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A Case Study Examining the Influence of Youth Culture and College Experience on Student Persistence Among Underserved African-American Students

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE AND COLLEGE EXPERIENCE ON STUDENT PERSISTENCE AMONG UNDERSERVED AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

Committee Chair: Sheila Gregory, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated May 2016

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how youth culture influences the attitudes and motivations of African-American junior college students who have aspirations to complete postsecondary credentials to advance their socioeconomic status but do not persist. In this study, youth culture was defined as the values, norms, and practices shared by African-American youth between the ages of 18-24, indicative of the way they chose to live life and make decisions. The independent variables were Academic Self-Concept, Student Educational Experience, College Bridge Programs, Academic Advisement, Faculty Involvement and Interaction, Extracurricular Activities, Youth Culture, Family Support, Socioeconomic Status, Black Media, and Social Media; the dependent variable was student persistence. The specific tradition of inquiry was the comparative case study approach because it dealt with the exploration of cases in a real
life setting over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. The researcher also utilized interpretive/theoretical frameworks to guide the study.

The study took place at two public colleges within the University System of Georgia, one rural and the other urban. The participants included 12 students, 2 academic advising directors, and 2 faculty members. The study consisted of three types of instrumentation—interviews, direct observations, and focus groups. To analyze data, the researcher interpreted and coded statements from the interviews and focus groups from which themes were developed. Significant statements were also clustered into defined themes. The results substantiated and expounded upon the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Using the qualitative data collected, the researcher created an Analysis Matrix organized with the three data sources, 20 themes and 5 categories.

The researcher found that youth enrolled in college have a strong desire to persist but encounter many internal and external pressures which make persistence to graduation challenging. Although colleges may be equipped with the tools and resources necessary to promote persistence, many are deemed inappropriate to the needs of African-American students. The conclusions drawn from the findings suggest unlike their majority counterparts, many of these students spend their first semester trying to untangle feelings of belonging and fitting into college culture.
A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE AND COLLEGE EXPERIENCE ON STUDENT PERSISTENCE AMONG UNDERSERVED AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

SONYA SHULER OKOLI

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not toward your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight.” Proverbs 3:5

I give all my honor and glory to God, the source of my strength for grace, mercy, and favor over my life. I was obedient even when I did not understand the why’s, how’s, or even the no’s. To my beautiful daughters, Adaora Kathryn and Amara Rose, who give me courage, strength, and purpose, I am forever grateful to the Lord as he thought enough of me by entrusting the two of you with me. To my husband, Dr. Ogechukwu Okoli, my biggest cheerleader, you listened to me complain and doubt my talents but you always reminded me that I was built for this. To my mother Katherine, your unconditional love kept me grounded; thanks to you, Earnestine and William Shuler, I did it. To my brother Jermaine, you are a dad to me. Growing up, we were all we had; you provided me with an example of how to make it out of our situation and I followed. To Trevor and Syretta, thank you for keeping me humble. Janice and Johnny Smith, you are our children’s everything; your support of my family made this possible. To Tiffany Lipscomb and Donna Okoli, my team of meticulous editors/sisters, I love you both. To my CAU professors, Drs. Hill, Turner, and Grooves, your support meant everything to me. Last but certainly not least, Dr. Gregory, you believed in me, saw potential greatness, and gave me not only opportunity but the confidence I needed to be an educational scholar. Thank you eternally for pushing me to not just be done, but well done.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Higher educational professionals across the country have been given the responsibility of engaging in practices and procedures to help students complete college. When people think of academics or college, the second thought to follow is normally the level of difficulty or rigor that comes with college. Most know how challenging college life can be to the average student but cannot even imagine what college might involve for those who lack the basic skills. Educational researchers tend to depict the successful college student as one who is prepared. In determining the factors of what a prepared student might look like, the following characteristics come to mind: good high school grades, awareness of goals, and an established post-degree life plan. However, on the reverse side for those ill-prepared for college, it may be difficult to determine the external factors present which hinder success in educational outcomes.

The Georgia Board of Regents (2012) reported that 34.2% of community college enrollees in Georgia were African American; of those enrolled, only 8% actually completed associate degree programs. Subsequently, in order to identify the factors which lead to student departure prior to degree completion, one must dig deeply into the roots of our educational system, specifically degree completion and its relationship to African-American students. Consequently, the educational attainment inequities of the minority college student are often tied to educational inequities, disparities, and
achievement gap issues in existence within the public K-12 educational system. African-American students often live in school districts that are considered low performing, academically inferior, with fewer qualified teachers, poor curriculum quality, and outdated materials (Wood, 2011).

In observation of the structural problems of our educational system and its responsibility to educate students in an equitable manner, one must note those things that are normally or often cited as only a small portion of the problem. Specifically, when observing the minority student, one must begin to examine how one’s cultural background may also influence educational decisions related to the pursuit of completing a college degree or persistence.

For the purpose of this study, student persistence is defined as continual pursuit of an associate degree program leading to graduation. Persistence beyond the technical definition describes the intentions, decisions, and influential factors impacting a student’s overall decision not to leave their institution. Thus, it is important to review factors that may have been present early in their educational journeys (Hermanowicz, 2004). When observing persistence as it relates to minority students, it is important to determine not only what these factors are, but how they impact a student’s decision to leave college. To determine the public educational factors that may impact student matriculation in college, it is important to reference some of the concerns within the public educational system. According to Barth (2006), the psychosocial climate, and both subtle and non-subtle messages that minority families may sometimes receive, can aid in their alienation or lack of participation in the educational process. Although the majority of parents want their
children to be successful in school, many minority parents do not know how to assist their children in ways that directly improve school performance (Hill & Craft, 2003).

Another variance related to parental roles in schools is parental involvement. Parental involvement is often the glue that ties the entire educational experience together; however, many minority parents feel unwelcomed and out of place in public schools. Across cultures, each parent’s participation style is described differently. For example, Hispanic parents tend to regard teachers as experts and will often defer educational decision making to them (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007). White American parents are often more visible, actively involved, and tend to volunteer and assist teachers. However, African-American parents may view involvement in their child’s school as carefully monitoring—they are present but not intervening. This may be because they feel limited in their ability or knowledge to intervene. On the basis of some research, African-American parents are noted as being less involved in their children’s school in comparison to parents of other races (Brown, Linver, Evans, & DeGannaro, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Spradlin, 2012).

In looking at school norms reflecting power and privilege, limited resources, time off restrictions, childcare issues, and the schools overall lack of knowledge about how to engage parents in involvement practices, it was evident why African-American parents may feel constricted in their efforts (Neblett, Phillip, Cogburn, & Stellers, 2006). While obvious that most parents would like to be as active as possible in their child’s education, there was tremendous variability within African-American cultural groups which may have impacted the value placed on education across the race.
As related to African-American students, it was important to understand how many parents formulated opinions and perceptions that shaped their educational values based on specific school experiences. African-American students who may have been exposed to negative experiences in school, such as discrimination or racism, may have an engrained negative association with school. This negative association may have ultimately played a role in the reasons some attributed to placing very little value on the importance of school (Wood, 2011). Students who have negative educational experiences within their school are not always the most confident or comfortable students; thus the process of shifting gears from secondary to postsecondary education may not have been an attractive option, especially in a traditional college that may mirror the same policies and practices. With this in mind, junior colleges were often very attractive to African-American students as they offer the ability to meet the needs of diverse groups, have open access admission standards, a wide array of learning support programs, and ultimately provide a non-rigorous and inexpensive pathway for students. Junior colleges were often regarded as “dream makers” and criticized for being “dream diverters,” but have served a unique role specifically for the African-American student (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Junior colleges also afforded those traditionally underserved and underrepresented students with an opportunity to attend college without the presumed insurmountable hurdles that may be present at more traditional institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).
Statement of the Problem

African-American students persist through two-year colleges at rates severely disproportionate to their Caucasian counterparts (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems [IPEDS], 2011; Georgia Board of Regents [BOR] Report, 2012). Of African-American undergraduates in the United States, 49% are community college enrollees (Mullins & Phillippe, 2009). According to a 2012 report by the University System of Georgia, only about 23% of African Americans attain an associate’s degree even though they make up over 40% of the Georgia community college population (Georgia Board of Regents Report, 2012).

Educational scholars are constantly looking to identify barriers African-American student’s face in the midst of degree attainment. While Georgia completion rates for minorities report Asians 85% and Hispanics 51%, African Americans fall well below at only a 23% degree-completion rate at the associate level (CCG Report, 2012). Low retention and persistence rates impose hardships on the individuals who incur expenses as a result of non-degree attainment (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2011; Merrow, 2007). Low college completion rates also pose hardships to the economic development of the state, as states may incur financial loss as a result of college students who fail to complete their degree programs (Baum & Payea, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how youth culture influenced the attitudes and motivations of African-American junior college students who had the aspiration to complete postsecondary credentials to advance their socioeconomic status
(SES) but did not persist. In this study, youth culture was defined as the values, norms and practices shared by African-American youth between the ages of 18-24 and indicative of the way they chose to live life and make decisions.

National statistics show African-American students pursue secondary education at substantially lower rates, earn lower wages, inherit less, and transition into higher social strata at lower rates. These statistics are cause for concern, especially when in the two-year college setting they represent the majority (Hammrick & Stage, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005; Complete College Georgia, 2012; Archer, Hutchins, & Ross, 2003). African-American youth without academic success, a high school diploma, a trade certificate, or a college degree will continue to penetrate a workforce that promotes and rewards individuals for advanced educational or technological credentials, all of which continues a cycle repeated generation to generation of limited financial gain and socioeconomic immobility (Rollins & Valdes, 2006).

**Research Questions**

The central question that guided this study was: How do youth culture and college experience influence African-American students in pursuit of earning an associate degree? From this central question, the study addressed the following related research questions:

**RQ1:** To what extent does academic self-concept influence persistence in an associate degree program?

**RQ2:** How does student educational experience influence persistence in an associate degree program?
RQ3: How does participation in *college bridge programs* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ4: How does *academic advisement* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ5: To what extent does *faculty involvement* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ6: How does participation in *extracurricular activities* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ7: To what extent does *youth culture* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ8: How does *family support* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ9: How does *socioeconomic status (SES)* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ10: To what extent does *black media* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

RQ11: How does *social media* influence persistence in an associate degree program?

**Significance of the Study**

In the realm of higher education research, student retention and persistence issues are of major importance; however, the bulk of research is done primarily within the four-year residential student population as opposed to the two-year population in looking at
persistence (Tinto, 2007). Key administrators in educational institutions where thousands of students are enrolled each year are challenged with meeting the needs of the very diverse population served (Carnevale & Strohl, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Federal and state governments have added to the challenges administrators face by mandating a substantial increase in postsecondary attainment across all educational levels (Greenstone, Holzer, Berth, Conway, & VanAusdie, 2011; Complete College Georgia, 2012). To manage the effectiveness of reaching individual student needs, it is paramount to begin creating studies which take an in-depth look at two-year colleges and their success in the pivotal role of providing access and opportunities to African-American students. African-American students hold a very strong standing within the community college sector but seem to be an overlooked population in determining college success outcomes. Further exploration is needed to determine the reasons African-American students do not take full advantage of the access and opportunities community colleges provide.

**Summary**

Completion rates of junior college students are low at all race categories in the state of Georgia; however, African Americans are the largest minority group entering junior colleges across the state but the smallest group to persist, graduate, and complete associate degrees. The educational attainment level of an individual is statistically proven to be a significant factor leading to substantial socioeconomic gains both personally and within the context of one’s community. Ultimately, this study explored
the influential role *youth culture* played in the values, beliefs, and practices of African-American students in their overall educational decision to persist through an associate degree program.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents the review of recent educational literature directed to youth culture and college persistence. The overall focus of this chapter is to review literature related to student persistence, literature related to institutional resources, and literature related to the influence of the college experience. In addition, literature was reviewed on youth culture and its impact on African-American students in their plight to persist through associate degree programs. The review of literature synthesizes relevant and current sources; however, older sources that provide historical relevance are also present.

Dependent Variable: Student Persistence

Historical Overview

The notion of student persistence was captured through Tinto’s (1975) work on student theories affecting student persistence with discussion of characteristics present in students’ lives that indirectly impacted educational expectations, commitment, and outcomes. Student persistence terminology and meanings were modified by Tinto (1993) to help explain the causal process leading students to leave an institution before completing a degree program of study. Subsequent studies were responsible for including or identifying specific characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parental background, and educational experience (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008).
In addition, a study by Braxton and Hirschy (2005) indicated that academic and social integration were not contributing factors in two-year programs as much as they were in four-year residential programs.

According to Tinto’s (1998) study, approximately half of all leavers chose to leave an institution prior to the start of their second year. The more academically and socially involved a student was, the more inclined they were to interact with other students, faculty, and staff, thus increasing the likelihood of persistence. However, in order for persistence to be impacted the most, involvement must take place at least during the first semester of enrollment (Tinto, 1998). Consequently, a review of two-year programs showed that with integration, it was the type of programs offered to students over the existence of programs that attributed to the causal process of persistence (Tinto, 2007).

Related to African-American students, there were ideas presented within several works about the influence of institutional support factors as a means of keeping students enrolled. Tinto (1998) discussed how within the first year, institutions should offer programs that focus on students who matriculated through the first year such as New Student Orientation Programs, First Year Orientation Programs, and Learning Communities. The purpose of each of these programs was to introduce new students to the institution through exposure and information regarding academic, social, and extracurricular activities, which are all a part of student integration. Learning communities provided academic foundation to first-year students and required students to be actively involved with other students in a learning capacity. According to Tinto, Russo, and Kadel (1994), student experiences which occurred inside of the classroom
along with those beyond the walls of the classroom, equally impacted student persistence. Although students enrolled in associate degree programs may not be within the typical age range of the nontraditional first-year student, they often display defining characteristics of a nontraditional student: employed full time or part time or family obligations outside of school. Students such as those described may be incapable of spending a lot of time on campus; thus, in order for these students to be affected by institutional measures proven to aid in persistence, these efforts should be within the academic/classroom setting.

Studies that observed characteristics of African-American students on college campuses stated that they found value in collectivism or sharing which was deeply rooted within their cultures. Spradlin (2012) revealed that African Americans valued fictive kinship or relationships with those who were not biologically related and formed bonds to care for one another when in need. Learning communities also allowed students to register for courses together, share learning experiences, and collaborate within the classroom together.

**Independent Variables**

**Academic Self-Concept**

Academic self-concept is a term to describe a student’s overall perception of his/her ability or competency level in an academic setting (Demetriou & Schmitz, 2011). The term academic self-concept or self-efficacy are often used interchangeably as both describe one’s perceived ability to succeed.
Self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s beliefs concerning whether or not he/she can perform a course of action resulting in a desired outcome (Bandura, 1986). Self-concept is another term used simultaneously with academic self-concept and is defined as a person’s self-perceptions formed through experiences and interpretations of one’s environment. Self-concept is a process with many dimensions including perceptions of personal behavior in specific situations, framing inferences of the broader self in social settings, and a view of physical/academic settings.

In looking at variables that may influence one’s self-efficacy, culture was found to impact one’s belief in his/her abilities. According to Siegle, Rubenstein, Reis, McCoach, and Burton (2012), a growing body of research revealed that there was a positive, significant relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and their academic performance. While self-efficacy influenced many things in a student’s overall decision-making process, of those most important related to this research were the following: (a) the amount of effort placed on goals, (b) the level of persistent a student has in the face of difficulty, and (c) the level of difficulty of the goals set. The overall relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement increased as a student advanced through each level of schooling. According to Pajares (2002), the belief an individual develops about themselves creates the foundation of what they hold to be true and is a vital force in their success or failure in academic endeavors. Upon entering college, ones self-efficacy beliefs should be at its highest because self-efficacy is more strongly related to their individual achievement than any measure of their overall ability during this time (Siegle, Rubenstein, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012).
Students with low self-efficacy may not be expected to do well and often may not achieve at levels commensurate to their actual abilities, simply because they do not believe they can do so. Consequently, what students feel or believe about their capabilities rather than by what they are actually able to accomplish may drive academic achievement (Bandura, 1986).

Academic self-concept plays a critical role in student satisfaction and interest in school while making an influential platform to success beyond school (Marsh & Martin, 2011). Many African-American males experience an internal conflict between immediate and long-term needs, thus frame negative perceptions about the benefits of school (Wood, 2011). Specifically, African-American students place different levels of importance on academics based on their perceived personal or societal limitations which lead to diminished academic outcomes. Underserved and Underrepresented students residing in lower income areas not only deal with limited educational resources but teachers with low expectations of academic performance.

