The Impact of Selected Barriers on Students Completing Community College in Michigan

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THE IMPACT OF SELECTED BARRIERS ON STUDENTS COMPLETING COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN MICHIGAN

by

Terri Lynn Burt

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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and Counseling Psychology

Western Michigan University
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Research studies have been conducted to investigate barriers that inhibit the ability of adult students to obtain a postsecondary education (Powell, 1989; Shields, 1990). These studies suggest that there are three distinct categories that could be used to describe this phenomenon: (1) situational, (2) dispositional, and (3) institutional. The overall purpose of this study was to determine what barriers, if any, are experienced by nontraditional African-American students in selected Midwest community colleges in comparison to White adult students according to selected demographic variables (e.g., age, sex, marital status, number of children, employment, status, income, and race). More specifically, this study provided answers to the following two questions:

1. Were there any significant differences between adult African-American students and their corresponding White counterparts concerning their perception of situation, dispositional, and institutional barriers to achieve a postsecondary education?

2. Were there other barriers that impede African-American adult students' ability to complete a postsecondary education?

For this study, 1,558 nontraditional students age 25 and above were selected from Lansing Community College, Muskegon Community College, and Grand Rapids Community College. The respondents were asked to answer 24 questions, on
a scale from 1 to 5, pertaining to selected situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers that they perceived had an impact on getting an education. Additionally, the respondents were requested to provide demographic information, such as income, gender, number of children, and employment hours per week. A total of 487 students responded, which is equal to 31.3% of the total number of surveys mailed.

The results of the t test and Levene’s Test indicated that African-American adult students perceived more of a barrier in completing a postsecondary education than White adult college students in two of the three barrier areas. More specifically, these perceived barriers were the lack of financial aid/resources and low confidence in the ability to succeed in college because of poor grades in the past. Additionally, income, class attendance requirements and entrance requirements in a desired curriculum, and the concern about appearing too ambitious to others also were perceived barriers.
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Terri Lynn Burt
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, African Americans have faced formidable challenges in the United States. Slavery, job discrimination, violation of civil rights, violation of voting rights, housing discrimination, and the lack of educational opportunities have all contributed to the oppression of minorities in America. Prior to the Civil War, it was illegal for African Americans students to matriculate in public and private educational institutions, particularly in the South (Fleming, 1984). Because of this ban, educational opportunities for African Americans were limited to three colleges in the North that were established by Christian missionaries: Cheyney in 1830, Pittsburg Avery College (later called Lincoln) in 1852, and Wilberforce in 1856 (Fleming, 1984). After the Civil War ended in 1865, Northern White missionaries took considerable steps to develop schools for the purpose of providing educational opportunities for the newly freed slaves in the former Confederate states (DuBois, 1935). These efforts led to the founding and development of African American colleges (Anderson, 1988). By 1900, over 200 colleges were established (Fleming, 1984; Frazier, 1949). These institutions provided higher education opportunities for African Americans when established White colleges and universities refused their admission (Ploski & Williams, 1989).

During this Reconstruction period, problems began to arise between Northern White missionaries and Southerners. The missionaries desired to help African Americans become educated. Their Christian perspective focused on an obligation to
educate freed slaves. Their Southern counterparts opposed education for African Americans because they believed that only the White privileged should be educated (DuBois, 1935). By the early 1900s, the majority of these institutions had closed due to the constant philosophical clashes and lack of financial support from federal and state governments (Frazier, 1949). In addition to the changing of educational opportunities for African Americans after the Civil War, the prevailing thought at this time was that African Americans should receive industrial training rather than training in the liberal arts (DuBois, 1935).

Despite the fact that in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case, in which the courts ruled that facilities and services, including education, would be "separate but equal" for African Americans and Whites, it soon became apparent that schools and facilities never were equal (Frazier, 1949; Lowery & Marszalek, 1992). On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court declared: "... in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981). This ruling, which banned "Jim Crow" practices that had governed many areas of the United States, revitalized educational opportunities for African Americans that had been provided, then eliminated, after the Civil War (Burt, 1975).

Thereafter, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there was a great surge in the enrollment of African Americans in postsecondary institutions. This Act forced predominately White colleges and universities to admit African American students and increase the quality of education at Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (Bullock, 1967). For example, in 1960, approximately 150,000 African Americans were enrolled in colleges and universities throughout the continental United States. By 1975, the number had increased to 1,000,000 students.
Interestingly enough, prior to the 1960s, most African American students were enrolled in African American colleges and universities (Gurin & Epps, 1975; "Surveys, Studies, and Social Action," 1982). By 1973, most African American students were enrolled in predominately White colleges and universities ("Surveys, Studies, and Social Action," 1982). Despite the shift in African Americans enrolled from predominately African American higher education institutions to predominately White institutions (PWI), the majority of African American graduates were still from predominately African American institutions ("Surveys, Studies, and Social Action," 1982).

Whether a student enters an HBCU or a PWI, education is a means to escape poverty and increase one’s socioeconomic level and standard of living. This is a predominant reason why nontraditional students (those over the age of 25) decide to pursue a postsecondary education (Mardoyan, Alleman, & Cochran, 1983). Additionally, nontraditional students enter college as a means of (a) increasing enjoyment of personal leisure time; (b) dealing with a midlife career change; (c) making a transition following divorce, death of a spouse, unemployment, or a physical or emotional handicap, or (d) achieving upward mobility in their chosen profession (Mardoyan, Alleman, & Cochran, 1983). Since 1970, the number of nontraditional students who returned to obtain a postsecondary education has increased. In 1970, 4.5% of African American adult students had received a degree. By 1991, the percentage had increased to 11.5% (Hornor, 1997).

It is important to note that, according to the national average, over 50% of campus populations in 1984 was comprised of nontraditional students pursuing a postsecondary education (Richter & Witten, 1984). This trend has continued into the 1990s. As recently as 1997, nontraditional students enrolled in postsecondary
institutions in the United States were represented by 630,000 African Americans,
4,768,000 Caucasians, and 355,000 students of other races (Hornor, 1997). Previous
studies show that some adults who do not participate in additional learning hesitate to
do so because they perceive certain barriers to their continued education (Richter &
Witten, 1984). When they do return to college, they are hindered by barriers or
circumstances that inhibit their participation in college. Such negative circumstances
have been shown to be attributed to the lack of time, money, childcare needs, or fear
of academic challenges (Shields, 1990).

Selected barriers that impede students' continued success in postsecondary
institutions usually are classified into three categories: (1) situational,
(2) dispositional, and (3) institutional. Situational barriers are personal life limitations,
such as lack of transportation and childcare provision. Dispositional barriers are
students' negative beliefs about their ability to succeed in college. Institutional
barriers are limitations the college or university imposes on students, such as location
of classes, time of course offerings, availability of classes, and admission entrance
requirements. The barriers can act independently or concurrently to discourage a
student from trying to complete a postsecondary education (Powell, 1989).

African American adult students tend to experience barriers in different ways.
Recent studies suggest that minority students are underrepresented in higher
education, including graduate education, coupled with a trend of declining enrollment
(Shankar & Tourse, 1994). For those enrolling in college, recent studies show that a
disproportionate number of minority students are enrolled in community colleges
(American Council on Education, 1988; Pruitt, 1987), but few transfer from
community colleges to 4-year institutions, as compared to their White counterparts
(Alexander, 1992).
Pruitt (1987) identified additional barriers specific to minority students. These barriers include poor academic and high school preparation; attitudinal hindrances (e.g., the lack of understanding the value of a postsecondary education); and geographic obstacles (e.g., living too far from campus or long commuting times from an institution that is affordable). Because minority students are less likely to complete a postsecondary education (American Council on Education, 1988) and experience barriers unique to minority students (Fleming, 1984; Pruitt, 1987; "Surveys, Studies, and Social Action," 1982), there is a paucity of research about the barriers that impede the matriculation of African Americans in 2-year postsecondary institutions.

Problem Statement

Research studies have been conducted to investigate barriers that inhibit the ability of adult students to obtain a postsecondary education (Powell, 1989; Shields, 1990). These studies suggest that there are three distinct categories that could be used to describe this phenomenon: (1) situational, (2) dispositional, and (3) institutional. Despite efforts to improve educational opportunities for adult students, there has been little, if any, research conducted to investigate whether these variables have an impact on the matriculation of African American adults into postsecondary institutions, particularly at the community college level. Therefore, this study will address this problem: to what extent and in what ways are there differences in the self-reported perceptions of African American adult college students and White adult college students concerning situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to matriculation in selected Midwestern community colleges.
Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study will be to determine what barriers, if any, are experienced by African American adult students in selected Midwest community colleges in comparison to White adult students according to selected demographic variables (e.g., age, sex, marital status, number of children, employment status, income, and race). More specifically, the purposes of this study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. Are there any significant differences between adult African American students and their corresponding White counterparts concerning their perception of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to achieve a postsecondary education?

2. Are there other barriers that impede African American adults students’ completing a postsecondary institution?

Null Hypotheses

The six null hypotheses will investigate if there is a difference between African American adult college students who report that they are unable to attend college because of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers as compared to White adult college students.

Hypotheses Related to Situational Barriers

There will be no significant difference between the mean scores of African American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a
postsecondary education because of the lack of financial aid/resources as compared to White adult college students.

