They have a security guard on campus. He actually helped me out when my [car] battery died.
The security guard provided additional support beyond the day-to-day tasks by assisting with his car troubles. With the provided support, participants were able to complete their dual enrollment coursework, which also led to the transition to college.

Participants also received robust support systems as they participated in dual enrollment coursework and transitioned into a college environment. Schlossberg (2008) categorizes support functions into three categories: affection, affirmation, and assistance/aid. Within these support structures, participants were able to find affection, affirmation, or assistance as dual enrollment students and while transitioning to college. The six participants in this study experienced positive social and academic experiences that significantly impacted their transition to college. Participants identified support structures from parents, friends, girlfriends, the institution, teachers, counselors, uncles, and tutoring services.

The majority of students identified as first-generation college students. Despite members of their family not being able to graduate from college, they provided guidance, inspiration, and motivation to participants as he transitioned to college. Matthew received encouragement from his family members to participate in dual enrollment, ultimately influencing him to transition to college. Several participants also mentioned the importance of their fathers as an integral part of their support systems. For example, Joseph explained:

I would say a big inspiration for me to go to college is my dad for sure. He is like… the man works two jobs. Everything he’s learned, he’s learned through his own experiences, not even through trade school or not even college. And if everybody had my dad, I feel like it’d be a better city. That’s what I would say.

Another participant described how his father encouraged and recommended going to college to avoid the challenges that he faced due to a lack of education.
Elijah: My dad of course told me to go to college to do better than himself. He was like recommending, telling me like the best options, if I don't wanna be stuck working a job. Regarding parental support, Matthew also highlighted the support he experienced from his mother as a high school student. His mother took a creative approach to inspire him by making a deal, challenging him to be successful.

Matthew: It was like a deal with my mom, she said… She made a deal with me saying... that I want you to beat my GPA score and want you to become a top ranking student. And ever since she told me that… That’s what motivated me to go higher.

For many other participants, their friends served as an important form of support, one of the many reasons they decided to transition to college. Joseph describes how friends influenced him to participate in dual enrollment:

I’ve always surrounded myself with positive people, people that are smarter than me. So they all went through the dual enrollment program. So, I was like, dang, if I don’t do it, I’m going to feel left out. So that’s another reason why I took the dual enrollment.

He then provides more details about the importance of his friendships:

I would say that my friend group is very diverse, I would say all of them. I am grateful to have them and they are my big drivers. Honestly, none of them do drugs. None of them do crime. It’s like, yes, they all have their own majors. Yeah, I’m not going to say it to their face. You know what I’m saying? I’m not going to be sweet and say it to they face, but I’m like, yeah, they for sure helped me to keep pushing forward in my academic journey to say the least. We all want success, so we’re not going to fumble the bag like that.
Another participant described how his mother supported him throughout the transition despite attending a community college compared to a four-year university. The notion of attending a university has been a stigma that immigrant parents believed strongly for their children. However, to his astonishment, Abraham’s mom supported the community college route. Abraham said:

It was my mom mostly. I was surprised when I told her. When I had told her I was thinking maybe I’ll go to a community college. It was a big surprise when she supported me because I thought she wanted me to go straight to university because this is what a lot of immigrant parents would like for their child to do. But no, she said she supported me in it. She even wanted me to go to community college. So that it could be a lot more easier for me when it came to transitioning and then eventually I would transfer over to a university so I don’t have to pay a lot of money.

At the high school level, participants like Matthew mentioned how his assistant principal provided support, inspiring him to transition to college.

Matthew: My assistant principal talked to me… he was like, you a really good student and I don't want to see you anywhere failing. You should be successful, you should be going to college, doing this, going far way far from failing. You should be succeeding for your whole life. He called me to his office and that's when he talked to me and he was like, I see potential in you.

Outside of family members, support from an assistant principal also had an impact on the college transition. Matthew experienced a positive affirmation that provided him with the confidence to transition to college. Matthew’s assistant principal provided encouragement that pushed him to
transition beyond high school to college. The various personal support systems identified by participants played an integral part in the success that helped assist each student in becoming more successful.

**Optimism Regarding College**

According to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1989), an individual can perceive a transition as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired, or dreaded. After carefully reviewing interviews, I found that 5 out of the 6 participants perceived their transition from high school to college as a positive and anticipated event. In some way, each participant felt optimistic about enrolling in college after participating in dual enrollment. Each participant also indicated that they felt adequately prepared for the rigor and culture of college due to their dual enrollment experience. As students reported their experiences with the dual enrollment program, many described their positive aspirations of attending college after graduating from high school. For example, Elijah described his optimism regarding enrolling in college upon graduation.

Elijah: Of course it [college] was part of the plan, yeah. Yeah, it was always part of the plan.

Contrastingly, David felt pessimistic about attending college even with his dual enrollment experience. He mentioned battling internally regarding his outlook on life in terms of college.

David: Honestly, no. There were a lot of self-conversations and also conversations just out in the open with different people as far as taking a route to college and sort of what I wanted for myself throughout life. It was a few times where I had to really reevaluate things and also kind of look at it as far as longevity. Do I want to put myself in a predicament where I’m only chasing a dollar or do I want to put myself in a predicament
where there’s passion behind it where regardless of how much money I’m making out of it, there’s a passion of me getting up out of bed in order to go do it.