In an effort to better understand student persistence and retention, DeWitz, Woosley, and Walsh (2009) conducted a study to investigate support measures needed to enhance student outcomes. The study investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and purpose in life among college students, ultimately concluding that the most significant predictor of purpose was self-efficacy. The psychological model of college persistence and retention mentioned by Marsh and Martin (2011), theorized how the relationship of self-efficacy increased participation in activities which aided in student persistence.
Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) examined the role of student-faculty interactions on the development of academic self-concept in college students. Komarraju and colleagues found that student-faculty interaction not only supported the development of academic self-concept but increased their level of confidence in their overall ability and academic skills. Subsequently, the combination of confidence in ability, perceived faculty respect, and flexible accessible university administrators also increased the probability of student engagement/enjoyment within the learning community (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Optimistic individuals perceived positive outcomes possible and were motivated to invest efforts to achieve goals. College persistence is influenced by student ability to adjust to new situations and manage stress. Researchers Nes, Evans, and Segerstorm (2009) investigated the significance of optimistic expectations with persistence, concluding that specified academic optimism was often associated with higher levels of motivation and judgment in addition to lower college stop-out rates.

**Student Educational Experience**

Experience is often defined as knowledge or exposure gained through involvement or participation in a given process. The educational experience of students in schools will vary due to the fact that each will ascribe to their educational experience through a different set of lenses. The public educational system represented a diverse background of students who each have their own distinct cultural personal history shaping how they view their experiences (Greenberg et al., 2003). Since the education
foundation starts with the K-12 system, it is important for the system to serve as the framework of a strong academic foundation.

According to Adams-Bass (2014), after nearly 30 years of studying “trust” in schools, research found urban school students reported trust deficiency in schools. A school culture that promoted trust was one with the ability to generate productive teacher-student interactions which increased successful academic outcomes. Adams suggested student trust is a prerequisite for the kind of preparative student-teacher interaction and attachment that supported fulfillment of psychological needs.

Deci and Ryan (2002) stated that healthy and trusting relationships with empathetic adults were vital to student resilience and productivity. The researchers compared the correlation of the outcomes of meeting physical or psychological needs as a measure to increase growth and development. Just as unmet physical needs stunted growth and development, not satisfying psychological needs—those of autonomy, relatedness, and competence—impeded effective personality and growth-oriented behavior.

Race framed educational outcomes and experiences of students which often led to severe displacement issues such as achievement gap, special education placements, disciplinary disparities, and high school dropout rates (Monroe, 2013). A stellar example of a program contrary to this is President Obama’s Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) initiative. This initiative sought to harmonize policies and procedures which historically promoted the status quo science technology engineering, and math exposure opportunities of African-American students. The initiative focused on exposure of minorities in urban schools to educational options proven to advance economics in
communities globally. Statistics showed whites were more likely to receive STEM degrees than people of color (Maltese & Tai, 2011).

Supportive adult interactions help students adapt to changing environments and circumstances evident in schools; however, without adult role models it is difficult for a child to internalize cultural boundaries. Ladson-Billings (1995) said that African-American students excel academically when culture is infused into curriculum. The infusion of cultural history of African Americans within the schooling process aided in enhanced student learning outcomes. It is important that educators at all levels understand that students’ perceived views of the transmission of education significantly impact their academic outcomes and psychological/emotional well-being (Cholewa & West Olatunji, 2008).

Rosenbloom and Way (2004) suggested that African-American students were likely to encounter racial discrimination at their schools. Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, and Jackson (2008) reported that 25% of African-American students experienced negative race-related interactions with teachers in an academic context. Wang and Hugely (2012) reported that a student’s perception of teacher discrimination negatively related to educational success and aspirations. Students’ experiences with discrimination within their educational process placed their educational outcomes at risk (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

Data used by schools to determine risk often encompass basic characteristics like race, gender, and free/reduced lunch status; thus, it is hard to uncover those in-depth limitations that exist within students beneath the surface. The limitations portrayed discussed actual risks experienced by African-American students that helped to gain a
more comprehensive understanding of how student experiences within schools affect educational outcomes (Konstantopoulos & Borman, 2011).

**College Bridge Programs**

College bridge programs are traditionally known as an early intervention strategy which has the ability to help students of color succeed and persist. These programs are often referred to as transition to college programs with a mission to recruit, reach, and prepare students for college. Junior colleges today face the challenge of attracting students that are prepared to meet the academic challenges and rigor of college-level course work due to changing policies regarding remedial level course work.

The college experience often begins well before students enter the doors of their selected institution. For some, the opportunity comes early in their educational matriculation through parental exposure and for others the opportunity comes a bit later in secondary school through teachers, guidance counselors, or mentors. Deil-Amen (2006) reported that it is important to begin introducing at-risk students to the college environment before they get to college. Thus, it is important for students to engage in college-bound activities which actively demonstrate skills needed to pursue college. College bridge programs are great examples of platforms which set the stage for students interested in pursuing college.

Community colleges once served as a launching pad for students otherwise ill prepared for the academic rigor of a traditional college; they once provided developmental courses which addressed the needs of students lacking proficiency in writing, reading, and math. Unfortunately, students within the community college sector
today are typically pegged as unattractive to traditional colleges due to the assumed notion that all junior college students are in need of developmental or remedial courses. Due to the fact that learning support courses are not only undesirable by traditional colleges, they are also currently unavailable, as traditional colleges require students to enter at college preparatory/101 levels. Therefore, a student who may test “in need” of developmental courses must enroll in a community college before being admitted to a traditional four-year college.

College bridge programs have been recognized as more effective than traditional educational programs for African-American students. This is partially due to the built-in components of support services present within these programs such as exposure to college life, transition to college support, academic/social anxiety support about college life, foundational support labs for writing/math, and overall access to college academic counselors. Ultimately, students who attend open-access institutions such as community colleges often require social know-how to be successful during their college matriculation. Therefore, college bridge programs are extremely beneficial (Wathington, 2011).

To ensure that a student is equipped with the tools/resources needed to be successful in college, students should be acquainted with some basic “how to” information such as selecting courses, obtaining assistance, and navigating existing bureaucracies on campus. Unfortunately, this knowledge is less accessible to underserved and underrepresented students. College bridge programs within the context of this study referred to both Upward Bound and Dual Enrollment within the same context. The Upward Bound Program was selected because it was a great example of a
program whose goals were centered on disadvantaged high schools and resources provided to bridge the gap between high school and college (Kezar, 2011). The main objective of Upward Bound is to provide educational and foundational support to level the educational disparities many low-income students experience (Thomas, 2014). Subsequently, the Dual Enrollment Program was selected because this program’s goal is to allow high school students the opportunity to enroll in college-level courses for college credit while technically enrolled in high school. In areas dominated by minority students, these programs often took place dually on both the high school and college campuses; thus, students were exposed to college life (Georgia Department of Education [GADE], 2011). According to Baum and Payea (2013), college and career readiness are extremely important when looking at persistence. Multiple data sources and studies suggested that when students were prepared for college, they persisted to degree completion at much higher rates than those who were ill prepared.

**Academic Advisement**

Academic advising is characterized as good when students depart from the advisor with a good sense of academic aptitude and an idea of the learning resources available to them. Good academic advising is noted as a positive correlator to student persistence outcomes (Bean & Eaton, 2002). With the overall difficulty many African-American students face to even get to the place of enrollment into college, it is important for them to establish personal and professional affiliations which promote academic success or overall guidance. According to Tinto (1994), almost half of students who decide to depart/leave college do so within the first semester. Therefore, it is important
for students to establish connections with academic advisors early in their matriculation process. According to Drake, Jordan, and Miler (2013) an excerpt from the professional standards for academic advising states the following as the definition of academic advising: “The primary purpose of the Academic Advising Program (AAP) is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans” (p. 29). The importance of continuous contact with academic advisors ensures that students receive guidance to make proper and appropriate decisions about their matriculation.

Some high achieving African-American students reported feeling pressured to prove their intellectual ability to peers as well as to members of the college academic staff (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). This study proved that unlike their counterparts, African-American students face insurmountable academic and social challenges on a multitude of levels. The literature on academic advisement focused on two different styles of advisement, developmental and prescriptive. Prescriptive advisement is a style where the advisor simply provides information in a nondirective manner. Developmental advisement is intrusive, directive, and is seen as “charting” a student through educational matriculation as well as life concerns (Crookston, 2009).

According to a study conducted by Crookston (2009), African-American students may prefer advising that is prescriptive as it employs a sense of empathy and concern for their success. Overall, academic advisement is important to students as it serves as an engine that aids in development, engagement, presumed experiences about college, and how to maneuver through the system to get where they desire to go (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). With this, the advisor’s job is not only to influence behavior and guide student actions but also to illicit accountability and acknowledgement. The sense of
personal accountability in conjunction with students’ beliefs that they are being held accountable is a way that advisors are able to form an overall connection to students allowing them to become successful (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). With common myths about students attending community colleges as those underprepared academically and possessing low GPAs, the U. S. Department of Education reported that an alarming rate of students attending directly out of high school had a GPA of at least 3.0 or above (Planty et al.). Ironically, Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) stated that African-American students were more likely to enroll in developmental courses and were overrepresented as compared to Caucasian students with the same academic skills, preparation, and social background.

Academic advisement served as a process to ensure that students were on the right track academically. Students felt comfortable meeting with their advisor as failure to do so limited their knowledge of an effective academic plan which was needed for effective persistence to occur. In addition, consistent utilization of academic advisement served to eliminate excessive course withdrawals, registration in unnecessary courses, and provided factual information about financial aid, all of which had a negative impact on overall persistence to graduation (Martinello & Stewart, 2012). Overall, students exposed to an appropriate balance of support and resources were susceptible to academic success when presented in an environment where advisement was the focal point (Crookston, 2009).
Faculty Involvement and Interaction

The literature from Astin (1997) stated that the more academically and socially involved a student became, the more likely they were to engage with other students and interact with faculty. Students who identified interactions with their institution as positive felt valuable and chose to integrate with the institution which increased their likelihood to persist (Tinto, 1997). According to Tinto, students were more inclined to persist when they were either academically or socially integrated, especially in junior colleges, as students did not have the luxury of engagement in tons of socially related activities. Student interactions were more likely to be accomplished through academic involvements taking place within the instructional setting.

Although most studies have focused on student integration and involvement which primarily affected four-year college students, it is important to address why those differences exist among two-year college students. Consequently, students in the junior college sector were not bound by location, resident living, or the other traditional college-life situations students encountered; thus, most experiences or perceptions in regard to this sector took place in the instructional setting. With both residential four-year and nonresidential two-year colleges, instruction took place in classrooms or laboratories where students collaborated with faculty and other students. These academic experiences strongly influenced persistence (Tinto, 1997). Student populations at the junior college level consisted of students who met normally and socialized with peers and faculty through the normal confinement of their classrooms. This academic involvement at the junior college level was just as important to students enrolled at four-year residential colleges.
The junior college student often found their “validation” within the classroom. However, these interactions stimulated continued integration outside of the classroom. Tinto (1997) stated that nearly half of all leavers depart before the start of the second year; thus, it is important to reach students during their first year while they are in “transition mode” and personal affiliations are not yet established.

Barnett (2011) suggested community college persistence rates can be amplified if faculty commitment to the welfare of students and are recognized for their successes. Studies have found that persistence rates of junior college students are enhanced when students feel known and mentored by faculty, receive encouragement and procedural assistance in institutional matters (Deil-Amen, 2006), and perceives faculty as committed to their individual welfare (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). In addition, faculty who were able and willing to assist students with procedural items such as financial aid, academic registration, and curriculum mapping removed barriers many students found to be insurmountable. Due to the fact that junior colleges represent a large number of first generation students, procedural assistance is vital to their success. Overall, procedural assistance heightened student confidence in their ability to meritoriously navigate the college system and enhanced their sense of belonging. A study conducted by Jaeger and Eagan (2009) showed students who viewed their faculty as accessible reported greater satisfaction with their college experience. Students who were involved in mentoring relationships with junior college faculty also displayed increased social and academic integration with the institution which led to goal commitment and persistence to graduation.
Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities fall into several categories: school based, recreation based, athletic based and social/fraternal based. Athletic based sports activities have been linked to many positive attributes which aid in increased academic standing for students. Athletes often learn commitment, problem solving, conflict resolution, identity development, and emotional development (Melendez, 2006). However, student participation in social, academic, or athletic organizations helped to build attributes needed for leadership skills, academic competency, and enhancement of school identification. Extracurricular activities offered students the opportunity to network with other faculty/staff members which boosted their overall level of confidence in the educational process.

Student retention and persistence are measures of a student which take into account completion factors measured by student success. Participation in extracurricular activities is a way to keep students engaged or stitched into the institution so that their commitment to the school is extremely high, thus making it difficult to consider leaving. According to Tinto (1998), the more socially involved in college life students are, the more they become interested in engagement and interaction with other students, college faculty, and staff. In addition, a student’s overall sense of belonging on campus can be intensified through extracurricular involvement. Although students’ needs are different and not all students’ performance is tied to what they chose to participate in on campus, studies show that when academic and social integration are both present, students are more likely to persist (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Engagement of students inside of the classroom is one piece of the equation that is the student’s responsibility. The other piece of the equation involves direction toward extracurricular activities which is the responsibility of the institution. Directions toward the activities offered on campus are proven to optimize overall learning outcomes (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Another study conducted by Eiche, Sedlacek, and Adams-Gaston (2003) stated that participation in school based extracurricular activities often correlated to high levels of academic commitment and performance of students. In addition, a study by Mahoney, Harris, and Eccles (2006) concluded that at-risk adolescents benefited more from extracurricular activities than non-at-risk students because they often provided a certain level of structural leisure which allowed the student to remain focused. Students who participated in extracurricular activities were able to engage in healthy relationships with adults other than their parents. According to Eccles and Roeser (2009), participation in high quality youth activities allowed students to form nurturing, caring relationships with adults within the wider community which provided social capital. Organized activities also allowed students to engage in healthy relationships and form bonds with their peers. The involvement of students in extracurricular activities deepened the characteristics of social circles; thus, participation in specific activities increased the likelihood of meeting peers who share the same goals and aspirations. In addition, participation in extracurricular activities is linked to the following attributes in high school students: higher grades, competitive test scores, increase in educational value, increase in school engagement, and higher aspirations (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).
Youth Culture

The influence of culture on beliefs about education, the value of education, and student engagement styles with regard to education are all directly related to one’s culture and the personal value placed on education (Spradlin, 2012). Culture impacts student outlook and participation in the educational process as there are certain behaviors that are seen as accepted or unaccepted by the group. Behaviors deemed as unacceptable in a minority culture are those identified as characteristics of white American culture and seen by minorities as inappropriate. For example, one’s culture could consider being studious as “acting white” or exhibiting behaviors otherwise known to promote an ideal of “success,” such as dressing a certain way or using vernacular in a certain manner. Student academic motivation may decline due to a desire to be accepted or not seen as conforming to majority standards such as those previously mentioned. The overall effect on the African-American student is a detrimental decline of academic achievement or aspirations to excel through school in fear of cultural rejection.

Cultural background affects ones value system, definition of self, response style, and overall approach to life (Lambie, 2005). There are many intra-individual factors involved in the youth decision-making process, especially related to education. Educational researchers consistently examine the link between parental support, community-based factors, and the tie or relatedness to academic performance. Since culture encompasses the values, traditions, and beliefs that mediate the social group’s behavior, it is important for educators to know what those behaviors are (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Sadly the public education system employs ideologies based on Eurocentric values that only benefit the cultural backgrounds of European Americans
which, in turn, lacks alignment of African-American values and ideologies (Shockley, 2007). Many teachers have only a cursory understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and their efforts to bridge the cultural gap has often fallen short.

According to Irvine (2010), culturally relevant pedagogy is a term that described effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. Although pedagogy implores a standard that is inclusive to minority students, teachers often lose sight of what it means to fully integrate this pedagogy into their lesson plans. Culturally relevant teaching is described by many educators as a daunting idea that is easy to understand and difficult to implement. Consequently, this style of teaching is often noted as a way to engage and motivate minority students. Ladson-Billings (1994) theorized that teaching should match the home and community cultures of minority students who traditionally lack academic success in school equivalent to their Caucasian counterparts. In addition to school environment, barriers are the existence of the constant negative portrayals of African-American male students embedded in television, music, and media which has aided in a negative connotation associated with their overall ability and capability in school (Woods, 2011). Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) stated that African-American students who reported a stronger connection to their cultural group showed less of a decline in school motivation and academic achievement.