There will be no significant difference in the proportion of African American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of time as compared to a representative proportion of White adult college students.

There will be no significant difference in the proportion of African American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of childcare provisions as compared to a representative proportion of White adult college students.

**Hypotheses Related to Dispositional Barriers**

There will be no significant difference in the proportion of African American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of poor grades in the past as compared to a representative proportion of White adult college students.

There will be no significant difference in the proportion of African American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because they are not traditional-aged college students as compared to a representative proportion of White adult college students.

**Hypothesis Related to Institutional Barriers**

There will be no significant difference in the proportion of African American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary
education because of the lack of convenient times for course offerings as compared to a representative proportion of White adult college students.

Rationale of Study

Many institutions have developed services aimed to meet the needs of returning adult students. These services include, but are not limited to, evening hours for campus service offices, special orientation programs, campus childcare, and age-specific financial aid awards. These programs have been designed to assist students in overcoming situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers. Conclusive research findings have documented that these barriers do impede the ability for adult students to achieve a postsecondary education. However, previous research studies have presented adult students as a relatively homogeneous group (Mercer, 1989) and failed to consider that there might be differences in adult student populations as a result of ethnic, economic, and social factors. Consequently, there has been little, if any, research that has focused on the barriers unique to ethnic groups, specifically African Americans.

Research conducted by Pruitt (1987) suggests that African American students face barriers that may be related to academic, financial, attitudinal, and geographic factors. However, this study failed to investigate barriers unique to students 25 years of age and older. Additionally, limited research has been conducted to identify barriers unique to adult students attending community colleges.

For this study, the research has been designed to identify the barriers of African-American adult students as compared to White adult students and to identify some barriers unique to this population as they pursue a postsecondary education.
This study will add to the body of knowledge pertaining to adult students, and thereby, enhance greater equity and access to educational opportunities.

Limitations

This study will be based upon a random sample of nontraditional degree-seeking students enrolled in selected Western Michigan community colleges: Grand Rapids Community College, Lansing Community College, and Muskegon Community College. Therefore, the study will be limited to adult students attending these institutions and will not include students attending other community colleges in the state of Michigan. The study also will be limited to adult White and African American students and will not include students of other ethnic groups. Finally, the study will be limited to those students who responded to the questionnaire; consequently, no generalizations or inferences will be made beyond these three community colleges.

Assumptions

The responses provided by participants will be accurate and reflect a true representation of their perception to barriers that impede students' matriculation and success at the community college level.

Definition of Terms

Adult Student: A student 25 years of age or older.

African American: An American of African/Negroid descent, formerly identified as Black.
Dispositional Barrier: A negative personal belief or value that discourages postsecondary participation. These barriers may include self-esteem, fear of being too old to attend college, or lack of background knowledge.

Institutional Barrier: A barrier that is caused by the college or university that may discourage participation. These barriers may include location of the campus, time of classes, course availability, course offerings, high tuition and fee charges.

Situational Barrier: A barrier that discourages students from attending a college or university because of physical or social constraints. Physical constraints include the lack of transportation and childcare needs. Social constraints include lack of money and lack of support from family and friends.
CHAPTER II

AN OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES
AS IT IMPACTED AFRICAN AMERICANS

Of the many historical figures in the development of education in the United States, Horace Mann made a significant contribution. Described as an educational reformist (Dropkin, Full, & Schwarcz, 1978), Horace Mann argued for the support of schools for economic development of communities in the United States (Franklin & Anderson, 1978). He believed that common schools would allow all to contribute to the “general” prosperity and guarantee the dissemination of democratic and egalitarian values (Franklin & Anderson, 1978). Additionally, he believed that “education does better than to disdain the poor of their hostility towards the rich; it prevents being poor” (Franklin & Anderson, 1978, p. 125). Mann also stated, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the greater equalizer of the conditions of men” and education is “the balance wheel of social machinery” (Franklin & Anderson, 1978, p. 125).

By studying teaching styles in the United States and in Europe, Mann was able to identify and select ideas, theories, and methods of the best teachers that could be adapted to the common schools; he then interpreted and popularized these ideas in his writings and lectures (Downs, 1974). His reformation ideas included enhancing classroom instruction to cultivate natural abilities, urging school committees and teachers to adapt a pedagogical style of instruction, and having schools practice self-government (Dropkin et al., 1978).
Mann emphasized that the success of “common” schools was dependent upon trained teachers (Downs, 1974). Having common schools for everyone provided for equal chance of earning and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earned (Dropkin et al., 1978). Mann also assisted in the development of “normal” schools (Downs, 1974), which set the pattern of study for teacher training institutions. Normal schools emphasized knowledge of subjects to be taught, methods of teaching, school management, and practice teaching (Downs, 1974). Normal schools also were significant in the development of education in the African American community. From 1886 to 1890, most normal schools taught former slaves to become common school teachers (Frazier, 1949). Without Horace Mann’s contributions to the educational system in the United States, many African Americans would not have obtained teacher training, which, in turn, may have impeded the educational development of many ex-slaves. In summary, Mann envisioned a system to “intellectualize education” for the prosperity of all Americans and remove class distinctions, even for ex-slaves (Dropkin et al., 1978).

The evolution of education for African Americans can be traced from slavery. The progression of this education can be formatted into six phases of time: (1) Slavery to 1865, (2) Reconstruction (1865–1896), (3) Plessy v. Ferguson (1896–1954), (4) Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka (1954–1964), (5) the Civil Rights Years (1964–1970), and (6) the 1970s and Beyond. The events in each period helped to bring about persuasive federal laws that changed the direction of civil rights for African Americans and their ability to succeed and obtain an education.
Slavery Education (Before 1865)

During the first time period of education for African Americans, from slavery to 1865, it was a crime to teach enslaved children to read or write (Anderson, 1988; Fleming, 1984). Laws were passed in the South that prohibited teaching slaves (Frazier, 1949). Half of the freed slaves in the North and South were literate; servant slaves were given permission to learn how to read and write (Davie, 1949). Many schools in Georgia and Louisiana were supported financially by African Americans, and “Sabbath Schools” provided for African Americans to be educated, prior to the Civil War (Anderson, 1988). Education for African Americans primarily was confined to the North (in some public and few private schools) (Davie, 1949), where a few laws specially provided education for African Americans.

The first legal school in the South that admitted African Americans was organized during the Civil War in sections occupied by Union forces (Davie, 1949). In September 1861, the first African American day school, Fortress Monroe in Virginia, was established. It was promoted by the American Missionary Association, and the first teacher was Mary S. Peake, “a free colored woman,” who was educated in England (Davie, 1949; Frazier, 1949). In 1862, the United States government began plans to educate African Americans; then in 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was signed.

Reconstruction (1865–1896)

Congress then created the Bureau for Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands in 1865 (Anderson, 1988; Davie, 1949; Frazier, 1949). It was assumed that the Freedmen’s Bureau would take responsibility and systemize the adjustment process.
for the freemen's new status in America (Frazier, 1949). African Americans had begun to develop schools without the Freedman's Bureau, but the Freedman's Bureau took over and maintained schools with federal dollars and by levying a property tax. Between 1865–1870, it is estimated that 4,239 common and normal schools were established, 9,307 teachers employed, and 247,333 pupils enrolled (Davie, 1949; Frazier, 1949). But when the Bureau began to have financial trouble, many of these established schools closed by 1866 (Anderson, 1988).

Also, during Reconstruction, over 200 colleges were established (Piifer, 1973). Because they were founded in haste (Fleming, 1984) or lacked financial support (Frazier, 1949), most of them closed by 1900. As mentioned previously, missionaries established many of the schools, and funding was placed upon the shoulders of congregations (Frazier, 1949).

Between the 1860s and 1870s, White Southerners were opposed to educating African Americans. They threatened parents who wanted to educate their children with expulsion from their houses or termination of employment as servants (Anderson, 1988). Clashes developed between the Northern Whites and the Southerners. The Northern Whites believed that they owed it to African Americans to help them catch-up. They believed that if African Americans were not educated, they would become a menace to society and that African Americans were just as intelligent as Whites. Northerners viewed Southerners as unable to educate African Americans, and, therefore, it was the Northerners' responsibility to educate as well as a Christian obligation to uplift (Frazier, 1949).

On the other hand, some Southerners opposed educating African Americans because education always was considered a privilege in the White community. Others believed that some education should be given to African Americans, but Southerners
should determine the nature of that education. Some Southerners desired to teach African Americans, who, in turn, could teach themselves. Finally, many Southerners believed Northerners were encouraging social equality and teaching African Americans to distrust and hate Whites (Anderson, 1988).