David eventually decided to enroll in college, but it took more effort than other participants to transition. David seemed to be persuaded by the chance to make money as a full-time employee rather than going to school and making less money.

**Early Exposure Led to The Creation of Success Strategies**

Participants highlighted the several benefits of participating in a dual enrollment program. Students mentioned ways in which their dual enrollment experiences affected their lives. The impact of taking a dual enrollment course allowed participants to understand the expectations of college beforehand which ultimately prepared them for the transition to college.

David: It was a riveting experience. I was able to see the flow of how college students were. And also it was me being taken out of the environment of high school. And with that being put into the college environment, it was kind of exposing me to different things at the same time, while still having that high school environment. And it was pretty cool. So it [dual enrollment] was able to help me see how things were, and I was able to adapt a little bit better rather than it just being my first year altogether.

Another participant acknowledged that exposure to dual enrollment allowed him to establish long-term friendships with college students while in high school. His dual enrollment course consisted of both high school students and full-time college students. As a result, he had an opportunity to collaborate with these students throughout the semester.

Joseph: How has dual enrollment affected my transition to college? I would say it gave me a head start. I would say that it got me used to college before I even got to college. So I would say it made me, meet new people. They let us go into classes with college
students as dual enrollment students. It wasn’t just solely dual enrollment. It was some college students in those classes. So yeah, we got the build connections with people. Even to this day, I’m still friends with some of the people I met during those first classes. So I would say it builds connections early on and you started early on.

Dual enrollment exposure allowed participants to understand the nuances between college and high school. As participants faced the sometimes overwhelming yet unfamiliar experiences, they displayed examples of resiliency. One participant described how failing a dual enrollment pushed him to obtain the dean’s list during his first semester as a freshman, where he retook the course.

Noah: Let’s just say that college is a step above high school. So let’s just say that I didn’t take the math class, right? And I started at the college, I would’ve probably came here thinking, I can just like, you know, slack around, but no. It was like a preemptive warning that you got to actually put effort in into college. So in my case, it was a pretty easy transition following the dual enrollment classes because like I said, those classes made me realize I got to put in more effort into going to college and actually want to pass. And so my first semester I made Dean’s list and I was like, what’s that?

He then discusses the nuances between high school and college. He mentioned that while in high school, he did not have to put in much effort to be successful, but had to make necessary changes in the dual enrollment course and while in college.

Noah: So like I said, in high school I was just smart, it’s about just listening in class or whatever. So I’m smart and I take college and it worked out pretty good for the most part. Like in high school, although I was a good student, I really wasn’t trying, I was just
listening in class, I just learned like that. But in college it’s more than that, you got to listen in class, take notes and study.

Another participant acknowledged that dual enrollment helped to change his mindset about community college. For example, Abraham said:

Coming to dual enrollment really did kind of shape my way of thinking, maybe I could do community college to save up money if I don’t get a scholarship. And it could probably help me with the whole transfer process that I’m planning on doing soon. So, it did help me out with that. And plus, yeah, it was just like if you don’t have a scholarship or if you are not well off, you know what I mean? Dual enrollment kind of helped me see, I could probably stay at a community college.

Overall, students indicated very positive experiences with the dual enrollment program. This experience provided opportunities that exposed students to college instructors, staff, students, and the overall college environment.

As students experience change during a transition, Goodman et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of changing the situation as an attempt to modify the source of stress. A common strategy to combat college debt involved participants utilizing the Tennessee Promise Scholarship. Some participants had ambitions of attending a four-year institution beyond a community college. Additionally, students mentioned not being able to afford to pay for dual enrollment coursework or college tuition, depending on grants and scholarships. A clear advantage of attending a community college involves taking general education courses and then transferring to a four-year institution, thus saving money as opposed to transitioning directly to a four-year institution. This strategy reduces the need to take out additional loans to pay for
college. As a result, participants learned about the affordability aspect of utilizing the Tennessee-based scholarship before transitioning to a four-year institution.

Abraham: Yeah, I was a Tennessee Promise student. You gotta think, four years are very expensive. We all know that. Plus, if you don’t want to take on college debt, going to community college, doing two years doing all the simple [general education] classes that you need to do, even your electives, it saves you a lot more money. Yeah. And then when you transfer over to finish off your classes with a little bit less debt.

Another participant understood the advantages of taking dual enrollment courses while in high school allowed him to obtain credit early. This led to Joshua’s transition to college, where he took on less debt by utilizing scholarship funding.

Joshua: I’m getting credits and I’m going to college for free. I’m not paying for anything. It’s getting me credits early on.

A similar example of a success strategy implemented by a participant involved Elijah enrolling in a community college as an attempt to take care of the general education courses first, before transitioning to an out-of-state school. Elijah planned on attending an art school in Atlanta, GA but understood that the move would be expensive.

