SECOND-GENERATION AFRICAN-AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF EARNING AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE

by

LAURI SILAS BENTON

(Under the Direction of Anneliese A. Singh)

ABSTRACT

Disparities in educational preparation, postsecondary access, and academic achievement for under-resourced, first-was generation college students, particularly African-American and Hispanic students, are well documented. However, there is limited information about the specific educational experiences, influences, and outcomes of second-generation African-American college students, a significant (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Li & Nussbaum, 2007). This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of second-generation African-American college students who have navigated the path to college completion. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the researcher identified three themes in the data aligned to Bronfenbrenner's (1997) ecological systems theory. The first theme, expectations and interconnected support systems, included three sub-themes: (a) parent and family influences, (b) community influences, and (c) educator influences. The second theme, influence of school culture and climate, included two sub-themes: (a) academic rigor, and (b) co-curricular involvement and engagement. The third, and most salient theme communicated by students, participant self-knowledge and future focus, included three subthemes: (a) racial identity, awareness and class, (b) motivation and inspiration and (c) resilience. Implications for future research, school counselor and higher education

practice, and advocacy are described to inform successful college advising and support strategies for all African-American students.

INDEX WORDS: African-American College Students, Second-Generation College Students, Ecological Systems Theory, Persistence, College Completion, Role of School Counselors, Qualitative

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DEDICATION

The completion of this dissertation is dedicated to my family who exemplify love, patience, patience, patience, and the determined spirit to expect and achieve unimaginable possibilities. I thank God for each of you: Jessie, Austin, and Ansley Benton. Team Benton always!

In honor of my parents and grandparents, Benjamin and Martha Silas, Charles and Nannie Silas, and Elerie and Leola Williams, I thank you for dreaming the biggest dreams, laying the foundation, setting the expectation, and never, never, never loving each other or your children too much! Humbled to be but one generation removed from a South Georgia farm and West Virginia coal mine - To God be the Glory for Great Things He Has Done!

In loving memory of my father, Benjamin S. Silas (1935-2010)

A promise fulfilled.

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Ernest Henley

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But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery." ~ Horace Mann, 1848

During his lifetime, Horace Mann's professional efforts and accomplishments centered on elevating society's intrinsic and extrinsic commitment to public education. Believing in the responsibility of a free republic to frame educational opportunities for all, he worked to change attitudes and policies to favor the depth and breadth of experiences for school children and their families. It was a noble idea with basic tenets evidenced in contemporary educational policy, political discourse, economic programs and general kitchen table dialogue and discussions. Mann worked for more and better-equipped school houses, more years of schooling (until 16 years old), higher pay for teachers, and a wider curriculum. Mann's six principles included: (1) the public should no longer remain ignorant; (2) that such education should be paid for, controlled, and sustained by an interested public; (3) that this education will be best provided in schools that embrace children from a variety of backgrounds; (4) that this education must be non-sectarian; (5) that this education must be taught by the spirit, methods, and discipline of a free society; and (6) that education should be provided by well-trained, professional teachers (Good, 2008).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the context and the population targeted for this educational reform was not remotely inclusive of students of color. Minority populations were deemed less important and were not included in privileged society's discussions referencing societal change or modernization. The foundational premise of the importance of education

resonates universally for diverse populations across the globe. From Indonesia to the Sudan, examples abound of communities collaborating, developing, building and sacrificing to create learning opportunities for their children living near or far and in homes covered by thatched roofs or replete with modern conveniences. Each incarnation speaks to the culture's belief in the absolute value of education's power to be a great equalizer for all humankind. As such, across the globe, there is tacit agreement that ignorance is not bliss.

African-Americans in the United States long have fought for educational opportunities and experienced challenges and successes along the way with evidence of winners, losers and collateral damage. Beyond the opportunity of education to serve as the responsibility of a free society, education conceptually or otherwise is also political. Access and attainment of quality formal education have the capability to impact social mobility, economic stability, career opportunities, and generational success and accomplishments (Krymkowski & Mintz, 2011; Leach & Williams, 2007; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Relatedly, for some, these realities can be perceived as unsettling threats to the size and ownership of a piece of the proverbial American pie. To believe this sentiment is untrue negates the motivations of those who created laws against teaching enslaved people to read or write, called innate intellectual capability into question, constructed separate and unequal learning environments for students, and banned access to higher education. In spite of these and other barriers, African-Americans consistently have set their sights on pathways to educational opportunity and success.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics [NCES] (2016) showed a steady increase in the number of African-Americans completing a college degree. In 1976, African-Americans earned 58,636 bachelor's degrees earned. This number comprised 6.5% of the degrees conferred that year. Additionally, in 2015, 192,715

bachelor's degrees were conferred to African-Americans, comprising 10.6% of all degrees for that year (NCES, 2016, Table 322). Cumulatively, from 1976 through 2015, 2,712,112 African-Americans earned a bachelor's degree and an additional 1,124,053 earned a master's degree (NCES, 2016, Table 323). Moreover, in addition to African-Americans holding a professional degree in fields such as law, business, and medicine, 173,413 African-Americans earned a doctorate degree during that time span (NCES, 2016, Table 324). The NCES (2016) data also point to a significant pool of potential second-generation and other African-American college students.