Some Southerners fought against educating ex-slaves by forcing children to work, especially in the fields. Therefore, because of crop seasons, schools would start in December. Authorities failed to enforce the compulsory-school attendance laws among African American children. White landowners wanted every available pair of African American hands to work during planting and harvesting times. Because of this, the academic school year ranged from 3 to 6 months in length (Kluger, 1979). Some Southerners also fought educating ex-slaves during Reconstruction when federal troops were removed, kept schools underdeveloped, stressed lower taxation or school support, opposed compulsory school attendance laws, blocked new laws that would strengthen common and normal school education, and discouraged expansion of these schools (Anderson, 1988). Because of pressure from Southerners, by the mid-1870s the Northern societies had reduced the support for African American education. Despite these barriers, African Americans were able to set educational short-range and long-range goals: basic and literacy skills, rudiments of citizenship for training for participation in a democratic society, and intellectual and moral development of a responsible leadership class to organize masses and lead others to freedom and equality (Anderson, 1988). Also significant during this time was the establishment of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), the first "teachers'" college, founded by the American Missionary Association (Frazier, 1949).
In 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Act. The purpose was to develop agricultural, industrial, and mechanical colleges in each state. The Morrill Act made it possible for every Union state to establish colleges. By granting every state in the Union 30,000 acres of public land for every member of its congressional delegation, this Act made it possible for higher education to be more accessible (U.S. Statutes at Large, 1862). Because there were at least three delegates for each state, each state received a minimum of 90,000 acres. When the states sold the land, proceeds were used to establish engineering, agriculture, and military science institutions. This Act helped to establish 70 "land-grant" colleges (U.S. Statutes at Large, 1862). Because racism was so pronounced, the Morrill Act of 1862 did not significantly impact African American education. Almost all the states excluded African American institutions from receiving federal funding, with the exception of Mississippi and Kentucky (Federal Information Exchange, 1996). Therefore, the Senate and House of Representatives passed the Second Morrill Act of 1890. This Act expanded the system of grants to include 16 Southern states and African American institutions. It provided federal endowments for the establishment of separate colleges for African Americans (Federal Information Exchange, 1996). These "1890 Institutions," now called land-grant colleges, impacted education for African Americans in the 19th century and certainly prior to 1954. Land-grant colleges for African Americans were organized in 17 states. Thus, through the Second Morrill Act, access to higher education for African Americans became possible.

During the end of Reconstruction, two schools of thought about methods to effectively educate African Americans began to emerge. One focused on a liberal arts education, which was supported by W. E. B. DuBois; the second advocated industrial education and was supported by Booker T. Washington.
W. E. B. DuBois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, on February 23, 1868. He received bachelor degrees from Fisk University and a second bachelor's degree and a Ph.D. from Harvard University. As one of the founders of the NAACP in 1909, director of publications and editor of the *Crisis* magazine, professor of economics and history at Atlanta University (now Clark-Atlanta University), and author of numerous literacy publications, DuBois embraced a philosophy that African Americans should develop their own cultural values (Ploski & Williams, 1989).

Booker T. Washington was born a slave in Hall's Ford, Virginia, in April 1856. In 1876, he graduated from Hampton Institute. Washington is noted as Frederick Douglas's successor, the black leader of his day, and a political activist. Additionally, he founded Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University, in 1881, and became its first president.

The two schools of thought, represented by the philosophies of DuBois and Washington, significantly impacted the development of African American education during this era. W. E. B. DuBois believed that the person must develop the "meaning of life" and develop into a man. Economic adaptation must be subordinate to the teaching of life and culture (Pilgrim, 1990). Booker T. Washington believed that men must meet the needs and be trained to function in the industrial age. According to Washington, the African American man must not be taught to despise humble work; in his opinion, studying liberal arts subjects, such as Latin, Greek, etc., would not necessarily prepare graduates for industrial occupations (Pilgrim, 1990).

Between the two schools of thought was conflict as to which was most appropriate and applicable to ex-slaves intending to become functional and literate citizens. There were pros and cons in support of both philosophical views. Proponents of the liberal arts philosophy was believed that industrial education did
not effectively train students, even though diplomas were awarded. The industrial schools were not considered equal to White schools, and skills learned became obsolete because the technology was advancing faster than the schools could implement revised curricula (Pilgrim, 1990; Woodson, 1990). Individual stores and trades were being eliminated by chain-stores and world-wide credit, and it was very difficult for African Americans to get a foothold in the job market (Pilgrim, 1990). Additionally, farms were being eliminated, the schools missed out on movements in industry, and organized labor kept African Americans out and allowed them to be hired only as scabs (Pilgrim, 1990). On a positive note, industrial schools achieved great accomplishments and helped bridge slavery to freedom (Pilgrim, 1990). Industrial education did not prepare African Americans to be servants, but instead opened up their minds to higher education (Frazier, 1949).

In support of industrial education, in 1895, at the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, Booker T. Washington addressed an audience about economics, politics, and racial equality (Anderson, 1988). Washington’s speech, “The Atlanta Compromise,” focused on how African Americans and Whites could make peace with each other in the South. Washington explained that African Americans should abandon an interest in starting at the top of Southern society and make the best of the opportunities that they have always had, pass up political interest, and remain in service jobs (Bullock, 1967). Washington’s speech propelled him into the position of spokesperson for industrial education in the United States.

The liberal arts philosophical model emphasized that African Americans should focus on a liberal arts education, rather than an industrial education. The advocates for industrial education, Booker T. Washington, Northern philanthropists,
and Southern racists thought that a liberal arts education did not prepare African Americans for work (Frazier, 1949). Additionally, some Northerners did not want to hire the African American Tuskegee Institute graduates (where industrial education was implemented and expanded for African Americans), and, therefore, they became teachers. At the same time, African American liberal arts graduates were ridiculed because American culture was considered not ready for any education but “hands-on” training taught in common schools (Frazier, 1949). Another argument against the liberal arts philosophy was that the university would not put the Negro man in touch with the world (Pilgrim, 1990).

A model that was developed to describe the preferred educational philosophy of the Northern White philanthropists, wealthy White Southerners, and Southern White supremacists was the Hampton Model. The primary goal of this model was to minimize the education of African Americans so they would “stay in their place” and not vote or express/exercise their rights. The two models, Hampton and industrial education, were combined to obtain financial support (Hampton) while implementing “training” (Tuskegee). Thus, the Hampton-Tuskegee model was born. The Hampton-Tuskegee style of education was first implemented in Georgia at Fort Valley Normal School (which is now closed), because of financial need. Northern philanthropists offered money as long as the school implemented the Hampton-Tuskegee style of education (Anderson, 1988). These Northern philanthropists established funds worth millions of dollars to assist in educating ex-slaves. In 1867, $1,000,000 from the Peabody Fund (a Northern philanthropist fund) was given to establish common schools for African Americans. Most of the money went to Berea College, where African American and White students were educated together (Frazier, 1949). The Slater Fund was organized for liberal arts, private schools, and vocational public education.
schools. However, Booker T. Washington, the leader in the African American community to implement industrial education, was convinced that the money should be applied to industrial education. Other funds that were established were Rosenwald and Jeanes Funds (Frazier, 1949). All of these Northern White philanthropists financially supported African American industrial education and the philosophy that it represented.

_Plessy v. Ferguson_ Era (1896–1956)

Reconstruction came to an end as the result of a legal case in 1896. _Plessy v. Ferguson_ (163 U.S. 537 [1896]) was a legal case that reversed and limited educational opportunities for African Americans after gains had been made during Reconstruction. This case represented the beginning of the third phase of educational development of African Americans in the United States. The case centered around an African American who refused to give up his train seat to a White Louisianian. After being arrested, he decided to take his case to court. After losing, he appealed to the Supreme Court (Lowery & Marszalek, 1992). The court ruled that furnishing separate compartments on railway trains did not violate the Thirteenth Amendment and that states could legalize separate compartments based on race without violating the Fourteenth Amendment (Bullock, 1967). The court also ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment did not abolish distinctions based on color and that the laws that permitted or required separation of races did not imply inferiority (Lowery & Marszalek, 1992). It also allowed states to establish racial segregation, if the accommodations and facilities in public institutions were equal (Anderson, 1988). Even though this case specifically addressed separate public facilities, it encouraged
the development of separate but equal educational facilities for African Americans (Fleming, 1984).

In the 1930s, African Americans began to seek admission into PWIs and challenge legally the "separate but equal" ruling (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981). There were four major cases that began to crack the laws requiring the separation of races. At that time, there were no African American graduate or professional schools, and, therefore, some states paid tuition and fees for an African American student to attend an out-of-state or private institution (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981).

One of the first cases that challenged the "separate but equal" ruling was Pearson v. Murray (1935). The courts ruled that the tuition or grant money for African Americans to go to another school, even out-of-state colleges and universities, violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Because of this ruling, Virginia, Texas, and Louisiana became the first to establish African American graduate and professional schools. West Virginia became the first state to admit African Americans into a PWI graduate and professional school.

In the Missouri ex rel Gainers v. Canada (1938), the Court ruled that out-of-state tuition grants for African Americans were unconstitutional and that each state must provided equal opportunities for African Americans. In Sipuel v. Board of Regents (1948), the Court held that the state of Oklahoma had to provide, at the same time, the same educational opportunities for African Americans as it did for Whites. In Sweat v. Painter (1950), an African American student applied to the University of Texas Law School and was not admitted because of his race. Texas began a new "Black" law school, but Sweat would not attend because it did not have facilities equal to the PWIs. The Supreme Court agreed and then ruled that he must
be admitted into the University of Texas Law School (McDonald, 1979). Between 1946 and 1954, most predominantly White junior and undergraduate colleges in the United States voluntarily admitted African American students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981).

*Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954–1964)

It was not until the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case (1954) that the "separate but equal" doctrine was abolished, ushering in new educational opportunities for African Americans. *Brown* overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that legalized segregation in all areas of life in the United States as long as the separate facilities were equal. African American facilities were not equal to the White facilities (Morgan, 1995).

On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Warren declared that the fundamental principle of racial discrimination in public education was unconstitutional (Blaustein & Zangrando, 1970). During this same time, 21 states and the District of Columbia permitted or required separate facilities for African Americans and Whites. Four states—Arizona, Kansas, New Mexico, and Wyoming—permitted segregation by local law, but were ready to comply with the court ruling. Little opposition was expressed by the District of Columbia, Delaware, Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, or West Virginia. The court ruling was ignored, avoided, or delayed by officials in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. It was not until lengthy legal battles in 1957, 3 years after the ruling, that these states began to comply (Southern Education Foundation, 1974).

Delay tactics were used successfully to avoid desegregation (McDonald, 1979). There were continuous delays in Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina,
Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia. Arkansas was the state that exemplified noncompliance by violence (Blaustein & Zangrando, 1970; Morgan, 1995). The Little Rock, Arkansas, crisis on September 3, 1957 required the action of federal troops to enforce the federal executive court order of desegregation. This executive order, issued by President Eisenhower, provided protection for nine African American children to attend an all White high school in Little Rock, Arkansas (Blaustein & Zangrando, 1970).

Also, during the Brown v. Board of Education years, the Supreme Court ruled in Cooper v. Aaron (1958) that it was illegal to discriminate in school admissions for children (Kluger, 1979). At this time segregation continued through various means: "freedom-of-choice" plans, transfer programs for White students from majority African American schools to majority White schools, and closing public schools and then providing tuition grants and other aid to private segregated schools (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, November 1981). However, in Gross v. Board of Education (1963), the Supreme Court ruled that the transfer of White students from majority African American schools was unconstitutional (McDonald, 1979). Also, in Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (1964), the Court ruled that Virginia could not perpetuate segregation by closing public schools and operating segregated private schools with state funds. The Supreme Court also indicated that "freedom of choice" schools perpetuated a dual system and, therefore, were unconstitutional (McDonald, 1979).

Postsecondary undergraduate lawsuits were won when two points were established. First, it had to be proven that it was not convenient for an African American student to attend an out-of-state school or HBCU. Second, the cost of attending a local PWI had to be less expensive than an HBCU across the state (U.S.
Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981) After a series of lawsuits, those who were first admitted into PWIs included Harvey Gantt, who entered the University of North Carolina in 1963, and James Hood and Vivian Malone, admitted into the University of Mississippi. Both of these admissions included violence and protests by White students (Southern Education Foundation, 1974). These lawsuits, as well as others, began a transition into the civil rights era which prompted more educational changes in the United States for African Americans.

The Civil Rights Years (1964–1977)

The next major evolution in the education of African Americans in the United States was during the Civil Rights years. Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, educational opportunities for African Americans to attend college had been almost totally limited to historical Black colleges and universities (HBCU) (Howard University, 1976). For example, in 1961, in the Southern states alone, 67,828 African Americans were enrolled in HBCUs and 5,388 in PWIs (Bullock, 1967).

Educational segregation and oppression was systemized by political control and overtones (Warren, 1978). It was not until Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that there was a release from the burden of personal litigation, as previously mentioned, and the expense for African American parents to enforce the 1957 Brown decision (Morgan, 1995).

On July 2, 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts for the United States to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on
The Civil Rights Act of 1964 began the desegregation of dual systems of public and nonprofit education systems in colleges (Title IV) and prohibited racial discrimination in the administration of all federally assisted programs (Title VI) (Howard University, 1976).

In the 1960s, many public school districts did not comply with racial segregation laws. When the school districts did not comply, their position was upheld by government officials who allowed this stance to continue. This, in turn, delayed reviews and, in some cases, caused the withholding of Title VI funds (Center for National Policy Review, 1974). School segregation was the result of "de facto" and "de jure" segregation. "De facto" segregation referred to segregated residence patterns implemented by government officials. "De jure" segregation was a result of segregation attributable to school boards and other government officials (Center for National Policy Review, 1974). "De jure, according to law, was implemented by selecting new sites for schools and determining their size in White majority areas, establishing and/or modifying attendance boundaries, setting student transfer policies and assigning teachers" (Center for National Policy Review, 1974). "De facto" segregation was successful because government officials selected projects to be built in metropolitan school districts and not suburban school districts, and housing regulations forced African Americans to stay confined to certain school districts (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, November 1981). The cases won by plaintiffs for desegregation were based on "de jure" segregation, unless the school board officials could prove that there were no other options to desegregate. Segregated schools also were promoted by open enrollments and transfers to allow White students to leave...
predominantly African American schools, and adding portable classrooms to African American schools for increased enrollment (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, November 1981). De jure and de facto segregation continued to perpetuate limited access of educational opportunities for African Americans in the United States.

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) had the responsibility to enforce desegregation and laws for discrimination against public school children (Center for National Policy Review, 1974). Their strength came via Title VI. With Title VI, school districts that did not comply with the desegregation regulations would lose federal dollars (Southern Education Foundation, 1974). HEW had two procedures to enforce Title VI: (1) terminate federal funds, and (2) refer the matter to the Department of Justice for review (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1981). It took many years to get states to comply (National Policy Review, 1974), and the first district in the North that was desegregated because of “de facto” segregation was the New Rochelle School District in the state of New York (Ploski & Williams, 1989). Because some Southern states indicated it would be too costly to desegregate schools, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act in 1965 to provide Title I funds for school districts to promote integration in public schools (Morgan, 1995, Ploski & Williams, 1989). Even in 1966, years after the Brown ruling, legal cases continued to assist in the desegregation process (Morgan, 1995).

The 1960s was the beginning of a great transition for African Americans from being enrolled in HBCUs to PWIs (Fleming, 1984). As mentioned previously, prior to the 1960s, African Americans were enrolled exclusively in HBCUs in the South, and it was almost impossible for them to enroll in PWIs (Fleming, 1984). In 1964, 51% of all African American students who attended college were enrolled at HBCUs;
in 1970, 28%; and by 1978, only 16.5% (Franklin & Anderson, 1978). By 1973, of the African American students attending college, there were more attending PWIs (Franklin & Anderson, 1978). Despite the fact that more African American students were enrolled in PWIs than in HBCUs, in 1975 most African Americans (75%) received their degrees from HBCUs (Ford Foundation Commission on Higher Education of Minorities, 1982). Additionally, many African American students began to enroll in 2-year colleges (Franklin & Anderson, 1978). By 1978, 50% of all African American freshmen were enrolled at 2-year schools. Pruitt (1987) notes that minority students have pursued community colleges because tuition cost has not gone up as fast as that of 4-year colleges. Community colleges have helped to serve minorities and the economically disadvantaged, but the linkage from community college to 4-year colleges and universities has been poor (Pinkney, 1985).

The 1970s and Beyond

In the 1970s and 1980s, three major issues impacted the history of the education of African Americans in the United States: (1) the Adams States case, (2) enrollment declines in HBCUs and increases in PWIs, and (3) the Bakke decision.

The *Adams v. Richardson* (1973) case, also referred to as the Adams States case, involved 31 students and 6 children in a class-action lawsuit, which focused on the fact that HEW (Department of Heath, Education and Welfare, directed by Richardson) was continuously funding federal dollars to public colleges, universities, and public school systems that did not enforce Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Three federal district court judges declared “that the Supreme Court in the *Brown* decision is applicable to schools for higher education as to schools on the lower level” (Southern Education Foundation, 1974, p. 17).
HEW began to review states' practices, but found that via their letter to request a higher education desegregation plan, some schools did not reply to the letter; therefore, the Adams attorneys were able to argue that HEW did not withhold funds from public college and universities that discriminated and states that had dual systems did not review these institutions even though there were clear indications of discrimination. (Southern Education Foundation, 1974)

Finally, on June 1, 1974, Judge Pratt, who presided over the Adams States case, forced colleges and universities in 10 states to submit a comprehensive plan for desegregation of their higher education systems. By this date all submissions by the Adams States, primarily comprised of Southern states, were approved except Mississippi Community College (Southern Education Foundation, 1974).