Elijah: Going to the art school in Atlanta first, I needed the pre-reqs [pre-requisites] and I figured scholarships, I would need to get the pre-reqs out of the way here which is a lot cheaper than going to Atlanta, getting an apartment or getting a dorm set up. Instead of transitioning directly to an out-of-state postsecondary institution where the costs would be exponential for a student, Elijah chose to save money by attending a local community
college first. He then learned that his pre-requisite courses that were taken at the community college could be accepted at his chosen art school, meaning fewer courses needed to graduate. Participants understood the advantages of staying at a local institution and using a Tennessee-based scholarship before transitioning to college. Students strategized taking pre-requisite/general education courses while in high school and at a community college to save money and even obtain a transfer scholarship upon graduating. Although all participants were employed, one participant mentioned his employer’s tuition reimbursement program, which also identified an additional success strategy used to assist with the costs of college.

Noah: You got to go to college to be successful in life. So during the quarantine time of 2020, I thought about it. I’m like, okay, having a degree is nice. I will go ahead and graduate with my associate [degree] and then work through Nike. But at the time I was a temp [temporary employee] and then I got full time at the back end of 2020. Basically, with Lane Four, I get my college tuition paid. But it’s only online.

In partnership with a specific college, the company allows its employees the opportunity to enroll in a degree program. The company pays the college directly, reducing the upfront tuition costs that students often encounter. An important component of this partnership specifically requires the employee to enroll in an online degree program. Noah plans on utilizing this program upon graduating from the community college.

In addition to utilizing funding, participants also mentioned success strategies that aided in a successful transition experience and effectively adapting to the postsecondary environment. Each participant employed a different strategy to change the situation. When asked about effective strategies to assist with the transition from high school to college, common themes
included “time management” and the mitigation of “procrastination.” Participants learned through dual enrollment how vital time management was in helping them be successful.

Matthew: I learned that time management’s very, very, very important. I thought about the schedule and timing on how I do between school and work and home. I did schedules with each one. I gotta do this class on this time, then I gotta focus on this on work. Then when I come home, focus on school and stuff like that.

The participant learned the importance of time management by balancing his work and school schedule. He was proactive in setting up a schedule in which he designated time to study while at home and away from work. This strategy ensures that participants are aware of their schedule ahead of time.

Another participant mentioned not having an initial strategy but eventually created an excel sheet that helped him become more organized. On this excel spreadsheet, he would document each college course with upcoming assignments. This strategy allowed him to take advantage of his time while also ensuring that all assignments were complete. Prior to the implementation of this strategy, Elijah mentioned that he struggled:

Elijah: At first I didn’t have a strategy at all, I just figured I’d just go in there and do my assignments like I did in high school, but of course that kind of backfired for the first half. I wasn’t doing that well at all. Then I developed the Excel sheet, Excel sheet strategy, and after that I was doing pretty much perfect after that... I have my own little Excel sheet with certain classes in which I do certain assignments. So it’s just a matter of trial and error first and time management’s really what it’s all about.

Another strategy involved a participant displaying a proactive mentality which assisted him in being successful at the college level. He learned that it was important to study and complete his
assignments ahead of time. He also learned and was exposed to the rigor of college, which also prepared him for the expectations of instructors.

David: I knew that I had to make sure I do my work early. I gotta make sure I have every assignment finished on time, all that.

Resiliency in Students

Participants described several scenarios that defined their motivation to transition to college after high school. As a result, this compelled participants to succeed while participating in dual enrollment. The decision to enroll in college is triggered by environmental factors such as family members and the recognition of socioeconomic status. Five of the six participants identified as first-generation. Most participants saw examples of the effects of not having a college education and viewed it as a negative experience among family members. For example, Elijah mentioned:

Well, my dad was unable to go to college, so I was able to see how finding a job was a lot harder for him. He worked harder hours and whatnot. My older brother… he dropped out of college and I see how hard it is for him in terms of getting a job and getting a house and stuff like that. So I figured that going to college is a must.

Joseph also provided insight into his family, who did not complete college as well as ambitions to change his family trajectory. He also mentioned obtaining a college education as a way to break generational curses.

Joseph: They both went to college, but they both never finished college. So basically, I would say just to break the family curse, the typical old, let’s break the family curse. Cause no one’s really gotten an associate’s degree. My parents… they don’t have a degree. They just have some college, they never actually finished college.
Matthew also provided the perspective of having an uncle that went to jail and how it impacted his family. His uncle, despite his struggles, chose to push Matthew to be better than him. This talk ultimately inspired Matthew to transition to college.

Matthew: I know my mom, she went to college but she didn’t finish it. And my uncles, they graduated high school but they never went to college. Well before I was born, one of my uncles went to jail for 20 years and when he came back home, he had this long talk with me. He was like, he said jail is not a place for you and I don’t ever wanna see you in there. And he said, if he sees me in there, he’s going to be highly disappointed. He wanted me to be successful. He said I don’t want you to be like me. I want you to be better than me at all times. It made me feel like I want to help out. I want to be successful for my family and try to get them out of struggles and stuff like that.

As participants described situations that impacted their dual enrollment experience, a common theme involved the pandemic. Some participants were enrolled in dual enrollment coursework during the pandemic, which affected their high school experiences and their transition to college. Elija mentioned how his dual enrollment experience went well until the pandemic, during which he and other students had to move from in-person to online learning.

Elijah: Academically, it’s been pretty good up until high school. It only started to slow down a bit during Covid because the online learning was kinda harder, and I guess it was what you call it, harder to learn certain things like math and science via online classes.