While there is a plethora of research that focuses primarily on the deficits African-Americans encounter in degree preparation and attainment (Aud et al., 2012; Gavins, 2009; Ross et al., 2012; Schaeffer, Akos, & Barrow, 2010; Unverferth, Talber-Johnson, & Bogard, 2012), there is a noticeable dearth of research examining the experiences of second-generation African-American college students. Therefore, this study provided an opportunity to elevate the voices of second-generation African-American college students by highlighting their experiences and perceptions along the educational trajectory toward college completion. Additionally, this study provided an opportunity to capture learnings to support understanding and action steps for all kindergarten to postsecondary or K-16 students, related to college access, persistence and completion. It is important to note that this study was not designed to negate the myriad of educational challenges and disparities experienced by African-Americans. Conversely, the intent of the study was to acknowledge the broad range of experiences for second-generation African American college students without focusing solely on deficit experiences.

The Disparity Between African-American and White College Completion Rates

More than 186 years after the first African-American college graduate from Middlebury College in Vermont (Wiggan, Scott, Watson & Reynolds 2014), 144 years following the abolition of slavery (Davis, 2014; Sinha, 2016), and 50 years after the landmark decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, 346 U.S. 483 (1954) desegregating schools in the United States (Fraser, 2015; Jackson & Moore, 2008; Wattley, 2014), the country's first African-American, Ivy League educated President, Barack Obama, challenged the nation's citizens to prioritize college completion as goal by committing to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. Accordingly, to recapture the global competitive edge, President Obama indicated that the United States and its citizens must look to creating and supporting an educated workforce through 2020. Fast forward eight years to 2017 and progress to that 2020 North Star College Completion Goal (2009) is considered just a distant twinkle as all Americans continue to significantly lag behind other industrialized nations in college completion at the associate's and bachelor's levels (Fry, 2017). Within the context of concern for the overall lack of progress and collective will to address college completion rates for Americans in general, it is important to acknowledge the profound disparity for African-American students, in particular, to access persist, and complete a postsecondary education (Ishitani, 2016; Knaggs, Sondergeld & Schardt, 2015; Williams & Portman, 2016). Furthermore, comparisons of completion rates among African-American and white college students highlight consistent differences in outcomes (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Due to a myriad of causes, the data reveal that white college students graduate at the rate of 62.7%, while African-American college students graduate at a rate of 45.9% (Shapiro et al., 2017).

Challenges and Barriers for African-American College Students

African-American college students experience considerable challenges and barriers when trying to complete an undergraduate degree. These challenges and barriers are well documented and an ongoing clarion calls for swift, wide-ranging and immediate action by educators, researchers and policy makers. Common challenges and barriers noted include inadequate financial resources, insufficient academic preparedness, balancing work and family issues with college demands, communication issues with professors and counselors, stereotype threat, and cultural and aspirational misalignments (Aud et al., 2012; Gavins, 2009; Ross et al. , 2012; Schaeffer, Akos, & Barrow, 2010; Unverferth, Talber-Johnson, & Bogard, 2012).

There are also current examples of African-Americans who successfully navigated K-16 educational pipeline to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees (NCES, 2016). The children of this group, second-generation college students, can provide insight to frame and extend the path toward college completion (Eberle-Sudre, Welch, & Nichols, 2015; Harper, 2012; Moore, Madison-Colomore, & Smith, 2003). However, in order to access insight about the influences and success strategies employed by second-generation African-American college students, I have felt led to ask, “What are the experiences that influence second-generation African-American college students?”

Influence of Generation Membership

There is a need to learn about and leverage the knowledge and experiences of successful second-generation college students as they are best positioned and versed in the language of post-secondary access and success. Seeking their insight personifies of the adage, “iron sharpens iron,” indicating that individuals can both offer help and receive instruction for improvement and enhancement. This study was designed to identify common themes and glean learnings to inform

success strategies that support the educational journeys of African-American students aspiring and pursuing an undergraduate degree. It is the researcher's contention that second-generation African-American college student perspectives are vital to help parents, elementary, secondary and postsecondary educators, communities, and all students learn about the experiences that contribute to the end goal of college completion. The study also provided an avenue for participants to share their insights and embrace the power of their experiences. Therefore, this study addressed the gap in the research and common knowledge about this student population by exploring the experiences of second-generation college students' college preparation, persistence, and completion strategies.

