Academic achievement and the community college: Perspectives of Black male students on the importance of ‘focus’

J. Luke Wood
Robert T. Palmer

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ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Perspectives of Black Male Students on the
Importance of “Focus”

J. Luke Wood  
San Diego State University

Robert T. Palmer  
State University of New York, Binghamton

This article reports on selected findings from a qualitative study of factors affecting the academic success of Black male students in the community college. Data from this study was collected through semistructured interviews with 28 participants at Desert Valley Community College (SVCC) (a pseudonym). SVCC is a mid-sized institution located in the Southwestern United States. Findings address the concept of “focus,” the degree of attention students direct toward their academic goals. In general, participants noted that when they were “focused” on college, they succeeded academically; while a lack of focus was associated with poor success. The intricacies and outcomes associated with being focused are presented.

Black male achievement in the community college has been a topic of increasing interest in recent years (Bush, 2004, Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Perrakis, 2008; Wood & Palmer, 2012). This interest is evidenced by the proliferation of Black (and minority) male initiatives in community colleges (Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011). Though community college leaders remain concerned about issues of student performance in the areas of enrollment, persistence, and graduation, there is also a need for heightened attention on student grades. According to recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2008), Black males in the community college have the lowest grade point averages (GPA) among all male students in public 2-year colleges. The mean GPA of Black males is 2.55, markedly lower than their White (2.85) and Asian (2.82) counterparts (also representing a statistically significant difference, $p < .001$). This GPA is also lower than those held by Hispanic/Latino (2.63) and Native American (2.65) students (though not a significant difference).

The aforementioned achievement scores led to the researchers’ interest in this topic. Thus, this study presents selected findings

Please direct inquiries about this manuscript to: J. Luke Wood, luke.wood@sdsu.edu

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from a larger study of Black male achievement in the community college. In the larger investigation, factors which affect achievement were identified and then grouped into several interdependent domains: academic, institutional, personal, and psychological. This study focuses on the latter. Within the psychological domain, three primary factors were identified as affecting achievement, students’ motivation, their academic confidence, and “focus.” This particular manuscript is concerned with the concept of focus, the degree of attention directed toward academic matters. As such, the purpose of this study is to discuss Black male students’ perspectives on how focus affects their achievement in the community college.

In this study, achievement (often termed academic success) refers to students’ grade point averages and course completion (see Beckles, 2008; Mosby, 2009; Perrakis, 2008). This study’s focus on factors affecting achievement among Black males in the community college is important given that previous research has focused primarily on issues of persistence (what enables students to stay in college) as opposed to achievement (what enables students to excel academically) (Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014). The next section presents relevant literature which sets a foundation for understanding the role of psychological factors affecting Black male achievement in the community college.

**RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Recently, there has been a proliferation of scholarship examining Black males in postsecondary education (Brown & Dancy, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Dancy & Brown, 2008, 2011; Harper, 2006, 2009; Harper & Nichols, 2008, Palmer & Gasman, 2008, Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer & Young, 2009; Palmer & Wood, 2012). However, fewer studies have examined the experiences of Black males in the community college (Wood & Turner, 2011). While Black males in community colleges share common sociocultural experiences with Black males in public 4-year institutions, there are important differences. These groups differ greatly, with respect to demographic characteristics (e.g., marital status, dependency status, children), degree expectations, academic integration, social integration, and institutional context (see Flowers, 2006; Wood, 2011). For example, Flowers (2006) suggests that Black males in 2-year colleges experience lower levels of academic and social integration than their 4-year counterparts. Such differences necessitate research, programming, initiatives, and policies which account for the distinct experiences of each group.

Though limited in nature, previous research suggests the importance of background, academic, environmental, social, and psychological variables on the success, broadly defined, of Black males in the community college (Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Mason, 1994, 1998; Perrakis, 2008). With respect to psychological factors, the limited research on this population has illustrated the importance of several concepts: utility, goal commitment, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and locus of control. Utility refers to students’ perceptions of the worthiness of their academic endeavors. In essence, whether the time students invest in their education will be worth their effort. Mason (1994, 1998) found that Black males were significantly more likely to succeed in the community college when they had high perceptions of utility. Wood (2010) found a similar relationship between utility and student achievement, noting that utility served as a core motivational factor for student success.

