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A Study Examining Contributing Factors That Impact the Persistence of African-American Girls Completing a 4-Year High School Program and Strategies for Improvement

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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2016

A STUDY EXAMINING CONTRIBUTING FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE
PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN GIRLS COMPLETING
A 4-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM IN MISSISSIPPI AND
STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Committee Chair: Barbara Hill, Ed.D.

Dissertation dated May 2019

The purpose of this mixed methodological study was to discover the possible causes of persistence for African-American high school girls attending a 4-year program in Mississippi. Currently, there is a precise focus on African-American high school girls and the detrimental outcomes that follow as a consequence of behavioral referrals within schools. Unfortunately, the narrative of African-American high schools girls centers on discipline as a leading concern in their academic performances. This study sought to determine whether student perception of completing a 4-year high school program plays a significant role for African-American girls. Support systems of teachers towards high school African-American girls were assessed in consideration for the educational professionals and their influence to the academic advancement of students. Lastly, the

social influences of social media were investigated as a contemporary factor for African-American girls considering completing a 4-year program. The consideration of organizational structures that are not conducive to the advancement of high school graduation is the primary discussion for educational leaders to evaluate.

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STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

A DISSERTATION

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

BY

LATONYA HOPE HARNESS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every year there is a population of successful high school African-American girls marching across a monumental stage celebrating their greatest accomplishment—graduation. This is a day that these girls have invested time and worked towards for four years. These ambitious girls are filled with optimistic plans for their future and an eagerness for the uncharted territory of transitioning into womanhood. However, there are also a significant number of African-American girls who do not arrive to this grand stage. Where are they? What optimism can these girls possess for their futures when they have not completed high school? A report conducted by the National Women’s Law Center (2007) suggested that “In fact, one in four girls overall do not finish high school and the numbers are worse for girls of color” (p. 5). African-American girls are seemingly completely unaware of the statistics that mount as a trifold of barriers without a high school diploma. To be first perceived as a minority, African-American girls carry the stereotype as being intellectually incompetent and ineligible for selected academic conversation. To then, be labeled with the inferiority of being a female, the stereotype of negative attitudes and over-sexuality suggests that African-American girls hide their emotions and remain reticent to meet society’s expectations of etiquette.

Adversely, when intellect does not suffice as an apparatus in suppressing black women, an assured aggression of physical appearance can consummate. For example, First Lady Michelle Obama, who attended Princeton for undergraduate school and Harvard for law school, suffered horrific public abuse from the news commentator, Rush Limbaugh (2011), with such offensive comments as,

I'm trying to say that our First Lady does not project the image of a woman that you might see on a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue or of a woman Alex Rodriguez might date every six months or what have you. (Limbaugh Radio Program, February 22)

When the First Lady of the United States, who attended top Ivy League schools, can be intellectually diminished and being objectified by a man who did not graduate college, young African-American girls who do not graduate high school and admire to her leadership could face harsher racist and sexist standards. This objectification perpetuates the continuous invisibility that African-American girls are confronted with as equal contributing members of society. For these same girls who do not graduate from high school, the subjected criticism and hardships that they confront places them in systematic economic restraints that also projects labels and statistics for their children. A 2007 study done by the National Women's Law Center, evaluated the economic cost of female dropout rates in their statement, "The economic costs are particularly steep for women, who face especially poor employment prospects, low earnings potential, poor health status, and the need to rely on public support programs to provide for their families" (p. 5). Therefore suggesting that the support of improving cohort graduation rates for

African-American girls is essential and contributes to economic growth needed in the United States.

According to the National Center of Educational Statistics [NCES] (2018), African Americans fall 7% below the national graduation rate of 83% putting the total percentage of African-American high school graduates at 75% overall. White students proved to exceed that national graduation rate by 5%, establishing themselves as the only subgroup exceeding the national graduation rate (NCES, 2014). For young black girls in Mississippi, Mississippi State Superintendent, Dr. Carey Wright, recently celebrated consistent growth in the state's cohort graduation rate. In a 2016 press release, the Mississippi Department of Education (2016) stated that Mississippi's graduation rate improved significantly from 2011 to 2015, inching closer to the national average. This rate puts the total percentage at 78.4%, according the state's annual report. The celebratory percentages indicate progressive change that the state has pursued for years. However, the National Center of Educational Statistics (2016) reported that in the state of Mississippi, whites still exceed the national graduation rate by 2% while African Americans indicate a reduction of 6%. With progressive concentration of attendance and dropout preventions, the state has managed to make gains in bridging the national graduation gap. Ironically, Mississippi's Educational 5-year Strategic Plan (2016-2020) outlined 5 hopeful outcomes in their efforts to "increase the percentage of students graduating from high school in each subgroup." However, it becomes a problem to educational leaders when these "subgroups" have not been defined or identified in meeting the goal of increasing the numbers of high school graduation. When race and

gender has not been considered among the “subgroups,” the research support provided could have the expected outcome. Certainly, when educators consider strategic academic initiatives there should added consideration in males contrary to females, and African Americans contrary to white students.

Statement of the Problem

In her book, *Women Race & Class*, Angela Davis (1983) wrote, “It is not for the sake of historical accuracy alone that such a study should be conducted for lessons can be gleaned from slave era which will shed light upon Black women’s and all women’s current battle for emancipation” (p. 4). Historically, black women have been disregarded and scorned dating back to times when debauched white slave owners favored them over the white wives who resented them for it. Davis later wrote, “The enormous space that work occupies in Black women’s lives today follows a pattern established during the very earliest days of slavery” (p. 5). The lack of education provided to slaves would be greatly credited to the workspace that Davis considered in her book. African-American women during slavery were not estranged to hard work. However, education represented hope and freedom for most African-American children.

In light of the progress of American education systems, it would be disparaging not to acknowledge the great contributions of Mary McLeod Bethune¹ or Ruby Bridges.²

¹Mary McLeod Bethune became one of the most important black educators, civil and women’s rights leaders, and government officials of the 20th century.

²Ruby Bridges was one of the first African Americans to attend William Frantz Elementary School after *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that the desegregation of schools was unconstitutional.

However, based on the graduation rate of 75%, there are a significant number of African-American girls who are not graduating from high school. In today's society, contemplation of dropping out of high school can be contributed to numerous personal circumstances that potentially glorify dropping out of high school as the most reasonable choice during such an impressionable age. The National Center of Educational Statistics (2018) also suggested that the number of African-American females that dropout of high school in the United States has consecutively exceeded their white counterparts over the last seventy years. Although the graduation rate in the state of Mississippi is consecutively growing, the remaining 25% of African-American students who did not complete the program within the 4-years show a large group of students that require extensive research and support.

African-American females show unique indicators that can hinder successful completion of a 4-year program. Most studies providing recommendation for academic achievement of African-American girls suggest increased economic support for teenage mothers. For example, in a report titled "Unlocking Opportunity for African-American girls," (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], 2014) the call to action was to improve high school completion rates focused solely on "pregnant and parenting students. However, the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2019) reported that the number of teenage pregnancy has dropped to a record low of 22.3%. When considering African-American girls in education, there research was used to examine the potential factors for those who did not make it graduation and do not identify themselves as being teenage mothers. Through the

lack of literature and research, the remaining African-American girls who do not graduate seem to have no support through educational systems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methodological study was to discover the possible causes of persistence for African-American high school girls attending a 4-year program. This study sought to determine whether student perception of completing a 4-year high school program plays a significant role for African-American girls. State academic achievement was also an examining factor in the research to evaluate the academic encouragement required to promote the number of graduates for African-American girls. Support systems of teachers towards high school African-American girls were assessed in consideration for the educational professionals and their influence to the academic advancement of students. Lastly, the social influences of social media were investigated as a contemporary factor for African-American girls considering completing a 4-year program. The consideration of organizational structures that are not conducive to the advancement of high school graduation is the primary discussion for educational leaders to evaluate.

Research Questions

- RQ1. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school females and their perception of passing all required courses for on-time graduation?

- RQ2. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school females and their perception of successfully passing required state mandated-assessments for on-time graduation?
- RQ3. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school female students and their academic achievement levels towards on-time graduation?
- RQ4. Is there a significant relationship between African-American high school girls and the support of teachers that influence their persistence of on-time graduation?
- RQ5. Is there a relationship between social media and the persistence of African-American high school girls and their perception of not completing required courses?
- RQ6. Is there a significant relationship between African-American high school girls and their engagement in intramural/school sponsored social clubs and their perception of on-time graduation?
- RQ7. Which factors prove to be most impactful to African-American high school girls and their persistence for on-time graduation?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to evaluate possible reasons that hinder or prevent African-American high school girls in their persistence to graduation. With this study, it is suggested that educational leaders are provided with advanced research and recommendations on the unique support for troubled African-American high school girls

with possible related causes and suggested intervention that makes girls and schools more successful. Findings from this study validated the importance for educational leaders to recognize and support a unique group of students who seemingly tend to go unnoticed academically. This study also sought to add to the fundamental literature of African-American high school girls. African-American girls who do not complete school and are not pregnant receive insufficient support due to their subtle departure from school. Their dismissals are not as palpable as their male counterparts, who to some could project the studied advancement of the school to the prison pipeline. This study's purpose was to encourage educational leaders and community members to reflect on the selected variables and their possible role in the graduation rate for African-American female students towards completion of their academic programs.

The significance adds to the data of African-American high school girls and the national achievement gap among races. With these findings, educators are prepared with possible causes and recommendations to increase schools' cohort graduation rate. It is also imperative to acknowledge the unique instructional practices needed to cater to African-American girls who are considering not completing a high school 4-year program. In the differentiation of male and females, educational leaders should be prepared for more research and practices that could empower African-American female students who address unwarranted distractions towards their success of completing a 4-year program.

Summary

Recent literature that focuses primarily on female graduation rates in a high school setting is extremely limited. African-American girls that do not graduate from high school seem to go unnoticed because they are typically moderate compared to African-American boys who are projected to spend a concerning amount of time in prison systems. Social acceptance has shifted dramatically since the introduction of social media and virtual networking. With the growing recognition of reality television and entrepreneurship, some young African-American girls find little to no need in completing a high school 4-year program to be successful. Students of today's society seem to view success as it relates to large amounts of money rather than obtaining a formal education. Detrimental outcomes can occur when there is no standard set for African-American girls to relate academic achievement as being successful.

Additionally, literature that spotlights African-American female graduation rate is extremely scarce for educational researchers and mostly focuses on teenage pregnancy as the leading cause. Although the numbers are not as sizable as African-American boys, there is a significant number when comparing African-American girls, white girls and high school graduation. The most recent published literature that focuses on graduation rates of African-American high school girls dates back as three years ago. When educational leaders are considering bridging the racial achievement gap, it is disadvantageous not to evaluate all subgroups of male and female.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

African-American Girls and School

Unintentionally, there is a requirement of substantial encouragement needed to accomplish daily goals. A study done by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) (p. 2) on student perceptions, states, “the way we look at situations, places, and things reflects the way we view the world and influences the conclusions and decisions we make.” (p. 2). For impressionable high school girls, personal insecurities and social acceptance equates with daily tasks of completing homework. Educational researcher, Terri N. Watson (2016), conducted an insightful visual of the perceptions of African-American high school girls. Every day, girls walk into a high school building making a decision regarding their academic performance and social interactions within that building. African-American girls, in particular, are forced to embrace an existential role in defying stereotypes of vulgarity and violence. In Watson’s study on the perceptions of high schools, African-American girls expressed their concerns in obvious displays of discrimination. One student noted, “I feel like they don’t trust Black people here” (p. 244). Her comment reflects the perceptions that many African-American girls are forced to accept from society, teachers and administrators during daily encounters. It is almost illogical to believe that students who absorb thoughts such as these will

reciprocate the trust needed to share important information with schoolteachers or administrators.