Because of the Adams States case, HEW also desired to complete the following goals in higher education: (a) dismantle dual systems of education for both White and African American students; (b) desegregate student enrollments at PWIs; and (c) desegregate faculty, staff, and governing boards (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981). The purpose of dismantling dual systems was (a) to ensure that African American students were represented at the graduate, professional, and undergraduate levels at PWIs, and that African Americans were represented in faculty, administrative, and staff positions; and (b) to develop HBCUs to be a part of the state systems and attract students of all races on the basis of the curriculum available at these institutions. These goals required an institution's mission statement be revised to include nonracial language, assisted HBCUs in having a successful role in educating students, and eliminated duplicate programs at HBCUs and PWIs (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, April 1981). The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education expressed concerns for the dismantling of the dual systems because:

the colleges founded for Negroes are a source of pride to blacks [sic] who have attended them and a source of hope to black families who want the benefit of higher education for their children. These . . . colleges . . . have
been responsible for the higher education of the majority of college-educated Negroes, and during the expansionist 1960s these colleges doubled their enrollments as did the predominately White institutions. The predominately Negro institutions have produced the vast majority of black professional workers. They have recruited and educated students from low income families and have developed service programs for their communities. Colleges founded for Negroes have many obstacles to overcome but they have already contributed significantly to the life and progress of black America. (Mayhew, 1977, pp. 89–90)

Between 1988–1990, minority enrollment increased by 8.2% to 1,223,000 in colleges and universities in the U.S. (Evangelauf, 1992). The number of African Americans enrolled in colleges and universities has continued to rise to the latest figures in 1994 at 1,316,900 students (U.S. Census Bureau 1996). More specifically, between 1975 and 1979, 400,000 African American adult students were enrolled in college; between 1980 and 1985, the number grew to 508,000 students; but by the late 1980s, the number enrolled fell to 421,000 students. In 1991, the total number of African American adult college students grew to 630,000 students; in 1993, to 670,000 students; and in 1994, the most recent figures, to 763,000 students (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996). These trends show that as the government implemented laws to enhance opportunities for African Americans, enrollment rates for African Americans increased. Thus, institutional barriers that had been in place to limit educational opportunities for African Americans were being eliminated.

Finally, the Bakke case, similar to Plessy; also brought about a shifting of educational opportunities in the United States for African Americans. In 1977, the court ruled in Bakke v. University of California that the university's affirmative action plan for minorities discriminated against Bakke, a White male, but the college's admission affirmative action plans were constitutional (Ploski & Williams, 1989). Because of this decision, admission procedures have changed in California. Thus, African American students, because of past educational experiences, may
perceive that institutional barriers are in place to impede their ability to achieve a postsecondary education. In reality, community colleges currently embrace an "open door" admission policy.

**Adult Student Trends**

More students over the age of 25 are appearing in college classrooms across the United States, due to changing demographics, a changing society, and technical advances (Mardoyan, Alleman, & Cochran, 1983). These older students are referred to as nontraditional students, re-entry students, stop-outs, adult learners, and/or returning students (Polson, 1986) (For the purposes of this study, respondents will be referred to as nontraditional students.) Nontraditional students are returning because of career changes, to obtain retraining to seek new jobs for more productive and satisfying lives, to improve life, and as a key to survival for industries to keep up with the changing technology (Powell, 1989). Women are returning to college because of new or evolving home and family roles and increasing economic pressures (Powell, 1989). Other reasons for returning to school include career advancement; a midlife career change, enjoyment of personal leisure time, and/or a transition resulting from divorce or death of a spouse, employment, or physical or emotional handicap (Mardoyan, Alleman, & Cochran, 1983).

Sometimes, as nontraditional students pursue postsecondary education, they experience problems. These problems are referred to as barriers (Powell, 1989). Barriers arise from the student's own personal life, policies and programs which institutions have geared to younger students, and internalized beliefs toward learning (Powell, 1989). Research by Shields (1990) categorizes the barriers in three groups: situational, dispositional, and institutional. Situational barriers include physical and
social constraints, such as long travel distances, time constraints, lack of financial resources, childcare problems, and lack of social support. Dispositional barriers refer to students' negative feelings toward returning to school due to lack of confidence, beliefs about declining ability to learn as one ages, beliefs about appropriate adult roles, etc. (Shields, 1990). Institutional barriers include college/university issues, such as time of class offerings, available financial aid for part-time students, and prejudice against older students. These three categories of barriers may act individually or together to impede the attainment of a college degree (Powell, 1989).

Adult Student Theories

As cited by Scanlan (1987), many studies have been conducted and several theories developed that focus on barriers facing returning adult students. The following five theories, which researched barriers of returning adults students, found that situational barriers are the main cause for adult students' failure to complete a postsecondary education (Scanlan, 1987).

Johnstone and Rivera (1965), in the first study conducted regarding returning adult students (Scanlan, 1987), found that ethnic differences for educational attainment are insignificant, but that the disparities in the involvement of continuing education are based on socioeconomic level (Scanlan, 1987). Boshier's Congruence Model stresses the interaction between internal psychological variables and external environmental variables. The main focus of this theory is that there must be congruence between the student and his or her educational environment to determine participation or nonparticipation (Darkenwald, 1980). Boshier’s research categorized returning adult students in one of two ways: (1) growth oriented/motivated students, and (2) deficiency motivated students. Boshier (1973, cited in MacLean, 1987)
believes that growth oriented/motivated students seek activities and experiences that lead to a state of imbalance or heterostasis. In searching for heterostasis, the student will attempt to achieve a balance at a higher level. He identified these students as individuals in higher socioeconomic levels. Deficiency orientated/motivated students search for homeostasis (MacLean, 1987). They strive to regroup and gain stability after a crisis. They seek education because of deficiencies and need for remediation. Boshier identified these students from lower socioeconomic levels (MacLean, 1987).

In 1974, the Education Testing Service for the Commission on Non-Traditional Study, directed by Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, conducted a study of over 300 “would-be-learners” to identify reasons for not pursuing an education. The study also focused on learning activities, needs, and interests for this population (Scanlan, 1987). Even though the study was an upgrade to Johnstone and Rivera’s 1965 study which concentrated only on older, semi- and unskilled female participants, this new study still failed to represent African Americans, Southerners, and rural individuals. Results of the study did find that students who work part-time jobs and are at low socioeconomic levels and educational attainments have low enrollment levels (Scanlan, 1987).

In 1981, Patricia Cross developed the Chain-of-Response Theory. Her theory implies that participation in postsecondary education is not an act isolated from making the decision to attend college, but rather a complex chain of responses based upon the evaluation of the position of the individual and his or her environment (Scanlan, 1987). In 1982, Darkenwald and Merriam developed the Psychosocial Interaction Theory. This theory, based on socioeconomic issues, suggests that the environment will determine how an individual values continuing education. These theorists also added an additional barrier to the original three and redefined the
dispositional barrier. They added an informational or communication barrier because of the direct relationship they found between education opportunities and socioeconomic status. Informational barriers involve the inability of individuals to obtain the correct or any information about their ability to pursue an education. The dispositional barrier was modified to include not only personal beliefs about the ability to pursue an education, but also feelings towards participating in school. The modified dispositional barrier is called the psychosocial barrier (Scanlan, 1987).

Conclusions

In summary, the evolution of the education of African Americans has undergone many stages of development. A major influence has been the laws specifically aimed to be less oppressive to African Americans across all areas including, but not limited to, education.

The theories and studies imply that barriers are multidimensional and are based upon the perceptions of the individual. Additionally, barriers are based upon personal and life circumstances (Scanlan, 1987). The top five barriers from all of the studies are as follows: (1) individual and/or home-related problems, (2) the cost of attending, (3) the decision as to whether pursuing a postsecondary education is valuable, (4) negative perceptions about the institutions, and (5) the lack of motivation (Scanlan, 1987).

African Americans have experienced tremendous oppressive barriers in their attempt to strive for academic achievement in postsecondary education. Allen ("Surveys, Studies, and Social Action," 1982) believes that campus race relations and campus support for African Americans are institutional and environmental and impact the social-emotional variables in student performance. These issues, in turn, impact a
student’s experience of perceived barriers and, thus, the ability to complete a postsecondary education. “Cultural” shock is described as a major barrier for African Americans in achieving success ("Surveys, Studies, and Social Action," 1982). It is obvious that laws and policies instituted by local, state, and federal government also have curtailed the ability of African Americans to succeed academically. Thus, it is important that educational lobbyists embrace a philosophy that supports educational reforms to maintain higher education access for all students.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study attempted to determine (a) whether African American adult college students perceive situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers in achieving a postsecondary education in ways different from White adult college students; and (b) if there are other barriers that African American adult college students incur as compared to White adult college students.

Outside of the Detroit, Michigan, metropolitan area, the majority of adult African Americans students in the state are concentrated in West Michigan. Therefore, the sampling frame from which students were selected is comprised of students from three institutions: (1) Grand Rapids Community College, (2) Lansing Community College, and (3) Muskegon Community College. The total target population consists of adult White and African American students 25 years of age and older.

Utilizing a computer-generated list that identifies the participants by age and race, the investigator randomly selected African American and White students 25 years of age and older, who were currently attending Grand Rapids Community College, Lansing Community College, or Muskegon Community College in the fall of 1996. Based upon the adult student population of White and African American
students attending the above-named institutions, 1,558 students were selected according to probability sampling procedures (see Table 1).

### Table 1
**Number of Enrolled Students by Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>AA</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>AA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids C. C.</td>
<td>4,377</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansing C. C.</td>
<td>6,549</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon C. C.</td>
<td>1,951</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12,877</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>1,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Sample**

Data were received from Grand Rapids Community College, Lansing Community College, and Muskegon Community College. N represents the total number of enrolled (population) adult students (age 25 and above) enrolled in the Fall 1996 semester. The letter n represents the random sample that was selected by the computer system for all three institutions. The sample size was selected by using the random sample table.
Instrumentation

A questionnaire was mailed to each randomly selected student. A cover letter (Appendix A) also was mailed with the questionnaire to explain the purpose of the study and directions for completing the survey instrument. To ensure a high rate of return, a stamped, self-addressed envelope was provided to each respondent. In addition, participants were informed in the cover letter that if they returned the questionnaire by the 10-day deadline, their name would be entered into a drawing for $100 towards the next semester's tuition and/or books. After 10 days, participants who had not returned the questionnaire received a follow-up reminder card (Appendix B). After 3 weeks, participants who had not returned the questionnaire received a follow-up phone call requesting their participation in this study.