In another example, Abraham mentioned how the pandemic affected his experiences while in high school and also as a college student attending classes on campus.
Abraham: Yeah, it affected me because by around of course March I was still in high school or the 12th grade. And then I think around August it was still going on. And then I remember I had one class during the spring semester of 2021 where I had to always go to school. I had to wear a mask of course, and I had to show them my status. It was almost like a website where you had to show you weren’t having covid symptoms or anything, you had to show it to the security.

During his interview, Joseph took a significant amount of time to express the conditions in which the pandemic affected his situation in terms of his dual enrollment experience, high school graduation, and the transition to college.

Joseph: It was March, remember? When they got to the second semester for those two classes, they just gave us credit. Cause we were finished anyway. So seniors, they graduate early. So around that time we were just about to finish. I remember vividly, I had a research paper just like now. But it was for criminal justice. But we never got the prompt for it because Covid happened. But yes, but I still ended up passing those classes. Thankfully that didn’t hinder me.

The pandemic occurred during the spring term of his senior year. As a result, it interrupted his dual enrollment coursework tremendously. Joseph then described his experience when it came to transitioning from high school to college during the pandemic. Unfortunately, he could not experience a traditional graduation which includes a formal event in which students walk on stage to receive their diploma. Instead, due to the pandemic, his graduation was held virtually.

Joseph: Cause during the transition, for one, we didn’t, graduate, but we had a slideshow. We didn’t walk on stage. So I can’t exactly talk too much on the graduation ceremony
and stuff like that. But yeah, I look back on it now, I was like, dang, I mean I still got a diploma but dang I didn’t even get to walk the stage. But it’s fine. It is what it is.

During the interview, Joseph also described the pandemic as a formidable challenge that led to him taking a semester off when it came to enrolling in college. Unfortunately, Matthew experienced internet access issues that affected his college transition during the pandemic.

Matthew: My first semester, which was the fall semester, which after graduation I didn’t go to it. I went to work instead because I didn’t have access to any classes or any internet access because it was like covid just hit basically. I signed up for those classes in fall, but I didn’t go to any of them because that’s when Covid hit. But the thing is, it wasn’t that detrimental to my academic journey because the college… I thank the college for this. Because there’s an appeal form for fall semester you can sign that form and they basically, will cover that tuition.

Unanticipated events are classified as situations that may catch students off-guard (Anderson et al., 2012). Unfortunately, these high school participants expressed experiencing the unanticipated event in the Covid-19 Pandemic. This event significantly impacted their high school learning and dual enrollment experiences. Some participants indicated that they had to move from in-person to online learning during the spring semester of their senior year. However, although the impact of the pandemic had detrimental effects on students, participants still completed coursework and transitioned to college. Findings from this research point to the importance of resiliency in African American males who persevered despite the many challenges faced during their senior year.
Summary

Data collected and analyzed for the study, shared through the participants’ voices, captured their experiences with dual enrollment and how it directly fosters the ability to transition to a postsecondary institution. This chapter reviewed the results of interview data gathered from African American male students. First, a general overview of the participants was offered, followed by the findings discovered through the themes that emerged from the participant’s responses. The participants shared their experiences regarding Schlossberg’s 4 S’s (Self, Situation, Support & Strategy) as it directly connects to their inner/outer microsystems, which leads to their resilience through academic achievement.

To establish validity of the findings, I used multiple sources of data that included interviews, document analysis, demographic survey data, and journaling. Essential support systems identified by the participants were friends, parents, family, college staff, and high school staff. When data saturation occurs in which the researcher no longer receives fresh information, Seidman (2003) suggests that the sample size is sufficient. As a result, data saturation was achieved with a sample size of six participants. To increase both the reliability and trustworthiness of the data, I provided rich descriptions of the data for readers to observe data analysis.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study aimed to understand the experiences of African American male students who participated in dual enrollment as they transitioned from high school to college. This study explored the transition of African American Male students through the lens of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1989) and African American Male Theory (2013). I asked participants to describe their experience in terms of situation, self, support, and strategies as they transitioned from high school to college. This study is important because it adds to the current literature regarding dual enrollment and adds the perspective of African American males to the research base. This perspective was valuable as the number of African American males participating in dual enrollment is low compared to their white counterparts. This chapter summarizes the qualitative case study, including an overview of the study, restating the research questions, and discussing the research implications for the partnership between secondary education and student affairs within higher education.

Summary of the Study

This study examined six participants who participated in dual enrollment while in high school and then transitioned to a postsecondary institution. I used a qualitative case study research design to investigate the problem in the literature. The rationale for using a qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of African American male students as they transitioned to a postsecondary institution. I gathered research data through semi-structured interviews, demographic surveys, journaling, and document review. Participants provided insight into their views, thoughts, and experiences while participating in dual enrollment and transitioning to a postsecondary institution. Research subjects participated in semi-structured interviews that Ie
recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Through analysis of interviews and document review and journal data, five themes were identified and reported. Interviews asked participants to describe their dual enrollment and transition experiences from high school to college. The research questions that guided this qualitative case study were:

**Research Question 1**

**What are the lived experiences of African American male students who participated in a dual enrollment program?**

This question allowed participants to recall their experiences while participating in dual enrollment. The themes that emerged were “Awareness of Dual Enrollment,” “Strong Personal and Institution Support Systems,” and “Resiliency In Students.” I will discuss each theme as it relates to relevant literature. Overall, findings indicated that participants reported a positive experience while participating in dual enrollment coursework. Exposure to institutional services was vital in influencing dual enrollment students to transition to college. As dual enrollment participants, students gained early exposure to college life, which helped prepare them to transition to college after graduation. While taking dual enrollment coursework during the spring 2020 semester, students experienced the untimely challenge of the Pandemic. Before the Pandemic, most participants indicated they were transported to campus by their school. However, the college and high school forced students to move from in-person to online coursework as a safety precaution. Despite these abrupt changes, students still completed coursework and even transitioned to college after graduating high school.