Currently there is a precise focus on African-American high school girls and the detrimental outcomes that follow as a consequence of behavioral referrals within schools. Unfortunately, the narrative of African-American high schools girls centers on discipline as a leading concern in their academic performances. In a report titled *Black Girls Matter* (Crenshaw-Williams, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015), alarming numbers indicate that black girls are 12% more likely to be suspended than girls from any other race. These types of statistics perpetuate the violent image that black girls currently face within a failing education system. With the alarming number of mass school shootings, districts have increased the presence of resource officers within individual buildings. However, during Watson's (2016) interview, one student indicated "I feel like the security agents are jerks sometimes" (p. 24). With the growing attention around police brutality, black girls do not feel protected with the added security. More than protected, the students in the study seem to have felt more that school security guards were there to provoke and harass them. These perceptions facilitated by administrators and support staff create a perilous environment where black girls are forced to feel defensive and preservative.

To increase the graduation rate of black girls it is crucial to understand their disposition to effect academic change. According to the report, *Black Girls Matter* (Crenshaw-Williams et al., 2015), "girls attachment and sense of belonging in school can be undermined if their achievements are overlooked or undervalued" (p. 32). The false perceptions that African-American high school girls do not require immediate attention

could correlate with the number of girls who do not graduate. Personal perception reflects the decisions that are made. When African-American girls do not feel safe, when girls do not feel supported, there leave could an absence in the persistence for high school graduation. In an article titled, "Gender, Self-Perception and Academic Problems in High School" (Crosnoe, 2007), it was suggested "On one hand, high school graduation does not afford the economic and social opportunities that it once did, a so inequalities between the 'stayers' and the 'leavers' have widened considerably" (p. 12). The correlation between high school graduation and success has seemed to diminish as a necessity in economic success. This could be a valid perception of African-American girls when attending school bolsters the success of each subgroup except your own. Mississippi, in particular, carries a strong, negative connotation of racism and discrimination. For African-American girls who do not graduate in Mississippi, the invisibility established could prove to be a survival tactic.

Teacher Support Systems

According to an article by Sandolis Rimm-Kauffman (2011), improving teacher and student relationship can have positive and long lasting effects for students' academic and social development. Students' need for support requires teachers to proactive in cultivating these relationships. For example, in Watson's study (2016) the girls were asked a specific question that reflected support of professionals in the school building. In answering the question, Iesha remembered a specific time that she had been diagnosed with depression and how it went "unnoticed" by teachers and administrators in the building. "It's not me being lazy. They just look at it as you're being a typical teenager,"

(p. 243). The support needed for African-American girls requires a purposeful effort from educational professionals. Students like Iesha typically go “unnoticed” until she has presented a concern to teachers or administrators. Iesha’s feelings of going “unnoticed” could also correlate with a low academic performance. This would require teachers and administrators to be actively analyze performance and behavior to be sure that Iesha does not fall behind in the curriculum needed for graduation.

Researcher, Chloe Miksovic (2015), outlined distinct characteristics of successful teachers of African-American students. Through her qualitative research, she interviews and observes six teachers in a Virginia elementary school. Building the foundation of her study around culturally relevant pedagogy, Miksovic listed five characteristics of successful teachers of African-American students:

- High expectations for all students
- Connections with students on a personal level
- Community building in the classroom
- Connections between curriculum and students’ lives
- Critiques of instructional racism in curriculum and school system

These five characteristics require a consciousness and significant time for reflection in cultures and instruction. Through the interviews, most teachers reflected on some of their most difficult times with students. Ironically, all of these encounters involved boys, perpetuating the invisible persona that girls attain in schools. Through Miksovic’s (2015) research, she was able to conclude that, “Overall their life experiences growing up tended

to prepare them (teachers) for success, but their multicultural education training had negligible effects on their success with African-American students” (p. 86).

To prepare educators for such scenarios, educational researcher, Brandi Johnson (2014) studied teacher preparedness for instructional strategies and cultural relevant pedagogy needed for effective academic relationships for African-American girls. Although her study focused more on single-gendered classrooms, most of the teachers in her study reported that the preparation needed for enhancing instruction for African-American girls was something they were required to learn on the job and that could take years to successfully develop. Johnson evaluated educational leaders and showed that there was a significant value in professional development needed for African-American girls. For example, one teacher in the study indicated that personal relationships with female family members provided the precise communication skills needed for African-American female students. Therefore, leaving an opportunity for administrators to support teachers and students with gendered based professional development. However, Johnson’s study showed that teacher demographics such as ethnicity and years of teaching experience did impact the preparedness of participants for implementing single gendered classrooms and cultural relevant pedagogy. In her findings, Johnson (2014) also reported that data from the investigation did show “demographic factors gave them an advantage in being prepared to implement single-gender instructional strategies and culturally relevant pedagogy” (p. 145). Johnson also found during her qualitative findings that,

Teachers' preparedness for and implementation of single-gender instructional strategies and culturally relevant pedagogy depended on administrators creating an aesthetically pleasing academy environment/setting and providing experiences for African-American girls outside of the classroom within the school to support learning including: bringing in mentoring groups and plays, celebrating Women's History Month, and providing various extracurricular activities. (p. 146)

Social Media Influences

Social media is a millennial phenomenon that allows participants to connect with peers and relay information on an international level. It has become such a daily routine that current United States President, Donald Trump, has vowed to maintain his personal Twitter account as a primary action to speak with constituents. Social media sites have become such a necessity that the right number of followers could warrant a generous income. For example, reality superstar Kim Kardashian can earn up to \$300,000 for promotional posts on her social media page as reported by Forbes. With such an astonishing opportunity, it seems logical that high school students spend such an absorbent amount of time glaring through numerous social media accounts. "Getting a large amount of likes on a photo posted on Instagram or Facebook secures your status. It makes you feel important, popular and well liked," said Katie Benmar (2015, pp. 22-23). who wrote the article "My Favorite Teacher Uses Social Media: A Student Perspective." For a young African-American girl without a high school diploma, such careers are genuinely compelling in a poor state such as Mississippi. A large number of "likes" could

give African-American high school girls a worldwide platform to navigate their sense of social belonging and acceptance.

Fortunately, there are considerable benefits to social media and high school students. Teachers are consistently researching innovative ways to connect with students using social media accounts. Educational platforms like Schoology, Blackboard, and ConnectED are a few digital platforms that teachers are using to take advantage of cellphones and enhance the education of students. Through the use of discussion boards and direct messaging, students are able to candidly participate in classroom topics without the embarrassment and criticism of classmates from their personal devices. In the overwhelming stacks of ungraded papers, the critical need for timely feedback and overcrowded classrooms, educational platforms become a necessity for teachers to monitor students' progress over nine months. Educational platforms also serve as an additional form of communication between students and teachers after school hours.

However, there are some negative effects of social media for teens and their education. A report conducted in 2015 by Rideout (2015) found that "On any given day, American teenagers (13-to-18 year olds) average about nine hours (8:56) of entertainment use, excluding time spent at school or for homework" (p. 13). For the sake of the study, entertainment included listening to music, social media, playing video games and reading online. For schools or districts that do not have a phone policy, the average time spent on social media could greatly increase. The study also reported that the nine hours of entertainment use differs between boys and girls. "On the other hand, teen girls spend about 40 minutes more a day with social media than boys on average

(1:32 compared with :52 among boys),” as recorded by Common Sense Media (Rideout, 2015, p. 15). The additional amount of time on social media leaves areas for harmful opportunities of cyberbullying with susceptible high school girls. Cyberbullying has recently been a new focus for schools following the alarming teen suicides credited to cyber bullying by peers.

The image of African-American females on social media carries an overwhelming negative connotation of violence and over sexuality. The “angry black woman” persona has carried over to teens to entice their desire for social media views and “likes.” In Watson’s (2016) study, Christine commented,

That stigma that Black girls are supposed to be loud and ratchet and ghetto and don’t have any class or manners and things like that, I feel that stigma is what holds us back, like well, they want me to act like that, so let me just act the way they want me to act. (p. 245)

There has been a growing expectation of African-American high school female students set by numerous social media accounts dedicated solely to school fights and underdressed dance performances. Consequently, such behaviors attract exponential numbers of followers and “likes” on social media, therefore, awarding African-American girls with the desperate desire for attention an acceptance.

Summary

The review of the literature highlights some of the latest finding on the perception of African-American high school girls from teacher and administrators. It also outlines some of the perceptions that African-American high school girls have about the current

isolation and discrimination they encounter within school programs. An examination of literature has also been dedicated to teachers and administrators and their preparedness needed to effectively support troubled African-American girls. As described in the report *Black Girls Matter* (Crenshaw- Williams et al., 2015),

If the challenges facing girls of color are to be addressed, the research and policy frameworks must move beyond the notion that all of the youth of color who are in crisis are boys, and that the concerns of white girls are indistinguishable from those of girls of color. (p. 44)

There is a growing concern for African-American girls and it must be centered in on-time high school graduation. Lastly, the social media trend is a growing topic for researchers as the market continues to develop with innovative way for students to connect. The literature discussion of social media indicates that there are social concerns that could present major concerns and be harmful to the advancement of the African-American community. For example, current U.S. Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, is a known supporter of school vouchers and charter schools. In her own social media account, DeVos (2017) celebrated Charter School Week by stating that charter schools offer parents a choice and helps students succeed. DeVos' support of charter systems present itself as an increased effort to discriminate against African-American students and protect schools who reserve the right to refuse their admittance with so-called lottery-picks. For states like Mississippi, where chartered systems are low in number, there is little accountability to demand the support of African Americans. With the growing spotlight for African-American high school girls, it is crucial to amplify the research and

funding to cultivate the educational environments needed for their academic success.

Lastly, the limited research devoted to African-American girls mainly focused on teenage pregnancy. This leaves educational leaders with limited resources to advanced research for African-American high schools that have left school without the concern of teenage pregnancy.

CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

To ground the research, the researcher chose three theories that could help to indicate the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation. This mixed-method study was conducted based on the Black Feminist Theory introduced by Patricia Hill Collins. This theory suggests that the experiences that African-American high school girls face in schools are much different from African-American males and their female counterparts. An analysis done of the state distributed data reports that the number African Americans that spent time out of school due to suspensions totaled at almost 14% while that number of white students that spent time out of school due to suspensions was less than 5% within the entire state (2017). Theories like the Black Feminist Theory and Cultural Relevant Pedagogy can help educators provide an improved environment where students feel supported to spend time in school rather than outside of school.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culture is an intricate component in projecting successful outcomes for students. In order to provide effective cultural experiences to the classroom, educators must examine the diversity within society. For African-American girls, there is a first racial consideration in creating effective pedagogy. However, to be an African-American

female is not as a relatable experience to even the most notable African-American scholars, such as W.E.B. DuBois or Ralph Ellison. Effective culturally relevant pedagogy for an African-American girl is distinguishing that one does not correlate to the other. Educational researcher Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defined cultural relevant pedagogy as “an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge skills and attitudes” (p. 483). As indicated by the students in Watson’s (2016) study, African-American girls do not feel empowered by their educational cultures. Adversely, they potentially feel neglected intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically within a culture that is presumed to encourage these precise characteristics.