**Family Support**

African-American achievement and graduation rates are significantly different in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. According to Planty et al. (2008), there was a huge disparity in academic success between African-American adolescents and the
majority population. Parental behavior and family socialization tended to be the most cited factor which contributed to how well African-American students performed in school (Brown, Linver, Evan, & DeGannaro, 2009). There was also an overabundance of information addressing parenting style, behaviors, and discipline that facilitated positive academic outcomes in African-American youth (Gonzales, Cauce, Friedman, & Mason, 1996). Foley (2008) stated that family support can help with college student success rates as family has the ability to provide moral support, financial support, and assistance with career planning. Family beliefs, values, attitudes, and level of education were extremely important as factors that contribute to the level of support a student received.

College students with high perceived availability of family support often built connections with faculty and other students and believed in their ability to complete academic goals. In addition, family support systems offered students a strong sense of security and self-actualization which encouraged student self-exploration toward those activities seemingly risky. Family relationships served as an important source of support throughout a student’s life, and strong familiar ties aided in student confidence. The existence of support proved to be a factor which enabled students to preserver through external challenges of school which were often a noted distraction to focus on academic components of college. However, if alleviated, students’ ability to be successful was threatened.

Sledge (2012) suggested that having both parents in the home lowered the risks of low academic achievement in grade school. Other factors such as socioeconomic status (SES) and the level of education of the family also contributed to a child’s completion of secondary school and acceptance into a college. Most African-American college students
are first-generation students and come from low-income families (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

African Americans traditionally have a close tie with those who are not relatives, referred to as fictive kinship and often rely heavily on family and close friends for support and guidance with challenging decisions they deem unfamiliar or uncomfortable. African American students look to extended family for emotional and social support (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Kinship is an extension of family and for many African Americans their family unit includes neighbors, church, and community members. Families with a solid educational background or advanced credentials are more likely to reach higher achievement marks over those with less education (Stewart, 2006). Families of first-generation students have less academic knowledge, lower self-esteem, and are unaware of how to support their children in a higher education setting. According to Sledge (2012), the more assistance given to students throughout their lives, the greater their chances are for college acceptance and persistence toward degree completion.

**Socioeconomic Status**

Socioeconomic Status (SES) creates one’s exposure and proximity to others who may identify with and share experiences, and may aid in the overall development of specific skills and competencies. Huston and Bentley (2010) stated that poverty is not a singular experience but one with a complex web of specific social disadvantages. Subsequently, most African-American families reside in school districts with fewer academic offerings, less qualified teachers, outdated materials, and lower quality curriculum, all of which lead to under preparation and being at a disadvantage (Wood,
Epstein (1986) stated that most parents want their children to succeed in school but those living in poverty often do not know what it takes to assist them with increased school performance.

African Americans overwhelmingly experience disadvantages that make it more challenging to become upwardly mobile and accomplish socioeconomic parity. African Americans face the same hiccups within the educational systems as other minority groups in order to achieve the American dream (Harris, 2010). African Americans are disadvantaged across various measures of economic and educational well-being (Epstein, 2010). The gap between students from low income households versus those of higher income households related to degree attainment is explained partly by lower college-going rates.

In addition, students from disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled in college are less likely to persist than those from higher income backgrounds (Spradlin, 2012). Traditionally, higher persistence and attrition rates were in direct correlation to the students themselves. In addition, low income students tended to have fewer academic, social, and financial resources available to them unlike their higher income background peers. The lack of financial resources negatively affected the extent to which they were successful within the college environment (Berumen, Zerquera, & Smith, 2015).

The American school system is based on state property taxes which determine the economic strength, academic resources, and social climate/environment of the school where a child attends. Subsequently, a strong measure of economic status is homeownership. Another study pointed out that when looking at the number of Americans who own the homes they reside in verses those who do not, a disparity existed
between the percentages of African Americans versus their white counterparts (Harris, 2010). Although studies showed access to higher education has expanded, students from low income backgrounds remained at a distinct disadvantage. Low income students have often been ill prepared for college by their K-12 school districts. According to Thomas (2014), students from low income backgrounds would succeed if the technology and educational resources to compete on a level playing field were offered. Economically disadvantaged students may not have support systems in place comparative to their counterparts which is often a noted factor in academic success. Low income students are often first-generation college students (students who entered college at a disadvantage in relation to their counterparts primarily due to preparation or influence).

Berumen, Zerquera, and Smith (2015) suggested, that social and financial support of first-generation college students from family as well as the community is often absent. In many instances, these students have to work while attending school to take care of their families, which makes it twice as hard for their preparation deficits to ever equalize. Kezar (2011) wrote that over the past few decades, many colleges and universities had made contentious efforts to increase diversity of those attending and succeeding in their institutions, but had put little or no focus on the issues that came with those students from low-income households.

Although many predominately white institutions seem to ignore socioeconomic status (SES), their programs focused on student resource offerings and depict an understanding of the impact SES had on student success. Contrarily, tribal colleges as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) are revered by students from low-income backgrounds. Within these institutions, programs, policies, and
practices exist that are sympathetic to the precarious condition of the finances and first-
generation students who represent the institutions. These institutions understand the
underlying ignorance students and families may have with the financial aid and
scholarship application process (Kezar, 2011). Ironically for mainstream colleges,
programs for students of color generally do not make a distinction between the varying
needs of African-American students from upper-middle class, middle-class or low-
income backgrounds which often overlook the specific or particular individual needs of
students at these institutions.

An example of one specific need of students based on socioeconomic status is
college textbooks. College textbooks have gone up in price more than 600%, which is
more than any other type of book in the market over the past 30 years (Government
Accountability Office, 2005). Kezar (2011) stated that with the rising cost of textbooks,
institutions generally do not mandate faculty to search for less expensive books, create
scholarships for textbooks, or even review the cost of textbooks before assigning them as
required course texts which could aid in the support of low income student affordability.

Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) affirmed that,

Issues of racial disparity contribute to the low representation of African-American
students and low-income/first-generation students in higher education institutions
and the methods that surround race, white supremacy, supposed meritocracy, and
racist ideologies have shaped and undermined policy efforts for African-
American students’ participation in higher education. (p. 390)
**Black Media**

Black media is described as communication channels that disseminate news and information specific to African Americans. There is a growing consensus about the prevalence of negative black media images and the influence of them on African-American youth. Many Americans seem to think that the current climate of “tense” race relations has represented itself with the inauguration of the first black president, Barack Obama. Although race in America has always been a sensitive subject, the growing strains in race relations have impacted media coverage regarding issues of social issues and crime. There has been a drastic increase in the presence of stories regarded as negative in nature related to African Americans, especially African-American youth.

While unanimity existed about the prevalence of negative black media images, there were few studies that pointed to how images impact the way black youth interpret and respond (Adams-Bass, 2014). According to the study conducted by Adams-Bass, television viewing is the most popular media medium among African-American youth. With regard to TV viewing habits, Watkins (2005) suggested that African-American youth prefer to watch black TV shows or movies and revere character depictions as valid models of those behaviors that are accepted and expected in society. African-American youth are often tasked with developing positive productive relationships and ideals related to navigating life decisions and relationships, but receive conflicting messages from the media (Adams-Bass, 2014). Despite the many pieces of literature that suggest how damaging negative stereotypes can be on developmental experiences of African-American youth, the frequency of the appearance of these images in mainstream media is extremely high (Ward, Day, & Epstein 2006).
African-American youth often turn to urban radio, television shows, and magazines for guidance with not only life decisions such as education, money, or social issues, but also with their depiction of the overall “world view.” The impact of urban radio stemmed as far back as the 1940s but has been understated and underappreciated in looking at its contributions to the enrichment of lives within the African-American community. Urban radio stretched far beyond those who directly listen due to the fact that those who listen often pass along information to others, which have played a major role in transforming social, economic, and political movements. Jennings (2012), also posited that the historical relevance of urban or black radio is paramount to the infrastructure of the African-American community so much that its present absence may be the reason so many things within the culture are lost.

The plight of the urban radio in existence decades ago was one responsible for positive images and reinforcement of African Americans; it was responsible for noting their value and importance within society. In addition, during this time black radio served as a sounding board for addressing the issues regarding social injustices within the African-American community.

**Social Media**

Social media is defined as an electronic communication source where one creates, exchanges, and engages in networking socially. African Americans are more likely to possess smart phones than any other demographic group on the planet and spend more time using them to engage in social media activities (Lee, 2015). A 2015 Nielsen Study found that 81% of African Americans utilize their smart phone to penetrate social media...
applications (Nielsen, 2015). According to Lee (2012), 72% of African Americans use their smart phones for text messaging and 61% to download and listen to music. Mounting evidence suggests the new wave of social media has diminished face-to-face interactions or even simple telephone conversations among adolescents. Most youth report the preference of social media, texting, or nonverbal means of communication for privacy reasons citing parent intrusion as the biggest factor in choice to text over talk (Lee, 2015).

Skierkowski and Wood (2012) found that texting behavior was appealing to youth because it is convenient, fast, and free from parent supervision. Other motivating factors such as getting information, seeking entertainment, relationship development, security, and relaxation were most appealing factors for youth (Kang & Jung, 2014). Masur, Reinecke, Zieggele, and Quiring (2014) also identified basic motive dimensions for using social medial networking cited for the following: information on social happenings, entertainment, meeting new people, and self-presentation. Gonzales and Hancock (2011) proposed that college students who engaged in self-presentation on Facebook enhanced their self-esteem levels. Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010) suggested that the most common use of Facebook included staying connected with friends, connecting with past friends, locating family/friends, learning about events, posting/viewing pictures, and sharing information for academic/dating purposes. Facebook was also noted as a means by which students that have a lot of friends have a positive experience with social adjustment (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2010). Facebook has the potential to provide substantial information about civic/community issues, racial heritage, and current social
issues, thus promoting and enhancing student understanding of their overall racial and ethnic identity (Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009).

Lee (2012) stated that over 40% of African-American students cited they mainly communicate on social media with other African-American friends, associates or community members and not to meet or engage with those outside of their level of comfort. This study also found that college students reported overall sharing of information about themselves to include cultural interests, preferred music/art/quotes ultimately allowing them to create a social and cultural identity specific to what they value. Paul, Baker, and Cochran (2012) found a statistically significant relationship between time spent on social media sites and academic performance. A study conducted by Junco (2012) found students who used social media during class were found to have significantly lower GPAs than those who did not. In addition, college students who were heavily involved in social media usage reported loss of sleep, higher levels of stress, and decreased hours of study which ultimately impacted overall academic performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Since African Americans are noted as the heaviest users of social media, there may be a relationship between lower college performance and the inability to persist to associate degree completion.

**Emergent Themes**

There were seven major themes that emerged from the literature review: student attitudes, engagement, peer influence, racial disparities, educational standards, institutional politics, and motivation. Each theme not only interlocked or was interdependent of the other, but played an essential role in the educational experiences of
the African-American student. For example, student attitude severely affected their overall level of engagement, while one’s circle of friends impacted both their attitude and engagement in school. In addition, the racial disparities present in schools may have determined the kind of institutional policies and procedures governed and how educational standards/expectations were imposed on students of color.

Summary

The review of recent literature on student persistence and youth culture set the tone for an understanding of the historical and relevant components of each. The literature provided illumination of the importance of this topic and how the study aligned with current works already done.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within the field of higher education there have been far less studies regarding student persistence with junior college students, as studies regarding student retention have remained on the front lines (Tinto, 1998). Conversely, it was important to determine through retention studies the causal items which lead to a student’s physical action to leave an institution and also to determine why a student does not complete a degree. This study sought to determine factors related to the “why” or “reasons” a student fails to persist in a degree program.

The theoretical framework for this study provided an explanation of how the dependent variable (persistence) interacted in relationship to the 11 independent variables. The study focused on the following four theories: (a) Vincent Tinto’s (1993) Student Integration Theory, (b) Jean S. Phinney’s (1997) Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Theory, (c) Erickson’s (1968) Psychosocial Theory, and (d) Delgado and Stefancic’s (2006) Critical Race Theory. Together, the theories chosen built the framework needed to understand the context of the study.

Student Integration Theory

First, Tinto’s (1993) Student Integration Theory posited that when students become connected to the social and academic life present on their college campus, they
are more likely to become integrated into college and more likely to persist. Researchers Tinto (1998), Pascarell and Terenzini (2005) and Maltese and Tai (2011), all pointed to student departure as occurring the most within the first year of enrollment. Therefore, significant factors that may emerge before college entrance must be identified.

To be successful in college, students must ascribe to a set of dispositions, attitudes, and abilities proven to establish a strong academic foundation. Tinto (1998) stated that students who become integrated are more inclined to form connections with faculty/staff, partnerships with classmates, participate in campus extracurricular activities and engage in academic endeavors outside of the classroom. All of these connections may have imparted a sense of value and respect students often need to feel they are a part of something greater than themselves. Once students feel connected to the college, they are more inclined to feel the institution is in support of helping to meet their academic goals.

According to Tinto’s (1993) Integration Theory, students who made connections with their college environment were more likely to return to school and persist each semester of enrollment. The connection of the Student Departure Theory to student persistence was important because this theory aided in identification of those internal and external factors which influenced persistence. The theory aligned with the following independent variables: Academic Advisement, Academic Self-Concept, College Bridge Programs, Faculty Interaction, and Extracurricular Activities.
Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Theory

According to Phinney’s (1997) Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Theory, students belonging to a minority, racial, or ethnic group, experienced fundamental conflicts simply as a result of being a minority. Students consistently experienced threats to their identities though prejudicial acts and stereotyping. Students had to scrutinize disparagingly their racial identity to overcome these threats (Quintana, 2007).

Phinney’s (1997) Theory infused three stages of ethnic development:

1. *The Diffusion-foreclosure Stage*: This is the initial stage where students have not quite developed their ethnic identify and may simply lack interest in where their racial membership should lie or what membership even means.

2. *The Moratorium/Search for Identity Stage*: This is the second stage where students are exploring their ethnic background in attempts to understand what membership means on a personal level.

3. *The Identity Achievement Stage*. This third stage is where students are in acceptance of their racial minority or ethnic group. Student have become comfortable with their identity and knowledgeable in the customs, traditions, history, and contributions made by ancestors.

Phinney’s Theory permitted the researcher to integrate human development from the womb through adulthood with an effect on student thinking. Phinney’s theory depicted how student experiences are built upon a myriad of things, not happenstance. The theory aligned with the following independent variables: College Bridge Programs, Student Educational Experience, Youth Culture, and Social Media.
Psychosocial Theory

Erickson’s (1968) Psychosocial Theory identified the eight stages of human growth and development from birth through death. This theory provided a hierarchical development process that posits individual construct experiences in order from those past to present. With each interval (stage) where conflict was present, one had to successfully overcome conflict in order to successfully complete the stage. In instances where conflict remained unresolved, the individual had to rework strategies for successful resolution of conflicts (Taubenheim, 1979).

Erickson’s theory represented the “life cycle” and was referred to as a moratorium which described periods during which the individual experienced societal crises that warranted mastery in order to fully develop. This moratorium referred to the period between adolescence and young adulthood where certain things may be left to society to resolve. This period is commonly referred to as the “identity crisis” stage (Cote & Levine, 1987). Of the many challenges facing late adolescence, there is a need to explore ones inner world and external environment while seeking to commit to life goals considered critical in negotiating the evolution to adulthood.

The connection of the Psychosocial Theory allowed the researcher to uncover the internal motivators and detractors which were present in the students’ matriculation decisions. This theory closely aligned with the following independent variables: Academic Self-Concept, Family Support, Socioeconomic Status, Youth Culture, Black Media, and Social Media.
Critical Race Theory

Finally, Delgado and Stefancic’s (2006) Critical Race Theory stated that racism is engrained in the fabric of American society and individual racism does not need to exist in order for institutional racism to prevail over the dominant culture. The Critical Race Theory used an analytical lens to examine existing power structures within our society based on white supremacy and privilege perpetuating the marginalization of people of color. This theory also challenged the legal discourse, often alluding to notions of color blind, yet neutral systems where equal opportunity and access exist.

In addition, the Critical Race Theory pointed out the many dimensional aspects of subjugation and posited that race alone is unable to account for a system of disempowerment (Parker & Lynn, 2002). An additional layer of the Critical Race Theory encompassed a commitment to social justice and the role of educators and scholars in taking active roles with practices that encourage the elimination of racial oppression and all forms of racism—prejudicial practices and unequal treatment of people of color.