Goal commitment is the degree to which students are committed to their degree expectations. Similar to findings on utility (Mason, 1994, 1998), found that greater levels of goal commitment were associated with greater levels of success. This finding is in line with previous research from Bean and Metzner (1985), whose foundational model of nontraditional student attrition denotes that goal commitment is an integral consideration in student achieve-
ment. Self-efficacy is also an integral factor for success. Self-efficacy refers to students’ belief in themselves. As Wilkins (2005) noted, Black males in the community college, who have a strong self-efficacy in academic matters (academic self-efficacy), are more likely to succeed than those who have lowered levels of self-confidence.

Several authors (Beckles, 2008; Perrakis, 2008) have noted the importance of students having a sense of belonging. Black males in the community college who have a greater sense of belonging to a campus generally experience fewer campus climate issues and feel more welcomed on campus. In turn, these students are more likely to succeed in college as their success is not as likely to be impaired by campus environmental factors. Lastly, locus of control deals with a student’s sense of control over their future. Students with an internal locus, those who believe they control their own destiny, are found to experience greater levels of success than those with an external locus, believing their destiny to be externally controlled (e.g., by others) (Faison, 1993). Mason (1994, 1998) had similar findings, though he framed his comments around the concept of locus of control in terms of hopeless and helplessness. In all, these concepts served as the conceptual guide for this manuscript, particularly the psychological findings relevant to Mason’s (1994, 1998) model of urban Black male persistence in the community college. This section has discussed previous findings relevant to psychological factors affecting the success of Black males in the community college. The next section will discuss the methods employed in this study, which led to this study’s discussion of the psychological concept, focus, which is interrelated with the concepts addressed in this section.

**METHODS**

**Participants and Site.** Twenty-eight Black male students participated in this study. The average age of participants was 24.5 years of age (with a range from 18 to 58). Participants’ length of attendance at the institution ranged from one to ten semesters, with an average of four semesters of attendance. Students were representative of various majors (e.g., psychology, nursing, philosophy, biology) with the most popular major being business. Participant selection utilized convenience (direct contact on campus) and snowball sampling (participant referrals of potential participants). At the time of data collection, all participants were current or former (within 2 years) students at Desert Valley Community College (a pseudonym). Desert Valley is located in the southwestern United States and is part of a large community college system. Approximately 13,000 students attend Desert Valley, with Blacks representing 8% of the population. Despite this percent, only 148 of the 1,020 Black students at Desert Valley were male. The institution serves a high proportion of Hispanic/Latino students (32%), leading to the campuses recognition as a Hispanic Serving Institution.

**Data Collection.** This study collected data through 28 semistructured interviews. In depth, semistructured interviews allowed the researchers to organize the discussions around predetermined questions while maintaining the flexibility needed to pursue emerging lines of inquiry (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour in length. Prior to each interview, participants engaged in unstructured concept mapping. Using this technique, participants were asked to depict concepts associated with or affecting the key phenomena of study (in this case achievement in college) (Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2003). Factors affecting achievement were depicted in various forms (e.g., poetry, drawings, listings). Concept maps provided a reflective time whereby participants could conceptualize factors affecting their achievement prior. They also served as supplemental data to inform the researchers’ analysis. During interviews, students were asked questions regarding their previous academic experiences, current academic standing, and
their perceptions of what they believe affected their success in college (see Appendix A for interview protocol).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Data were analyzed using a systematic data analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994). This approach allows researchers to develop research goals, questions, a conceptual framework, and predetermined codes prior to analysis. Coding of data is conducted in two stages, the first focusing on basic codes, and the second seeking more advanced patterns. A data reduction process is used whereby visual displays and data are used to postulate themes and either confirm, revise or eliminate themes. Member checks were employed as a validity measure through a post data analysis focus group. This technique allowed for interview participants to provide input during the analytic process to ensure study findings reflected their comments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness of findings was also pursued through intercoder-reliability. Using this technique selected portions of transcripts were coded by multiple researchers to ensure a high degree of congruence between coding (Kurasaki, 2000).

LIMITATIONS

As with all research, this study had limitations. First, this study sought to determine students’ perspectives on factors which affected their academic success. This focus limited the input of other potential sources of knowledge on this subject, including campus faculty, staff, administrators, community members, and other stakeholders. These individuals may have been able to offer additional insight on the topic of focus which may be difficult for a student to articulate. For instance, a student may be unaware of institutional processes in place that served to influence their focus on college, while campus personnel with an integral knowledge of the campus may have been able to discuss. Further, while this study is based on the experiences of 28 students attending one community college, we provided thick description of the institutional context to allow readers to assess the transferability of findings to similar contexts.