*The Importance of Active Recruitment for Dual Enrollment While in High School.* As reported, there were several ways in which students became aware of participating in the dual enrollment program. Most participants mentioned high school staff at their high school, reaching
out in an attempt to recommend them for a particular course. Other participants mentioned being targeted by school staff, recruiting them to take a dual enrollment course. These individuals who hand-selected students encouraged them, motivating them to enroll in the dual enrollment program. One of the six participants mentioned that his mother’s previous role in education afforded him the opportunity to know in advance about dual enrollment and resources provided by the state of Tennessee. If it were not for high school staff, students would not have known about the opportunity to enroll in dual enrollment.

**Strong Institutional Support and Personal Encouragement.** Students expressed their thoughts regarding the positive impact of exposure to institutional services. In partnership with the local college, the participants’ school district provided transportation to students from high school to the campus throughout the week. This exposure allowed students to interact with college students, staff, and faculty. Results from this study noted several benefits as a result of the interactions at the postsecondary institution. Participants mentioned the experience of having the autonomy to roam around the campus between classes. Another participant also mentioned feeling welcomed and having a sense of belonging on the campus due to staff providing each student with IDs and name tags. In partnership with the local college, the school district provided transportation to students from high school to the campus throughout the week. Based on the participants’ descriptions of their experiences, they truly enjoyed their time on campus as college students. While on campus, several participants mentioned the lack of representation of other African American male students.

Besides institutional support, participants also indicated the importance of personal encouragement and support structures. All participants mentioned family and friends who supported and encouraged them to be successful. Participants provided several examples that
justify the need for strong support systems. Two participants mentioned the impact of their fathers, who not only supported them while they participated in dual enrollment but even recommended that they go to college to prevent some of the struggles that they experienced. Another participant mentioned being challenged by his mom to do better than her, which inspired him to be successful at the high school level. Students mentioned that this support encouraged them throughout dual enrollment to transition to college beyond dual enrollment eventually.

**Resiliency in Students.** Beyond the benefits of participating in dual enrollment, students acknowledged experiencing significant environmental factors that led to changes while in dual enrollment. For example, the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic tremendously impacted students throughout the country. Participants described shifting from in-person to online coursework, which was incredibly challenging. Findings showed that the grades of participants dropped dramatically from the fall to the spring semester due to the Pandemic. One participant recalled not being able to experience an actual high school graduation but, unfortunately, having a virtual graduation.

Despite the adverse effects of the pandemic, participants in this study appear to have an ecosystem of support that propelled their success as dual enrollment students. As students described their dual enrollment experiences, participants indicated the importance of support. Many of the families and friends of participants were strong advocates for them to attend college. Most participants spoke highly of their parents when it came to a support system. Although they did not attend or graduate from college, parents provided continuous support in the form of motivation, belief, and encouragement to participants. Participants also emphasized the importance of friends that provided inspiration and accountability while in dual enrollment. This
support from friends added to their success, which helped participants matriculate into college. This led to not only success but also matriculation into the postsecondary institution.

Research Question 2

How do African American males who participated in dual enrollment describe their transition to college?

Findings revealed that exposure to dual enrollment coursework prepared students for the transition to college. Students described their aspirations to attend college as a product of the dual enrollment experience. As they transitioned, they were properly prepared and knowledgeable of the expectations. As participants reflected on their experiences, they agreed that participating in dual enrollment overall prepared them for the transition to college. The main themes that emerged were “Optimism About College” and “Early Exposure Led to the Creation of Success Strategies.”

Early Exposure Led to the Creation of Success Strategies. During a transition, it is essential for individuals to change the situation by modifying the source of stress (Goodman et al., 2006). Several participants mentioned creating their own strategies to combat the rigor of college coursework. One participant recalled failing a dual enrollment course but then retaking the course as a full-time student while also strategically using the tutoring office on campus to improve his understanding of assignments. These strategies were discovered due to the dual enrollment program and then utilized as full-time college students.

While participating in dual enrollment, college exposure helped students learn the importance of saving money and time by utilizing grants and scholarships. All participants used the dual enrollment grant to pay for each course. Upon completing each course, students were
aware that their courses were transferrable and counted towards their major. The state provided the dual enrollment grant to all Tennessee students considered high school juniors and seniors. Through the dual enrollment program, participants learned the advantages of utilizing state-based scholarships at the community before transferring to a four-year institution. Participants who enrolled in dual enrollment saved substantial costs by taking advantage of the dual enrollment grant. Even at the community college level, tuition continues to rise, making it difficult for students to enroll without the assistance of grants or scholarships. The state provides students in Tennessee several opportunities to save on overall college costs through grant dollars for dual enrollment, which awards up to 11 courses for free. As college costs continue to rise, it is imperative for students to take advantage of this funding as Tennessee residents.