The Critical Race Theory provided the researcher with the greatest connection to race, class and the organization as well as societal ramifications involved in the student decision-making process. The theory closely aligned with the following independent variables: Academic Self-Concept, Student Educational Experience, College Bridge Programs, Social Economic Status, Youth Culture, Black Media, and Social Media.
Definition of Variables

**Academic Advisement (ACA)** are the number of hours spent in active academic advisement and counseling.

**Academic Self Concept (ASC)** is the level of self-perception in a person’s ability to excel academically.

**Black Media Outlets (BMO)** are the communication channels which news and information specific to African Americans are disseminated through magazines, TV, radio, and the Internet.

**College Experience (CEX)** is the academic, extracurricular and social interactions taking place on the college campus.

**Developmental Advising (DVA)** is a process based on a close advisor-student relationship intended to aid and counsel students not only on academics but with issues that affect the whole student (education, career, personal) to facilitate persistence and growth.

**Extracurricular Activities (EXA)** is defined as the participation in institutionally-sponsored activities (social, political, academic, interest-based, or athletic) that take place outside of the classroom.

**Faculty Involvement/Interaction (FIV)** is defined as frequent, consistent contact and communication with faculty outside of the classroom.

**Family Support (FSU)** is the financial, mental, emotional, and physical parental support directly related to the educational experience.

**First Year (FYR) Student** is a student matriculating within his/her first two semesters of college with at least 12 credits of enrollment hours.
Persistence (PER) is the progressive matriculation semester to semester of enrollment toward degree completion.

Social Media (SMD) is an electronic communication source where students create, exchange, and engage in networking socially via the Internet and smart phones.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) is the self-reported family annual salary range.

Student Educational Experiences (SEP) are the experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, from kindergarten through grade 12 that are believed to be impactful to educational perceptions and choices.

Youth Culture (YTC) is defined as the values, norms, and practices shared by students between the ages of 18-24 which are indicative of the way one lives life and makes decisions.

Relationship of Variables

In the review of literature, a predicted relationship among the impact of culture and other academic, social, and familiar characteristics played a significant role in the persistence of African-American junior college students. Each independent variable impacted the dependent variable equally. Figure 1 shows the relationship of the dependent and independent variables. The independent variables are arranged in a clockwise manner beginning with factors that are present precollege through college matriculation. This arrangement is used to show that when placed together, the variables have the ability to directly influence persistence.
**Limitations**

The results of this study may not have addressed all of the perceptions of the influence of youth culture and college experience on student persistence among African-American students. Although the researcher protected the anonymity of the interview and focus group participants, participants may not have fully disclosed information that was directly related to their job or educational studies. For example, academic staff may have felt compelled to respond favorably to any questions asked about institutional resources or advisement strategies, as they are a part of their job responsibilities. In addition, students may not have felt comfortable responding negatively to any questions about college practices in fear of retaliation or retraction of services. Another limitation
identified was the number or sample size utilized in the study and the validity of responses from such a small group.

Summary

This chapter presented the conceptual and theoretical framework on which this study centered. The theories represented in this chapter contributed to the researcher’s understanding of the influence of youth culture and the external non-controlled factors involved in student persistence to degree completion. This chapter outlined the frameworks utilized in the student decision-making process about persistence through college programs and institutional factors. The theories chosen illuminated and guided the researcher in successful management of the expectations, needs, and desires of all participants included in the study.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the framework for conducting research inquiry. Throughout this chapter is a description of the research design, the setting, and the procedures for selecting participants. In addition, this chapter includes explanations of the instruments, method of collecting data, and relevant information in the process.

Research Design

This study utilized a Qualitative Comparative case study approach where two colleges were assessed. A qualitative case study was used to illuminate understanding within the study. The triangulation method was used allowing data for this study to be gathered through multiple sources of information including interviews, direct observations, and focus groups. Data were collected in the natural setting where the participants experienced the issue. A qualitative approach was appropriate as student persistence defined, described the intentions, decisions, and influential factors which impacted a student’s overall decision not to leave their institution. This is important to the study, as it was designed to look at how youth cultural factors may manipulate findings regarding student persistence, specifically for African-American college students. The researcher utilized the strength of qualitative research through the use of interviews that helped to validate results of student perceptions because it provided an
account of what students felt. The students’ feelings about predicted influencers to remain in college or to stop out reemerged during the conversations in interviews and focus groups.

There are several definitions on Qualitative Research. Yin (2015) stated that qualitative research first involves studying the meaning of people’s lives under real world conditions. Yin also stated that case study research is a research strategy purposed to contribute to our knowledge of an individual or group related to a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in its real world context. Maxwell (2013) suggested that a qualitative research study should engage in a reflexive process where the researcher is flexible throughout the process.

In this study, the specific tradition of inquiry was the case study approach because it dealt with the exploration of a system in a real life setting. A case study, as defined by Creswell (2009), explores a real life contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and themes. In addition, Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research begins with assumptions and that the principal researcher should use interpretive/theoretical frameworks to guide the study while addressing social or human problems individuals or groups may ascribe to. The key characteristics of this study include conducting the research in the participants’ natural setting, utilizing multiple methods to collect data, and focusing on the participants’ perceptions about the issue.
Description of the Setting

The participants for this study were selected from two public colleges within the University System of Georgia. The two institutions selected were chosen from the few colleges in the state of Georgia offering both associate and bachelor-level degree tracks. All participants represented African-American underserved or underrepresented profiles and were financial aid eligible. Each school reported that at least 85% of students received some form of financial aid. The study took place during the summer and fall semesters of 2015; each college operated on a rolling admissions cycle where students are admitted in any semester of the academic year.

College A

College A is classified as a commuter college offering both associate and bachelor degrees. The college is located in the metropolitan Atlanta area and considered one of Georgia’s largest urban colleges. Currently, the college serves 3,000 students. Demographically, the institution has a slightly diverse student population and reported that during the 2014-2015 academic year, the on-campus student population included 92% African American, 1.8% Caucasian, 1.8% Hispanic, 0.8 Asian, and 1.8% Multiracial. The median age of the students was 23 and the mode age was 19. The college reported that 61% of the students were classified as full-time. High schools from surrounding counties classified as low performing, urban or “Title 1” schools heavily fed into this college and participated in Dual Enrollment programs. The average incoming first-year student GPA was 2.7 with an 846 SAT Composite score.
College B

College B is classified as a residential college offering both associate and bachelor degrees. The college is located in a rural county approximately 50 miles south of the metropolitan area and currently serves 4,000 students. Demographically, the institution has a diverse student population and reported that during the 2014-2015 academic year, the on-campus student population included 38.6% African American, 53.5% Caucasian, 3.7% Hispanic, 1.0% Asian, and 2.7% Multiracial. The median age of the student was 23 and the mode age was 19. The college reported that 65.6% of the students were full-time. High School students from around the state of Georgia fed into this institution since it offered student residential housing. The college participated in Dual Enrollment programs with partnering school systems situated around the college. The average incoming first-year student GPA was 2.89 with an 869 SAT Composite Score.

**Sampling Procedures**

The sampling method utilized for the study was purposeful, specifically in the selection of participants, the type of sampling used, and the consideration for the sample size. These sites were chosen based on their similar program offerings, significant population of African Americans, and proximity to the metropolitan area. Furthermore, these colleges were also chosen because of their ability to provide access to a large population of students due to their location from/around the city and select programs that offered a bachelor degree. Additionally, the selection of these colleges was based on their offerings of both an associate degree track and a bachelor degree track. A student
may find increased value in attending a college where they have the opportunity to attain an advanced degree (bachelor) if they desire change along the way. They were also selected based on their academic partnerships through existing college bridge and Dual Enrollment programs with some of the state’s largest and demographically diverse high schools.

The sample size at each institution included 16 participants: 2 academic advising directors, 2 faculty members, and 12 college students. Sampling included each data source for the purpose of triangulation, interview, direct observation, and focus group. Through data collection, the researcher uncovered student perceptions of their educational experiences, institutional resources, and cultural values in support of their aspiration to engage in the college matriculation process to complete their college degree programs. The researcher also sought to determine faculty perceptions of the level of engagement of students and how they interacted inside and outside of the academic environment. In addition, the researcher sought to uncover academic staff perceptions of African-American students’ engagement in comparison to their counterparts. The researcher also sought to identify if staff deemed institutional measures appropriate in providing support and guidance to students. The researcher further sought to determine if the staff’s pedagogical knowledge levels were adequate for understanding the needs of minority student success.

**Working with Human Subjects**

To prevent encountering ethical issues in this study, the researcher submitted Intent to Conduct Research Forms to Clark Atlanta University’s Institutional Review
Board (IRB). The researcher also underwent IRB processes at each of the other two sites where the research took place. In addition, the researcher made ethical considerations during data collection by advising participants of their rights of confidentiality and that participation was strictly voluntary. The researcher also provided an explanation to participants regarding the purpose of the study and the researcher’s interest to collect information about the influence of youth culture among African-American students related to their ability to persist in college. It was further explained that the researcher was interested in knowing this information because the number of African-American students attending junior college is substantially greater than any other racial group; however their percentage of college completion is the lowest of all racial groups.

**Instrumentation**

The study consisted of three types of instrumentation: interviews, direct observations, and focus groups. The students identified from the prescreen instrument (Appendix A – Qualifying Questionnaire) were invited to participate in a focus group and were asked interview questions (Appendix B – Student Focus Group Questions). Staff Interviews were conducted with each college’s Director of Academic Advising in an effort to obtain the view of the entire staff without conducting an interview with each staff member. Interview questions asked of the academic staff can be found in Appendix C - Academic Advising Staff Interview Questions. Faculty members were interviewed from each college’s heaviest populated major which was Business Administration. The purpose of faculty interviews of the largest academic major meant that faculty had more exposure to a larger number of students and were able to provide a more vivid picture of
their experiences with students. Interview questions asked of college faculty can be found in Appendix D - Faculty Interview Questions.

Each set of interviews consisted of questions aligned to the research questions covered in Chapter I, but were structured in a broad and general manner to allow participants to provide rich, in-depth responses. Direct Observations utilized an observation guide which can be found in Appendix E. The guide included questions that painted a picture of the very essence of the Academic Advising Center and its overall role in student persistence. The focus group protocol (Appendix F - Student Focus Group Questions) included a review of confidentiality with participation.

With both the interview and focus group, a script was used at the beginning of the sessions and again during the culmination of interviews, to ensure coverage/understanding so that the interviews remained on track (Jacobs & Ferguson, 2012). Next, each participant was asked a series of demographic questions about classification (students) or years of service on the job (faculty/staff).

**Participants/Location of Research**

The research took place on the campuses of two public colleges in the state of Georgia specifically offering associate as well as bachelor degree-track programs. The study consisted of a total of 16 participants, 8 from college A and 8 from college B. The student participants adhered to a strict classification determined by a preliminary questionnaire (Appendix A) which included enrolled “within” the first year of studies, matriculation in associate degree program/track, presumed Pell Grant eligible, and of African-American descent. Faculty and staff participants were identified by review of an
institutional data system report which compiled requested data and determined fit for study parameters. Each interview, direct observation, and focus group was conducted in the natural work setting of the participants.

**Case Selection**

The data for this study originated from two select Georgia colleges serving a substantial number of African-American students. Institutional data from school A reported that 92% of the 3,000 students were African American. Institutional data from school B reported that 38% of the 4,000 students were African American. In addition, through review of the University System of Georgia’s Board of Regents databases, data on the two colleges reflected each as meeting researcher delimitation factors such as location, demographics, and study tracks. Of all the colleges meeting the demographic limitations, the two selected institutions were determined most appropriate for this study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Clark Atlanta University, as well as the IRB of each of the colleges where data collection took place. Data Collection started with the dissemination of the qualifying questionnaire (Appendix A).

**Student Questionnaire**

The study began with the use of a written questionnaire disseminated via email which was used to prescreen participants for study selection. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. The researcher required each participant to sign
the Informed Consent. Participants were allowed to complete the qualifying questionnaire within a five day window of time. Once the preliminary questionnaires were collected the researcher randomly selected participants based on the first six completed questionnaires meeting the set criteria. The students who met the study criteria were asked to participate in the student focus group.

**Academic Advisement Staff Interviews**

During the first step in the data collection process, the researcher conducted one interview with the Director of Advising and Counseling Services at each college. This was done because the director of the department was in a position to provide the most influential discussions as he/she oversaw the experiences of the entire staff of advisors in addition to his/her own. The interview consisted of questions that gauged staff members understanding of advising practices which promoted active engagement from African-American students. The academic advising department represented the individuals most closely linked to student decisions regarding course enrollment, registration, guidance on institutional procedures, and assistance in matters directly related to academics. It was important to get as much information as possible regarding their views of the overall perception of African-American students’ decisions to stay or depart from the institution within the first year of enrollment.

**Faculty Interviews**

The second step of the data collection process involved the researcher conducting interviews with one faculty member from each college campus. The faculty member represented the major with the most students on campus as they had more varied
experiences with students by virtue of the number of students encountered personally. The literature on student persistence consistently pointed to the role faculty played in student motivation, self-concept, and overall level of comfort within the institutional structure. In addition, since students tended to spend a significant amount of time with faculty members, they often became more accustomed to developing a level of comfort with faculty and relied heavily on their guidance and advice regarding decisions about college. Faculty members were often privy to information that staff members did not have. They engaged in conversations with students that were more personal in nature. Personal conversations were often those most beneficial in assisting students with decisions related to persistence; thus, the interview with faculty provided the most in-depth information needed to substantiate assumptions regarding students.

Direct Observations

In step three of the data collection process, the researcher conducted direct observations at each college’s Academic Advising and Counseling Center. The observations were conducted intentionally after the conclusion of academic staff and faculty interviews as a way to determine alignment in their responses to questions about the resources and services provided to students in relation to what was visible. In addition, the observations viewed students’ actual interactions with faculty and staff at the institution in their natural setting. During the observations, students’ actions, interactions, and verbal/nonverbal communication within the environment were observed. The researcher took copious notes of things seen, sensed, and heard by students as well as anyone existing within the environment observed.
Focus Group

In the fourth and final step in the data collection process, the researcher conducted a student focus group with six students at each college in a conference room housed in the college student center. The focus group was the culminating activity of the study with the most important participants—the students. The data collected added information otherwise uncovered by prior protocols. The researcher received in-depth information from students in their natural setting surrounded by their peers. The focus group focused on questions addressing the needs of the majority and not the individual. Ultimately, the students discussed their overall experiences in an open forum. Overall, the focus group served to further illuminate or bridge connections of other findings presented in earlier data collection methods.

Description of Data Analysis

The key characteristic of qualitative data collection is collection of data in natural settings sensitive to the people and places under study. Data analysis is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. In other words, qualitative research focuses on information where the final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, interpretation of the problem, and the report’s contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher collected data provided through questionnaires submitted and interviews conducted face-to-face to form themes. In addition, items identified through observation and focus groups aided in categorizing emerging themes. Once collected, the researcher gathered and coded data to fit into familiar themes. Next, the data were coded for themes across sources and
organized accurately to reflect the data source represented. The researcher ensured validity and ethical considerations while fulfilling all research objectives. These methods were proven to intensify the validity of the study with use of pattern building, explanation building, and logic models (Yin, 201).

**Summary**

This qualitative research study provided an overview of the importance of the qualitative research process in identifying how culture and other characteristics influenced persistence in African-American college students. The researcher conducted a thorough investigation and collected/interpreted items proven to be contributing factors to student persistence to degree completion.
CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS

This qualitative comparative case study sought to determine the influence of youth culture and the college experience of African-American college students in pursuit of associate degree completion. The data were collected at two public colleges within the University System of Georgia and classified by The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) as colleges granting both associate and bachelor degrees. For this study, the researcher utilized three data sources which included interviews of 16 total participants – 8 from College A and 8 from College B. Participants from each college were as follows: six students, one faculty member, and one academic staff member. Each data source was utilized at College A and College B. The first data source was direct observation of the student centers at each college, the second data source was a one-on-one interview with the Director of Academic Advising at each college, and the third and final data source included a student focus group with six total student participants in each college’s session.

To analyze data, the researcher interpreted statements from the interviews and focus groups. Statements were then coded and themes were developed. Significant statements were also clustered into defined themes. The results substantiated and expounded upon the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. In addition, the researcher developed a direct observation guide to assist in the observations
at each college. Observations were also interpreted, coded, and placed into themes.