In order to respond to culturally relevant pedagogy, educators must establish the difference in the annual Black History Month unit and creating effective daily instructional strategies that African-American female students can find relative. For black girls, this includes studies from prominent African-American female writers and scholars. Sojourner Truth’s “Aint I a Woman” (1851) provides context for African-American girls to evaluate the basic rights earned far after the feminist movement considered African-American women as inheritors of the same human rights. Effective cultural relevant pedagogy in today’s classroom would also evaluate the exponential strength required from black women in today’s debates of exceptional entrepreneurial circuit. To effectively create culturally relevant pedagogy is to be knowledgeable of the incremental changes that women have made over time and the extensive changes need for equity of African-American girls. Today’s culture has progressed from young women planning and

preparing for their roles as a wife and mother to encourage these girls into the fields of math and science.

In a state like Mississippi, there is an overwhelming initiative to encourage students to attend one of the local historically black colleges or universities. However, in some cases, students have no interest in attending college in their goals for becoming successful. For example, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce states that agriculture is the state's number one business. The state counts that agriculture is a 7.6 billion dollar industry. Author Angela Y. Davis (1983) acknowledged, "slaves in the Deep South—the real home of the slavocracy—were predominantly agricultural workers" (p. 5). Both women and men worked the fields of slave owners. Even far after slavery, sharecroppers worked and taught white landowners how to tend to their crops for best profits. This shows that the cultural relevant to the students of Mississippi may not require a college degree. Distinctively, after Mississippi's famously known work in agriculture there are no classes offered to high school students to take advantage of the state's number one business. Bringing these facts with the limitation of being a black female with little education prevents young women from an opportunity that could make them successful without a college degree.

Black Feminist Theory

The black feminist theory is a relatively contemporary thought of social construction within the educational field. Researcher, Patricia Hill Collins (2000), grounds the complexity of differentiating its foundation with prominent African-American female activists like Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer. To acknowledge

the oppression that black women encounter on the basis of race, gender and social class embeds a trilogy of systematic cycles of deficiency, Collins proposed that "... African American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female" (p. 747). The usage of the word "and" in Collins' statement supports the differentiated group that suffers distinguished struggles in comparison to the privilege granted to their white female counterparts. With these unparalleled experiences, the black feminist theory requires a consciousness of refuting subordinate and suppressive requirements of behavior from African-American women. Collins (2000) suggested, "Expressing an independent Black Feminist consciousness is problematic precisely because more powerful groups have a vested interest in suppressing such thought" (p. 749). Regardless of the context being the majority of another race or the historic societal dominance of male authority, African-American females are in an existential role where wisdom would suggest that biblical references of submission is key to a woman's survival.

For African-American girls in high school, the black feminist theory encapsulates the impalpable persona that presents justification for not completing high school within the 4-year cohort timeframe. Typically, teachers or administrators do not flag African-American females students until they have failed a required course or has shown to be a behavior problem. For example, the studied school district provides an alternative route for students who "have not been successful in the regular high school setting." However, students have to be admitted into the program after their transcripts have been assessed. The daunting conclusion with the alternative program is that those students who require

the additional motivation for on-time graduation will not qualify for admittance. Therefore, leaving and underserved population with a bauble of consideration for success seems justifiable. With the present concern of behavioral referrals that African-American high schools girls are generating, this provides an extraneous layer of oppression to overcome. The general concern is that although, black girls academically perform preferably over African-American boys there is a concerning amount of girls who seem to be unaccounted. The muffled disappearance of troubled African-American girls in high school requires intentness when considering increasing the overall cohort graduation rate. As it relates to the black feminist theory, African-American high school girls are extremely limited in social scenes like classrooms that require them to repress their emotions simply because they are not the adult in the room.

Self-Determination Theory

High school students are wildly influenced by their peers and their environments. When considering high school graduations, students are typically more motivated by observing their classmates' excitement for walking across the stage. Senior year presents thrilling traditions that most students and parents garner family members for support. However, for some students senior year does not seem as exciting. According to the self-determination theory (SDT), "The theory proposes that not only is the content of our goals (i.e., what we strive for) important for our need satisfaction and well-being, the process of our goals (i.e., why we strive for them) is just as influential on our well-being" (Deci & Ryan, 2018, p. 68). To provide an analysis, the self-determination theory reflects the importance for African-American high school girls to obtain their goals of

graduating high school. However, the process in which these students obtain this goal is just as important as the reward.

A recurring theme in Mississippi is “leaving Mississippi.” some young residents pursue education simply as their ticket to leave the state for increased opportunities. The connotation of this phrase carries a tone of freedom and opportunity. The self-determination needed to accomplish this goal is boosted from students social media interactions is more than the simple thought of escaping such a poor state with few opportunities for African Americans. “Self-determination theory, or SDT, is a theory that links personality, human motivation, and optimal functioning. It posits that there are two main types of motivation—intrinsic and extrinsic—and that both are powerful forces in shaping who we are and how we behave” (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 69). The human motivation as described in the theory is an additional layer that encouraging educators would be beneficial to a struggling student. Whether the motivation needed from students is garnered intrinsically or extrinsically, high school students are typically not mature enough to manage these emotions. Therefore, requiring the support from educational professionals like teachers or administrators.

Theory of Variables

Grounded in the theoretical frameworks, this study investigated how the independent variables, student perception, academic achievements, teacher support and social media affects African-American high school girls and their persistence to complete high school as a 4-year cohort. The study also specifically focused on the dispositions of teachers and students to successfully complete high school. Although recent studies

suggest discipline as a considerable justification for African-American girls to dropout, students persistence altitudes could fluctuate based on their own beliefs of success.

Definition of Variables and Important Terms

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study was persistence of African-American high school girls. For the purpose of this study, persistence is defined as students' thoughts and beliefs on the importance of successfully completing high school in a 4-year time frame.

Independent Variables

Perception of Graduation: For the purpose of this study, persistence is defined as the extent to which African-American girls display positive thoughts and beliefs (passing required classes the first time, one or less discipline referrals, passing state assessments the first time) towards successfully completing high school in the 4-year cohort time frame.

Academic Achievements: For the purpose of this study, the state's annual published academic achievements of graduations rates and district ratings will be used for evaluation.

Teacher Support Systems: For the purpose of this study, teacher support systems is defined as the extent to which teachers provide additional support (referrals, counseling, tutoring, etc.) to African-American girls who are at risk of not meeting the 4-year cohort graduation rate.

Social Media Influence: For the purpose of this study, social media influence is defined as the extent to which African-American high school girls believe that social media influences their academic achievement in required coursework and graduation.

Relationship among the Variables

Based on the literature, there is reason to believe that student perceptions, academic achievement, teacher support and social media could significantly influence the persistence of African-American high school girls. More than that, educational leaders need to be prepared with current research to effectively provide professional learning for teachers who stand as guardians of successfully completing high school. Teachers must learn to remove punishing students for misbehavior with failing grades due to the long-lasting effects it causes for students. To create prosperous outcomes for African-American high school girls, educators must first understand what motivates them to complete or not complete high school, as the portrait of success has changed with an absence of a diploma. Figure 1 shows the relationship among the variables.

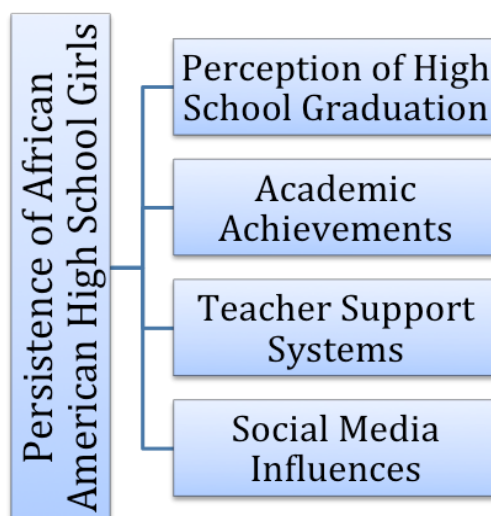


Figure 1. Relationship among the variables.

Limitations of the Study

This study depended on responses from teachers and students in survey or interview form. Therefore, the following limitations were identified and considered during the analysis of the data.

- The girls chosen for the interview were not based on any requirements prior to participation. No personal academic data was shared prior to the study.
- The girls' participation in the observation, interview and survey, freely and independently chose to participate in the study
- Students chosen for the interview were not chosen by the researcher but by a school counselor, which could have limited the honesty shared by student participants.
- Student interviews were done during school time which could have influenced authentic responses.
- Teacher interviews were not chosen based on any requirements prior to participation.
- Teachers' participation in both interview and survey freely and independently chose to participate in the study.
- Students' may not have responded freely and honestly due to the types of questions.
- Teachers may not have answered questions freely and honestly in the interview or survey.
- Students' individual academic records were not available and not included in this study.

- The size of the study included a small community that may not represent the same outcomes of like African-American high school girls in a corresponding setting.
- Findings from the study may not be identical to those in a more urban setting.
- During the time of data collection, the district was in search of a superintendent which limited the research available to the researcher.
- The researcher was limited to published records on the state's department of education website.

Summary

For a state like Mississippi, graduation is a key ingredient to securing one of the scathing job opportunities. Therefore, it requires the researcher to consider numerous variables as indicators as to why African-American girls do not make it to high school graduation. The variables chosen for investigation were selected by recent studies and contemporary concerns for educators. With the adoration of social media, educators much research innovative ways to control and minimize the influences that enter the school building. With the integration of contemporary frameworks like the black feminist theory, this study provided insight to the unique circumstances and requirements that African-American high school students combat in order to be persistent in graduating high school within the 4-year time frame. This study intended to provide additional support to at risk African-American high school girls with the consideration that applicable interventions and mediations will not mirror those required for highly studied

African-American high school boys or those of girls who require assistance due to pregnancy.

CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Unfortunately, because of systematic race and gender discriminations, African-American girls are often stereotyped before they even enter a school building, and this can affect their self-perceptions and self-esteem as well as the perceptions of their teachers (Johnson, 2014). This mixed method research sought to determine the perceptions and persistence of African-American high school girls and their progression to graduation. Specifically, this study focused on those African-American girls who are considered at risk of not graduating and possible approaches for providing educational support as improved options for 4-year Cohort graduation.

This study provided insight for educational leaders as well as teachers to a culture that is being groomed for African-American girls in high schools. In efforts to increase the graduation rate, intentional efforts should target single-gendered instructional strategies, as recommended by educational researcher, Brandi E. Johnson (2014). Fundamentally, when students are not receptive to these instructional strategies, focus should be placed on students' perceptions of the culture cultivated or lack thereof. In rural areas such as Mississippi, resources are low and that can make it difficult to provide the specific support needed for African-American girls. Therefore, this qualitative/

quantitative research seeks to provide a voice and a light to a population of students who may feel invisible or diminished.