**Optimism About College.** During the transition, students indicated feeling prepared academically for the rigor of college due to their dual enrollment experience. Participants also felt they performed better academically due to their participation experiences from dual enrollment coursework. This dual enrollment experience exposed students to instructors, coursework, and the overall college environment. These findings align with research from D’Amica et al. (2013), who found that dual enrollment participation increases the ability of students to integrate into the college environment. Findings in this study also support Karp’s (2012) “role rehearsal,” concept in which a student temporarily acts as if they are already in the role while also having the opportunity to gauge the reactions of others. These findings highlight the importance of higher education institutions providing meaningful early postsecondary opportunities to high school students. These early exposure activities create a well-rounded student who understands the postsecondary institutions’ structure, policies, and expectations, which ultimately helps with student success.
What Do These Findings Mean?

Findings through participant interviews further revealed the concept of resiliency as participants faced several forms of environmental challenges. Despite experiencing an unfamiliar college environment, participants could successfully complete their dual enrollment coursework and transition to college. A major challenge mentioned involved the effects of the Pandemic on education. Participants mentioned that the Pandemic forced students to move from in-person to online coursework, which was more difficult. Participants also exuded resiliency through their choices to achieve despite family circumstances. For example, one participant mentioned how several of his family members went to jail as a product of their environment. This participant decided to take another route by going to college. Another example involves one participant mentioning failing his dual enrollment course but retaking and passing after transitioning to college. These examples of participants emphasize Bush and Bush’s (2013) fourth tenet regarding resiliency and resistance. African American Male Theory looks at the act of resiliency through the ecological models mentioned above. This study focused mainly on the inner and outer microsystems, indicating resiliency's importance.

Another interesting finding through the demographic survey involved the ACT scores of participants. Findings (Table 3) show that most participants’ recorded composite and subscores were below the requirements to be considered “college ready.” Although some participants reported low subscores in English, Reading, and Math, dual enrollment grades were exceptional during their first semester. Most students recorded an “A” or “B” in their first dual enrollment course except for one student. This phenomenon also demonstrates that standardized scores may not be a good determinant for students, especially African American males (Donnor & Shockley, 2010; Marchant & Paulson, 2005).
Data Analysis Using African American Male Theory

In addition to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, I used African American Male Theory as an additional framework to further analyze participants’ experiences. African American Male Theory integrates the five interconnected environmental systems attributed to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (2005) to focus on the narratives specific to the experiences, environments, and other interrelated structures and systems that affected and shaped African American males’ position and trajectory. Furthermore, African American Male Theory expands Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system by creating an inner and outer microsystem. Schlossberg’s 4 S’s (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategy) fall under both the inner and outer microsystems created by Bush and Bush (2013). The inner microsystem consists of personality, beliefs, intellect, and perceptions. The outer microsystem consists of family, peers, neighborhood, and school. Throughout each interview, participants described their experiences that directly connected to two African American Male Theory tenets.

Ecological Systems Approach

The inner microsystem captures the components such as biology, personality, perceptions, and beliefs. A common belief that participants mentioned frequently is the need to work. Most participants were employed and worked at least 30 hours per week while attending college. Working and attending school requires significant effort, and participants indicated having an adequate work-life balance. Participants also described feelings of self-confidence throughout their interviews. Overall, most viewed college as an attainable option and planned to attend before graduating high school. Despite being first-generation students and having no family members who graduated from college, students held a belief that employment was important.
Strong support systems were critical to the success of participants. Participants mentioned receiving several forms of support while participating in dual enrollment, during the transition to college, and as full-time college students. These support systems included: family, faculty, friends, and campus staff. As described in AAMT’s first tenet, constant activity within the outer microsystem shaped the trajectory of participants compelling them to enroll in college beyond graduation. Most participants were encouraged to enroll by a supportive parent, counselor, or staff member who felt they could succeed. This verbal affirmation served as a form of encouragement for participants.

Several participants mentioned working as both college students and high school students while also transitioning to college. Participants who worked stated how their employers were flexible regarding their work shifts. Intertwined with their inner microsystem in which participants perceived the need to have a source of income, the outer microsystem comprised of their employers providing financial support and a flexibility between work and school.

Another important support structure that served as an integral part of the student’s dual enrollment experience involved transportation. Some participants mentioned being transported by bus through local college and school system partnerships. This allowed hundreds of students to experience dual enrollment on the college campus at no cost. Due to various socioeconomic factors, many students cannot obtain transportation to and from a college campus.

Through findings from interviews, themes emerged connecting state government policies specific to the state of Tennessee. In addition to practical support, participants also mentioned financial support such as grants and scholarships, which state government funds. Participants indicated that they participated in multiple dual enrollment courses at no cost. Participants also mentioned receiving scholarship funding to pay for college. The dual enrollment grant is a
statewide initiative offered to all Tennessee students in high school, which pays up to 10 college courses. All participants took advantage of this grant. In addition, participants mentioned being a Tennessee Promise student, another statewide initiative offered to graduating seniors within the state. Participants depended on these funding structures to pay for their education.