Using the qualitative data collected, the researcher created an Analysis Matrix organized with the 3 data sources, 20 themes, and 5 categories. The first category, College Preparedness, included the following themes: Knowledge of Practices or Procedures, Basic Study Skills, Academic Expectations, and Learning Support. The second category, Connection to Faculty, included the following themes: Guidance/Support, Experiential Learning, Collaboration with Peers, and Academic Self Esteem. The third category, Linkage to Spirit of Institution, included the following themes: Relationship with Administration, Holistic Student Development, Participation in Extracurricular Activities, and Institutional Resources. The fourth category, Purposeful Academic Advisement, included the following themes: New Student Orientation, Early Alert Strategies, Guided Pathways, and Career Services Integration. The fifth and final category, Impact of Social Media, included the following themes: Degree Motivation, News Source, Relationship Building, and Engaging Millennials.

Each data source presented some similarities and differences with regards to the related themes. Table 1 outlines the themes identified by the researcher along with the meaning of each theme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DC 1A</td>
<td>COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS</td>
<td>Knowledge of Practices and Procedures</td>
<td>Understanding college structure, format, language and the system of college operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 1B</td>
<td>Basic Study Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Possession of tools needed to engage in productive and effective study habits needed to handle academic rigor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 1C</td>
<td>Academic Expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clear understanding of academic rigor, curriculum and standard of college coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 1D</td>
<td>Learning Support Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td>Course track for students not meeting the standards assessing readiness for college composition in the areas of English and Math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 2A</td>
<td>CONNECTION TO FACULTY</td>
<td>Guidance/Support.</td>
<td>Providing mentorship inside and outside of the classroom with those items students value or deem necessary to their overall success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 2B</td>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum or Learning Standards infusing real world experience into curriculum/coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 2C</td>
<td>Collaboration with Peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student engagement in collaboration and teamwork with peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 2D</td>
<td>Academic Self Esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>One’s perceived potential and academic ability to handle rigor of college-related tasks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DC 3A</td>
<td>LINKAGE TO SPIRIT OF INSTITUTION</td>
<td>Relationship with Administration</td>
<td>Meaningful and Significant relationships with persons titled faculty, staff or administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 3B</td>
<td></td>
<td>Holistic Student Development</td>
<td>Engagement from all college personnel on development practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 3C</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in Extracurricular</td>
<td>Commitment to activities occurring outside of the classroom that are not academically related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 3D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Resources</td>
<td>Tools and resources the institution has available to assist with college challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 4A</td>
<td>PURPOSEFUL ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT</td>
<td>New Student Orientation</td>
<td>Institutions practice of orienting students to the various aspects to navigate through their first year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 4B</td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Alert Strategies</td>
<td>Proactive strategies to ensure students failing below academic standards are assisted early to prevent failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 4C</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guided Pathways</td>
<td>Academic advisement infusing specific advising tips and strategies to ensure registration mirrors a successful degree plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 4D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Services Integration</td>
<td>Integration of career goals/ aspiration into all discussion regarding matriculation in effort to bridge connection of how college connects to desired future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DC 5A</td>
<td>IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA</td>
<td>Degree Motivation</td>
<td>Impacted by what is seen viewed or liked due to status symbols of success presented by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 5B</td>
<td></td>
<td>News Source</td>
<td>Media type responsible for attaining news on pop culture and current affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 5C</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
<td>Engagement in meeting people sharing similar likes or interest through various SM sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC 5D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging Millennials</td>
<td>Practices meeting youth where they are by speaking their language, engaging their interest and providing similarities in systems similar to the way they live life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 displays the frequency of themes which emerged through the data collection process by providing a visual description of the category where frequency was the highest.

![Figure 2](image_url)  
*Figure 2. Frequency of themes by category.*
All data sources were used in identification and support of the themes presented. In this section, data are presented under subheadings using the 11 research questions presented in Chapter I that guided the study. The results were analyzed to determine specific personal and institutional variables through the lenses of attributes defining youth culture which guided a student’s decision to stay or depart from an institution prior to completing a pursued degree.

**Analysis of Responses to Research Questions**

The study outlined each of the 11 research questions and the response as determined through each of the three data collection sources. Figure 3 displays the significance of the top four research questions which represented over a third of the research questions guiding the study and emerged through the data collection process and displays those having the greatest influence on student persistence. Figure 3 also provides a visual description of the research questions whose participant responses had the greatest significance on the answered research questions and determined the influence of each on student persistence outcomes.

*Figure 3. Research questions of greatest significance.*
RQ1: To what extent does academic self-concept influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Academic self-concept greatly influenced student persistence in associate degree programs as it was determined that having a high belief in academic abilities serves as a motivator in completing studies. Among the 11 variables, academic self-concept ranked second among those having the greatest relevance in student persistence outcomes.

During Focus Group A (six students) and Focus Group B (six students), students unanimously agreed that having a strong belief in overall academic ability aided in their decision to return to school each semester. During Focus Group A, five out of six students attributed their academic strengths to positive thoughts and feelings about their abilities. Students also stated that seeing good marks on assignments got them excited about future assignments and overall coursework. During Focus Group B, four out of the six students shared that when their academic confidence level was high, especially in tough areas like science and math, they felt that they belonged in college and this made them want to continue to persist.

Direct observation was intentionally scheduled by the researcher during the first week of the fall semester to observe students in their natural setting before the thoughts or perceptions about the present semester kicked in. In conversations, students tended to be extremely confident about the courses in which they received good marks and did not mind divulging their success tips to others.

RQ2: How does student educational experience influence persistence in an associate degree program?
Student educational experiences influenced the overall foundation of student thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions about college. Positive educational experiences attributed to successful academic outcomes and also led to students prepared for the rigor of college. Negative educational experiences attributed to low academic self-concept, low value placed on college education, and students inadequately prepared for college. Among the 11 variables, student educational experience ranked first as an overall influencer of student persistence.

During the academic staff interview at College A, Ruth (pseudo), the Director of Academic Advising stated, “We are still feeling the effects of the APS cheating scandal” (R. K., personal communication, September 18, 2015). She conveyed that there are many students at the college who were not supported and taught the basics through their educational journey through K-12. Ruth expressed, “Students are expected to come out of high school ready for pre-calculus and yet they are not even ready for mathematics modeling” (R. K., personal communication, September 18, 2015). Ruth went on to say that if students were not getting the basics through the educational system and coming to college at ground zero, they were facing an uphill battle before any other college factors were factored in. These sentiments were echoed during Focus Group B where all of the students stated they felt their K-12 experience did not provide the foundation needed to exceed in college, especially when they talked to some of their majority counterparts on campus.

One of the students shared that many of the students in learning support courses are African American which was a bit concerning to him. Another student, the most vocal in the group, shared the following and others then chimed in, in agreement:
I don’t know why I am in learning support courses, I graduated high school with a 3.5, but I feel like they failed me and I was not adequately prepared for this college work. Like when I look at my grades, I try so hard and study a lot…like my entire day is studying, but I guess I don’t know how to study, but I never knew because I always had good grades. (R. K., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

RQ3: How does participation in college bridge programs influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Participation in college bridge programs influenced student persistence in associate degree programs because participation served as a practice run for college. Students in college bridge programs were exposed to college curriculum, environment, faculty/staff, and the college experience before they enrolled which aided in student persistence.

Both Focus Group A and B students agreed that having been exposed to aspects of college prior to being a college student, provided them with the jump start needed to survive the rigor of college. During Focus Group A, one student, a Biology major with aspirations to be a scientist, stated that his high school partnered with the college and that this allowed him to participate in a Dual Enrollment program where he was able to get one full semester of college done while in high school. The student stated the following:

I participated in Dual Enrollment here at the college so I pretty much got to know everybody here before I became a student. My professors, especially in my science areas, are those that I encountered last year as a high schooler and learning their styles, work load, and expectations I feel gave me an advantage
RQ4: How does academic advisement influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Academic advisement influenced student persistence as it guided students through their associate degree programs in a manner that promoted degree completion. Among the 11 variables, academic advisement ranked fourth as an overall influencer of student persistence.

During the researcher’s initial visit to each campus (direct Observation), the college was in the middle of registration. At this point, students for the most part had already solidified their fall schedules; however, it was drop/add period and students were in the midst of weighing their options. While visiting College A, several students were conversing back and forth about their perceptions and opinions of their Biology professors and how unexcited the professor seemed to be about class lessons each day. One student stated that during her advisement appointment, her advisor would tell her how professors were rated or seen by other students. The student stated:

My advisor told me to look at the course syllabus before registering for a course so I could get to know a little bit about the professor and the way the work would be. Thanks to her, I had already made up my mind that this would not be a good time for me to take that class as I work at the mall and its gonna be busy soon, and I won’t be able to handle all that work right now so Spring will be better for me.

(D. K., personal communication, September 18, 2015)
During both interviews with Ruth and Terri (pseudo), Directors of Academic Advising, each stated how their college viewed advisement as a direct, intentional, personal, and strategic process where students were engaged in how to make proper decisions about coursework leading to program completion. Both colleges devoted an extensive amount of time to New Student Orientation Programs which served as a first stop to all incoming students. In addition, each college requires mandatory advisement in the first year and first semester of college matriculation. During the first advisement appointment, each college set standards and expectations of how courses should be scheduled along with providing helpful tips and resources for academic assistance.

During the interview at College B, Terri stated the following:

   Particularly with the African-American student population, often times a lot of them are first-generation students so they are not aware of the whole requirements as far as preparing for college life. So getting them prepared is challenging because they don’t know what questions to ask, so the entire first part of the session is explaining to them, first of all, what advisement is and how important it is. Think about what you want to do, what your strengths are particularly when you are taking classes, learning style, personality style, all those type of things, you know just basic things they should know when they come into an advisement session. (T. B., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

RQ5: To what extent does faculty involvement influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Faculty involvement had one of the greatest influences on student persistence because students looked to faculty for guidance and counseling in academic matters. The
extent of the faculty-student relationships greatly served as a motivator to students in their decisions to return to college. Among the 11 variables, faculty involvement ranked third as an overall influencer of student persistence.

Unlike traditional four-year college students, two-year students were commuter students solely coming on campus to attend class. Thus, the majority of their time was spent in the academic setting of college life where they were with faculty. The extent of the faculty-student relationships served as a motivator to students in their decision to return to college. Uniquely, faculty members had the ears, eyes, and heart of the student and were able to serve as trusted college representatives in whom students could confide and look to for assistance navigating through the waters of college, mainly because this was the individual with whom they spent the most valuable time. While observing students at College B, I overheard several students talking about how much they liked a certain faculty member and how that made them want to keep coming back to class. In addition, students were discussing the benefit of the faculty’s willingness to talk to them outside of the classroom. One student stated, “Professor Knight (pseudo) is always nosy but I like it because that lets me know he cares about what I am doing” (J. K., personal communication, September 18, 2015).

During Focus Group A and Focus Group B, students expressed deep gratitude for the assistance of faculty members more than anyone else on campus. Students unanimously agreed that if they were having a challenging experience, they were more comfortable speaking with their professor than any other representative on campus, because they felt that they were more sympathetic to their needs and wanted to see them succeed. When the researcher asked students to describe or list characteristics of faculty
that were important to them and why they felt more comfortable with faculty, five out of six students said “empathy” and felt that faculty was more concerned about their lives outside of class. Four of six students said “patience” and that faculty took time to assist them and identify resources or advised who they needed to talk to regarding problems.

During faculty interviews with Drs. James and Cathy (pseudos’), they explained how much of a connection is felt toward students. However, Dr. James (College B) said that she feels connected to the futures of her students. Dr. James expressed how their successes are her successes and that she holds herself personally accountable for their success or failures both inside and outside of her class. When asked about ways to encourage students both inside and outside of the classroom, she stated the following:

Students are going to do well in their courses and come out with a certain set of knowledge, but what is going to differentiate them from everyone else are their social skills. We all know that social intelligence is a better predictor of success than intellectual capacity. In a college setting, particularly a small one, they have the opportunity to try out their social skills, academic skills, etc. to see what works and what doesn’t work, and they have the opportunity to have faculty involved to say hey, you probably don’t want to do that, that’s probably not a behavior you would want to engage in, or that’s not a good idea but this is. (D. J., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

RQ6: How does participation in extracurricular activities influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Participation in extracurricular activities influenced student persistence because students felt connected to the overall spirit of the institution. This connection gave them
a sense of pride and ownership of doing well, not only for their individual benefit, but overall allegiance and accountability to the institution.

It was discovered that participation in clubs and organizations required specific academic GPA requirements, thus students had to meet an academic standard to participate. In addition, members kept each other abreast of news and information; they became resources to each other and aided in the spirit of collaboration, which was a strong characteristic of youth decision-making. During an interview with the Academic Director at College B, Sheri discussed how much peer motivation and encouragement was evident within clubs and organizations on their campus. Sheri stated:

We did a fundraiser where two clubs worked together, and the students who really participated in that have built their own sense of community. Yet again are more engaged in the process and you almost see a sort of level of influence amongst each other, and they begin to hold each other accountable not only in academics but also in their leadership roles within the organization. So I am a huge proponent of engagement; I’ve seen it work in the favor of a lot of students. (T. S., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

In addition, during the Focus Group at College B when students were asked if participation in extracurricular activities changed the way they felt about college, they all agreed that it did. One student stated the following:

My first semester I did not know anyone except my roommate and a few of my classmates; but I would see students walking around in t-shirts and paraphernalia and I would say to my roommate, girl we need to get involved in something. It just seemed like the students that were in something were like connected, like to
professors, advisors, other students etc. and I wanted that; more than that, I wanted to feel like I was a part of something bigger than my major. (D. S., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

RQ7: To what extent does youth culture influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Youth culture has a strong influence on student persistence due to the fact that persistence describes the intentions and decisions of a student to depart from their institution. The study defined youth culture as the values, norms, and practices shared by students indicative to the way they live their lives and make decisions; thus, youth culture proved ever present in student academic decision making.

During direct observations conducted at each of the colleges, the researcher noted that students tended to travel in small groups. Students in groups looked more comfortable and happy than those who were not in groups. Students that were sitting alone tended to be completing school-work or personal web surfing. The groups were small, ranging from two to four students. Students within these groups were usually walking around campus, eating together, or sitting around chatting. Students were discussing things, surfing on their phone, viewing videos or clips of the week, or viewing familiar people/organization postings. When looking at the colleges individually, the environment was vastly different. At College A, the conversations were about music, social media and a sounding board for thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the institution. At College B, the conversations were more about school, group assignments, employment, other colleges, transfer desires, and work; the groups were accompanied with open books and notes. The similarities with the small student groups at each school
were that this meeting/break time seemed to be a time students vented or shared helpful information, and that students viewed each other as resources. Students also engaged in collaborative conversations, welcomed dialogue, and encouraged sharing of all involved.

During faculty and staff interviews, the phrase “the millennial generation” was noted over a dozen times. Specifically, each student discussed the level of effort needed to keep them (millennials) engaged in college. In addition, they were heavy users of smart phones, electronic devices, and social media; thus, when these things were not present, students became turned off. Due to this fact, millennials often determined that missing relatability to the things they found important was a waste of time or not in alignment with what they wanted to accomplish as their life goals. Dr. Cathy stated, “College practices, procedures, curriculum, and instructional methods should all heavily utilize those things to keep the attention of youth like they do in K-12 with multicultural alignments” (D. J., personal communication, September 18, 2015). She went on to explain how a large bit of their external motivators lie outside of the college life and experience and were in the realm of the wonderful world of cyberspace or electronic media. The one thing both faculty members agreed on was that social media, in their opinions, was the biggest part of youth culture followed by a sense of belonging and belonging to a group. Faculty stated that essentially each of the items represented a student’s overall desire to be a part of something.

Another component mentioned by faculty was their observation of student behavior and how they have both noticed that students typically enjoy shared activities or assignments where they are able to work together. Dr. James stated, “The students enjoy studying together and celebrating their successes together. Group assignments are an
instructional strategy that allows a peer-to-peer relationship to exist and often allows a level of trust and respect to emerge” (D. J., personal communication, September 18, 2015). During the discussion with Dr. James, she expressed how she intentionally developments her course with a built-in group component. Dr. James stated, “Teamwork is challenging to their intellectual thought processes and also helps them in getting to know their classmates in an academic capacity” (D. J., personal communication, September 18, 2015). In addition, Dr. Cathy followed the sentiments of Dr. James by saying, “Group Projects is the business world, so by integrating group assignments in my class I am only providing them with a glimpse of what they will encounter in the business world and that is tons of collaborative projects” (C. F., personal communication, September 18, 2015).

RQ8: How does family support influence persistence in an associate degree program?