FINDINGS

Findings from this study illustrated the importance of focus as an integral factor affecting students’ academic achievement. To explore this concept, the authors begin with an overview of the concept of focus. Then, actions indicative of being or not being focused are discussed. Finally, the authors describe factors leading to or detracting from focus. To illustrate the recurrence of this concept, the word focus is italicized in students’ quotes.

Toward an Understanding of Focus

A large number of participants, 22 of 28 discussed the role of having focus in relationship to academic achievement. As portrayed by participants, focus concerned the degree of their attention or effort in their studies. Of these, eight students noted that their personal degree of focus positively affected their academic achievement, ten articulated a negative association, and five discussed both a positive and negative relationship. The word focus is used to describe this concept based upon the rationale that the majority of students (15 in all) used this word to describe the degree of concentrated effort directed toward academic matters.

Focus is interrelated with the concept of goal commitment. As Tinto (1975) articulated, goal commitment is a twofold concept, entailing both the level of degree expectations held by students as well as the degree of intensity held for this expectation. Being focused is the outcome of this psychological orientation, the level of attention exerted toward their academics. Thus, expectation intensity (goal commitment) leads to students’ concentrated effort and intensity of attention (focus) on their stud-
ies. When students’ goal commitment is high, they apply effort in their studies. Typically, this effort is directed at a set of academic variables connected to persistence (e.g., studying, attentiveness during class, completing homework). When the value is low, students became disengaged. Of course, these examples represent binaries, when focus is either high or low. However, focus was viewed by participants, almost invariably, as a binary concept, either they were focused or they were not. For instance, Martin, (a business major), stated:

I just, like I said, I have to get that will, you know? Keep that will to keep going, you know, because otherwise, and stay focused, ‘cause you know, when I’m—when I’m focused, you know what I’m saying, like, I get a lot done. But when I lose that focus then, you know, everything around me is just you know, grey areas, you know. I just completely lose it. So it’s either I have the focus or I don’t.

Despite the binary nature of focus, students stated that their focus could shift depending upon a number of external factors associated with their motivation. The students’ descriptions illustrate that focus and motivation are mutually dependent. Focus relates to attentiveness or commitment toward college, while motivation is the rationale or reason for doing so (e.g., utility). In essence, motivation affects students’ goal commitment which in turn affects their focus. If students are unmotivated, they will exhibit lowered goal commitment, and as a result, lower focus. When motivated, the opposite relationship will exist. In Wood, Hilton and Hicks (in press), we delineated the primary factors which Black male students in the community college cited as improving their academic achievement. These factors included students’ desire to: (a) achieve their career goals; (b) prove others (particularly naysayers) wrong; (c) create a better future for themselves and their families; (d) fulfill their self-imposed responsibilities to others (e.g., family, friends, children, ancestors); and (e) develop themselves intellectually, in essence, a love for learning. In all, these motivational factors lead to greater focus in school.

**Actions Indicative of Being or Not Being Focused**

An analysis of students’ discourse around the topic of focus revealed actions (outcomes) which were indicative of whether a student was or was not focused. Students described being focused or unfocused in relationship to time spent studying, attentiveness during class, class attendance, completing of homework, turning assignments in on time, and the higher course load. Students who were focused illustrated positive behaviors in these areas, while unfocused students did not. For example, when focused, students noted that they spent ample time studying and attended class sessions; in contrast, unfocused students did not study, turn in homework, and had spells of absenteeism (see Figure 1).

Shaun (a criminology major), described focus as being attentive during class and completing his homework. He juxtaposed this mental attitude with actions exhibited by some of his fellow collegians who he criticized for coming to class unprepared (e.g., without books or writing materials) and talking during lectures. Shaun was so concerned about learning that he described times where he would personally ask disruptive students to either leave class or pay attention. With regard to the effort he exerted toward his studies, Shaun stated:

So, I mean, when I come to school, when I come to class, I mean, I come to class focused and know what I need to do … I immerse myself in my studies. I go to school; I go home; I do my homework, I study; I read. I mean, that’s why I’m here. I’m not going to half do it, you know. I’m going to do it and do it completely and not just do it half the time. No, I’m not here for that.