Purpose of the Study

Common research topics on the educational experiences of African-American college students are often framed from the perspective of insurmountable challenges, deficiencies, barriers, and failings as standalone explanations for disparities in achievement in academic outcomes and ultimate degree attainment (Beard, Stansberry, & Brown, 2008; Petty, 2014; Kirp, 2010; Williams & Portman, 2014). However, there is growing discourse in the literature that researchers should move beyond the deficit perspective research about students of color to help expand knowledge and identify specific action steps to inform measureable strategies for student success. Harper (2012) encouraged researchers and practitioners to use this critical information as it provides an important perspective; however, he also challenged that research foci move beyond a restrictive and prescriptive lens in examining academic opportunity, progress and success for African-American college students.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of second-generation African-American college students to understand how those experiences contributed to their

preparation, persistence, and completion. The focus of the study sought to provide insight into the interactive systems and experiences of second-generation African-American college students on their journey to the attainment of an undergraduate degree. This study can be used as an additional opportunity to prioritize the expansion of the literature examining African-American success and related calls to action for individuals, education professionals, and general society to develop and implement equitable educational opportunities for African-American college students. Building on and contributing to work in K-16 education, education policy, administration and leadership, secondary school counseling and college student affairs, the information captured from this study may be leveraged to directly inform effective training, advisement, and support strategies to increase college degree completion for African-American college students, in general, and first generation African-American college students, in particular (Anumba, 2015; Brooks, 2015; Flowers, 2005).

Research Question

To explore and understand second-generation African-American college students' experiences related to college preparation, persistence and completion, the following central research question that guided this study: *What are the college preparation, persistence and completion experiences of second-generation African-American college students?* Data gathered to answer this research question could assist families, school counselors, K-16 faculty, staff and administrators, community leaders and policy makers in the development of effective academic preparation, academic advising, student support, and retention strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The ecological systems theory (EST) first posited by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1997) was used to guide the design and data collection for this study. Bronfenbrenner (2001) described his

model as “an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time” (p. 6963-6964). The model reflects interdependent reality within the human experience in five environmental systems that individuals influence and by which they are influenced. According to Neal and Neal (2013), each level of the systems is also nested within each other. This nested system, in order of direct relationship to the individual, includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). His later work also evolved to include two key tenets related to time and the interplay of the individual within the dynamic bioecological paradigm.

Bronfenbrenner (1997) posited that human development processes grow more complex over time and therefore require regular interactions over extended periods of time. The first interdependent proposition of proximal processes highlights interactions of the individual’s immediate environment over time. The second proposition indicates that the proximal processes change in intensity and direction based on the source of three forces: the dynamic person, the environment, and the nature of the outcome. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner’s (1997) construct provided a critical framework to explore the interactive, overlapping, and intertwined experiences of second-generation African-American college students along the path of college preparation, persistence, and completion. By examining the interactions of students and their environment, this ecological framework was particularly relevant and useful for this study.

The microsystem and mesosystems examine the bidirectional interaction of the immediate environment of influences for the individual such as family, parents, peers, church, and adults in educational settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). The researcher examined the important microsystem for second-generation African-American college students. The first experiences related to educational exposure and support occurred within a microsystem to set the

stage and contributed to building a foundation for learning and academic exposure. There are many factors that impact one or more of the individual's microsystems. Additionally, the interactions between microsystems comprise the mesosystem. One example of the indirect influence of the mesosystem in this study included a parent's interaction with a faith-based or community sponsored extracurricular academic program.

For the individual, the exosystem and macrosystem are more distant influencers and center on social structures that may impact access to resources over which the individual does not have direct control (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). For students, examples include extended family networks, parent workplaces, and the school board. Students who may aspire to college may not have access to rigorous coursework due to a lack of state or district funding or lack of priority based on policies set by the local school board. However, parents who are transferred due to employment changes may choose to prioritize school quality in selecting areas of relocation. The macrosystem includes the prevailing values and attitudes within a particular social and political setting (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The exosystem and macrosystem provide context for committed professionals to understand aspects of educational opportunity and develop success strategies to impact college completion. For this study, education professionals and other adults beyond the microsystem must be aware of, included, and actively engaged in the process and success outcomes for second-generation African-American college students.

Significance of the Study

In examining the experiences that contribute to African-American student success, educators, policy makers, families, and students representing multiple generations of concern continue to call attention to the challenges that face students in their pursuit of meaningful educational opportunities qualify for, remain in and graduate from college (Anumba, 2015;

Brooks, 2015; Education Trust, 2014; Harper, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). The research on the impact of generation membership on college student success has focused primarily on first-generation students (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Li, Nussbaum & Richards, 2007). As a result, much is known about the obstacles and the challenges first-generation students face when preparing for and attending college (Harper, 2012; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016) but little is known about the knowledge and techniques employed by African-American students who are at least second-generation college attendees to successfully navigate the path to college and degree attainment. Addressing this gap in the research has practical implications.