The financial, mental, emotional, and physical parental support provided to students has a substantial influence on their ability to persist. The family’s ability level, be it high or low, represents the outside external pressures that inhibit a student’s ability to solely focus on their educational studies. Looking specifically at financial support, a student whose family has the ability to make significant contributions toward his/her educational expenses alleviates the burden of a student attempting to determine ways to secure tuition payments. This alone allows the student to focus solely on his/her educational studies verses work-school balance which aids in better grades, the ability to take more courses, and persist to degree completion sooner. Subsequently, all participants (students, faculty, and Staff) agreed that when financial barriers are removed,
there is an increased probability for higher academic achievement and persistence to
degree completion.

During Focus Groups A and B, students unanimously indicated how much easier it would be to balance all of the expectations of college if they had parents or family members who were able write a tuition check so they would not have to work to supplement the cost of school. One student in Focus Group B stated how working comes with its own set of challenges, especially when trying to secure employment with a boss who would be willing to work with their school schedule. Another student in Focus Group A stated:

Yes, like I do not have a problem working and actually enjoy working because I do not want to burden my family with asking them to help me pay for school. But it would be nice to work when I wanted to, if I wanted to, and whenever I wanted to instead of having to do it or else I got to go back home. The other thing about it is employers will say, oh of course we will work with your school schedule, and then flip the script and you become a problem. You ask for days off during important stuff like projects or your group can only meet at a certain time, then you ask to come in late and they want to look at you crazy or fire you. (A. O., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

When students were asked about how their family motivates them to stay in school or go back after the first semester, students began to discuss college education levels of family members and how parents who have attended college understand the challenges and those who have not attended do not. One student in Focus Group A stated, “My mom went to college for one year and got married, so she always tells me to
keep going no matter what because she wish she had” (B. J., personal communication, August 18, 2015). Another student in Focus Group B talked about her oldest cousin who just graduated with a master’s degree and how proud she is of her. The student expressed her admiration and how she wanted to be just like her in a few years. The student went on to say:

For a lot of us, we don’t have a lot of people in our family who went to college and even if they did they don’t share their experiences with us. Like I don’t know if it’s because like things are so different now that they can’t relate to our struggles or they think we just hard headed all the time and won’t listen. But like with people a little older than us, like you Mrs. Okoli, y’all understand and are like people we look up to but not parents so much. Like my cousin, she always tells me what I need to do, what to look up online, who to talk to like stuff like that and she always tells me like shoot for it all, get your Ph.D. I like that because sometimes family and friends are haters and not supportive of your goals because they’re mad they didn’t do it. (A. K., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

During both focus groups, the unanimous response was that they attended college due to their own self-fulfillment prophecies. Students went on to state that although their family may or may not support them, this has very little significance to their decisions as they must do what they need to do to make sure they take care of themselves.

RQ9: How does socioeconomic status (SES) influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Socioeconomic status (SES) influenced persistence marginally as overall students, faculty, and staff did not attribute family financial status as the reason students attended
class each semester or not. However, students reported that having a lower SES made college more challenging, but it actually motivated them to return to school so they could enter the workforce sooner and begin making money for themselves. Faculty and staff reported that students with low SES experienced enhanced external pressures that made attending college stressful, but that this was not usually the reason a student decided not to persist.

College A represented the most conversations about the difficulty of students with low SES and how financial aid and living situations often made getting to the level of actual educating and advising students difficult. This college was the most urban of the two and closer to the metropolitan city which provided a different set of overall challenges and circumstances for students. In addition, College A did not have campus housing. Residential dwellings more costly in nature drew a different population (fiscally) to a college.

Ruth (pseudo), Academic Director at College A, expressed how she thought students were categorized as underserved and underprivileged because they simply have real issues at the college where she is employed and those conversations often come before academics. In probing and asking Ruth to expand further on this particular statement, she explained the following:

I use to think that it was just this area, but when I talk to other schools in other urban cities across the country, their advising teams’ say they have the same issues we have here. We have a file cabinet in our department with tooth brushes, tooth paste, soup, food, noodles, deodorant those types of things. So you really can’t get a child or young adult to say, you know show me this pre-calculus
problem when I don’t have a place to stay. Or when I ask where they are staying and they say to me I have a place to sleep but am bouncing from different homes so then I have to adjust and say, well where do you receive your mail? That’s when you realize they are really homeless. Those are the real issues that keep them from studying; so if we can address some of those issues, so that when the do decide to come to college they don’t have to worry about what they going to eat or where they going to sleep. (R. K., personal communication, September 18, 2015)

When the question was asked at College B, Terri’s response was slightly different. She stated:

Well a lot of the African-American students here represent the first-generation population. Some have parents who went to college and some do not; most, if not all, do receive financial aid and most live in dorms on campus. I find that with this fragile population, you must learn to employ a holistic approach as they all come with different needs. It’s not just the academics, it’s the social, spiritual, and career and they just need to see how all of these pieces work together. Most are concerned with how I am going to make a living after I get the degree. If you can help paint that picture of what life looks like after college, then they are more determined to come back for advisement, do well in classes, get involved, and develop themselves when they see that college is not just about a teaching (giving them a grade), but about them learning how to make a living for themselves, having a decent lifestyle, and being able to support their future families. (T. B., personal communication, August 18, 2015)
During the focus group with students, they all seemed to attribute their SES to their ability to have a healthy work school life balance. During Focus Group B, one student stated that she wished she was rich so that she could just roll out of bed and only have to worry about going to class, studying, making A’s, and graduating. Students stated how challenging it was to work around so many Caucasian students who did not seem to have a care in the world, seemed to live at home, and seemed to work for recreation, not because their tuition payment depended on it. Ironically, four out of the six students stated that they felt their grades would be better if they did not have to work. In addition, five out of six students indicated that they might have chosen different majors or one more challenging (STEM areas noted) if they had been able to devote more time studying; they feared receiving poor marks on their academic record would hinder them from attending professional schools.

RQ10: To what extent does black media influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Communication channels providing news specific to African Americans have a slight impact on student internal and external motivations when looking at the reasons they persist. Black media is the communication channels which news and information specific to African Americans are disseminated through magazines, TV, radio, and the Internet; however, students stated that they do not utilize this outlet frequently. Students reported that news or information about current affairs is often retrieved via their social media accounts, but if they happen to hear or see news via television or by tuning into the radio, they are often disappointed in the portrayals of youth in the media which is disturbing in their idea of the support they have by society in their overall success.
During both Focus Groups, students unanimously brought up all the negative portrayals of African-American youth presently displayed in the media today. Students angrily pointed out have discouraging it is to see so many people their age being killed, condemned, and persecuted unjustly. Students stated that the media is responsible for why everyone in the world thinks black youth are nonconforming, arrogant, above the law, and citizens who deserve whatever bad things happen to them. One student in Focus Group A expressed how he felt the media intentionally put out trumped up stories to keep people thinking badly about the African-America race. Another student chimed in by saying how discouraging it is to turn on the TV or radio daily and not hear one positive thing about youth. Another student in Focus Group B stated:

When I turn to CNN, of course I expect to hear terrible things about us and Trayvon Martin, Ferguson, and Brown. However, even when I turn to BET I don’t see anything better. Like I would think that they would have positive stories about the good things we are doing. I mean look in this room, no look on this campus, its majority black so we can’t all be up to no good. Like can I hear about the boy who got in to all the Ivy League schools for more than one day? No, I can’t but I can bet my check that there will be coverage on the amount of money or things some reality TV star made this year. (K. J., personal communication, September 18, 2015)

Following that comment, another student chimed in by saying “Yes, I think that if these kids saw positive images on TV or heard it on the radio, maybe they would believe that a better life is possible” (K. L., personal communication, September 19, 2015). Other students chattered about the importance of success symbols and seeing college in real
life, like TV shows. A student expressed his disappointment in the lack of college-related shows such as the Cosby show spin off, “A Different World.” He went on to say how more shows are needed for his generation.

The students’ responses to this question sparked a lot of offline conversations as they began to chat among themselves. The students in Focus Group B engaged in heavy dialogue and the responses from this question lingered a bit longer than others. From the nature of the conversations, facial expressions, and comments made, it appeared that until the comment was stated out loud, they stated how they did not realized how much seeing positive examples of a desired behavior can influence, support, or engage their opinions and decision-making process.

RQ1: How does social media influence persistence in an associate degree program?

Social media had a strong influence on student persistence as it served as the platform in which students stayed connected to the college when they were on campus and off campus. Students felt that when the college provided them with a platform to share, engage, create, and exchange communication, this contributed to them being more engaged in the college experience. In addition, the connections made through social media with the institution, faculty, staff, and peers held them accountable for their actions and overall decisions.

During the interview with Dr. Cathy (pseudo), a faculty member at College A, she was asked how social media was used in her classroom to engage students her response was:
I recently had this discussion with my principles of management class and I gave them a scenario where they had to address how to make our business program more visible in social media and attracting more students by social media. They were very interested in seeing and being able to support school on social media via Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snap Chat. They were interested but there is not a presence here strong enough for them to use so they were a little discouraged and motivated to make changes. (C. F., personal communication, September 18, 2015)

Dr. Cathy also went on to say how students were commuters; they come on campus with the intent of leaving and moving on to the next part of their day, unless they have a good reason to stay. The college, like most colleges, hosts events for students all the time, but the way the information is disseminated often does not reach students. Dr. Cathy stated:

There are activities held here on campus that are arranged nicely, but don’t get the publicity that they need because it has not been publicized in a way that our students receive information. They may put a flyer here and there and that’s great, but if it is seen on Instagram or Twitter to those students who enjoy following what’s happening via tweets, then there may be many more students who are more likely to participate. (C. F., personal communication, September 18, 2015)

All college faculty and staff participants stated that they were constantly looking for ways to integrate social media to meet students where they are in hopes of bringing them up to the desired levels of academic success. Each stated how they felt there was something to the notion that social media aids in engagement of students which helped students persist.
In both focus groups, students agreed that the college having a strong social media presence was important to them because this was how they stay connected. A student in Focus Group A stated, “It’s not just social media but any form of electronic communication even email; I have my email set to my phone so if something comes through, I instantly see it” (A. O., personal communication, September 18, 2015).

In Focus Group B, the students stated how much they despised using their university email to retrieve information because it is not convenient. One student stated that the university sends everything to through the university’s email and that he gets the important information. However, he wanted to know why the university did not use text messages like his friend gets who attends another university. It is important to note that during the focus group, questions about social media and black media were used in conjunction with one another as the researcher wanted to determine how much students utilized social media and how students were able to retrieve information present in the news. Students were asked, what do they like or follow on social media non-socially related. Students in both focus groups overwhelmingly agreed that outside of the social, it was used to get quick snapshotted information about current affairs present on Instagram or Facebook verses reading a newspaper or visiting CNN.com. When the researcher asked, other than pop culture updates or current affairs, what was social media utilized for, the group stated to connect with people, find cool ideas, and see what others are experiencing. When students were asked if social media played a role in the value they place on attaining a college degree the responses varied.

In Focus Group A, four out of six students said they see and read very little posts about college or degreed individuals so the value they already have is not changed by
what is found on social media. In Focus Group B, five out of six students stated that social media does not glorify education or those with degrees and seems to only acknowledge those who just have material things that serve as status symbols like cars, designer clothing, and expensive gadgets—basically, symbols known across the board to set apart those who have money and those who do not. One of the students went on to say:

It’s weird that you don’t see too many folks talking about the degrees they have because that’s like a big deal where I am from, you know, like saying that you have a college degree. But when I look on my Instagram page or Facebook page everyone is just talking about material things. But when I look around in society or in this state, I see it like it’s the educated vs. the uneducated, like in real life those who have a degree and those who do not and I personally want to be in the educated group. But like I don’t find any validation for my decisions about being in college on social media or the racist news channels, but then again I’m not looking for it either; so I am here for my own personal motivation of seeing my dreams to be fulfilled. (B. K., personal communication, August 18, 2015)

Other students chimed in to that point by saying that their choices to remain in school were, indeed, due to self-fulfillment, but that it was discouraging to look on social media and see people making money because of talent or for participating in reality shows. Students noted that there were some examples of those who got where they are because of advanced degrees, like high-powered attorneys or well renowned physicians, but these are not the people you see on social media.
Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative data collected in this research study. For this study, data were analyzed by the researcher utilizing data coding and a data analysis matrix. To analyze data, the researcher coded transcripts of each interview and focus group and identified common themes. The researcher collected additional data by completing Direct Observations of both sites. The researcher created a research guide which served to assist the researcher in the observation, and to analyze this set of data, the researcher coded and identified common themes.

Twenty total themes emerged from the analysis of all three data sources developed to triangulate the study. Once common themes emerged across the data, the researcher identified five categories, in order of greatest to least relevant to student persistence. The five categories were College Preparedness, Faculty Connection to Student, and Linkage to Spirit of Institution, Purposeful Academic Advisement, and Impact of Social Media. In review of the data sources utilized to answer the research questions guiding the study, the following was determined. Interview responses of academic staff answered research questions, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 11. Interview responses of Faculty answered research questions, 5, 7, and 11. Direct observation answered research questions, 6, 7, and 11. The student focus groups answered all research questions, 1-11.
CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter represents the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study and the determined greatest influencers of student persistence among underserved African-American students. The one thing evident in this study is that higher educational professionals through pedagogy, research, and practice, understand and embrace the Theory of Social Mirroring. Social Mirroring was utilized many times in various contexts within data collection, specifically by the faculty member of College B. However, in relation to this study, the concept conveyed is how students from underrepresented groups often lack the social capital to understand the world of postsecondary education, simply because they are less likely to have role models or community where they have been privileged to see symbols of the things which mirror their individual dreams and aspirations (Hooker & Brand, 2010).

This study connected youth culture to student persistence. According to the findings of this study, youth culture is currently regarded as one of the great equalizers of the millennial generation because students now, more than ever, are engaged in practices promoting collectivism, collaboration, and support. In addition, the generation covered in this study’s assertions of their plight to be the group consistently capable of moving together in unison, beyond the bounds of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation further elucidates their mission to make the world a better place for all in the future.
The case study approach utilized in this study permitted the researcher to gather insight on student thoughts, perceptions, and meanings surrounding the problem of persistence to degree completion currently facing African-American college students. Direct observation and focus groups were used to provide participants with voices. These voices were used to describe their past and present educational experiences in congruence with the reported responses of faculty and staff members interviewed. This was done to capture the essence of the universal depiction of college experience and the influence presented on student persistence.

Findings

Description of Campus Visits

Campus A was located in the inner city of one of the largest metropolitan cities in the south. The college campus was physically located directly off of one of the busiest streets in the city. The campus was located on the metropolitan transit system’s bus line, with a bus stop directly in front of the campus. The access to the institution by virtually anyone riding the bus, made the campus feel open, public, busy, loud, and filled with students at all times. The researcher observed that students did not really talk or make eye contact with one another, but instead were busy trying to attend to their own affairs. Students were also heavily engaged in their Smart Phones, Tablets, and Laptops. The Academic Advising Center was filled with sounds from Instagram videos, Vine clips, and Facebook Memes. In addition, students were listening to music with headphones, but the music was so loud that it could be heard by those sitting near. The researcher also
observed conversations about who was going to what class, type/behavior of professors taken, and complaints about rising textbook and tuition costs.

The researcher’s visit to College B was vastly different from that of College A. Outside of the obvious factors like one school being rural and the other urban, the researcher was astonished by how many other things were different. The colleges seemed to be in the middle of nowhere with the expectation of dirt roads and farm life near; however, the campus was absolutely beautiful. Students seemed to be commuters who drove in and commuted to school from homes around the state. The researcher observed the various counties represented on vehicle license tags in the student parking lot near the Center. Although the campus was nestled in a small town about 50 miles south of the city, the campus was extremely large and inviting. The campus had acres upon acres of land filled with buildings, fields, and office complexes. The campus design mirrored that of a small university. The researcher noticed that the campus was student friendly, boasting in picnic table areas, lounges, and popular eateries which included Starbucks, and Seattle’s Best Coffee. Students would gather in groups with textbooks, notebooks, and study materials laid all around the promenade. It was easy to discern when there were classes in session as the common grounds where students typically congregated were free of students. The researcher observed students running to class, rolling around with backpacks, and frequently engaging in conversations with one another about school-related topics.