Like Shaun, many students described focus as being fully engaged in their coursework. For example, Allen, a business student, described
himself as an average student but noted that he goes beyond what is expected in order to be successful. He noted that he had not been prepared for college coming out of high school. As a result, he received poor grades during his initial time (first semester) at Desert Valley. He also attributed his initial underperformance to studying infrequently. However, Allen noted that he had become more focused on school, which led him to earning high course grades. In this vein, he stated:

Basically, I know what I’m doing now. It’s— I study for my class, I talk to people, you know, networking is a big thing in college, get together, do study groups, basically I just try and stay focused, and read ahead, you know, that’s important, and then when the teacher goes over the information in class, you know, it’s not a mystery.

As indicated by his comments, studying, reading course materials on time, and working collectively with others were actions that Allen associated with being focused.

While a number of students served as an example of being focused, Jarron, (a former business major), described being unfocused using the metaphor of darkness (see Appendix B for other metaphors used to describe focus). Jarron was a recent dropout who had participated in the study. During his interview, he repeatedly stated that he had not been focused on school. When asked what that meant, he responded, “When I wasn’t focused, ahhh, how did it look like? Dark, cause I was livin’ in darkness. When I was living in darkness, like, from my perspective, I couldn’t see anything.” He went on to describe what darkness looked like academically: “To be honest with you—dark because before I left here, once again I took part-time class, and still I wasn’t putting complete effort into my studies.” When asked to further discuss his lack of effort, he stated the following:

![Figure 1: Actions Associated With Positive and Negative Focus on Academics](image-url)
I'm not gonna lie to you, I didn't show up fully to my classes. I showed up halfway. I just, you know, came to school, to the college campus, chilled in the student lounge. That's number one, lack of attendance. When I did attend my classes, I wasn't paying attention. I did have resources, you know, my notebooks and everything. I did have my books, but they was just collecting dust because I wasn't using them. You know, when the professor was lecturing, putting notes on the board, honestly, I'm like, whatever.

Like Jarron, Pierce noted that he did not fully commit himself to his studies. Pierce (a criminology major), stated that during his first semester, he “treated college like high school,” failing to study or spend the time necessary to achieve. As a result, Pierce received failing grades during his first semester. However, he noted that he is now doing better in his courses. When asked what the difference was, he explained that he had worked full time during his first semester and as a result was not focused primarily on school but on making money. Now, he is not working, he stated “right now, I don’t have a job, because I kind messed up my grades by having a full-time job, so I’m just focusing on school right now … just focusing more time on school. Like the first semester I really did not realize how much work it was gonna be, and you actually, you have to study.” When asked for further clarification, he stated:

Well, last semester, I wasn’t really studying that much, but now I’m just constantly [studying]—like, for my criminal justice class, I just always look over the information to make sure it gets like stuck in my head so I don’t forget. And then, I devote like, after my classroom, after like my math class, like every day I’m done with my math class, I just go directly home and I do my homework, I mean, I make sure it’s still fresh in my mind.

As illustrated by his comments, for Pierce, focus meant that he studied regularly, reviewed information immediately rather than waiting, and completed homework in a timely manner. His remarks indicated that this concentrated effort on his studies had led to greater levels of academic achievement.

**Reasons for Being Focused or Unfocused**

The reasons participants provided for being focused or unfocused differed. Students who described themselves as being focused described a number of contributing factors: (a) attending school full time, (b) limiting one’s social interactions and engagements, (c) viewing school and learning as fun, and (d) being involved in campus clubs, organizations, and activities. Of these factors, the most prevalent contributor to being focused cited by participants was limiting social interactions. For example, Gabe described how he restricted his time with others. For Gabe (a business major), partying had served to detract him from succeeding in prior semesters. He noted that partying had not been a problem in high school, but in college his academic outcomes were greatly impacted. As a result, he described how he cut down on partying:

Basically I had to cut down on party time. Because you know high school is like a little bit easier, a lot easier, than college, you know? So I had to like, plan out my time more efficiently instead of like, partying or going out and doing that all the time. I had to balance between doing schoolwork and you know what I’m saying, reading the book, reading ahead, you know? Doing stuff like that.

Lance (a business major), also spoke about limiting his social interactions. When he first began attending college, he was worried about being popular. As a result, he spent substantial time concerned with his appearance and establishing relationships with other students on campus. He described that this behavior occurred at the detriment of his coursework. After performing lower than he desired, Lance stated that he had a change in mindset, placing school as his top priority and placing a lower
emphasis on his appearance and popularity. In this regard, Lance stated, “[I’m] more focused on work, and I find myself a lot more focused on work because I’m not THE man, I’m just A man.” Lance described how he now focuses his social interactions on establishing bonds with faculty members. This change does not mean that he does not have peer-bonds, but that those bonds are viewed as secondary to his academics.