Research Design

The research was designed to examine whether the independent variables significantly influences the graduation rate of African-American high school girls. This mixed method research used, both, qualitative and quantitative methods to ground the data for a comprehensive analysis of student and teacher responses. Creswell (2009) describes the approach of concurrent triangulation as one in which quantitative and qualitative data collection takes place concurrently, and the researcher compares the two types of data to determine if there is convergence, differences or a combination of the two. Advantages of the concurrent triangulation approach include its familiarity to most researchers and the fact that it results in well-substantiated findings (2009). To bring character and perspective to each number indicated from the instruments (surveys), interviews and observations were also be used as a rationale for educational leaders. Through the survey responses, the variables were organized as a hypothesis to examine particular logic of African-American girls' perception of high school and graduation. Because the study focuses on perceptions, qualitative instruments of interviews and observations was be used to provide a comprehensible explanation of the lived experiences of the students and teachers selected as participants.

The surveys were used to provide a quantitative analysis of teacher responses for implementing specific instructional strategies for African-American girls and maintaining for support through the strategies. The surveys were built on the Likert scale to determine

agreement of disagreement to the question or statement. Teacher surveys were also used to gain a perception of their teacher preparation programs for providing effective instructional strategies needed to convey effective lessons to African-American high school girls. The survey also examined their personal perceptions of African-American high school girls and their efforts invested in the success to high school graduation. Surveys, interviews and observations were not be administered until proper approval is granted from Clark Atlanta University and the chosen school district, including administrators.

Description of the Setting

The selected school district is located as a part of the capital in the state of Mississippi. The rural agricultural distributions of Mississippi are primary sources of income for the state. The region serves as a center point for the state's education platform. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDOE), has centered its efforts on literacy with the slogan "Strong Readers = Strong Leaders." The school system selected for the study has remained confidential as well as all participants in the study. The school system was selected based on the diverse demographics of teachers and students. With one of the largest student populations in the state, the study looked to include students from each grade level to represent the evolving perceptions of the high school community in Mississippi. The district currently serves seven high schools with a graduation rate of 71.02%, according to the states 2017 accountability report. The total population of students for the districts totals over 26,000 serving grades from Pre-K to 12th grade.

During the time of data collection, the district had also just evaded a state takeover after years of accreditation issues. After coming to an agreement, the local democratic mayor and republican state governor announced “the formation of a state-and-city project commission tasked with adopting a plan for fixing the faltering 27,000 student district” (Harris & Pender, 2017, p. 1). The “Better Together” initiative would bring Jackson Public School stakeholders—including parents—together with national local experts, including the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Education Commission of States and the Mississippi Economic Council. This partnership has garnered a considerable amount of community support for seeking strong leadership for the district. Therefore, it is also important to note that during the time of the interview, the district was in search of a superintendent and did not seem receptive to sharing information that they deemed would potentially shed a negative light on the district. Multiple contact attempts were made to the academic research office with information the release of on student data. Therefore, the data used in this study was limited to the published data that the state and district is required to share with the public. No personal academic records were shared on any participant of this study.

As a district, it offers a number of special programs such as International Baccalaureate Program and a school of the Arts, which both require an application process for acceptance. With the second largest student population, the district struggles with graduation rate. Ranking within the top 25 for lowest graduation rate in the state with almost 148 school districts. The state report cards also indicates that 96.3% of the district’s population identifies as African American, and a dropout rate totaling at over

20%. Lastly, the district's current action plan for the 2017-2018 identifies teachers using "instructional practices that are occurring in the classrooms across the district on a daily basis do not provide the necessary instruction that results in students' achievement" as a deficiency for the entire district. However, that action has not proven to be successful as the state has granted the district with an overall "F" rating according to the most recent published state report card. Also as of latest publication, there is not one high school within the district (out of seven high schools) that has scored greater than a "D" among rankings. To gain perspective, an "A" would be considered an excellent and highest ranking with an "F" being categorized as the lowest ranking possible. It is also important to note that the entire district is considered Title I meaning that all schools receive federal funds for the high percentage of low-income households who requires free or reduced lunch. The district also serves close numbers of females compared to male students.

Figure 2 shows the district's gender demographics.

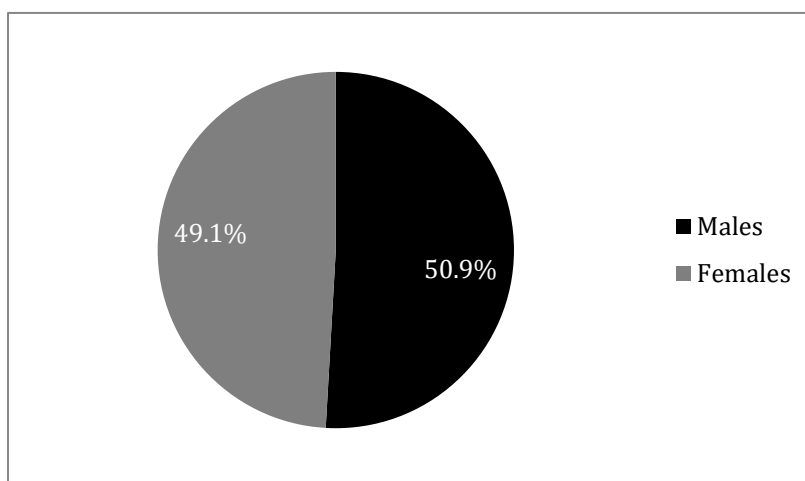


Figure 2. District's gender demographics.

To collect the data, the researcher was limited to a single interview time that took place in a guidance counselor's office at one of the local high schools. Five female students were chosen and it was not determined why the counselor chose those particular students. All interview participants were selected from the 11th grade and shared common opinions when responding to questions. Also, due to time constraints, the students seemed more devoted to their after school activities than participating in the study. Most of the surveys taken for this study took place after school hours with the assistance of the guidance counselor. The five interviewed participants seemed distant and reluctant to give honest responses.

After the interview, an observation was done with a local youth group at a church. This observation took place after school hours and had less of a formal school setting for participants. The church serves an elevated number of high school students varying across the district. However, the participants of the observation did not attend the same high school. The observation did range in age and grade levels and students seems interested in speaking specifically about their teachers. Because of setting of the church, participants seemed more comfortable in giving honest answers. The setting for the observation was at an open table and included 8 female students. One participant recently gave birth and was considering options of leaving the traditional classroom setting. There was also a participant that identified as a senior who had only recently been adopted into a home from the local adoption agency.

Sampling Procedures

Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants for a qualitative project by recruiting individuals who can help inform the central phenomenon is a study (Creswell, 2016). The researcher purposefully sought the participation of African-American girls from each grade level 9 through 12. Because the study focuses on perceptions of impressionable participants, the researcher deliberately chose girls from the chosen school community to identify comparable themes throughout the interview and observation. The student participants were selected from the same school community and offers independent experiences of their school culture. Due to the focus of African-American high school girls, the sampling was purposeful in choosing participants that meet the requirements of being a female in a traditional 4 year high school cohort program.

The teachers selected for the study were randomly chosen from the same school district. The teachers were not chosen on particular demographics (race, gender, education, teaching experience, etc.). Teacher responses were documented through electronic survey software and were correlated with prior research involving student perceptions of teacher support. Table 1 shows the female to male ratio of the teacher participants for the survey.

After evaluating the data, most of the teacher participants were females totaling at 26 (87%) and 4 (13%) male teachers. Teachers that chose to participate in the study were slow in consideration through email communication.

Table 1

Teacher Participation by Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Female	26	86.7	86.7	86.7
	2 Male	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Participation in the study increased after several visits and assurance that responses would not be shared with the current leadership team. Teacher responses were taken from 4 different schools across the chosen district. Teacher participants also varied throughout the district.

Working with Human Subjects

Anonymity was granted to the school district and the participants chosen for this study. After receiving an approved consent form and invitation letters, the participants reserved the option to refuse their responses and inclusions to the study. Written permission was received from teacher and parents of students. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout and following the research and names may be changed to protect the validity of the research. Interviewed participants were aware of all recording devices present at the time. Participants were informed that their chose to default from the study could be exercised and any point of the study.

Errors in the research were projected and may cause disparities with responses. Working with human subjects of the selected age bracket requires an open space and welcoming culture where there is voluntarily participation in personal experiences. The

researcher communicated the purpose of the research and the study's implication through a formal letter (see Appendix A). An informal introduction was made between the researcher and students with the facilitation of the school counselor.

Instrumentation

Quantitative and qualitative data were taken to test the dependent variable using three methods. Teachers from all over the chosen district were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Teacher responses were taken using an online software called [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The survey consisted of 30 questions. The questions included in the survey first gathered data on the teacher demographics. In continuance, the questions focused on the variables chosen for the study. A letter and link was sent to teachers to request teacher participation. Table 2 shows the instruments used to test the variables of the study.

Table 2

Instruments Used to Test the Variables of the Study

Dependent Variable	Instrumentation
Persistence of African-American high school Girls	
Independent Variables	
Student Perception	Interviews, Observation (4 students; one from each grade level) Survey (30 students)
State Academic Achievement	Published State Test Scores and Graduation Rates
Social Media Influence	Survey (30 students), Interview from 4 Students
Teacher Support Systems	Survey (30 teachers)

Student data were taken using the same online survey service as well as a formal interview for qualitative purposes. Notes from an informal observation were also added to the study to strengthen weakness in the qualitative data.

Summary

Data collection is the process of systematically gathering information on an issue of interest (Creswell, 2016). Through a mixed method approach the research sought to investigate how the four independent variables: social media influence, academic achievement, student perceptions, and teacher support influences the persistence of African-American high school girls and their 4-year cohort graduation. The information in this chapter offers descriptions of the participation and setting used for the research. Qualitative and quantitative methods were chosen to measure the probable influence of each independent variable. Ethical practices were facilitated throughout the data collection process and multiple sources of data collection in relation to previous research helps to validate the study.

CHAPTER V
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methodological study was to determine the factors that impact the graduation rates of African-American high school girls after focusing on the independent variables of student perceptions, teacher support systems, social media influence and state academic achievement. After an extended amount of time the researcher was able to accomplish an interview of five African-American female students to participate in the interview process. Qualitative and quantitative data were taken to evaluate the seven research questions.

Description of Teacher Quantitative Data

The demographic of responding teacher participants totaled at 30 (n=30). Table 3 gives a quantitative description of teaching years of experience. According to Table 3, the 30 participants were diverse in years of teaching experience. The results are as follows: 8 teachers had 0-5 years of teaching experience (n=8), 16 teachers had 6-10 years of teaching experience (n=16), 4 teachers had 11-20 years of teaching experience (n=4), and only 2 teachers had 21 or more years of teaching experience (n=21).

Table 3

Quantitative Description of Teaching Years of Experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1: 0-5	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
	2: 6-10	16	53.3	53.3	80.0
	3: 11-20	4	13.3	13.3	93.3
	4: 21+	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

A further analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the majority of the teacher participants identified as being African American. The result of the ethnicity for teacher participants are as follows: 3 participants identified as Caucasian (n=3), 21 participants identified as African American (n=21), 1 teacher identified as Hispanic (n=1), 3 teachers identified as biracial (n=3), 1 teacher identified as Asian (n=1), and 1 teacher identified as other (n=1). Participants with the ethnic demographics totaled at 30 (n=30). Table 4 shows the qualitative data taken on the ethnicity of teacher participants.