The direct observation painted the picture of the environment of each site to guide the researcher in conducting the study with regard to the participant’s viewpoint. As noted in the section above, each site provided very different insights into the background
information about each institution. The researcher deemed it necessary to frame background institutional information in order to illuminate insights uncovered during the study. Ultimately, the researcher uncovered many distinct similarities as well as differences within each college by virtue of the observation alone. The similarities noted were mostly in the area of student support services which are items generally acknowledged by institutions as best practices through professional organizations or the governing bodies of the Institution. Oddly, many of the differences the researcher noted were more of a disparity or inequality between the colleges than actual challenges needing alteration or attention. The overall climate and atmosphere of College A and College B seemed representative of the area in which it resided, which in itself was demographically a polar opposite.

**Qualitative Findings**

The participants’ responses in this qualitative case study determined that from the data collection methods utilized, direct observation, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups, 20 themes emerged. The researcher divided the 20 themes that emerged into five large categories. The first category was College Preparedness and included four themes: Knowledge of Practices or Procedures, Basic Study Skills, Academic Expectations, and Learning Support. The second category was Connection to Faculty and included four themes: Guidance/Support, Experiential Learning, Collaboration with Peers, and Academic Self Esteem. Category three was Linkage to Spirit of Institution and included four themes: Relationship with Administration, Holistic Student Development, Participation in Extracurricular, and Institutional Resources. The fourth category was
Purposeful Academic Advisement and included four themes: New Student Orientation, Early Alert Strategies, Guided Pathways, and Career Services Integration. Category five was Impact of Social Media and included four themes: Degree Motivation, News Source, Relationship Building, and Engaging Millennials. Social media was the lowest category; less than 20 themes emerged in the data.

Through the Data Analysis Matrix the researcher determined the influence of the 11 variables of the study. It was determined that of the 11 variables, Student Education Experience ranked first as an overall influencer of student persistence and Academic Self-Concept ranked second. The Data Analysis Matrix also determined that although Relationship with Administration and Institutional Support were important components of Student Persistence, these variables were rarely addressed and emerged as the lowest ranking themes within the matrix. It was determined that the variations in which the themes emerged depended upon the context of the data source. The Interviews with academic staff indicated a strong connection between youth culture and student persistence more than any other data source.

The findings from the academic director interviews showed evidence that supported the concept that student educational experience had a lasting impact on their entire educational journey and was an indicator of student preparedness for college. During the interview with both academic directors, it was stated that when a student does not come into the first semester of college prepared, it sets the entire academic advising process back in that advisors have to regroup to determine the student competency level. Specifically, understanding college norms, practices, and procedures as advisement was structured with the assumption that a student had basic knowledge about college.
African-American students, often first-generation, entered college doors with very limited information and thus needed a lot of basic assistance that their majority counterparts did not need. As such, each college devoted the entire first semester to New Student Orientation, Freshman Orientation, and Pathway to College programs to ensure the gap between high school and college was filled within the first year of matriculation for these students. Each college’s practices were distinctively similar but implemented differently due to the student demographics and need present. For example, College A summoned the entire college to participate in new student matters and felt that it was the responsibility of all faculty and staff to ensure that students persisted to graduation. The academic directors reported that their minority students responded well when they knew people were holding them accountable.

College B, on the other hand, retained New Student Programs to the few departments responsible for new students—Housing, Admissions, and Academic Affairs. The programs were implemented in the respected departments and students worked solely with those individuals during their first year. The students at College B had more questions about transferring to larger colleges, STEM major changes, and declaring bachelor-level majors than those at College A. However, College A represented more economically disadvantaged students who displayed unmet basic needs such as housing, transportation, and food. The Director of Academic Advising at College B expressed the most concern about students not reaching their full academic potential due to the external pressures they faced with family and finances. However, the Director of Academic Advising at College A expressed great concern with the fact that students were homeless and unemployed. The overall findings from the academic staff interviews supported
findings from previous studies that academic advisement must be strategic, purposeful, and proactive to engage minority students.

Findings from the college faculty member were interesting since, by default, one was African American and the other Caucasian. Both were middle-aged women in the College of Business with corporate America experience and held advanced degrees. Surprisingly, the faculty member at College B was more knowledgeable about the struggles of the African-American student on campus and the resources the institution needed to provide in order for them to be successful. The Caucasian faculty member provided names, dates, and examples of success stories of all of her students, most of whom were African American. However, the faculty member from College A seemed to have limited knowledge of the institutional support structures in place and what the students needed to be successful in college not just her classroom. Although she displayed concern for her students, the passion and drive to do whatever was needed to advance African-American students’ standing were not present. Although it appeared that both faculty members were equally influential in the lives of the students they taught, only one truly grasped the importance their overall position as a role model. Due to the fact that there was a huge difference in years of experience between the two, it appeared that the lack of knowledge was solely due to seniority level.

The African-American faculty member from College A appeared to be 30-something and stated that she was on social media, engaged in conversations with students via Linked-in and Facebook which led to many connections with students outside of the classroom. Contrarily, the Caucasian faculty member from College B appeared to be 50-something and stated that she did not use social media personally or
professionally, thus did not engage with students that way. She stated that she was an “old fashioned lady” and that she found more value in reaching students face-to-face and showing support in other ways. However, one of the things she mentioned was the absence of cultural engagement with African-American students in the sense of exposure to other cultures, and this was something she tried to encourage. Overall, the findings provided evidence that supported previous research/theories suggesting that students in nontraditional college settings value faculty the most by having supportive instructional figures inside of the classroom because they spent the majority of their time on campus with faculty.

The findings from the student focus groups were the most vivid and profound. The researcher was shocked at the points of contention made by the student participants, especially in regard to their awareness of what was taking place in society as it related to the media and the social movements. The students, all African-American youth, displayed a great deal of concern about their lack of preparedness to survive in college. Many pointed to the achievement gap disparities they faced during K-12. There were multiple examples of how they felt teachers just passed them along, knowing they were not performing at a satisfactory level. In addition, students did not state their opinions or perceptions in a way that pointed a finger of blame at their past educators, but more so just wanted to know “why.” Many students felt overwhelming support and nurturing from school but did not feel that they were taught or given the opportunity to be taught what they needed to know. Another surprising factor was that, contrary to what research has supported for many years regarding family support, many of the students in this study stated that it had very little bearing on their decisions about college. Students conveyed a
sense of simply doing what needed to be done because they knew what it took to reach their goals in life.

Oddly, it appeared that these students had become desensitized to support and guidance and were not in need of validation or support from anyone about college. While these students stated that they cared about what their parents or loved ones felt regarding their decisions, their decisions were loosely based on these opinions. The student’s lack of concern about the opinions of others made sense as to why they had become very involved in the lives of each other. There was a sense of collectivism with these students, one that transcended beyond race, class, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or religious affiliations. The students spoke of other students, not just black students or urban students, but collectively about wanting to see better things on college campuses. While many noted the racial disparities present in society, none mentioned any experienced on campus. The student’s main concern about the institution was providing support and making them aware of the options to attain it.

With regard to social media and the black media, the dialogue became tense; students were angry about constant negative media portrayals of people in their age group. Both groups stated how they felt that it was a distraction to all of those who were doing the right things and how it set a fixed stereotype for all youth, especially African-American youth. In addition, they referenced the absence of positive images of African Americans in general and the lack of television shows or movies that promoted educational attainment. Regarding social media, the sentiments of the students were how it was used and the items heavily liked or searched. The conversation about social media drove the thought of examples of success. When the researcher asked students if they
had witnessed anyone on social media bragging about having a college degree or the joy of college life, they answered no. Students in this study felt that social media had become a place where people showed off what they had but did not necessarily share how they got it. The students had a desire to follow a positive framework of success but had a difficult time finding one. In addition, students wanted to see their colleges become more involved in social media so that there was a presence for them to follow, engage in, and brag about. Social media served many purposes for students socially but none academically.

**Conclusion and Implications**

In an effort to connect the theories that undergird this study, it was determined that there was a significant alignment with the findings, in relation to the theories presented within the theoretical framework in Chapter III. Following is a reintroduction of the four theories with the contextual congruence within the findings of this study.

**Vincent Tinto’s (1993) Student Integration Theory**

The Student Integration Theory (1993) was described as the concept that when students become socially and academically connected to their college campus, they were more likely to feel like they were a part of the institution and thus more likely to persist. From the findings of this study, students became more stitched into the fabric of the institution due to the fact that participation in activities came with set requirements and criteria that enforced priority of academic engagement. The colleges presented in this study included clubs and organizations which had classification, GPA, and performance
indicators required of all students to determine good standing with the institution while participating.

According to the interview response of faculty and academic directors, the students in this study who participated in extracurricular activities notably became more familiar with other students through volunteering, fundraising, or designated activities or meetings. The sense of familiarity encouraged the students to form connections, support groups, and systems of accountability with each other to ensure they were all on top of their academics. Participation in organizations allowed students to become acquainted with college politics, policies, and procedures simply through the overall governance structure of the organizations. It was also noted that participation in social, academic, or athletic organizations promoted the quality of relationships with college faculty or staff members with whom students might not have otherwise connected. The students in this study who participated in extracurricular activities stated how their participation influenced their allegiance to the institution which influenced their persistence.

Jean S. Phinney’s (1997) Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Theory

The Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Theory (1997) was described as the fundamental conflict present in the mindset of minority students based on their experiences as a member of an ethnic/minority group. From the findings of this study, African-American students arrived at college with a predetermined notion of how they would be treated as a college student. In addition, students entered college with feelings of inferiority to their Caucasian counterparts in not just academics, but finances,
institutional support, and family support. In this study, the ideas involved in this theory persuaded student thoughts about the role of the college in their overall success.

This study determined that students spent a great bit of their first semester trying to untangle their feelings of belonging and fitting into college life. Also, with regard to college resources, their mindset involved the thought of whether or not they deemed it necessary to receive assistance with many of the basic college success factors including tutoring services, housing and financial assistance, psychological counseling, accommodations, and traditional financial aid. The theory infused the thought that African-American students were present in college with an existing inferiority complex. This inferiority complex, when added to their level of discomfort, made it difficult for them to ask for guidance or assistance when they needed it the most, in fear of rejection.

Students in this study felt it was their duty to withstand tough challenges without support or lean on other African-American students with comparably limited knowledge for support. Reaching out for support from other students who looked like them, shared similar beliefs, and experienced the same academic struggles fell within stage two of Phinney’s (1997) Theory: the “Moratorium” stage. This stage represented student exploration of support, from those sharing the same cultural membership. Many of the students in this study attended predominately African-American secondary schools where their only choice was to seek help from other African Americans; however, in college, they were exposed to other cultures and continued to seek guidance from those sharing their racial or ethical identity.
Erickson’s (1968) Psychosocial Theory

Erickson’s (1968) Psychosocial Theory was described as the identification of the eight stages of human growth and development from birth to death and provided a hierarchal stance on how an individual student may construct educational experiences from past to present. The concept, in relation to this study, represented how students who possessed unresolved conflicts had to go through a process to rework strategies before being successful at resolving present stage conflicts. This theory aligned specifically with the negative experiences students acknowledged in the data collection process, specifically the focus group where the conversation occurred regarding their perceptions of the K-12 matriculation journey.

Students shared how they faced insurmountable challenges from K-12 on to college, specifically in the areas of academic achievement, racial discrimination, social disparities, inequitable treatment, and unequal distribution of educational advancement opportunities. The totalities of those experiences remained present during their current course of study at the college level. Students stated how those factors made it difficult to persist through college in an effective and healthy manner. Ultimately, the students involved in this study associated their K-12 experience with the stressors faced in challenging coursework because they felt they were inadequately prepared for the academic, social, and political pressures of college.


Delgado and Stefanic’s (2006) Critical Race Theory was described as the analytical lens utilized to examine existing structures of power, privilege, supremacy, and
the marginalization of people of color deeply engrained in the fabric of American society. In this study, the concept of the nonexistence of neutral systems where equal opportunity and access exist was the premise of the discussions. This was important due to student opinions regarding their perception of the educational matriculation they encountered through grades K-12. The perceptions of the African-American students in this study, was that their majority counterparts did not disclose similar educational journeys or presented the same external pressures.

Students, faculty, and staff all mentioned how there was a separate set of handling instructions needed to nurture the needs of African-American students presently on college campuses, solely based on the fact that their needs are vastly different. Many of the participants stated that institutional resources did not represent the actual needs of the students in terms of what it would take for them to collectively and consistently persist. The study pointed out that although opportunities may have existed at the college level for students of color, many were ruled out before they even got there due to the inadequacies and deficiencies encountered earlier in their educational journey. The theory aligned with the fact that students in this study were underserved and underprepared from the existence of power structures which made it difficult for them to possess the tools needed to survive college with as few hurdles as possible.

The playing field was not a level one for students in this study. The participants stated that their majority counterparts entered the doors of the institution prepared for college algebra and pre-calculus, while many of them did not test out of fundamentals of mathematics. The majority of the students presented in this study were enrolled in developmental courses within their first semester of study. African Americans begin the
college race a semester behind their counterparts. In addition, developmental course work not only placed the students behind academically, but bruised their egos and caused them to question whether they were ready for college.

**Recommendations**

Regarding the influence of youth culture and the college experience on student persistence among African-American students, this study presented the top five influencers of student persistence: College Preparedness, Faculty Connection to Students, Linkage to Spirit of Institution, Purposeful Academic Advisement, and Social Media. Given the fact that student persistence played a role in overall degree completion, the issue was in alignment with the state’s mission under the 2012 mandate, “Complete College Georgia.” The Complete College Georgia Initiative mandates an increase in competency level in the population of workers in the state by aiding in the percentage of adults with advanced educational credentials beyond a high school diploma, and advancing the quality of the workforce by 2020. Because of this mandate, there are several recommendations to consider.

**Recommendations for Federal Level (Financial Resources and Policy)**

In order for students to engage fully in college, financial resources must be in place for all qualified and eligible students. As such, the financial aid program should consider revamping some of the stipulations involved in eligibility. Some of the inhibitors for African-American students are tax return documentation, mandatory parental reporting of financial information, and income below the Federal Poverty Line. Each of these pose a challenge to students who have parents who lack the understanding
of how financial aid works and why their income information must be disclosed. Therefore, many refuse to fill out the application for their children, hindering them from receiving the funding needed to pay for college.

**Recommendations for the State Level Board of Regents (Access to Resources)**

The Hope Scholarship Program has various tiers to cater to disadvantaged students with GPAs below the current standards and who have extenuating circumstances. African-American students in disadvantaged areas are often not competitive with GPA’s in high school as many do not decide to go to college until well into their junior year of high school. In addition, many are totally unaware of the benefits of the HOPE scholarship until they enter college and by that time it is too late.

The Board of Regents should review the funding structure for two-year and four-year degree-granting institutions, especially those that are considered open access, to ensure that they are equal across the board. Each college should have similar standards, structures, technology, and resources for students so that there is no disparity in colleges. Students attending any of these colleges in the state should have similar experiences, environment, and educational climate regardless of location or demographics of students.

**Recommendations for Practitioners, College Presidents, Deans, and Faculty (Practice)**

High School students interested in college often engage with Higher Educational Professionals long before seeking admission, specifically those interested in traditional college. However, students interested in open-access institutions do not ever engage with a college until they arrive on campus. College executive leadership should make it
mandatory that all faculty members with teaching responsibility in core coursework be required to know the services offered and participate in new student orientation. Faculty members are often consumed with the responsibilities of teaching and never get a grasp on student life or what motivates their students; however, when a student is in need of assistance, their first line of defense is faculty. Faculty at two-year schools should receive mandatory training on the importance of the first-year experience.

**Recommendations for P-12 Administrators, Teachers, and Counselors**

College bridge programs are noted as those providing underserved students with the opportunity to engage in college activities prior to seeking college admission. It is important that P-12 Administrators connect with college and university officials to create, collaborate, and implement programs especially within districts where they may be scarce. In addition, it is important for P-12 representatives to engage in continual conversation with college officials on trends, policies, and procedural items related to college recruitment and selection. In addition, K-12 officials should be equipped with the tools needed to provide current, relevant, and useful information that could be disseminated to parents and students showing interest in college. Consequently, many students who are in need of Bridge Programs may not have access to them. Therefore, college bridge programs are not always representative of those students who would truly benefit from participating in them.

College preparatory summer programs should be expanded to levels below high school. Research discussed how many majority students have a head start on college readiness from parental figures and enter grade school already knowing where they plan
to apply to college ten years down the road. The focus should be on the middle school level where students fully begin to understand the role of coursework and grades in connection to their futures. By the time they enter high school, the pressures of GPA, extracurricular activities, and standardized testing reach their peak with students and parents. Therefore, if African-American families were already equipped with the knowledge and resources needed, anything additional provided in high school would be supplemental information.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The following topics are suggested to researchers who may have an interest in contributing to the literature aligned with this study.