Students who noted that they struggled with being focused provided a number of reasons (in rank order): (a) spending excessive time with friends, (b) being overly focused on coeds, (c) entertainment distractions (e.g., computers, television, video games), (d) long work hours, (e) substance use and abuse, (f) strict teachers, (g) learning disabilities, and (h) deaths in the family. Of the rationales provided for being unfocused, the most commonly cited reasons were spending excessive time with friends and coeds as well as entertainment distractions. The following comments represent statements from participants which illustrate the importance of these distractions:

I lost focus. I think I lost focus when I was around, you know what I’m saying, thinking, you know, when I started smoking my own piss, you know what I’m saying, started thinking I’m grown, you know what I’m saying, walk around the streets and hung around with the wrong people. (Marcelle, biology major)

Yeah, once again I started getting unfocused, started getting friends, and start[ed] getting all mixed up, just playing basketball a lot and just doing nothing really… I [also] get caught up on the computer. I went through a whole, watching too much videos and stuff like that on the computer, and just not, you lose focus. (Zeke, computer science major)

I’ve got like a 3.0 right now and that’s because the last class, like I said, priorities were a little messed up, met a girl, you know. That’s what’s going on. So I just need to study. I guess my goal is to stay focused, to be honest with you, stay focused on what I can do. (Lance, business major)

A girl chasing me, like, you know, “I want you to come over,” I was always easily thrown off track, but … to succeed in school, you gotta stay focused to stay on top of everything. (Danny, business major)

It is important to note that two of these rationales provided for a lack of focus deal with limiting social interactions—a prevalent theme among factors that aided students in being focused. Thus, student comments illustrated that social interactions are directly related to whether students are focused or unfocused. Students who cut down on interactions reported being more focused; whereas students who dedicated too much time with interactions noted that they were unfocused. While the reasons for being unfocused differed among participants (e.g., friends, girls, or entertainment) the outcome was negative. Lower grades, dropping classes, and even college departure were all discussed as outcomes of being unfocused. In contrast, students who described themselves as focused noted higher grades and a positive perspective on their future academic outcomes (e.g., GPA, transfer).

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study indicated that focus affects academic achievement. As noted, focus refers to the degree of attention students place on academic tasks. When students’ focus is high, they noted spending more time studying, being attentive during class, attending class regularly, completing homework, turning assignments in on time, and taking a higher course load. Focus is interrelated with the concept of goal commitment, the degree of students’ dedication or commitment to their academic endeavors. Being focused is the outcome of these expectations, the degree of intensity and concentrated effort directed toward attaining students’ desired goals. Participants noted that focus was a binary concept, whereby they were either focused or unfo-
focused at a given period of time. Usually, becoming more focused was the byproduct of poor levels of performance which served as a wake-up call to do better in school. In general, the primary rationales for being more or less focused dealt with social interactions. By limiting their interactions, Black males were better able to focus on academic matters. However, when spending excessive time with friends and coeds or with entertainment distractions (e.g., computers, TV, video games), students were less focused on college, which they attributed to lower levels of achievement.

This study’s findings around focus, illustrate the importance of balancing social interactions and academic demands. Historically, research on student social integration has suggested that social interactions lead to a commitment to the institution and greater levels of success (Tinto, 1975, 1993). This finding is affirmed by previous research on the Black male experience in the community college which suggests that campus friendships and social involvement in the campus setting are integral to student achievement (see Poole, 2006; Scaggs, 2004; Stevens 2006). While the notion that social interaction leads to student success is generally accurate, this perspective is overly simplistic. Participants from this study indicated that excessive social interactions can lead to a minimalized focus on school, resulting in lower levels of academic achievement. This intricacy is affirmed by findings from Bush (2004), Faison (1993), Bush and Bush (2010), and Riley (2007), who found that peer group dependence, peer interactions, and social involvement can serve as detractors from student success. To this end, we suggest a simple delineation between these two schools of thought, social involvement is beneficial so long as that involvement is not excessive. Involvement becomes excessive when it begins deterring from student’s attention on academic matters.