Table 4

Ethnicity of Teacher Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1: Caucasian	3	10.0	10.0	10.0
	2: African American	21	70.0	70.0	80.0
	3: Hispanic	1	3.3	3.3	83.3
	4: Biracial	3	10.0	10.0	93.3
	5: Asian	1	3.3	3.3	96.7
	6: Other	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Teacher participants were also asked in the survey to indicate if they had received their teacher training from a program within the state of Mississippi. A larger number of teachers indicated that they had received their training in Mississippi. There were 30 teachers to indicate whether they had received their training within the state of Mississippi (n=30). The results show that 20 teachers specified that they had received their education from a program within the state of Mississippi (n=20). However, 10 teachers indicated that they did not receive their teacher training from the state of Mississippi (n=10). Table 5 shows the participants responses to teacher training.

Table 5

Teacher Training in Mississippi

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1: No	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
	2: Yes	20	66.7	66.7	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

After an analysis of the data, the tested variables did not show any significant correlation with the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation. This could be explained for many reasons, as teachers could be unaware of student perceptions. Teacher responses were in no correlation based on the questions asked through the survey. Tables 6 and 7 display the data for teacher responses.

Table 6

Correlation of Teacher Survey Variables

		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
		Gender	Teaching Experience	Ethnicity	Age
Q1 gender?	Pearson Correlation	1	.120	.047	-.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.527	.805	.659
	N	30	30	30	30
Q2 Teaching Exp.	Pearson Correlation	.120	1	-.147	.642**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.527		.438	.000
	N	30	30	30	30
Q3 Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	.047	-.147	1	-.296
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.805	.438		.112
	N	30	30	30	30
Q4 Age	Pearson Correlation	-.084	.642**	-.296	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.659	.000	.112	
	N	30	30	30	30
AfterSchoolVolunteerism	Pearson Correlation	-.342	-.164	.366*	-.402*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	.386	.047	.028
	N	30	30	30	30
AdequacyTeacherPrep	Pearson Correlation	-.194	-.232	.138	-.200
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.304	.218	.467	.290
	N	30	30	30	30
InstructionforGirls	Pearson Correlation	-.283	-.131	.002	-.202
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.130	.491	.990	.284
	N	30	30	30	30
GoalSettingforGirls	Pearson Correlation	.196	-.136	-.010	-.270
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.299	.473	.958	.149
	N	30	30	30	30
SupportStudentstoGrad	Pearson Correlation	-.059	-.185	.208	-.043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.756	.329	.269	.821
	N	30	30	30	30

(continued)

		After School Volunteerism	Adequacy Teacher Prep	Instruction For Girls	Goal Setting For Girls	Support Students To Grad
Q1 Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.342	-.194	-.283	.196	-.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	.304	.130	.299	.756
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Q2 Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	-.164	-.232	-.131	-.136	-.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.386	.218	.491	.473	.329
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Q3 Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	.366*	.138	.002	-.010	.208
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.467	.990	.958	.269
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Q4 Age	Pearson Correlation	-.402*	-.200	-.202	-.270	-.043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.290	.284	.149	.821
	N	30	30	30	30	30
After School Volunteerism	Pearson Correlation	1	.437*	.455*	.194	.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.016	.012	.305	.832
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Adequacy Teacher Prep	Pearson Correlation	.437*	1	.494**	.126	.215
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016		.005	.507	.254
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Instruction for Girls	Pearson Correlation	.455*	.494**	1	.472**	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.005		.008	.703
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Goal Setting for Girls	Pearson Correlation	.194	.126	.472**	1	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	.507	.008		1.000
	N	30	30	30	30	30
Support Students to Grad	Pearson Correlation	.040	.215	.072	.000	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.832	.254	.703	1.000	
	N	30	30	30	30	30

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7

Correlation of Teacher Demographics and Other Variables

		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
		Gender	Teaching Experience	Ethnicity	Age
Q1 Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.120	.047	-.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.527	.805	.659
	N	30	30	30	30
Q2 Teaching Exp.	Pearson Correlation	.120	1	-.147	.642**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.527		.438	.000
	N	30	30	30	30
Q3 Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	.047	-.147	1	-.296
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.805	.438		.112
	N	30	30	30	30
Q4 Age	Pearson Correlation	-.084	.642**	-.296	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.659	.000	.112	
	N	30	30	30	30
Curr Adequacy	Pearson Correlation	.211	.314	-.111	-.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.263	.091	.560	.488
	N	30	30	30	30
Teacher Student Rel Acad Perf	Pearson Correlation	-.141	-.254	.446*	-.224
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.458	.175	.014	.233
	N	30	30	30	30
Teacher Student Rel after Grad	Pearson Correlation	-.364*	.036	.072	.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.850	.706	.842
	N	30	30	30	30
Teacher Student Rel Personal	Pearson Correlation	-.258	.134	-.082	.192
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.168	.479	.668	.309
	N	30	30	30	30

(continued)

		Curr Adequacy	Teacher Student Rel Acad Perf	Teacher Student Rel after Grad	Teacher Student Rel Personal
Q1 Gender?	Pearson Correlation	.211	-.141	-.364*	-.258
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.263	.458	.048	.168
	N	30	30	30	30
Q2 Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	.314	-.254	.036	.134
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.091	.175	.850	.479
	N	30	30	30	30
Q3 Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	-.111	.446*	.072	-.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.560	.014	.706	.668
	N	30	30	30	30
Q4 Age	Pearson Correlation	-.132	-.224	.038	.192
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.488	.233	.842	.309
	N	30	30	30	30
Curr Adequacy	Pearson Correlation	1	-.297	-.095	.017
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.111	.617	.930
	N	30	30	30	30
Teacher Student Rel Acad Perf	Pearson Correlation	-.297	1	-.126	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.111		.506	.606
	N	30	30	30	30
Teacher Student Rel after Grad	Pearson Correlation	-.095	-.126	1	.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.617	.506		.970
	N	30	30	30	30
Teacher Student Rel Personal	Pearson Correlation	.017	.098	.007	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.930	.606	.970	
	N	30	30	30	30

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RQ4. Is there a significant relationship between African-American high school girls and the support of teachers that influence their persistence of on-time graduation?

Further review of the qualitative data shows that some teachers do not offer significant support to for African-American girls based on their own perceptions. Through the correlation chart it is suggested that African-American high school girls are not likely to be more persistent through the volunteerism of their teachers with after school activities; this is shown with a value of .832. Survey data show that a higher number of respondents do not spend time after school working with African-American high school girls. Therefore, there was no significant correlation.

Description of Quantitative Student Data

Student participants of the study were asked to identify their grade level through the online survey. An analysis of the data determined that 31 students were permitted to participate in the study. The grade levels that were indicated on the students were 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th. Of the 31 participants, 9 African-American female students indicated that they were in the 9th grade, 8 African-American female students indicated that they were in the 10th grade, 10 African-American female students indicated that they were in the 11th grade, and 4 African-American female students indicated that they were in the 12th grade at their current high school. Table 8 displays the responses from the 31 student participants.

Table 8

Student Grade Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	9	9	29.0	29.0	29.0
	10	8	25.8	25.8	54.8
	11	10	32.3	32.3	87.1
	12	4	12.9	12.9	100.0
Total		31	100.0	100.0	

Analysis of Regression on Variables

RQ6. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school girls and their engagement in intramural/school sponsored organizations and their perception of on-time graduation?

According to the regression analysis the survey indicates that the value of participants totaled at .81; this value is well over the .05 significance value. This shows that there is no causation associated with the persistence of African-American female students and their engagement with intramural/school sponsored organizations.

RQ7. Which of these factors prove to be most impactful to African-American high school girls and their persistence for on-time graduation?

The analysis of the regression table indicates whether the dependent variables have a relationship with the persistence of African-American high school girls. With a point of significance of .045 it is recommended that curriculum support could show strength in the persistence of African-American high school girls than any other variable.

The regression table shows that curriculum support does have a significant relationship with the persistence of African-American high school girls and RQ7. Table 9 displays the summary of variables impacting persistence.

Table 9

Regression on Variables Impacting Persistence

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R	Standard Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.396 ^a	.157	.121	1.64623	.157	4.455	1	24	.045	
a. Predictors: (Constant), CurrSupport										
Coefficients ^a										
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.		
		B	Std. Error		Beta					
1	(Constant)	8.235	.779			10.575	.000			
	CurrSupport	.401	.190	.396		2.111	.045			
a. Dependent Variable: Persistence										
Excluded Variables ^a										
Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics				
1	Q3 participate in after school activities	-.081 ^b	-.418	.680	-.087	.982				
	Q4 failed a required class	-.228 ^b	-1.230	.231	-.248	.998				
	Q5 failed a state test	.354 ^b	1.978	.060	.381	.981				
	Teacher Support	.016 ^b	.069	.946	.014	.711				
	Teacher Student Rel	-.059 ^b	-.303	.764	-.063	.979				
	Soc Media Influence	-.177 ^b	-.944	.355	-.193	.998				
a. Dependent Variable: Persistence										
b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), CurrSupport										

The regression analysis shows that curriculum support does have a significant impact to the persistence of African-American high school girls and their persistence towards graduation. Through the regression analysis it is believed that girls participation

does not show a significant relationship with academic achievements like failing a required course or failing a state test. According to their own perceptions, students also did not indicate that social media affected their persistence to their high school graduation.

Among the variables tested using the survey, some variables did not prove to show a significant correlation to the persistence of African-American high school girls and high school graduation to address the following research questions.

- RQ1. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school females and their perception of passing all required courses for on-time graduation?
- RQ2. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school females and their perception of successfully passing required state mandated- assessments for on-time graduation?
- RQ3. Is there a significant relationship between the persistence of African-American high school female students and their academic achievement levels towards on-time graduation?

In reference to passing required courses, the data show a value of .530. This value is well over the required .05 significance value. Therefore, there is no correlation to the persistence of African-American high school girls and successfully passing of their required courses for on-time graduation.

Correlations

This study focused on seven variables to monitor the persistence of African-American high school girls. An interpretation of the data suggests that there was some significance with isolated variables chosen for the study. Table 10 details the correlation between the chosen variables.

Table 10

Persistence and Independent Variables

		Correlations					
			Acad	Teacher	Curr	Teacher	Soc
		Persistence	Perf	Support	Support	Student	Media
						Rel	Influence
Persistence	Pearson Correlation	1	.119	.194	.346	-.059	-.286
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.530	.297	.057	.752	.148
	N	31	30	31	31	31	27
Acad Perf	Pearson Correlation	.119	1	-.371*	-.103	-.053	-.158
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.530		.044	.589	.781	.440
	N	30	30	30	30	30	26
Teacher Support	Pearson Correlation	.194	-.371*	1	.584**	.124	.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.297	.044		.001	.506	.607
	N	31	30	31	31	31	27
Curr Support	Pearson Correlation	.346	-.103	.584**	1	.197	-.162
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.057	.589	.001		.288	.421
	N	31	30	31	31	31	27
Teacher Student Rel	Pearson Correlation	-.059	-.053	.124	.197	1	-.240
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.752	.781	.506	.288		.229
	N	31	30	31	31	31	27
Soc Media Influence	Pearson Correlation	-.286	-.158	.104	-.162	-.240	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.148	.440	.607	.421	.229	
	N	27	26	27	27	27	27

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 10 shows the significant probability that educators could see higher levels of persistence from African-American high school girls if they received curriculum support. The correlation number of .057 shows the high probability. These numbers are also consistent with teacher and student relationships. The correlations help to answer the following research question.

RQ4. Is there a significant relationship between African-American high school girls and the support of teachers that influence their persistence of on-time graduation?