Moving beyond the deficit-centered narrative focused on African-American students, comprehensive interventions incorporating findings from second-generation African-American college students can provide targeted, culturally relevant, success-oriented skills and knowledge to assist first-generation African-American college students in their quest for college completion (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010; Long, Means, & Payne, 2008; Means, Bryant, Crutchfield, Jones, & Wade, 2016). Findings also elevate the voices and experiences of second-generation college students in the educational and social discourse to inform K-16 educators and policy makers. Additionally, the findings reinforce the relevance and rationale of near-peer advising strategies employed by national organizations including National College Advising Corps, Posse Foundation, and College Possible.

Finally, this study addressed the noted gap with the hope that the knowledge gained would highlight the accomplishments of a significant pool of second-generation African-American college students, spur additional research, and incorporate learnings in interventions to assist first-generation African-American students achieve greater levels college success and completion.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are defined to provide clarity and consistency in the review of this study:

African-American: Black or African-American refers to any person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. For the purpose of this study, self-identification was included in the race and ethnicity standards used by the U.S. Census Bureau and the 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997)

College Completion: The satisfaction of four-year undergraduate course requirements as outlined by a regionally accredited postsecondary institution resulting in degree attainment and graduation (Ishitani, 2016).

College Persistence: Persistence occurs when college students have maintained uninterrupted enrollment credit-bearing coursework to meet course requirements to earn an undergraduate degree (Ishitani, 2016; Ross et al., 2012).

College Preparation: For the purpose of this study, college preparation refers to the combination of formal academic skills and knowledge obtained throughout K-12 educational settings as evidenced by grade level appropriate coursework for required for college eligibility (Conley, 2010).

Second-Generation College Student: For this study, refers to any currently or recently enrolled college student pursuing a four-year undergraduate degree at a regionally accredited institution with at least one custodial parent and guardian who completed a four-year undergraduate degree at a college or university (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012).

Delimitations of the Study

While the researcher sought to examine experiences of second-generation African-American college students for college preparation, persistence and completion, there were delimitations to this study that impacted the scope and breadth of the findings. These boundaries related to use of individual interviews, the literature reviewed, and population studied for this research are included in the discussion that follows.

The researcher conducted a phenomenological study and employed individual interviews to collect information to describe participants' experiences and their attributions to success. Participants included eight African-American undergraduate college students who were between 20- and 24-years-old who have been consistently enrolled at least part-time (9 hours) each semester in undergraduate coursework since graduation from high school. There is limited research focused on this population in general, and the focus of this study was to explore particular insights to expand the literature on the experiences and influences of second-generation African-American college students. Inclusion of additional ethnic groups or students would not support the undergirding proposal to identify and examine the experiences and influences unique to understanding the challenges and opportunities of this population to inform future research, policy, and actions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

During the mid-19th century, education advocate Horace Mann (1848) asserted that, "…(e)ducation then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (p. 2). Mann's (1848) idea was noble in that it required and challenged society to strive for and support parity; however, educational inequality in access and opportunity is a reality as evidenced by completion data and the related achievement gaps for students aligned to race and income. In the 21st century, parents, educators, policymakers, and the general public acknowledge disparate resources and social capital available to students to successfully navigate the K-16 (kindergarten through college) pipeline. However, the concern about inequitable educational experiences and outcomes has not resulted in a broad-based call to action since *Brown v. Board of Education* more than 50 years ago (Wattley, 2014).

The historic legislation resulting from *Brown v. Board of Education* challenged separate and unequal education and provided a target for diverse groups to work collaboratively to ensure access to quality educational experiences for all African-American students. In recent years, with a multitude of data points confirming lack of consistent student progress, there is no one agreed standalone target 'responsible' for ongoing inequitable educational experiences. Barriers have been identified as state and local school funding models, racism, teacher effectiveness, student ability, social capital, real estate development patterns, economic disparities based on race, and waning tax bases. In contrast to the strategy that contributed to *Brown v. Board of Education*, contemporary interest groups are specialized and singularly focused on individual cause

educational inequality (Wattley, 2014). However, a proven and effective approach would identify an overarching goal and organize multi-prong actions that incorporate learnings from student success experiences to inform education, training, and implementation of K-16 direct and indirect supports.