The instrument utilized in this study was developed by Carp, Peterson, and Roelf (1972, as cited in Powell, 1989) in their study involving learning interests and experiences of adults. To ensure the instrument was reliable, Carp et al. performed a Cronbach's Alpha test to determine the extent to which observed variances in scores were due to true score variance. Results showed that the scores were reliable.

The investigators conducted a validation study by involving eight experts in the field of higher education who were familiar with issues associated with the matriculation and eventual program completion of adult students in postsecondary institutions. The researchers validated that the instrument accurately measured the extent to which African American and White adult college students perceive barriers to attaining a postsecondary education. A correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the degree of consensus between experts in the field and the extent to which they agreed that selected independent variables (situational, dispositional, and
institutional barriers) impede African American and White adult students’ success in postsecondary institutions ($r = .95$).

The investigator assured the survey participants of the confidentiality of their responses by securely filing each returned questionnaire in a locked filing cabinet, separate from the signed letter of consent. Also, the investigator complied with Western Michigan University’s policy pertaining to research on human subjects (Graduate College, 1997).

Analysis of Data

Six hypotheses were developed to determine if there was a difference in the perception of adult White and African American students concerning their perception of barriers to successful completion of a postsecondary education in selected Midwestern community colleges. Responses to the survey instrument were coded, and appropriate statistical procedures ($t$ tests, standard deviations, and ANOVA) were used for determining statistical differences between ethnic groups for each hypothesis. In all test applications, the 0.05 level of confidence was used for determining statistical significance. The $t$ test was used to compare means of African-American adult college students and White adult college students for the following independent variables: (a) the lack of time, (b) the lack of available childcare, (c) opinion on the time of course offerings, (d) the lack of financial aid/resources, (e) negative belief concerning personal ability to succeed because of previous poor grades, and (f) perceptions about being a nontraditional-aged student in comparison to a traditional-aged student. An ANOVA compared the means of all situational barriers (Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 16, 17), dispositional barriers (Questions 6, 14,
15, 18, 19, 20, 23, and 24), institutional barriers (Questions 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 21, 22), and all other barriers (Questions 1-24) between groups.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this study are as follows:

\( H_0: \) There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of financial aid/resources as compared to the mean score of White adult college students.

\( H_1: \) The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of financial aid/resources will be different from the mean score of White adult college students.

\( H_0: \) There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of time as compared to the mean score of White adult college students.

\( H_2: \) The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of time will be different from the mean score of White adult college students.

\( H_0: \) There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of childcare provisions as compared to the mean score of White adult college students.
H3: The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of childcare provisions will be different from the mean score of White adult college students.

H0: There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of previous poor academic performance as compared to the mean score of White adult college students.

H4: The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of previous poor academic performance will be different from the mean score of White adult college students.

H0: There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because they are not traditional-aged college students as compared to the mean score of White adult college students.

H5: The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because they are not traditional-aged college students will be different from the mean score of White adult college students.

H0: There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of convenient times for course offerings as compared to the mean score of White adult college students.

H6: The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they cannot complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of convenient
times for course offerings will be different from the mean score of White adult college students.

Each hypothesis has been stated in the null form. In instances where there were statistically significant differences between the two populations, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This study sought to determine if any differences exist between African-American and White adult college students in their perceptions of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to completing a postsecondary education. The study also sought to determine if unique barriers, not mentioned in the literature, impede African-American adult students' graduation from a postsecondary institution.

Student Participation

A total of 1,558 students were selected randomly from Muskegon Community College, Grand Rapids Community College, and Lansing Community College by the computer systems at the three institutions. The participants were mailed information about the study and asked to return a questionnaire and a signed consent letter (see Appendices A and B).

Ten days after the survey was mailed to the participants, a postcard (see Appendix C) was mailed requesting that the survey and consent letter be returned. Three weeks from the initial contact, a follow-up phone call was made to request participation. Table 2 shows the distribution of participant response rates from each college.
Table 2

College Participation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Number of Questionnaires Mailed</th>
<th>Number of Questionnaires Returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon CC</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>34.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansing CC</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>38.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids CC</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>27.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,558</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Data

In this section, the hypotheses were stated in the null form and appropriate tests were provided to determine whether the hypotheses are either accepted or rejected. In all test applications, the 0.05 alpha level was used then recalculated based on the number of questions for each hypothesis for determining acceptance.

Results for Variables Relating to Situational Barriers

Financial Resources

$H_0$: There is no significant difference in the mean scores for African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of financial aid/resources as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

Table 3 presents the results of the $t$ test for independent samples which focus on income. Levene's Test was used to establish the new alpha level .0250.
Table 3

$t$ Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Financial Concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.0003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 487$ respondents; $df = 137.348$

Because the observed probability .0003 exceeded the established .0250 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. In other words, there is a difference in the mean scores, with African-American adult college students scoring higher than White students.

Therefore, it can be concluded African-American adult college students to a greater degree perceive they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the situational barrier of lack of financial aid/resources than White adult college students.

Time

$H_0$: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of time as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

Table 4 presents the results of the $t$ test for independent samples for issues related to time. Levene's Test was used to determine the new alpha level .0071.
Table 4

$t$ Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Lack of Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.8068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 487$ respondents; $df = 137.348$

Because the observed probability 0.8068 did not exceed the established 0.0071 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. In other words, there is no significant difference in the mean scores for African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of personal time as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students. Therefore, these data suggest that lack of time is a factor affecting both ethnic groups.

Childcare

$H_0$: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of lack of available childcare as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

Table 5 presents the results of the $t$ test for independent samples for issues concerning childcare. Levene's Test was used to determine the new alpha level of 0.0250.
Table 5

$t$ Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students’ Scores on the Variable Lack of Available Childcare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>224*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 483$ respondents; $df = 137.346$

Because the observed probability .224 did not exceed the established .0250 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. In other words, there was not a significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of available childcare than White adult college students.

Results for Variables Relating to Dispositional Barriers

Ability to Succeed

$H_0$: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of low confidence due to poor grades in the past as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

Table 6 presents the results of the $t$ test for independent samples for issues concerning low confidence due to poor grades in the past. Levene’s Test was used to determine a new alpha level of .0167.
Table 6

$t$ Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Low Confidence in the Ability to Succeed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 487$ respondents; $df = 137,348$

This null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. The mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of low confidence due to poor grades in the past is higher than the mean scores of White adult college students. Thus, we can conclude that African-American adult college students perceive to a greater degree than White adult college students they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the dispositional barrier of low confidence due to poor grades in the past.

**Age**

H$_0$: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because they are not traditional-age college students as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

Table 7 presents the results of the $t$ test for independent samples for issues related to age of the student.
Table 7

$t$ Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Concern of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 487$ respondents; $df = 137,348$

Because the probability .70 did not exceed the established .0125 alpha level, the null hypothesis is accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the mean scores for African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the concern that they are not traditional-age college students and the mean scores of White adult college students. The low reported mean levels of concern suggest that age is not perceived as a significant barrier to achieving a postsecondary education for either ethnic group.

Results for Variables Relating to Institutional Barriers

Scheduling of Courses

$H_0$: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report that they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because courses are not scheduled when they can attend as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.
Table 8 presents the results of the $t$ test for independent samples for the issue that deals with the time courses are offered.

### Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>1.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 487$ respondents; $df = 137.348$

Because the observed probability 1.096 did not exceed the established alpha level .0125, the null hypothesis is accepted. The data show there is no significant difference between African-American adult college students' perception that courses are not offered when students can attend as a factor inhibiting the completion of a postsecondary education as compared to White adult college students.

### Additional Findings

The study found that African American adult college students perceive to a greater degree that they are unable to complete a postsecondary education as compared to White adult college students. The first barrier is the perception that their income level is too low to meet college expenses. The data presented in Table 9 show significant findings for the variable level of income.

Because the observed probability .000 exceeded the established .0250 alpha level of significance, there is a difference in the mean scores, with African-American
Table 9

$t$ Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students’ Scores on the Variable Level of Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$t$ Value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>-5.71</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 476$ respondents; $df = 135.349$

adult college students scoring higher than White students. Therefore, it can be concluded that African-American adult college students perceive to a greater degree they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the situational barrier of level of income as compared to White adult college students.

The second barrier is the perception of the college’s strict attendance requirements. The data presented in Table 10 shows significant findings for the variable attendance requirements. Because the observed probability .0005 exceeded the alpha level .0071, there is a significant difference in the mean scores for African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because of the perception of strict attendance requirements as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

The third barrier is the perception of their ability to meet program entrance requirements. The data presented in Table 11 show significant findings for the variable perception of meeting entrance requirements. Because the observed probability .012 exceeded the established alpha level .0167, there is a significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report
Table 10

*t Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Attendance Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.0005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 486 respondents; df = 137,347

Table 11

*t Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Perception of Meeting Entrance Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.012*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 486 respondents; df = 137,347

they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because they perceive they do not meet the program entrance requirements as compared to the mean scores of White adult college students.