The correlation data illustrates that the perceptions of students that participated in the study would be more persistent towards graduation if they had better relationships with their teachers. Coupled with curriculum support, the survey showed that persistence of teachers towards graduation was highly significant to the persistence of students towards graduation.

A correlation test was taken to determine the questions with the variables of social media. The chart in Table 11 displays the correlations between social media influence and students academic performance.

Data taken from the survey shows that the value shown be persistence was a value of .148. This value is above the .05 significance value. Therefore, there is no correlation to the persistence of African-American high school girls and social media usage.

Table 11

Persistence, Academic Performance, and Social Media

		Correlations			
		Persistence	Acad Perf	Q29 social media influence on relationships with teachers	Q30 social media influence on academic performance
Persistence	Pearson Correlation	1	.119	.240	-.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.530	.194	.583
	N	31	30	31	30
AcadPerf	Pearson Correlation	.119	1	.424*	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.530		.020	.842
	N	30	30	30	29
Q29 social media influence on relationships with teachers	Pearson Correlation	.240	.424*	1	.543**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.194	.020		.002
	N	31	30	31	30
Q30 social media influence on academic performance	Pearson Correlation	-.104	.039	.543**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.583	.842	.002	
	N	30	29	30	30

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 11, the researcher was able to analyze the following research question:

RQ5. Does social media significantly impact the persistence of African-American high school girls and their perception of not completing required courses?

From Table 11, it was determined that social media does not have a significant impact on the persistence of African-American high school girls. However, the table does show a strong significance between social media influence and participants' academic performance with relationship with to their teachers at a value of .020 which is close to the .05 value of significance.

Description of Qualitative Data

An interview session was conducted on January 10, 2018 to offer more insight for the qualitative data used for the study. The interview participants revealed insight that showed a high significance to the correlation of independent variables. As it relates to curriculum support, students were clear that they did not think that their current classes would be helpful to their future careers. Students also felt as if teacher support made a significant effect on their persistence to completing high school. Statements made by the participants (personal communication, January 10, 2018) alluded to the idea of professional development for not only providing support to African-American girls but being intentional about helping them complete the 4 year cohort program. For example, students were asked, "Do you feel that the required classes that you take right now are needed for what you want to do after graduation?" The responses to the question remained consistent from all participants.

Student 1: No, because it's like you have some classes that it's just like "Ok, I'm here" What's the.. yeah... what's the purpose? Uhh... Am I going to use this after high school? (pause) Not really. I mean, math might come in if your going to business but other than that.

Student 3: Not Trig.

Student 1: Yeah, not the math we do. But, Trig is hard. But it's like.. Yeah we got these classes but it's not preparing me for what I want to do in life.

Interviewer: That's fair. Ok.

Student 2: Mines is kind of both. Like some of my classes it'll help out but others it won't because it's not even teaching us about real life stuff. Like stuff that we ain't even go see when we start doing real life stuff.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: I think no.

Interviewer: No? Ok.

Student 3: Because I figure, the classes I take I don't think I will need them in the things I'm trying to do. Umm... but Chemistry maybe, yeah.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 4: I feel the same way. Like I don't like none of my classes except Science. Like I don't understand like Trigonometry, for instance. I don't understand how cosign and sign is gone help me in my career. (students laugh) I just don't understand. But you know, my Sciences that my strong subjects. I think that's the only classes that matter.

Students who participated in the interview showed through this question that the curriculum that students currently follow does not seem to align with their plans for professional careers. Student 4 was able to identify that she was stronger in her Science classes. Her persistence in these classes may not require as much support as Math where the student would need more support from the teacher. Based on data responses, students are not knowledgeable of the curriculum and the relation to their success after high school.

Further analysis of the qualitative correlated with the survey data that teacher relationships show a significant correlation with the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation. There were notable differences in their physical demeanor when the researcher asked the question. However, participants did take time to confirm that their responses would not be shared with their current teachers first. During the interview students repeated the same perception that teachers did not seem supportive to their completion of high school.

Interviewer: Ok. That's fair. Alright. Umm... (pause) So are your teachers helpful and supportive of your plans after graduation?

Student 1: Well, 50/50 because some of these teachers they just want to see you fail. It's like it's my (teachers) ultimate goal to watch you fail right now, right here. And they just want you to fail. It's like, so you want me to fail? I don't want to fail. I'm trying to get out of this school. You like tripping. My GPA going down because of you.

Interviewer: Ok. Alright.

Student 2: Mines it like sort of like hers because they... (pause) I don't know. These teachers, they like got to have like at least one student to fail their class or something. Like they just got to have a list of failures.

(Inaudible)

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: Well, I think it's kind of 50/50. Like they said. Like some of the teachers want you to fail. Like they have to see you fail. They pick on people.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 4: I absolutely agree with what she said. It's like some teachers... I don't. It's like they get a certain kick (laughs) out of failing kids and like seeing the kids not want to come to their class. I don't want to name drop. I'm just glad that I don't take a certain teacher here. You know what I'm saying. He bullies kids. (students laugh) He bullies their grades. He bullies their mindsets. I don't want to get a little bit too deep but I agree with what she said. (students laugh)

With these responses, students' indications supported the following research question:

RQ4. Is there a significant relationship between African-American high school girls and the support of teachers that influence their persistence of on-time graduation?

Four out of five participants responded to the question. The qualitative data analysis shows that a majority of the participants identified that they had a negative relationship with a least one of their teachers. This negative relationship answers the research question that students do not perceive that teachers are supportive of their plans post graduation. Therefore, teachers seemingly could not be supportive of the curriculum beyond their personal classrooms.

Interview data also support the qualitative data on the social media variable. Participants did not support the assumption that social media had a significant relationship with the persistence of African-American high school girls towards high school graduation. Participants' responses are as follows:

Interviewer: Ok. Alright. And the last one is “How does social media influence you towards graduation? If at all.”

Student 1: Ok. Well, social media is a big thing now days. And it's like you see graduation photos, all your senior friends getting to leave. And I'm just like I'm stuck here for another year. I just want to go. Like let me leave. It influences me about this much (holds up hand and squeezes fingers together to demonstrate a very small amount). It's like I don't get on social media that much anyways. So it's like a little bit of influence.

Interviewer: OK.

Student 2: Well, social media. It got like a little positive side to it. Like. (students laugh) It do really because like if you.. sometimes I go on Twitter and I see a little post. People talking about their ACT's or graduate from college and what they had to do to do it. So sometimes it makes me want to strive to do what they trying to do too.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: I'm with them. Because social media isn't that good on my end. Because I see a lot of kids, their parents didn't raise them right and that shows me that I need to boost up and go ahead and graduate.

Interviewer: Yeah. Ok.

Student 4: Yeah, I agree because like she said, there are positive sides on social media but overall, social media is a mess. Honestly, personally, It don't effect me

at all. It don't really give me a positive boost or a negative, you know, kind of down thing. So it's just like, yeah, so...

Based on the students' perception of social media, they did not indicate that it impacted their persistence towards high school graduation. In fact, Student 2 implied that social media influence does have a significant value towards her persistence of graduation due to the picture of senior post graduation plans. Out of the five responses, a majority of the responses indicated an insignificant interaction with social media. However, one of the participants implied that social media did have a significant value towards their persistence graduation due to the positive images posted of senior graduation accomplishments.

Summary

The purpose of this mixed method study was to determine factors that could deter the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation. The mixed method proved to be effective in gathering the necessary data needed to give validity to the study. Both methods used showed consistency with the outcomes for the participants. The quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS software system. Through the analysis of the quantitative data, a test of regression was used to segregate the variables for significance. Teachers who participated in the survey seemed to have a negative perception of social media influence. However, student survey and interview indicated that students do not perceive social media influence to have a negative effect of their persistence to high school graduation.

A quantitative correlation test was conducted to analyze the variables for research questions and some proved to have a significant value while other did not. There were 30 teachers to participate in the study. Teachers who participated answered all of the questions freely by using a link to the survey. However, student participants required more guidance and inquired more about the effects of their responses. The qualitative data was taken by interview. A tape recorder was used to document participant responses. The interview was later transcribed to show common themes that correlated with the data analysis of the quantitative data.

CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

“Life is a competitive race with school being the starting point.” (Spring, 2012, p. 3). For some students, that start point comes with more support for others. For African-American high school girls, they have started behind other ethnicities in their classroom. When teachers are not intentional about their support to students, this study has shown that students could not have the persistence needed to complete high school. With one of this highest dropout rates in the state, the chosen district would require a more intentional support of students. According to the study titled, *Unlocking Opportunity for African-American girls* (NAACP, 2015), as a result of the many impediments to African-American girls’ educational opportunities and success, African-American girls lag behind all other girls in almost all indicators of academic success, including high school graduation rates. Creating opportunities for the success of African-American high school requires educators to examine possible causes beyond teenage pregnancy rates.

Quantitative Findings

Descriptive analyses of the data regarding Teacher Survey are as follows:

- There were 30 participants of the study with a majority of identifying as African American. Of the 30 respondents, 86.7% (n=26) identified as being female. There were 13% (n=4) of respondents were male.
- Although a majority of the teacher participants were African American, there were Caucasian (n=3) totaling at 20%, biracial with 10% (n=3), Hispanic with 3% (n=1), Asian (n=1). Lastly one person identified as other at 3%.
- Of the 30 teachers, most teachers that chose to participate in the survey indicated that they had 6-10 years of experience. Those teachers showed a majority percentage of 53% (n=16). Next, the highest numbers of participation were teachers who had 0-5 years of experience. The percentage of teachers that identified at 0-5 years totaled at 26.7% (n=8). There were 4 teachers that had 11-20 years of teaching experience and only 2 teachers having 20 or more years.
- The participants were asked if they had obtained their teaching training in Mississippi. Most of the teachers were determined to have received their training within the state of Mississippi with 66.7%. (n=20). While only 10% of teachers stated that they did not receive their training in Mississippi (n=10).

Quantitative Data among Teacher Survey

- There were no notable significant findings among teacher surveys. All tested variables were well over the needed .05 value of significance.

Descriptive analysis of the data regarding student surveys is as follows:

- There were a total of 31 students to participate in the survey. A majority of the participants identified themselves as being in the 11th grade with one more year until completion or graduation. Those in the 11th grade covered 32% of the participants (n=10), there were 29% identifying as 9th grade with 3 more years until graduation or completion (n=9); there were 25.8% identifying as 10th grade with 2 more years until graduation or completion (n=8), and there were 12.9% of participants identifying as being in the 12th grade and were currently finishing their final year of high school (n=4).

Quantitative Data among Student Surveys

Significant findings from the regression analysis are as follows:

- The regression test did indicate that there was a significant value with curriculum support and the persistence of African-American high school girls. This was proven with a .045 value.
- The regression test did not prove to show any significant value toward academic achievement, social media influence, and teacher support or teacher relationships. With consideration of Johnson's (2014) study, the results from this study does continue the theme that teachers are not prepared to provide culturally relevant pedagogy for African-American high school girls. An analysis of the regression test supports the findings.