While the data highlight an upward trend in African-American college students' completion rates since 1976, it is important to note that these rates remain lower in comparison to white college students' completion rates (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016, Table 322; Kena et al., 2016). Furthermore, although high school graduating classes are rapidly becoming more diverse, the current educational system is built on a model designed to primarily meet the needs of a white majority (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Woodson, 1998). Informed through experiences and knowledge shared by the studied population, stakeholders must consider the policies and procedures that should be implemented to make sure that African-American college students receive the academic, social support, and resources from K-16 to access, persist, and complete college. An investigation into the experiences of second-generation African-American college students provides insight regarding the contributing factors for preparation, persistence, and resilience attributed to achieve such success. This information should guide efforts geared at improving first-generation student retention levels and graduation rates through a lens of positivity, hope, and encouragement and not struggle, deficiency, or impossibility (Harper, 2012; Ishitani, 2016; Petty, 2014; Means, Bryant, Crutchfield, Jones, & Wade, 2016; Stull, 2016, Unverferth, Talbert-Johnson, & Bogard, 2012).

Much research to date has focused on the educational experiences of first-generation students of color, particularly African-American students (Dockery & McKelvey, 2013; Petty, 2014; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hodges-Payne, 2006; Powell, 2013; Stebleton & Soria, 2012;

Unverferth et al., 2012). These studies highlighted the challenges, triumphs, and outcomes for low-income, under-resourced and first-generation African-American and Latino urban youth populations (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Li, Nussbaum & Richards, 2007) and examined the impact of pedagogy, student-teacher relationships, student-school counselor relationships, race, and disparate historical educational policy on student achievement (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010; Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005; Dockery & McKelvey, 2013). Findings from this study are important to add to the body of research examining the growing population of second-generation African-American college students defined as one or more parents who have completed a four-year degree.

First-Generation Students and Limited Second-Generation African-American College Student Research

A substantial amount of education research has focused on first-generation college students, which consists of students who do not have at least one parent who has earned the minimum of a bachelor's degree (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Approximately 17% of first-year college students are first-generation students and more likely to be students of color (Hurtado, 2007). In the United States, 38.2% of first-generation college students are Latinx, 22.6% are African-American, 16.8% are Native American, 19% are Asian, and 13.2% are white (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, &Yeung, 2007). Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) noted that first-generation students are confronted with well-defined obstacles to gain access to, remain in, and complete postsecondary education. First-generation students tend to be at a higher risk for attrition than second-generation students, tend to have lower first-semester grade point averages (GPAs) and higher dropout rates, and are about twice as likely to drop out of a four-year institution relative to students whose parents are college graduates. First-generation college

students also tend to have lower educational aspirations and are more likely to come from low-income families, commute to school, and attend college part-time. First-generation college students tend to lack familiarity with the college admission and financial aid application process. Vuong et al. (2010) also found that the likelihood of students completing their sophomore year and returning the subsequent term was associated with self-efficacy. Specifically, the perceptions that college sophomore students have about their capabilities have an influence on their academic performance and their persistence to maintain GPAs that allow them to continue in their chosen programs of study and stay enrolled through graduation. However, although first-generation students tend to fare worse than other students on various academic variables, no differences were noted between first-generation and other students were found when it came to self-efficacy (Vuong et al., 2010). For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the influences that contribute to self-efficacy in spite of challenges attributed to academic performance or generation group status and motivate students toward their educational goals.

Beginning in 2002, Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) conducted a longitudinal study investigating unique challenges faced by first-generation college students. The study population included 10th graders, their parents, math and English teachers, and school principals. The analyses were based on four waves from a nationally representative educational longitudinal study, resulting in an overall sample of 16,197 students. The first-wave follow-up conducted in 2004, included high school seniors, dropouts, or early completers. The 2006 second-wave follow-up included those who dropped out, enrolled in college, or went straight to work after high school. The 2012 third-wave follow-up, eight years out of high school, provided retrospective data on college enrollment, completion, employment, marital status, families, and civic engagement (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Their findings indicated that first-generation

students are close to 70% less likely to enroll in a four-year college than students who were second-generation college attendees. Moreover, the researchers also found that first-generation students were 60% less likely to graduate (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016).

Similarly, Hunt, Boyd, Gast, Mitchell and Wilson (2012) investigated the reasons why senior college students cease attending college before receiving their degrees. The results showed that first-generation seniors were significantly less likely than non-first-generation seniors to state that their college attendance and success was actively supported by their families and that their progress toward a degree was, to a certain extent, hampered by family obligations. In their study, close to two-thirds of the first-generation respondents reported working outside of college, on average, 28 hours per week and were using work, personal loans, and savings to pay for more than 75% of their education expenses. First-generation respondents also were more likely to state that financial considerations influenced their decision to withdraw from school. Additionally, from the study, first-generation respondents also were significantly more likely to identify stress, anxiety, and depression as barriers to college success than their non-first-generation counterparts who were more inclined to identify routinely missing class as an obstacle to success (Hunt et al., 2012).