Given the dismal participation and achievement rate among Black males in community colleges, practitioners can use this information to help increase the success of Black male community college students. Specifically, practitioners could provide training workshops and seminars on “the importance of being focused” and “how to balance academic and social demands of college.” Given that students, particularly first-year students, struggle with balancing academic and social demands of college, such workshops could serve as a critical linchpin to teach students about the significance of managing their time, goal settings, and using calendars as well as other devices to be more cognizant of deadlines. In addition, community college practitioners could also consider teaching Stanford’s concept of challenge and support in these workshops to foster student independence and facilitate the development of their noncognitive skills, such as focusing. Sanford’s concept is centered on the ideal that challenge, when mediated by support, is necessary to facilitate student development and independence. In a sense, Stanford espouses that too much support and little challenge creates an environment where little development is possible. Conversely, too much challenge and little support impedes student development and independence (Sanford, 1968). Indeed, helping students cultivate the ability to focus would impact cognitive maturation, which may facilitate better decision making relating to academic or social issues in or outside the community milieu.

Palmer and Strayhorn (2008) noted that workshops of this magnitude have been critical to the retention and persistence of Black males attending 4-year institutions. Given that, in many cases, students attending community colleges live off campus, and therefore maybe more likely to experience distractions from their home communities and households, which could lower their focus (Tinto, 1993), workshops of this caliber could be particularly salient to the population of students that community colleges serve.

In addition to workshops, community college practitioners could use upper classmen to serve as peer mentors to incoming students. Peer mentors might be used to help students manage academic and social demands of col-
Furthermore, peer mentors could share stories about the importance of being focused, times they were not focused and the associated manifestations, and how invaluable being focused is to academic success. Moreover, alumni, staff, faculty, and administrators could be used in similar ways. For example, these individuals could be asked to disclose times during their educational junctures that they were not focused and the consequences that resulted. They could also share factors they helped their focused become resolute.

**CONCLUSION**

Given the underperformance of Black males in community colleges, investigating ways to enhance their academic success is critical. As discussed, while community colleges have been attentive to areas of enrollment, retention, and graduation, there is a salient need for to be more proactive in finding ways to help increase student academic performance, particularly among Black males. Using students’ voices, this article has delineated the importance of helping students balance academic and social demands and discussed how focus aids in academic success. Given the critical influence of focus on helping students succeed, this article concludes with salient recommendations for community college practitioners regarding ways in which they might consider helping to increase focus among Black males; thereby helping to maximize their academic success. Indeed, while this article has provided salient implications, because of the dearth of empirical studies on Black male community college students, future research should examine the extent that findings from this study are applicable to other Black males in community college.

**APPENDIX A**

1. Please tell me about yourself.
   PROBES: Tell me about your family. What are some defining moments from growing up? Tell me about your belief system (e.g., political, religious, cultural, personal). What makes you, you?
2. Tell me about going from high school to college. How did it happen? What was it like?
   PROBES: Tell me about your high school academic performance? Was college expected? How did you become a student here? Tell me about your initial experience in college classes? How did you do? What was your first impression of college? Did your high school performance impact your college performance? Did you take any remedial classes?
3. Tell me about your academics.
   PROBES: How are you doing in your classes? Tell me about your experiences as a student. What are you educational goals? Do you think your education here is worthwhile?
4. What do you believe affects your success at this college?
   PROBES: What about the campus environment or culture? What about academically? What about your backgrounds (e.g. family or school related)? What about with respect to relationships with faculty, staff or other students? How does this make you feel?
5. What do you believe affects the success of Black males at this college?
   PROBES: What about the campus environment or culture? What about academically? What about their backgrounds (e.g. family or school related)? What about with respect to relationships with faculty, staff or other students? How does this make you feel?
6. How well do you think Black males are performing on this campus?
   PROBES: If I told you that many Brothers were dropping out, and asked you why, what would you say? What do you think would support Brothers to stay and finish college?

I know I’ve asked a lot of questions, is there anything that I didn’t ask that you would like to add?
APPENDIX B

Metaphors used to describe or contextualize focus:

**Not Focused**
- Living in darkness
- Grey areas
- Don’t look at the big picture
- Fall off
- Lazy
- Off track
- The door was shut
- Empty
- No knowledge dripping down
- Sitting down at the wall
- Slip through those cracks
- Hole under that cup
- Living the ignorance

**Focused**
- Filled with knowledge
- Growing up
- Immerse myself
- Immerse yourself
- Faith
- On Top
- Building for/living for tomorrow
- Full glass
- Buckle down
- A grown man
- To struggle to get out of struggling

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