- Analyze the effect of institutional support and student development outcomes for first-generation students.

- Analyze the relationship of STEM majors versus other majors in youth culture and student persistence to determine whether institutional support is needed for students matriculating in STEM major tracks.

- Analyze the motivation of Hispanic students in college completion and the external pressures faced while attending college in comparison to African Americans.

- Examine the perceptions of Hispanic, Native American, and involuntary minorities enrolled in junior colleges to determine influencers of college completion for these populations.
• Examine the perceptions of executive leaders on the institutional support factors needed to aid in increased retention and graduation outcomes of minority students.

• Examine the perceptions of high school guidance counselors in college preparedness outcomes to determine their views on the importance of collaboration with college academic and admission advisors.

• Explore the perceptions of high school STEM subject teachers related to minority first-generation student preparedness to succeed in college.

• Examine the function, purpose, and reach of college bridge programs to African-American and Hispanic students.

• Analyze the relationship between college stop outs in relation to academic performance the year preceding college enrollment.

• Investigate the relationship between African-American and Hispanic college graduation rates at Research 1 Institutions for those who transfer from junior colleges.

• Examine the academic achievement levels of minority students with reported mentorships with faculty outside of the classroom.

Summary

The single most important finding of this study was, that a high level of academic preparedness in conjunction with a strong sense of involvement from faculty, created the most conducive environment supportive to a high level of student persistence. The nature of the relationships in which faculty engage students outside of the academic setting is
alignment with the literature. The limited literature presented about the community college student spoke to the utter uniqueness of this population and how they embody the need of relational support in conjunction to other institutional factors in order to be academically successful (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). These study findings illuminated the importance of the effect of personal connection of students with P-12 teachers/administrators and college faculty/staff in relation to the role they played on overall desire to fulfill educational purpose.

This study revealed that since faculty members are a part of the administration of the institution, when students feel connected to them, they in turn feel a connection to the college. This connection to the college ignites their willingness to become active and involved students with an allegiance to an institution they feel is in support of their educational goals. When students feel they matter to their institution or that the institution is in support of their personal mission, vision, and life goals, they, in turn, comply with the necessary steps to be active members in matters the institution deemed essential in completion of its mission.

What also emerged from this study was that most of the interviews with representatives of the institution stated, that although the resources present on campus adequately assisted students in their plight to persist to degree completion, until African-American students enter college more prepared, they will continue to struggle to complete their programs of study. In addition, all members of the campus community were devoted to the students and there was a strong sense of satisfaction and happiness when these members spoke about their role or overall experiences. Ultimately, in order to effectively strengthen student persistence among underserved African-American
students, colleges must partner with secondary schools to create a culture of support and partnership to provide proactive strategies. Ultimately, these strategies will equip students with the knowledge, information, resources, and tools needed to be successful in the postsecondary environment, prior to entering the doors of the college.
APPENDIX A

Qualifying Questionnaire

Thank You for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. Please answer each of the following questions.

Please check one of the following:
School A _____
School B _____

Please circle one of the following that best describes you

1. Is this the FIRST college you ever attended?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

2. What is your current classification at the college?
   (a) First Year/First Year
   (b) Sophomore/Second Year
   (c) Junior/Third Year
   (d) Senior/Fourth Year

3. How many semesters have you attended this college?
   (a) 1 semester
   (b) 2 semesters
   (c) 3 semesters
   (d) 4 semesters or above
4. Are you “currently” enrolled in an Associate’s Degree Program?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

5. How would you identify yourself based on race? Please circle only one.
   (a) White
   (b) Black
   (c) American Indian
   (d) Asian
   (e) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   (f) Hispanic
   (g) Two or more Races

6. Do you receive the Federal Pell Grant as a part of your financial aid award?
   (a) Yes
   (b) NO

7. Does your financial aid award include Pell Grant at the maximum amount allowed?
   (c) Yes
   (d) No
   (e) Not sure
APPENDIX B

Student Focus Group Questions

1. Why did you choose to pursue an associate’s degree at this college?

2. How has your K-12 educational experience made you feel about your ability to succeed academically in college?
   (b) Do you feel your high school educational experience prepared you for what you have already encountered academically in college?
   (c) If so how?

3. How would you all describe your first semester at this college? Did you encounter any obstacles that made the first semester difficult or challenging?
   (a) If so what were those obstacles?
   (b) Who were some of the individuals on campus that you recall assisting you and what department did they represent?

4. During your first semester did you all visit the Academic Advising and Counseling Center and how would you describe your experience?
   (a) How often did you go?
   (b) Was your Advisor helpful?

5. In your opinions, how easy is it to get information from the Academic Advising Center regarding things specific to your education and overall matriculation here at the college?
   (a) How satisfied are you all with the academic advisement you receive here?
   (b) IF given the opportunity is there anything you would change about the process, practices or procedures that may be affecting how often you visit the center?
6. How strong is your sense of connectedness with others here on campus, which may look like you or share the same things you enjoy?

(a) Do you feel this connection keeps you engaged and wanting to return to school each semester?

(b) If so, why?

7. When you think about your family, friends, and those in your community, how supportive are they in your decision to attend college?

(a) Has anyone in your family attended college?

(b) If so, what have they shared with you regarding their experience and does what they share encourage your decision to stay in college?

(c) How disappointed do you think they would be if you decided to leave school?

(d) How important is their reaction to you, if you did decide to leave school?

8. Tell me about your experiences with the people you consider “in” your “inner circle.”

(a) Are any of them college students, if so do you visit their college or participate in activities together?

(b) Are your friends who are not enrolled in college supportive of your decision to enroll in college? If not what are some of the things they say?

9. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities on campus through Student Affairs, Student Activities or with your Professors outside of the classroom?

(a) What are some of those activities?

(b) Does your participation change the way you feel about the institution?

10. Did you participate in any college bridge programs while in high school; such as Dual Enrollment or Upward Bound, if so which ones?

(a) Do you feel any of those programs prepared you for college life?
11. Most students today receive some type of financial aid to attend college. What other financial resources, if any do you rely on to help you pay for college expenses?

(a) Does your family provide financial resources?

(b) How many hours do you work per week?

(c) Do you use your paycheck to contribute to your college related expenses?

12. Many of you are working part-time jobs and have children or loved ones whom you assist in caring for; how do these obligations/responsibilities affect your ability to persist in college?

(a) Do you think you can be successful in college and ultimately complete your degree, while tending to your obligations or responsibilities

(b) When looking at your financial ability do you feel that it has impacted educational opportunities and or/your ability to fully engage in college?

13. How often do you all post on your social media pages about your experience on campus?

(a) What are some of your favorite social media sites to post on?

(b) Do you all share posts about your college experiences?

(c) Do you openly discuss your college experience with those friends, family and community members who are not in college with you?

14. What do you find on social media regarding being successful?

(a) Is attaining a college degree considered being “successful” in any of the groups you follow/friend?

(b) What do you read about success as it pertains to African Americans in your age group? How would you describe your thoughts after you have read them?

(c) Does what you read motivate or discourage you in your decision to attend college?
15. Where do you retrieve information from about current events surrounding politics, crime and world news regarding African Americans?

(a) How much does the information you encounter through black media (radio/magazines) influence your thoughts and perceptions about college?

(b) Does it affect your overall goals and decisions about school?
APPENDIX C

Academic Advising Staff Interview Questions

1. Please describe the interactions that take place with students during their academic advising appointment?

   (a) What does advisement look like with First Year students during the initial appointment?

2. The National Academic Advising Association suggests that minority students often respond extremely well to a proactive advisement strategy, with this how would you describe the type and quality of relationships advisors typically have and the strategies used with advisees?

3. Does this department actively use social media to attract students to the academic services you offer?

   (a) If so which ones?

   (b) How often?

4. How much do you feel students rely on social media and digital media to receive information about their academics?

5. Your college reports a very diverse population of students, with this there is a large percentage of students who are African American, in looking at race how often would you say the average African-American student visits the center for advisement in comparison to other races?

6. Do you feel engagement in the academic advisement process is an issue with those categorized as Underserved Underrepresented?

   (a) If so what do you think could help improve engagement?
7. Do you work with the Student Affairs/Student Activities Department with planning and implementation of campus activities?

   (a) With this would you say the departments work together on persistence related activities on campus?

8. Do you think that students actively involved on campus with social, academic or athletic organizations attend the center for advisement more frequently, than those who do not?

   (a) If so, what would you characterize as the reasons this may be the case?

   (b) Do you believe that the level of campus engagement of a student, impacts how often they seek advisement and why?

9. Your school is characterized as one with a high percentage of students who receive Federal Financial Aid; do you think a student’s social economic status plays a role in their level of comfort in being advised or preparation for the college academic experience?

   THANK YOU for your time and participation!
APPENDIX D

Faculty Interview Questions

1. Please tell me what brought you to the college?
   (a) How long have you been in a faculty position?

2. Can you describe some of the ways you encourage students to stay engaged in their studies and not give up?

3. The University System reports that this college is very diverse, with this when you are working with students outside of the classroom, would you say there is a proportionate number of African-American students seeking involvement?
   (a) Do you feel these students are as comfortable with talking to faculty outside of the classroom as their counterparts?

4. How would you describe some of the ways you try to encourage students to participate in academic activities, clubs organizations, internships or those practices you deem vital to their academic success?

5. In thinking about the students you work with the most outside of the classroom, would you tell me a little bit about their goals?
   (a) What are some of the things they may share with you about their college experience?
   (b) What are some of the things they are seeking to accomplish with your support?

6. Do any of your students request your friendship on social media sites?
   (a) If so, which ones?

THANK YOU for your time and participation!
## APPENDIX E

### Direct Observation Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Quality</th>
<th>Professional Knowledge and Practices</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Academic Advisement Knowledge | • Matriculation Mapping Planning-Degree Plans, discussion of academic, policy and assistance  
• Institutional Policy/Procedural Discussions  
• Major selection  
• Course Scheduling |           |            |                |             |
| Academic Counseling Delivery | • Academic Coaching Career and Life Planning  
• Personal Goal Setting  
• Engagement in proactive conversations assisting students in personal, family and financial matters |           |            |                |             |
| Institutional Support | • Location of center/visibility/accessibility  
• Assistance/Identification of resources, referrals or information on how to navigate on campus  
• Policy Procedural Items/Boundaries Counselor may bring up |           |            |                |             |
| Pedagogical Knowledge | • Advisor strategy choices as it relates to student population/needs  
• Design of Advising Center in alignment of what research deems necessary appropriate  
• Exhibit practices that are supported by current research on persistence |           |            |                |             |

Source: Georgia Teacher Key Effectiveness System 2012
APPENDIX F

Student Focus Group Protocol

Study: THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE ON THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE AMONG UNDERSERVED AND UNDERREPRESENTED AFRICAN-AMERICAN JUNIOR COLLEGE STUDENTS PERSISTENCE

College A____ B _____

Student______

Date ___________

Time: Start ______        End ______

Physical Location _________________

Campus Building _________________

Interviewed by ____________________

Notes to Focus Group Participant:
Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research in understanding the influence of Youth Culture and College Experience on Student Persistence. This will be conducted in a group setting with 6-8 total students from your college. Please note that your participation is voluntary and that your responses are protected and confidentiality of your responses is guaranteed. Your responses will be recorded via an “audio device” NO visual recording will take place. The use of pseudos’ will ensure anonymity and that your personal information is not disclosed to anyone and that your responses will be strictly for the use of this research and not shared with anyone.

Approximate length of focus group: 90 minutes.

Purpose of research:
The purpose of the study is to investigate how youth culture and the college experience influences the perceptions and attitudes of African-American junior college students in their overall decisions to persist in college each semester.
APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol

Study: THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE ON THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE ON STUDENT PERSISTENCE AMONG UNDERSERVED AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

College A_____ B ____

Student______ Staff _______ Faculty _______

Date __________

Time: Start _____ End _____

Physical Location __________________

Campus Building ___________________

Interviewed by ______________________

Notes to interviewee:
Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research in understanding the influence of Youth Culture and College Experience on Student Persistence. Your participation is strongly protected and confidentiality of your responses is guaranteed.

Approximate length of interview: 30 minutes.

Purpose of research:
The purpose of the study is to investigate how youth culture and the college experience influences the perceptions and attitudes of African-American junior college students in their overall decisions to persist in college each semester.
APPENDIX H

Direct Observation Protocol

Location of Observation: ________________________________

Date: ________________

Time: ________________

Academic Semester ___________

Participants Involved: Students ___ Academic Staff ____ Faculty ____

Principal Researcher: Sonya Shuler Okoli

Source of Observation Guide: Georgia Department of Education Teacher Keys Effectiveness Ass
APPENDIX I

Direct Observation Research Question Guide

1. Where is the Academic Advising and Counselor Center located on campus?

2. Are there a lot of informational items brochures, pamphlets, flyers that are engaging to students providing important information about deadlines etc.?

3. Does the center have diversity among staff in age, race, experience, etc.?

4. Who is coming in to be advised? What type of questions are they asking?

5. Are students coming into the office alone or are they joined by friends, parents, faculty members or other college staff?

6. Are African-American students visiting the center as often as other races?

7. What types of questions are African-American students asking? What seems to be the major concerns they are posing?

8. Are African-American students picking up literature and taking advantage of the resources provided?

9. What is the overall demeanor verbal/nonverbal of staff members to students?

10. What are the overall look, feel and vibe of the center?
### APPENDIX J

#### Research Question Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Student Interview</th>
<th>Direct Observation</th>
<th>Academic Staff Interview</th>
<th>Faculty Interview</th>
<th>Student Focus Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To what extent does academic self-concept influence persistence?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does student educational experience influence persistence?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How does participation in college bridge programs influence persistence?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How does academic advisement influence persistence?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent does faculty involvement influence persistence?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How does participation in extracurricular activities influence persistence?</td>
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<td>9. How does socioeconomic status influence persistence?</td>
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<td>11. How does social media influence persistence?</td>
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## APPENDIX K

Data Coding Matrix

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APPENDIX L

Statement of Consent

RESEARCH TITLE

THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE AND COLLEGE EXPERIENCE ON STUDENT PERSISTENCE AMONG UNDERSERVED AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER
Sonya Shuler Okoli

PURPOSE
The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of youth culture on the college experience related to persistence and factors such as Academic Self-Concept, Student Educational Experience, College Bridge Programs, Academic Advisement, Faculty Interaction, Extracurricular Activities, Youth Culture, Family Support, Social Economic Status, Black Media and Social Media. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a current student at one of the selected junior colleges chosen for this study. A total of 25 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation in the study will require a total of sixty minutes.

PROCEDURES
Upon agreement to participate in the study, you will be required to complete and submit a qualifying questionnaire to the principal researcher. You will also be required to participate in a structured one-on-one interview. Finally, there will be a focus group where you may be asked to participate as a finalizing part of this study. There will be no interaction with other participants. The research will take place at you college during the summer semester of 2015.

RISKS
Participation in this research study will not subject you to any risks.

BENEFITS
Participation in this research may benefit you personally. The investigative approach will allow you to explore your motivations and perceptions of completing college while considering elements of your personal cultures.

Your participation will assist the researcher with determining if culture or other factors influence African-American student persistence in completion of an associate degree. Your participation will yield insight for college administrators and executive leaders.
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this case study is completely voluntary. Your participation in this study is not required. You have the right to remove yourself from the study at any time if you change your mind. Your decision to remove yourself will not negatively impact you. You will not face increased risk or lose any rights or benefits you were entitled to.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The utmost effort will be made to maintain the privacy of your personal information and any connection to observation notes and interview responses. The use of your name is not necessary for this study. All identifying information will be removed from all data collection instruments. Any information you provide for this case study will only be shared with a third party for the sole purpose of furthering the study and its publication. All information from the case study will be summarized and analyzed strictly using discretion.

CONTACT PERSON
For any questions concerning this research study and or your participation, please contact:

Sheila Gregory, Ph.D.
Professor
Clark Atlanta University
Department of Educational Leadership
223 James P. Brawley Drive S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30313
Email: sgregory@cau.edu
Phone: (404) 880-6642

COPY OF STATEMENT OF CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPANT
If you understand terms of the study, and this form and are willing to participate, please sign and date the form below. A copy of this form will be provided for your records.

_____________________________________________
Participant Name (Printed)

_____________________________________________
Participant Signature

_____________________________________________
Date
REFERENCES


Jennings, M. V. A. (2012). *The effects of black radio on the African American community in the 1940’s and the new millennium: A qualitative analysis using the cultivation*
analysis theory. Proceedings of the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research, Ogden, UT.