The exosystem also includes environmental settings such as parents’ employment, which affect a student’s education and neighborhood. Several participants mentioned that their parents did not attend nor graduate from college, which impacted their job outlook while raising a family. One participant mentioned his father and brother struggling to find employment due to a lack of education. Even though the lack of education from parents does not directly affect participants (Bush & Bush, 2013), it does impact the types of schools offered to students based on location.

Relevant macrosystem support as it affects African American male students involved in the systemic issues around the lack of participation for students. Participants mentioned being one of the very few African American male students in the dual enrollment course. This lack of exposure to postsecondary education could affect individuals economically, ideologically, and even emotionally (Bush & Bush, 2013). Despite admissions requirements and grant eligibility of dual enrollment, there are clear disparities in postsecondary educational opportunities for African American males.

**Limitations**

A major limitation of this study involved the sample of students who participated in dual enrollment and transitioned to Midsouth Tennessee Community College. A very low number of African American male students participated in dual enrollment. Moreover, an even smaller number of African American male students participated in dual enrollment and then matriculated
to college. Recruitment of participants was extremely challenging. After sending out multiple emails to potential students, I did not receive a response. I then contacted the list of students via telephone only to receive a minimal response rate. Although I made multiple attempts to reach 59 potential students, participation resulted in six students that fit the criteria.

Although one student (Abraham) identified as an African American, his parents were African immigrants which could potentially differ from those participants whose parents were born in the United States. Immigrant-born children may have different life experiences and parental expectations. For example, African immigrants bring with them a distinct perspective in which they represented the majority population, as opposed to American born African Americans (Whittington, et al., 2021). These cultural differences could have impacted the participant’s thoughts regarding college and dual enrollment.

**Directions For Future Research**

This study adds to the scant research on African American male students who participate in dual enrollment. Although there is ample literature regarding participants in dual enrollment, there is a need to obtain more responses from African American males. Furthermore, many aspects of African American males who participated in dual enrollment need to be examined. As dual enrollment programs continue to increase in popularity, I recommend that this study be replicated in different regions of the country. Due to the small sample size, this particular study only provides a limited perspective on the African American student experience. Therefore, more perspectives of African American students could potentially add to the literature.

Findings from this study aligned with Schlossberg’s Transition Theory in terms of the type of transition that individuals encounter (anticipated, unanticipated, & nonevent).
Unanticipated transitions create a crisis that disrupts an established plan from moving forward (Anderson et al., 2012). I recommend that future research explore the impact of unanticipated transitions on the lives of African American male college students.

Because this research focused on the community college aspect, another area that needs future research involves looking at other dual enrollment partnerships between high schools, four-year institutions, and technical colleges. Understanding the experiences of African American male students who participated in dual enrollment and then transitioned to a four-year or technical college, would add to the literature on transition theory. It would also be interesting to learn more about the perspectives of high school students currently enrolled in a dual enrollment program. Their perspectives on how dual enrollment impacted their college choice would lead to significant findings within the literature. Findings align with Karp’s (2012) role rehearsal concept which helped students obtain the necessary exposure to transition to college after graduation. Future research could also examine role rehearsal’s impact on African American males who participated in dual enrollment.

Although this research study focused on students who participated in dual enrollment and transitioned to Midsouth Community College, additional research is needed regarding the college choice of students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school and then transitioned to a postsecondary institution. After reviewing data from Midsouth Community College’s report, several students enrolled in dual enrollment as high school students but did not matriculate to that particular institution. Further research would benefit postsecondary administration and admissions departments as they design potential recruitment strategies to increase enrollment.

Findings from this study support Bush and Bush’s (2013) tenets on resiliency and uniqueness. Several participants passed their college-level dual enrollment course despite having
low ACT composite scores. These early postsecondary opportunities offer college exposure that can inspire students to enroll and potentially succeed after graduating. Providing more opportunities to students who may not traditionally meet the criteria is vital. Furthermore, this research study demonstrates that although students may not have the required ACT scores, students can still be successful in a dual enrollment course.

**Implications**

This study provided insight into the dual enrollment experiences of African American male students as well as the transition experiences of those students as they graduated from high school and matriculated into a community college. An implication that can be drawn from this study involves a call for postsecondary administration to support this population even more at community colleges. Findings suggested that community colleges are essential in offering opportunities to underserved populations. This research is supported by Price (2019)’s findings on the need to increase high school and college partnerships, which could provide African American males with a pathway to college. Similar research by McCoy (2014) suggests that colleges and universities must collaborate with secondary schools to improve the application process and ease the transition to higher education. Therefore, community colleges must design programs targeting and supporting African American males.

Intentional collaboration between high school and college that provides programs and services to African American male students while in high school is essential to the success of this population. Both colleges and high schools need to establish transformational partnerships that intentionally target African American males. This program should be explicitly designed with the lens of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and African American Male Theory in mind to meet the needs of students through wrap-around support and services. Through the framework of
African American Male Theory, it is crucial to understand that this population is unique and impacted by societal factors that may prevent educational attainment (Bush & Bush, 2013). Findings showed that multiple forms of support for African American male students helped strengthen their belief in themselves, creating confidence to succeed beyond high school. These findings align with Brooms’ (2021) research on the educational desires of African American male students, which identified dedication, drive, and resilience as contributing to student success factors. Another implication from the findings indicated that African American males received enough support to transition from high school to college. Although McCoy (2014) identified that students experience an absence of role models and a lack of familiarity within higher education, these findings suggest that dual enrollment students received enough college exposure to successfully transition to college.