While obstacles related to financial stability, social engagement, and mental health support are not limited to first-generation students, the impact on persistence may be attributed to access to networks for adult encouragement, information sharing and support. Parks-Yancy (2012) found that low-income, first-generation African-American college students generally do not have access to family or neighbors who can explain to them how college works or to tell them how to exploit the career knowledge of professors, counselors, and other university staff. First-generation students are also unlikely to participate in extracurricular activities that could

ultimately improve their career options and socioeconomic position relative to non-first-generation students. Beyond academic preparation, such out of classroom survival skills to seek out, engage and leverage knowledge from well-versed adults may be a key understanding the disparity in college access and completion rates for first-generation and second-generation students in general. These direct and indirect knowledge sharing is important for all students seeking skills and understanding for success in high school and beyond.

"College knowledge," as described by David Conley (2010), is one of four keys to college readiness. Within the framework of think, know, act, go (college knowledge), students must be able to think critically, know and understand how and why they learn, employ purposeful habits to progress toward set goals, and progress successfully through life transitions through high school and college. Conley's (2010) college knowledge key indicated students must be able to successfully address contextual, procedural, financial, cultural, and personal issues. He contended students must be able to successfully navigate contextual issues and understand their motivations and options for educational programs after high school, procedural issues to address the "how to" of the admissions process, financial issues to be aware of the actual costs and the options available to cover identified costs for their desired choice of programs, cultural issues to understand the differences between the cultural norms in high school and postsecondary programs, and personal issues. Finally, students should be able to advocate for themselves in complex environments and be prepared to pursue their interests assertively with a range of adults (Conley, 2010). An overarching question may be, in the absence of family and social networks, where and how are all students guaranteed to acquire this critical knowledge critical to their success? To that end, acquisition of this information must be an intentional, collaborative

undertaking to expose students to opportunities for achievement and patterns and skills that lay the foundation for college eligibility and college readiness.

For instance, Long, Means, and Payne (2008) outlined a complementary partnership program between a thriving postsecondary institution and a struggling high school to facilitate student exposure to both academic skills and knowledge necessary for college preparation. This hands-on strategy curated students' preparation, participation, and support mechanisms as an effective approach as modeled by U.S. Department of Education Trio Programs. Since 1965 Trio has successfully targeted high school and college students with variations of academic support, exposure, and experiential learning opportunities to ensure college preparation and success through capacity building. While generation and socioeconomic status provide a buffer for students, college completion is not a guaranteed undertaking as confirmed by the data. Researchers contend the importance of expanding data points and disaggregating student characteristic data to better understand factors that contribute differences in persistence and graduation outcomes.

DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, and Tran (2011) found that 50.2% of first-generation students completed their degrees, while 64.2% of students whose parents had college experience completed their degrees. The researchers outlined that institutions could better predict graduation rates by examining social, economic, and psychological characteristics of incoming students. This strategy would contribute to predictive accuracy, proactive interventions, and clarify institutional progress in graduating students from diverse backgrounds. Current college graduation rate metrics include race and ethnicity, gender, high school grade-point-average, and SAT or ACT scores. However, they contend including broader characteristics such as generation status, student college selection process, ratings of emotional health, and employment plans

during college increased the precision of the graduation rate prediction. When institutions included the expanded data points to calculate and compare outcomes and contrary to the common narratives, public institutions graduated more students than predicted and private universities, given their students' generally accepted traits of privilege, fell below the graduation rate prediction – a significant contradiction in current reporting data. Indeed, as there continues to be a narrow focus on basic student demographics, there is a need acknowledge the importance of including disaggregated student characteristics and conditions that contribute to second-generation college students', particularly African-American students, path to graduation. The researcher sought to fill this gap by examining the contributing factors and responses to challenges exhibited by African-American second-generation college students to successfully access and navigate college to completion.

African-American Identity Development and Racial/Ethnic Pride

Research suggests that racial identity development may impact African-American students' academic performance. Byrd and Chavous (2009) examined the interrelationship of descriptions of racial identity development, racial pride and academic achievement. The researchers found that racial pride can mitigate the adverse impact that living in a less advantaged neighborhood can have on the educational outcomes of African-American students. In their study, racial/ethnic pride was defined as private regard that taps into group pride (i.e. the degree to which individuals feel positively or negatively about African-Americans and being African-American (Byrd & Chavous, 2011). Accordingly, for students from less advantaged neighborhoods, high levels of racial/ethnic pride were found to be associated with higher GPAs. On the other hand, a high degree of racial identification and pride was found to be

disadvantageous when African-American students lived in a more advantaged neighborhood. Ultimately, that sense of positive regard was associated with a lower GPA.

School Climate, School Culture, and African-American Achievement

School climate factors (e.g., student sense of belonging and relationships with teachers) and school culture have been found to directly impact what Fenzel and O'Brennan (2007) described as "at-risk" African-American academic achievement and student behavior. Fenzel and O'Brennan (2007) investigated the relationship of four climate factors (i.e., support from teachers and school principal, student perceptions of school as fair and enjoyable, student perceptions of peer social climate, and quality of learning environment) to intrinsic motivation, academic engagement, and GPA. The results showed a significant relationship between the degree to which students viewed their school to be enjoyable and fair and their GPA which suggests that teachers play a major role in determining a school's climate.