The fourth barrier is the belief about appearing too ambitious. The data presented in Table 12 show significant findings for the variable concern about appearing too ambitious.
Table 12

*t Test Analysis Comparing African-American and White Adult Students' Scores on the Variable Concern About Appearing Too Ambitious

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.0011*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= 484 respondents; df = 135,347

Because the observed probability .0011 exceeded the established alpha level .167, there is a significant difference in the mean scores of African-American adult college students who report they are unable to complete a postsecondary education because they do not want to appear to be too ambitious as compared to White adult college students.

Summary

The results of this study suggest that African-American adult college students perceive barriers differently than White adult college students as they try to complete a postsecondary education. More specifically, these results provide evidence that, in some instances, barriers are perceived as factors that impede the ability to complete a postsecondary education by both ethnic groups, but African-American adult college students report a greater concern. The hypotheses tested support that African-American adult college students perceive more difficulty with (a) a situational barrier—the lack of financial aid/resources to complete a postsecondary education,
and (b) a dispositional barrier—low confidence in the ability to succeed in college because of poor grades in the past.

Other findings that were significant were the belief that income level is too low, perception of strict attendance requirements, perception about the ability to meet program entrance requirements, and concern about appearing to be too ambitious.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to determine what barriers, if any, were experienced by African American adult students in comparison to White adult students in selected Midwest community colleges. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to investigate if there were differences between African American and White adult college students concerning their perception of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to achieving a postsecondary education. Additionally, the study sought to determine if there were barriers unique to African American adult students that impeded their ability to achieve a postsecondary education.

The intent of this chapter is to provide answers to the two major questions addressed in this study: (1) Are there any significant differences between adult African American students and their corresponding White counterparts concerning their perception of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to achieving a postsecondary education?, and (2) Are there other barriers that impede African American adult students’ completing a postsecondary education? In addition, this chapter will summarize and discuss the findings and provide implications for students affairs in higher education institutions. Finally, the study will include recommendations for additional study.
Summary

The devastating effects of racism, as manifested in oppressive laws and educational policies, have greatly impacted the opportunities for African Americans to achieve a postsecondary education. This study shows that African American adult students, as compared to White adult students, expressed a higher level of concern about their ability to complete a postsecondary education because of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers. Subjects included students attending Grand Rapids Community College, Lansing Community College, and Muskegon Community College. Of the 498 respondents, 349 (70.9%) were White and 138 (28.3%) were African American. A breakdown of student responses by participating institution and ethnicity was presented in Chapter III. The findings of this study showed the African American and White adult college students who responded differed significantly in their perceptions of their ability to achieve a postsecondary education in the areas of (a) financial aid/resources, and (b) low self-confidence in their ability to complete a postsecondary education due to poor grades in the past.

Discussion of Findings

The present study tested six hypotheses to determine if there was a difference between White and African American adult college students in their perceptions of barriers to successful completion of a postsecondary education. This section will contain findings related to the stated research hypotheses and previous research reported in Chapter II.

The first three hypotheses dealt with situational barriers—personal life limitations, such as lack of finances and child care provision. The first hypothesis
related to students’ perception of their ability to complete a postsecondary education because of the lack of financial aid/resources. On a scale of 1–5, with 1 indicating “not a concern” and 5 indicating “overwhelming concern,” the mean for African American adult college students was 3.49, compared to a mean of 3.01 for White adult college students. These results show a statistically significant difference between the two ethnic groups. Whereas both groups of respondents agreed financial aid/resources was a concern for their ability to complete a postsecondary education, the mean scores indicate this area is more of a concern for African American adult college students than for White adult college students.

Information gathered from the survey instrument shows the varying levels of income among the survey respondents, as seen in Table 13. Over 37% of the respondents indicated an income level under $25,000 per year, which is an average salary in the United States. The data in this study also indicate the mean income for African American adult college students ($15,000–$19,999) was significantly lower than White adult college students ($25,000–$34,999).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1995) found that there is a relationship between race, income, and sensitivity to tuition and financial aid. According to the study, most researchers find poorer students are more sensitive to increases in net cost, whether those increases are manifested by tuition increases or financial aid decreases. When tuition increases without financial aid increasing, it affects the access of higher education for America’s poorest students. There is evidence African American students are more sensitive to college costs than White students, even controlling for income, socioeconomic status, and ability (Heller, 1996). It has been found that “financial aid” is not a singular entity; it incorporates different forms of student financial assistance, such as grants, subsidized loans,
unsubsidized loans, tuition remission, and work study. Type of aid is a major factor. Heller (1996) notes when students look at the "sticker price" of attending college and react negatively, it is because either they are not aware of the availability of financial aid, or they do not believe they qualify for it.

The National Center for Education Statistics (1995) also found that, all things being equal, it is expected that students at community colleges are more sensitive to tuition and aid than students at 4-year colleges. This is because more lower-income students enroll in community colleges than 4-year colleges and universities. The fact that participants in the present study are students in community colleges may help explain why they are more sensitive to tuition/financial aid issues.

Results of the present study are consistent with previous studies by Cross (1981), Mardoyan, Alleman, and Cochran, (1983), Beder and Valentine (1987), and Johnstone and Rivera (1965), who found that financial aid/resources is the most frequently cited barrier, irrespective of race and ethnicity, in obtaining a postsecondary education. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) also found low-income groups are far more likely to mention cost as a barrier than middle and upper income groups.

In another study, Barton (1997, cited in Mahaney, 1998) found perceived financial aid barriers are growing, and students associate the value of an education as it relates to the rate of return financially, but the cost of funding an education is becoming more difficult. Barton also reported states have reduced tax funding for higher education. Nationally, the rate of funding was reduced by 32%. Federal grants peaked in 1992–1993, and today, the maximum award of $2,470 buys 43% of what it bought in 1979–1980. Therefore, the lack of financial aid/resources is not only a perceived problem, but a real problem.
The second hypothesis relating to situational barriers dealt with adult college students' perception of the lack of time as a barrier in completing a postsecondary education. The mean scores for African American and White adult college students were 3.30 and 3.27, respectively. While these results do not indicate a significant difference between the two ethnic groups, both groups indicated the lack of time was a concern in completing their postsecondary education.

Previous research by Cross (1981), Johnstone and Rivera (1965), Schmidt (1983, as cited in Scanlan, 1987), Shields (1990), and Bender and Valentine (1987) found that most adult students are concerned about the lack of time necessary to pursue a postsecondary education, identifying it as a significant barrier (Scanlan, 1987).

Although past research supports the present study's finding that lack of time is a concern to adult college students, no studies were found that investigated the differences between ethnic groups, specifically the differences in perceptions regarding lack of time between African American and White adult college students. In the present study, the difference between the two groups' perceptions was not statistically significant, indicating many adult college students, regardless of ethnicity, find lack of time to be a concern.

Also in the area of situational barriers, the third hypothesis was related to the issue of the lack of available child care as a barrier to the completion of a postsecondary education. Mean scores for African American and White adult college students were 1.61 and 1.48, respectively. These results do not indicate a significant difference between the two ethnic groups, nor do they show that lack of available child care is even a concern or barrier to both groups completing their postsecondary education.
In research conducted by Beder and Valentine (1987), 83% of the respondents indicated they had children. Of those parents, only 16% responded that obtaining adequate child care was a barrier for them. The remaining respondents believed lack of child care did not present a problem in preventing or reducing their classroom attendance. The present study revealed similar results. Of the 487 respondents, 58% indicated that they had at least one child at home. African American respondents averaged 2.26 children at home; White respondents averaged 2.06 children. Although the majority of respondents had children at home, mean scores indicated that lack of child care was not a perceived barrier to the completion of their postsecondary education, which supports Beder and Valentine’s study. The present study investigated the differences in perceived barriers between African American and White adult college students; however, no differences were noted, nor did previous research discuss differences between ethnic groups. Thus, ethnicity may not be a determining factor in the perception of lack of available child care as a barrier to completion of postsecondary education.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 dealt with dispositional barriers—students’ negative beliefs about their ability to succeed in college (Shields, 1990). Hypothesis 4 specifically related to the students’ perception that previous poor academic performance may present a barrier to their completion of a postsecondary education. Mean scores for the two ethnic groups were 2.01 for African American adult students and 1.55 for White adult students. These results showed that previous poor academic performance was a minor concern for both ethnic groups; however, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

This significant difference between the means of the two groups may be explained, in part, by considering the historic background of the education of African
Americans in this country as related in Chapter II. Many negative, low-confidence messages regarding academic success were instilled in the African American community (Woodson, 1990). In addition, most African Americans historically were denied postsecondary educational opportunities, with the exception of attending Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs were typically underfunded, staffed with poorly trained teachers, and absent of a traditional scholarship and learning. These circumstances contributed to the educational isolation of African Americans (Frazier, 1949). Not until after the Civil Rights Movement did African Americans gain access to predominately White institutions (Burt, 1975).