Significant findings from the Correlation analysis are as follows:

- Correlations data did show that there were more variables to be considered in the persistence of African-American high school girls.
- Based on the correlation test, there is a significant correlation with the persistence of high school African-American girls and curriculum support. Participants showed a .057 value of significance.
- Based on the correlation test, it was determined that there was a significant correlation to teacher support and academic performance. This was proven with a .044 level of significance.
- Based on the correlation test, there is a significant correlation with teacher support and curriculum support. This was proven with a .001 level of significance.
- Lastly, an analysis of the correlation data show that there was a strong significance with academic performance and the social media influence on relationship with teachers. This was proven with a .020 level of significance. However, the data take from students on social media influence could be explained because students are unaware of the effects that social within the classroom. Based on student responses, students showed relation to the self determination theory. Student responses indicated that they used social media as an incentive to graduate to contrast the images they were observing on social media. To the contrary, another student response alluded that senior

pictures posted on social media provided her with the motivation needed to graduate high school.

Qualitative Data

- The qualitative analysis of students' interviews provided evidence that supported the quantitative findings that curriculum support does impact the persistence of African-American high school girls. The data taken from this research on African-American high school girls reflect the foundation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Educational leaders at the chosen school setting has not set a culture among students or teachers that is aesthetically welcoming to students in their pursuit to graduation. Curriculum support seems to be a necessity that participants were expecting from teachers in the building. The cultural relevant pedagogy should set an environment of the expectation of graduation for all students. Responses from the participants suggest that students do not feel empowered academically, socially, emotionally or politically. In states, like Mississippi, African-American high school girls could be unaware of the appearance of curriculum support after years of submissive roles expected from females in the south.
- The qualitative analysis of students' interview provided evidence that supported the quantitative findings that teacher relationship does impact the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation or completion. Findings in Johnson's (2014) study that additional support with after school activities provides an aesthetically pleasing environment that

could positively impact the persistence of African-American high school girls to graduation. The black feminist theory supports the foundation that the students of this study have experienced with their teacher relationships. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) suggested that “African American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female” (p. 747). The findings of this study support Collins’ theory that students indicated that teachers manipulate and control students in ways that negatively affect their grades and progression towards graduation. The perceptions indicated from participants allude to the idea that African-American high school girls do not feel supported academically or emotionally towards success in their pursuit towards graduation. These reflections from participants set a negative culture within the classroom that African-American high school girls do not present a priority until they have identified as being an academic or behavioral problem to teachers. Students who show interest in positively progressing towards graduation have experienced difficulty from some teachers from their teachers.

- The qualitative analysis of student interview provided evidence did not support the qualitative findings that social media influence impacts the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on this mixed method research, some of the researchers assumptions were supported while others were not. The study found that some few variables were proven to

significantly impact the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation or completion.

- The researcher's assumption that academic achievement would impact the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation was not supported through the collected data.
- The researcher's initial assumption that after school activity would impact the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation was not supported through the collected data.
- After the completion of the data analysis, there were connections to teacher relationships and the persistence of African-American high school girls. This implies a connection to a statement made by researcher, LaShawnda A. Lindsay-Dennis (2010).

In order to prepare pre-service teachers to be responsive to academic and social needs of African-American girls, teacher education programs need to encourage teacher candidates to acquire factual information about gendered experiences within ethnic minority groups, and introduce developmental and instructional theories that take into account race, ethnicity, and gender in the teaching and learning process. (p. 30)

Recommendations

Based on the data analysis, it was determined that curriculum support could increase the persistence of African-American high school girls towards graduation or completion. Therefore, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

- Curriculum should be relevant to the content for current work markets.
- Invest in professional development for teachers to learn how to support African-American high school girls versus any other demographic.
- Professional development for teachers to cater to the specific support needed to African-American females compared to other minorities.
- Professional development with teachers on utilizing social media as a resource to engage students during instruction.
- Administrators should monitor student/teacher relationships by meeting with students periodically.
- Examine potential hires for teachers who support curriculum support for the advancement of students.

Recommendations for teachers

- Provide a classroom environment that promotes students engagement of African-American high school girls towards graduation.
- Each teacher should be adequately familiar with the requirements for graduation as to support each student with necessary information for success towards completion. Guidance counselors are often outnumbered and requesting additional support.
- Teacher should provide ongoing curriculum support so that students feel that teachers do not want to see them fail rather than succeed.
- Attend professional development on providing effective curriculum support.

- Provide students with additional opportunities to recover low grades rather than immediately inputting low grades.

Recommendations for Future Research

- More studies based on African-American female students.
- More studies centered on social media influence and student achievement.
- Conduct interview with students on the negative or positive relationships with their teachers and administrators.
- Studies focused on the pass/fail rates based on race and gender.
- Examine how teachers are accountable for the number of students that have failed their class.
- Examine teacher perceptions with an interview of their perceptions of curriculum support.

Summary

The goal of this mixed method research was to examine possible causes that could deter the persistence of African-American high school girls. Based on the data, it was proven that teacher provide the most influence towards African-American high school girls and their graduation. Although the students are motivated for different reasons, the result of this study determined that girls who felt supported by their teachers are more likely to complete the 4-year cohort high school program.

For educators, it is important to know that students potentially feel that their teachers are intentionally hurting their progress through high school. Whether it teachers are intentional about this or not, it is important that students feel that the goal for the

classroom if for them to pass the course. Educators must be aware that bad behavior displayed during such immature years, does not aim students towards an unsuccessful future. If the goal is for students to be successful through high school, it is suggested that educators see their class as an enhancement to their futures rather than a barricade. The abuse of such power limits the student's persistence and the learning that could ensue.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Consent E-mail to Principals

Dear Principal:

My name is Latonya Harness and I am a doctoral student at Clark Atlanta University in the Department of Educational Leadership. I am employed within this school district as a 7th grade English/Language Arts teacher, and I am conducting research on Contributing Factors that Impact the Persistence of African-American girls Completing a 4-year High School Program and Strategies for Improvement.

I would like to include your school in my study because of your school's demographics and the fact that your school serves the social demographic that could potentially benefit African-American girls and the 4-year cohort graduation rate. Inclusion of your school in this study will provide valuable information for the research investigation, and I will be more than willing to share the final product with you. The research investigation will consist of the distribution of a teacher and student survey, and student interviews on a one-time basis. There are no risks associated with this study. To maintain confidentiality, the name of your school will be shared and all records will be kept in private and in a locked file. Upon any publication of the results, no information will be included to make it possible to identify participants.

A tape recorder may be used to accurately record information, but will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Participation will occur on a voluntary basis and participants may drop out of the study at any time if they choose to no longer participate. I would greatly appreciate it if you would **respond to this e-mail confirming/declining your school's participation in the study**. If you have any questions about the research you may contact me at 404-445-8595. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Hill at 404-880-6126.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Latonya Hope Harness
Doctoral Student
Clark Atlanta University

APPENDIX B

Student Interview Questions

To establish an environment on open honesty, the researcher will open the interview with a statement for the girls to finish. The girls can elaborate if they so choose. However, the researcher will later move into more open-ended discussion questions for the girls to answer.

Ice Breaker:

1. I am intelligent because...
2. One word I would use to describe myself is...
3. In school my relationship with my teachers could be described as...
4. My motivation for graduation is...
5. After graduation, my plans are...

Open Ended Questions: (In your honest opinion...)

6. Do you feel that the required classes needed for graduation are preparing you for your plans after graduation?
7. What do you use to motivate you towards graduation?
8. Are your teachers helpful and supportive of your plans after graduation?
9. How does living in Mississippi influence your motivation towards graduation?
10. How does social media influence your motivation toward graduation?

APPENDIX C

Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to examine student perception of curriculum, academic achievement, teacher support and social media and the influence it may have on African-American high school girls and the process in completing a 4-year cohort program. By responding to this survey, you are providing valuable information to prepare programs for the success of African-American girls. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher asks that you respond with honesty and to the best of your ability. Therefore your identity will remain confidential throughout the research. If you are willing to participate in this research, please click on the link below and complete the survey. The Survey consists of 30 questions that should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The researcher deeply appreciates your participation.

Directions: Please circle the answer that best describes you.

Demographics:

1. Current grade level:
 9th 10th 11th 12th
2. What is your anticipated year of high school graduation?
3. 2018 2019 2020 2021 I don't know
4. Do you participate in any after school activities?
 Yes No I don't know

Dependent Variables

5. Have you ever failed a required class needed for graduation?
 Yes No I don't know
6. Have you ever failed a state test required for graduation?
 Yes No I don't know

7. Do you plan to attend college after high school graduation?
 Yes No I don't know
8. Do you plan to begin work after high school graduation?
 Yes No I don't know
9. Have you ever thought about dropping out of high school?
 Yes No I don't know
10. In your opinion, do you feel that your teachers are supportive to your graduation?
 Yes No I don't know
11. In your opinion, do you feel your teachers are passionate about your academic success?
 Yes No I don't know
12. In your opinion, do your teachers include classroom materials that cater to the interest of African-American girls?
 Yes No I don't know
13. In your opinion, do you perceive high school graduation as important towards your life goals?
 Yes No I don't know
14. In your opinion, do the required courses for graduation seem helpful to your plans after graduation?
 Yes No I don't know
15. In your opinion, do the required state assessments seem helpful to your plans after graduation?
 Yes No I don't know
16. In your opinion, do your teachers understand what your life is like outside of school?
 Yes No I don't know
17. In your opinion, do you think your teachers are preparing you for your plans after high school graduation?
 Yes No I don't know

18. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about disrupting the class environment?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
19. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about your good grades in your classes?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
20. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about not completing class work?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
21. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about poor grades in your classes?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
22. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about your plans for college?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
23. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about your plan for work after high school graduation?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
24. How often do your teachers speak to you individually about your interest outside of school?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
25. How many social media accounts do you maintain on a daily basis?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
26. How much time do you spend on social networking sites on an average per day?
- Less than an hour 1-2 hours 2-3 hours 3-4 hours
 4-5 hours 5+ hours
27. How much time do you spend on social networking sites during school hours?
- Less than an hour 1-2 hours 2-3 hours 3-4 hours
 4-5 hours 5+ hours

28. In your opinion, do social networking sites negatively influence your persistence towards high school graduation?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
29. In your opinion, how often have you ever received discipline in school due to social media?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
30. In your opinion, do you think that social media has a negative influence on the way you think about school relationships with teachers?
- Yes No I don't know
31. In your opinion, do you think that social media has a negative influence on your academic performance (homework, class work, attendance, testing, etc.)?
- Yes No I don't know

APPENDIX D

Interview Notes

Interview Notes: January 10, 2018

{Start} 3:03pm

Interviewer: Ok, so we're going to go one by one and you can just tell me your grade level and your year of graduation. So I guess we will start with you.

Student 1: Ok, I'm in the 11th grade. Junior. 2019 is when I graduate.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 2: I'm 11th grade. Junior. 2019

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: I'm 11th grader. Junior (laughs) 2019.

Interviewer: Ok. Cool.

Student 4: I'm 11th grade. Junior 2019

Interviewer: Ok. Cool. Alright; so the first five are kind of like Icebreakers. And I am going to start with a statement and you just kind of finish those however you feel, you know, honestly. Alright, so the first one is "I am intelligent because..."

Student 1: Ok. I'm intelligent because I like to think on my feet and be an all around person. That's just it.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 2: Oh, it's my turn?

Interviewer: Yeah. (laughs)

Student 2: Oh. Ummm... I'm intelligent because (pause)... I don't know. Umm.... I like, like... How do I put this? I make sure that my grade is right. And I make sure that I don't do anything bad or involved in anything bad. So I think I'm intelligent by doing that.

Interviewer: Alright. Ok.