Similarly, according to Karadag, Kilicoglu, and Yilmaz (2014), school culture referred to the symbols, rituals, stories, traditions, ceremonies, norms, values, mission, goals, and assumptions that comprise a particular school. They also noted that students' academic performance is related to robust and effective school cultures. Their research showed that when teachers view their schools negatively, school culture is adversely affected, which in turn negatively impacts student academic achievement. Karadag et al. (2014) concluded that it is the role of school administrators to overcome such negativity by improving teacher working conditions, allowing teachers to participate in decision making, eliminating distrust, and emphasizing accountability.

Moreover, Sanacore (2004) contended educators who provide a caring classroom environment for African-American students increase the chances of these students leading

successful academic and personal lives. Indicative of a caring classroom environment is a teacher's willingness to persist in cultivating an understanding of and sensitivity to the culture of their students.

School size can also impact the culture and climate, and therefore, the performance of a school. Fitzgerald et al. (2014) compared high school completion rates among white, African-American, and Hispanic students from small, medium, and large schools. Although the results showed no statistically significant differences among the three groups for small and medium schools, statistically significant differences were found when schools were large. In the study, the larger schools were found to favor white students. Additionally, Fitzgerald et al. (2014) concluded that school environment, including school size, may influence student/teacher/counselor ratios, thereby limiting opportunities for consistent student engagement with an academically knowledgeable, caring adult. For the purpose of this study, this is important to note as research suggested a significant adult model interested in or committed to their short term or long term, academic exposure, preparation and success is particularly influential for African-American and low income populations.

The Influence of Non-Parental Adult and Peer Expectations on African-American Student Achievement

Educational research supports the importance of teacher and adult expectations in determining school outcomes. Elias and Haynes (2008) posited that teachers are important in facilitating or hindering student adjustment to school, encouragement, and perseverance. Education has been highly valued in the African-American community, despite a history of discrimination, low expectations, barriers to high-quality resources, and effective instructors, (Bennett & Lutz, 2009). As the data reflect, significant increases in the mean educational level of

African-Americans over the last 100 years continue to be hampered by issues related to access and quality. However, positive adult influences also serve as a powerful common denominator for student aspirations, access, and success (Smith & Zhang, 2010).

For instance, Dockery and McKelvey (2013) stressed the pivotal role school counselors have in supporting student access to higher education. Researchers also recognized the importance of other influential individuals in contributing to the students' educational expectations and experiences, particularly in the transition from the elementary and middle school years. It is during this time that student development expands to highlight the influence of peer perspectives. Developmentally based research literature reflected some surprising findings including that peer reputations and school success directly oppose each other (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Influence is not limited to teachers as parental expectations provide the foundation within the K-16 educational expectations and experiences of African-American children. This pivotal role includes but is not limited to the notion that more positive parent perceptions are related to higher performance in children (Miller & Davis, 1992).

Students must be positioned and academically prepared to take full advantage of educational opportunities or recover from academic challenges or setbacks. Beyond academic preparedness and exposure to rigor, students must be able to effectively navigate the college culture and employ self-advocacy skills. According to Elias and Haynes (2008) while many African-American students would continue their education after high school, even if they had limited exposure to consistent course rigor, first-generation students find additional challenge related to unfamiliar expectations and nuances of interpersonal interactions important to progress and success in college. This indirect or implicit knowledge may hinder student progress toward

degree completion as privileged college faculty may misinterpret lack of knowledge for lack of concern by students.

Collier and Morgan (2008) conducted focus groups to determine the extent to which the expectations of faculty members at a university converged with how students understood those expectations. They found that that first-generation students tended to lack the implicit knowledge they needed to optimally meet professor expectations, knowledge that other students, having parents who had already successfully navigated the college experience, had conveyed to them either implicitly or explicitly. For example, first-generation students consistently told of how they found addressing the implicit expectations of professors to be difficult and frustrating. They contended they lacked the resources required to find solutions that would permit them to improve how they addressed these expectations.

The Influence of Parental Expectations on Academic Achievement for Ethnically and Income Diverse Student Populations

Parents' expectations have been found to have a strong impact on children's academic achievement (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005). Indeed, evidence indicated that parental expectations are more predictive of educational outcomes than other measures of parental involvement (Jeynes, 2007). Parental expectations are viewed in the literature as an aspect of parental participation. Jeynes (2007) viewed parental involvement as the active engagement in every part of a child's development, not only academically, but emotionally and socially, and considered expectations to be one manifestation of such involvement. Fan (2001) examined the impact of four different dimensions of parental involvement on high school students' academic development and the possible differences in parental involvement among Asian American, Latinx, African-America, and white parents using a national educational longitudinal study data

set. The four dimensions examined were communication, educational aspiration for children, participation, and supervision. Analysis of the data showed that, after controlling for family socioeconomic status, communication and educational aspiration had a positive impact on students' academic development. However, the impact of educational aspiration on academic development was more clear and consistent. The impact of participation and supervision on academic development dimensions was found to be small and inconsistent. Fan (2001) suggested that aspiration may be related to various activities and behaviors that have a positive impact on a student's academic growth.