Not only can denied opportunities and negative external messages impact one's confidence level, but Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) found that an adult's academic confidence is tied to one's socioeconomic status, particularly for disadvantaged and working-class adults. Larson (1980) found that a negative sense of self-esteem and competence is a major inhibiting factor in the ability of higher education institutions to reach disadvantaged adult populations. Lack of confidence is voiced as a common deterrent to completing a postsecondary education, but it does not correlate with the real abilities, aptitudes, and self-discipline that do affect a person's ability to achieve (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

The adults who are most underserved are those who not only lack a high school diploma but also are in the lowest quarter of annual family income and are members of minority racial groups (Anderson & Darkenwald, 1979). The least educated adults may have experienced chronic failure in school. For this reason, they may be fearful about returning to pursue a postsecondary education. Lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem, coupled with low verbal facility and low perceived value of education, commonly create high barriers to participation (Irish, 1980).
Thus, the results of the present study indicating a significant difference between African American and White adult college students in their perception of previous poor academic performance as a barrier to completing a postsecondary education are consistent with the findings reported by the other studies noted.

The fifth hypothesis dealt with the inability to complete a postsecondary education because the student is not a traditional-aged college student. Mean scores for African American and White adult college students were 1.57 and 1.54, respectively, which does not show a statistically significant difference between the two ethnic groups. It also indicates that the age of the student is a minor concern for both groups.

Previous studies moderately support this finding. Beder and Valentine (1987) found most adult students did not perceive they were stereotyped because of their age by the other students in the class or the instructor. Spouse (1981) found that most adult college students prefer being in age-integrated, as opposed to age-segregated, classrooms. Thus, these studies' findings support those of the present study that age is not a major concern to nontraditional-aged students, regardless of ethnicity.

The sixth hypothesis presents an institutional barrier or a limitation the college or university imposes on students, such as location of classes, time of course offerings, availability of classes, and admission entrance requirements. This final hypothesis dealt with the lack of convenient times for course offerings by the institution. Mean scores for African American and White adult college students are 2.7 and 2.91, respectively. It is interesting to note that this perceived barrier is of more concern for White adult students than it is for African American adult students, although the difference in the means of the two groups is not statistically significant.
Beder and Valentine (1987) found that adult students, when returning to college, initially experience a problem in scheduling classes that do not conflict with either their existing work schedule or family commitments. The researchers also report that honoring family commitments was a concern identified by more than 60% of adult students. Most students scheduled classes whenever they were offered despite family commitments, whereas only 11% actually scheduled classes based on prior existing commitments (Beder & Valentine, 1987).

The findings of the present study indicate the barrier of scheduling classes is of slightly greater concern than perhaps indicated in the cited research. Although the difference in mean scores between African American and White adult college students was not statistically significant, this study's findings indicated the barrier of scheduling classes was of greater concern for White adult college students than for African American adult college students. Additional research may be warranted to investigate if scheduling of classes poses more of a barrier for a particular ethnic group, and if so, why.

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that several barriers—situational, dispositional, and institutional—may hinder adult college students from completing a postsecondary education. For two of the barriers investigated in the present study, statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores of African American and White adult college students.

Implications

The results of this study and conclusions drawn from the findings suggest several implications for student affairs. First, the study identified one situational barrier—the lack of financial aid/resources—in which a statistically significant
difference was found between African American and White adult college students’ perceptions. As mentioned previously, the lack of financial aid/resources is a concern for both ethnic groups, but it is of greater concern for African American students, as reported in previous studies. Additionally, in this study, a $10,000 to $15,000 difference in average income existed between the two groups. It is important that information about and access to financial aid/resources be available continually to all students. With the growing trend towards eliminating affirmative action programs in higher education institutions, it is imperative that special programs continue to be available in order to provide continuous student access to colleges or universities. These special programs include, but are not limited to, scholarship opportunities, staff diversity, and academic support services and activities. Pruitt (1987) found that African American students did not persist in completing a postsecondary education, primarily because of academic problems and financial aid concerns. Pruitt also suggested that institutions develop financial aid/resources for those students with extreme need who otherwise may drop out.

While the perceived lack of time did not show a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of African American and White adult college students in this study, both ethnic groups indicated lack of time was a concern, as is also mentioned in previous research studies. It is important for institutions to offer time management seminars and workshops and also ensure that counselors and professors are available to advise students about how to balance work, family, and school.

Finally, the present study revealed that the difference in perceptions between African American and White adult college students concerning previous poor academic performance as a barrier to completing a postsecondary education was
statistically significant, although this barrier was considered by them to be a minor concern. Alsbrook's (1971) study indicated that minorities experience fears resulting from an educational gap between themselves and students with better educational backgrounds. They also may suffer from poor writing ability and lack of reading skills. It is imperative that academic advisors and counselors be aware of these types of fears and provide services to meet the needs of these students, thereby increasing retention rates. To assess the needs of the students, advisors and counselors should review academic transcripts and test scores and talk in-depth with students in advising/counseling sessions. Additionally, self-studies can be conducted by administering surveys and soliciting responses from students.

In summary, it is imperative that student affairs professionals be trained to meet the needs of adult students, as research indicates when college staff members have no training in working with adults, it negatively impacts retention (Roueche, Baker, & Roueche, 1987). This special training should include graduate level courses in adult learning theories and adult student development. Also, if internships are required, graduate students who are interested in working with nontraditional students may wish to obtain placement in a department that services a high volume of returning adult students. Additionally, research supports the need for: (a) peer support groups, where nontraditional-aged students can discuss their problems with other adult students; (b) study skills workshops; and (c) financial aid counseling and academic advising (Shields, 1990). These types of counseling/advising sessions should include dialogue about time management, child care needs, and financial aid/resource concerns. Finally, for the retention of African American adult students, there must be a commitment from the governing body of an institution. Such a commitment should be expressed in a self-study of every aspect of campus life that
impacts students (Pruitt, 1987). From this self-study, information should be collected to improve financial aid/resources, especially for students with great need, who may otherwise not graduate. Additionally, this study can access academic information so advisors and counselors can identify faculty who are interested in meeting the needs of African American students. As Pruitt (1987) notes, academic problems and lack of financial aid/resources are the two main contributing factors as to why African American students do not persist in higher education.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future studies are:

1. It is recommended that this study be replicated to increase the precision of the estimates. It is suggested that the sample size be increased and that other factors related to student matriculation and success in postsecondary education (e.g., attendance and admission requirements) be investigated. Prior to conducting such a study, it is important for the investigator to develop a good rapport with participating institutions, thereby increasing access to confidential student information and increasing student participation.

2. It is also recommended that future studies of this nature investigate if there are differences in the responses of African American adult college students who graduated from high ethnic minority enrollments as compared to African American adult college students who graduated from high schools with low ethnic minority enrollments.

3. It is recommended that more research be conducted to study the effects of previous academic performance on the ability to complete a postsecondary education.
4. It is recommended that additional research be conducted to study the impact of income, ethnicity, and financial aid/resources on the ability to complete a postsecondary education. It is also suggested that future studies investigate if scheduling of classes impacts ethnic groups differently.
Appendix A

Consent Letter
Western Michigan University  
Counselor Education/Counseling Psychology Department  
Principal Investigator: Dr. Theresa A. Powell  
Student Investigator: Terri Burt  

Your name was randomly selected from a list of 14,000 students attending Grand Rapids Community College, Lansing Community College, and Muskegon Community College to participate in a study pertaining to barriers that adult students face as they try to complete their education at the community college level.

My name is Terri Burt, and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education within the Counselor Education/Counseling Psychology Department at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a doctoral dissertation entitled, “The Impact of Selected Barriers on Students Completing Community College in Michigan.” Your participation in this study will help colleges and universities develop better programs and strategies for helping adult students who are returning to college.

I am asking you to please participate in this valuable study by completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to me in the postage paid envelope by October 26, 1996. Please be assured that your participation in this study is voluntary, and that all responses from the survey instrument will be kept confidential. As a matter of fact, no name of individuals will be reported or otherwise released. There is no risk in participating, but as in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or additional treatment will be made available to the subject except as otherwise stated in this consent form.

The code number at the bottom of the instrument is used to determine those individuals who have returned the survey instrument and are no longer in need of a follow-up. In addition, for those students who have completed and returned the survey instrument by October 26, 1996, their names will be entered into a drawing for $100.00 toward Spring/Winter tuition and/or books.

At any time, without risk of any repercussions, you can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study. Should you have any questions regarding this study, you can reach me at (616) 771-4210 or my advisor, Dr. Theresa A. Powell, at (616) 387-2152. Additionally, you can reach the Human Subjects Review Board (HSIRB) at (616) 387-8392 and the Vice President for Research at (616) 387-8298. Thank you very much for your time.

______________________________   ______________________________
Signature                        Date

Sincerely yours,

Terri Burt, M.A.
Enclosure
Just a reminder!

Recently you received a survey and cover letter requesting your participation in a dissertation study focused on adult students. As of today, I have not received your completed responses. Your participation in this study is needed. At your earliest convenience, please return the completed survey along with the signed cover letter in the provided envelope. Please feel free to call me at (616) 771–4210 or (616) 247–5533 if you have any questions. Thanks for your time and support.
Appendix C

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval
Date: 14 November 1996
To: Theresa Powell
From: Richard Wright, Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number 96-09-16

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project "The Impact of Selected Barriers on Students Completing Community College in "Michigan" requested in your memo dated November 11, 1996 have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

You must seek reapproval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 13 November 1997

xc: Terri Burt
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