Student 3: I'm intelligent because... I try to maintain my grades and stay out of trouble.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 4: (laughs) I'm intelligent because I have goals in life that I'm going to pursue.

Interviewer: Ok. Alright. And the next one is... "One word that I would use to describe myself is..."

Student 1: Amazing.

Interviewer: Amazing.

Students 2: (laughs) Umm... I'll say outspoken.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: Umm... Sweet.

Interviewer: Sweet.

Student 4: I'd say, interesting.

Interviewer: Interesting. Ok. (Inaudible) (Laughs) The next question is "At, In school my relationship with my teachers could be described as..."

Student 1: Weird.

Interviewer: Weird? What do you mean?

Student 1: Like, some teachers, it's just like you just love them then some teachers you just want to ring their neck in like, Ugh!

Interviewer: Ok? Alright.

Student 2: My relationship with them is hard because... I can't really... with the teachers I have now, it's hard to break through them to get what you need to get. So you got to like...

Interviewer: What do you mean, "break through"? What does that mean?

Student 2: Umm... It's harder for me to do the work. Like it's (pause) challenging.

Interviewer: Ok

Student 2: And then they the type to not to just give you a grade then and there. They want you to do extra for what you trying to do.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: Well, my relationship with my teachers is good because like I have a bond with like mostly all my teachers.

Interviewer: Ok

Student 3: Because I think I have had them before (pause) a year.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 4: I'd have to say strange because the teachers have they good days and they bad days. So, they're nice some days. Some days they have and attitude. You be like "don't bring it to school." So I'll say strange.

Students: Laughs

Interviewer: Ok. Alright. The next one is... "My motivations for graduation is..."

Student 1: (puts head down) I can't wait to leave this school. I don't want to be here no more. (laughs)

Interviewer: Ok. (laughs) Alright. So, you?

Student 2: What was your question again?

Interviewer: It was "My motivation for graduation is..."

Student 2: Umm... stay striving for what you want to do. Keep it up. You know what you got to do. Just gone get it over with. (Shrugs shoulders)

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: Mine is to keep pushing until graduation day. So I can get on out of here.

Interviewer: Well, you guys are close.

Student 4: To get out of here. To get out of here. Yeah.

(All participants laugh)

Interviewer: You guys are really, really close. Like eleventh grade year is almost over in two months. Gone.

(Participants agree)

Student 4: I'm so ready to be a Senior. (laughs)

Student 1: It's so hard to take AP English.

Student 2: I know.

Student 4: I'm not gone know how to act next year. I'm really not. (inaudible)

Student 3: May 21, 2019

Interviewer: Alright, and then, "My plans after graduation are..."

Student 1: To go to college, and hopefully major in foreign affairs, and minor in music.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 2: Mines is go to college and maybe go for nursing.

Interviewer: Ok. Are you contemplating something else?

Student 2: Yeah. I might go for business too but I don't know yet.

Interviewer: Both of them together would be really great.

Student 2: I know.

Student 3: Well, mine is to graduate. Umm... go to college, become a physical therapist and minor in business.

Interviewer: Ok

Student 4: And mine is to go to college and major in forensic biology.

Interviewer: Ok. You guys are so smart.

Interviewer: And the next one is, "Do you feel that the required classes that you take right now are needed for what you want to do after graduation?"

Student 4: Oh, I can't wait to answer this question.

Student 1: No, not for me.

Interviewer: No?

Student 1: No, because it's like you have some classes that it's just like "Ok, I'm here" What's the.. yeah... what the purpose? Uhh... Am I going to use this after high school? (pause) Not really. I mean, math might come in if your going to business but other than that.

Student 3: Not Trig.

Student 1: Yeah, not the math we do. But, Trig is hard. But it's like... Yeah we got these classes but it's not preparing me for what I want to do in life.

Interviewer: That's fair. Ok.

Student 2: Mines is kind of both. Like some of my classes it'll help out but others it won't because it's not even teaching us about real life stuff. Like stuff that we ain't even go see when we start doing real life stuff.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: I think no.

Interviewer: No. Ok.

Student 3: Because I figure, the classes I take I don't think I will need them in the things I'm trying to do. Umm... but Chemistry maybe, yeah.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 4: I feel the same way. Like I don't like none of my classes except Science. Like I don't understand like Trigonometry, for instance. I don't understand how cosign and sign is gone help me in my career. (students laugh) I just don't understand. But you know, my Sciences that my strong subjects. I think that's the only classes that matter.

Interviewer: Ok. That's fair. Alright. (pause) So are your teachers helpful and supportive of your plans after graduation?

Student 1: Well, 50/50 because some of these teachers they just want to see you fail. It's like it's my (teachers) ultimate goal to watch you fail right now, right here. And they just want you to fail. It's like, so you want me to fail? I don't want to fail. I'm trying to get out of this school. You like tripping. My GPA going down because of you.

Interviewer: Ok. Alright.

Student 2: Mines it like sort of like hers because they... (pause) I don't know. These teachers, they like got to have like at least one student to fail their class or something. Like they just got to have a list of failures.

(Inaudible)

Interviewer: (laughs) Ok.

Student 3: Well, I think it's kind of 50/50. Like they said. Like some of the teachers want you to fail. Like they have to see you fail. They pick on people.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 4: I absolutely agree with what she said. It's like some teachers... I don't. It's like they get a certain kick (laughs) out of failing kids and like seeing the kids not want to come to their class. I don't want to name drop. I'm just glad that I don't take a certain teacher here. You know what I'm saying. He bullies kids. (students laugh) He bullies their grades. He bullies their mindsets. I don't want to get a little bit too deep but I agree with what she said. (students laugh)

Interviewer: Ok. Alright, the next one is "How does living in Mississippi influence your motivation towards graduation?"

Student 1: Ok, it influences me because I want to get out of Mississippi. Like I'm ready to go. (Pause) People keep telling me "Oh, you have a smart brain. We need you here. We need you to pull up our scores or whatnot." But I feel like if I go out in the world and expand my brain, I can come back to Mississippi and help them out. Like let me leave.

Interviewer: Would you want to come back?

Student 1: Oh yeah. I'm going to come back and help out because I don't want my younger generation to be like feeling sad and all because they don't know what's going on to them. Like I just want to be the youth advisor.

Interviewer: Ok. Cool.

Student 2: Girl, you threw me off. (everyone laughs) What was the question again?

Interviewer: Ok. So it's "How does living in Mississippi influence your motivation towards graduation?"

Student 2: Umm... It influenced me because I'm in different groups at my... Well, in Mississippi. Yeah, I'm in different groups. So it's like girl groups. And we like do different things like in church or something in the outside world. Like we go to hospitals or clean up or something like that. So, it's like something nice to do. Makes you want to go ahead and do what you got to do.

Interviewer: Ok

Student 3: It influenced me to get out because... Umm... I see that a lot of people here they have talent but they do use it and that causes Mississippi to kind of look bad.

Interviewer: Ok

Student 4: Yeah, based off what she said. We live in Jackson, by the way. You know, in Mississippi and they already kind of a... You know people look at Jackson like ratchet. You know? It's like if your graduate from here, you make something out of yourself, that will make where you come from look good. So it will motivate you.

Student 3: That's true.

Interviewer: Ok. Alright. And the last one is "How does social media influence you towards graduation? If at all."

Student 1: Ok. Well, social media is a big thing now days. And it's like you see graduation photos, all your senior friends getting to leave. And I'm just like I'm stuck here for another year. I just want to go. Like let me leave. It influences me about this much (holds up hand and squeezes fingers together to demonstrate a very small amount). It's like I don't get on social media that much anyways. So it's like a little bit of influence.

Interviewer: OK

Student 2: Well, social media. It got like a little positive side to it. Like. (students laugh) It do really because like if you... sometimes I go on Twitter and I see a little post. People talking about their ACT's or graduate from college and what they had to do to do it. So sometimes it makes me want to strive to do what they trying to do too.

Interviewer: Ok.

Student 3: I'm with them because social media isn't that good on my end. Because I see a lot of kids, their parents didn't raise them right and that shows me that I need to boost up and go ahead and graduate.

Interviewer: Yeah. Ok.

Student 4: Yeah, I agree because like she said, there are positive sides on social media but overall, social media is a mess. Honestly, personally, It don't effect me at all. It don't really give me a positive boost or a negative, you know, kind of down thing. So it's just like, yeah, so...

Interviewer: Ok. Well, that's my last question and... Did you want to say something else?

Student 2: No. No. I'm alright.

Interviewer: Alright. So I am turning the recorder off.

{End} 13:30 secs

APPENDIX E

Teacher Survey

The purpose of this survey is to examine the demographics, teacher preparation, instructional strategies and additional outside support that caters to the success of African-American high school girls and the process in completing a 4-year cohort program. By responding to this survey, you are providing valuable information to prepare programs for the success of African-American girls. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher asks that you respond with honesty and to the best of your ability. Therefore your identity will remain confidential throughout the research. If you are willing to participate in this research, please click on the link below and complete the survey. The Survey consists of 20 questions that should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The researcher deeply appreciates your participation.

Directions: Answer the following questions by selecting the answer that best describes you.

Teacher Demographics

1. What is your gender?

- Male Female

2. How long have you been a full-time teacher?

- 0-5 years 6-10 years 11-20 years 21+ years

3. What is your ethnicity?

- Caucasian African American Hispanic Biracial
 Asian Other

4. In what age range do you fall?

- 21-30 years 31-40 years 41-50 years 51+ years

5. Did you receive your teacher training in the state of Mississippi?
 Yes No
6. Do you volunteer with a female support program (mentoring program, church counselor, tutor, nonprofit organization) after school hours?
 Yes No
7. Do you work with female students after school hours (coach, tutor, etc.)?
 Yes No
8. In your opinion, did your teacher preparation program adequately prepare you for a multicultural classroom?
 Yes No I don't know I don't remember
9. Did you learn about gender differences in student learning during your undergraduate teacher preparation program?
 Yes No I don't know I don't remember
10. Did you learn about cultural differences in student learning in your undergraduate teacher program?
 Yes No I don't know I don't remember
11. Do you include gender inclusive instructional strategies to use for girls in your classroom?
 Yes No I don't know I don't remember

Characteristics

12. In your opinion, do you include instructional strategies that cater specifically to African-American girls?
 Yes No I don't know
13. In your opinion, do you work with students to set goals towards graduation?
 Yes No I don't know

14. In your opinion, do you set different goals for African-American girls rather than boys?
- Yes No I don't know
15. In your opinion, have you ever received professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy?
- Yes No I don't know
16. In your opinion, do you establish personal connections to support students towards their academic achievements?
- Yes No I don't know
17. In your opinion, do you build a community in the classroom of supporting African-American girls towards graduation?
- Yes No I don't know
18. In your opinion, do you think the required curriculum for graduation adequately prepares African-American girls for success in college?
- Yes No I don't know
19. In your opinion, you think the required curriculum for graduation adequately prepares African-American girls for the workforce?
- Yes No I don't know
20. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about disrupting class?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
21. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about good academic performance?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
22. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about not completing work?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often

23. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about poor academic performance?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
24. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about plans for college?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
25. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about plans for work after high school?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
26. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about outside influences?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
27. How often do you have individual discussions with African-American female students about interest important to them?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
28. How often do you provide additional support for the success of African-American female students after school hours?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
29. How often do you have behavior problems with African-American high school girls?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
30. How often do you observe social media to be distracting to your classroom environment?
- Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often

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