If executed correctly, the solutions presented could create an impactful experience for students while also removing some of the many barriers faced by African American male students. As colleges continue to see an increase in diverse populations, it is highly important to view some of the processes and procedures from a student’s perspective to mitigate some of the issues that students experience. While participating in dual enrollment during the transition from high school to college, it is important for postsecondary institutions to effectively collaborate to ensure proper handoff to encourage and strengthen a seamless transition. As a result, exposing more African American male students to dual enrollment opportunities is imperative. Bush and Bush (2013) suggested that education should enable African Americans to express themselves according to their cultural and community norms. In addition, students that participate in dual enrollment courses should be equipped to share their experiences with up-and-coming high school students. Sharing these experiences with fellow classmates may inspire and increase dual
enrollment participation. Although African American males represent a small population within higher education, the impact of enrollment increases could lead to economic and societal changes nationwide. So, it is paramount for higher education institutions to assist in ensuring that this specific population is increasingly successful.

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to understand the experiences of African American male students enrolled in dual enrollment who transitioned to a community college. This study is significant because it represented the perspectives of a small student population at the college level. The participants felt that the dual enrollment program contributed to their ability to transition to college. Overall, the findings revealed the importance of support structures in students' lives. Additionally, the institutional partnership with high schools allowed African American males the opportunity to become exposed to college life. Therefore, providing more opportunities to African American male students will assist in providing more students with the opportunity to receive early exposure which could also lead to an increase in matriculation into college.
References


https://driveto55.org/


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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Reflection on The Meaning (Dual Enrollment’s Impact)

1. Please tell me about yourself

2. Please share with me your school experiences. How was your high school experience?

3. How did you become aware that you could take a college course as a high school student?

4 S’s Coping Model and Inner/Outer Microsystem

• Situation
  o What motivated you to take a college course as a high school student?
  o How would you describe the experience of being a college student?
  o How has dual enrollment contributed (positively or negatively to your transition experience from high school to college?

• Self
  o What were your thoughts about going to college before taking a dual enrollment course? Did you believe that you could attend college?
  o With your experience so far, how would you rate the transition from high school to college? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
  o How have you changed mentally as a result of transitioning from high school to college?

• Support
  o What personal experiences influenced your decision to attend college?
What factors have helped you cope with the transition from high school to college?

Has anyone/anything that made the transition more difficult for you?

What support systems are around you to ensure your success? Why or why not?

• **Strategy**

  What were some strategies that you used to successfully get through the transition of attending college?

  Were there any strategies applied that made the transition easier or harder?

  Think back to your time in high school and now, How can the campus be more effective in helping you?

  How can we influence more African American male students to participate?

• Is there anything else you’d like to talk about?

Thank you for participating in this interview! I appreciate you for taking the time to do this. I may contact you in the future for the purpose of follow-up interview questions. Again, let me assure you of the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone at 901-318-9123.
Appendix B

Demographic Survey

Demographic Data Form

This is a quick data form that will determine if you are the right fit for this research opportunity!

* Required

1. **First Name** *

   Enter your answer

2. **Last Name** *

   Enter your answer

3. **Phone Number** *

   Enter your answer
Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Good morning,

My name is Kenderek D. Harris, and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Higher Education at the University of Memphis. I am contacting you to ask if you would be interested in participating in my research study. In the study, I will attempt to understand the experiences of African American male students who participated in dual enrollment. Participation will include a 1-on-1 interview lasting between 60-90 minutes. As a token of appreciation, participants will receive a Chick-fil-A gift card.

If you are interested and willing to participate in this study, please respond to this email. Feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time,

Kenderek D. Harris
Adjunct Instructor
Southwest Tennessee Community College

Southwest Tennessee - Your Best Choice

www.southwest.tn.edu
Appendix D

Informed Consent To Participate Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO PARTICIPATE IN DUAL ENROLLMENT

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the lived experiences of African American Male Students who participate in dual enrollment. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you participated in dual enrollment coursework. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 10 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Kenderek D. Harris (Lead Investigator, LI) of University of Memphis Department of Higher and Adult Education. He is being guided in this research by Eric Platt (Advisor). There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study. No members of the research team have any significant financial interest and/or conflict of interest related to the research.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research is to better understand and explain the experiences of African American males who participate in dual enrollment. By doing this study, we hope to expand the knowledge about the experiences of African American male students and the impact of dual enrollment as students transition from high school to college.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

The only foreseen reasons why you should not take part in this study is if you do not feel comfortable discussing multicultural issues, such as diversity, biases, stereotypes, cultural competency, etc.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at a location and at a time that is convenient for you. Each interview is expected to last 30 minutes to 1 hour.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Participants will be asked to respond to questions about their childhood and upbringing, family.
Appendix E

IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

November 14, 2022

PI Name: Kenderek Harris
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Alison Happel-Parkins, Ronald Platt
Submission Type: Initial
Title: THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO PARTICIPATE IN DUAL ENROLLMENT
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2023-90

Expedited Approval: November 14, 2022

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00008815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.