Stull (2011) investigated the influence of a family's socioeconomic status (SES) and educational achievement. Specifically, Stull (2011) examined the relationship between family SES and parents' educational expectations for their children and distinguished the direct and indirect impact (mediated by the school environment) that family SES has on children's academic achievement. The results showed a relationship between family SES and parental expectations. Specifically, the results showed that as family SES rises, the percentage of the parents expecting their child to earn, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree, also rises. Furthermore, the percentage of parents with high SES and low achieving students that expected their children to earn a bachelor's degree is higher than for parents whose students were high academic achievers of low- and middle-SES. The direct effects of SES were greater than the indirect (mediated) effects (Stull, 2011).

Benner and Mistry (2007) conducted a study to determine how the educational expectations of parents and teachers impacted the academic achievement of adolescents, particularly expectations that they would go to school and complete college. Participants included ethnically diverse, low-income urban youths, their mothers, and their teachers. The

researchers found adult expectations had an impact on academic outcomes. Furthermore, they found that not only did the expectations of parents and teachers have an independent impact on adolescents' academic outcomes, but also that parents' expectations, when high, protected youths from the negative impact of the low expectations of teachers.

Similarly, Davis-Kean (2005) investigated the relationship between parents' achievement expectations, parents' education and income, and children's academic achievement using data from a cross-sectional study of 8- to 12-year-old African-American and white children. The analysis revealed that expectations had both a direct and indirect impact on the academic achievement of white children and a strong indirect impact on the achievement of African-American children. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the number of years parents' had attended school as well as family income has a positive influence on the emotional relationship between parents and children and relevant behaviors in the home (Davis-Kean, 2005).

Challenges Facing First Generation College Students

Saenz et al. (2007) found that for more than three decades, the percentage of first-generation college students who work more than 20 hours or more per week during their final year of high school was greater than that of their peers and that this gap has been widening since the late 1980s. Furthermore, they found that more than half of first-generation students intended to work while in college to pay for related expenses. Finally, they found that for first-generation students, financial factors were a key consideration when they selected a college to attend and that first-generation students are more likely to express concern about financing college than their peers.

Lohfink and Paulson (2005) investigated the factors that influenced the ability of first-generation students to persist relative to other students. They found that while grant aid was not

related to the persistence of the latter type of students, it had a significant positive influence on the persistence of first-generation students. Indeed, they found that as aid in the form of scholarships, grants, and work-study increased, the likelihood that first-generation students would persist in college also increased. On the other hand, they found that increases in student loans were inversely related to persistence in college. Thus, as student debt accumulates, so does the likelihood that students will drop out of college.

Ziskin, Fisher, Torres, Pelliccotti, and Player-Sander (2014) noted that many commuting students, many of whom are first-generation college students, do not comprehend the process of college financing, namely, acquiring financial aid information, learning how to apply for such aid, and the importance of submitting information on time. As a result, they lose out on financial aid opportunities and must struggle to make up for the resultant shortfall. The findings of their study, which specifically sought to investigate how students viewed financial aid policy, revealed a gap between first-generation college students' access to and comprehension of the requirements and their assumptions about how to navigate the financial aid system. This suggests that first-generation students may not interpret financial aid information in the ways that are assumed by educators, thus limiting the effectiveness of outreach programs, which stress providing information on the financial aid application process and eligibility.

Saenz et al. (2007) concluded that first-generation college students tend to attend colleges and universities within 50 miles of their home in greater proportions than their peers. Indeed, they found that the proximity of the college or university to home is key factor influencing first-generation college students' decisions to attend a particular institution. Furthermore, they found that first-generation college students are invariably more likely to live off-campus during their first year of school than their peers, which may impede their ability to become integrated into

college academic and social life. First-generation students, unlike their peers, also were more likely to depend on high school counselor's advice and family members to help them decide which college or university to attend. However, non-first-generation peers' decisions to attend a college or university were most influenced by the institution's reputation, its national ranking, and the likelihood that attendance would facilitate entrance into graduate school. Students with college-educated parents or guardians consider a number of factors including academic preparation to find the best fit for postsecondary experiences.

Preparing First-Generation Students for College Success

Success in rigorous high school coursework has been identified as a strong predictor of college success and completion (Camara, 2013; Roderick, Holsapple, Kelly-Kemple, & Johnson, 2014). Saenz et al. (2007) found a persistent and widening gap in the levels of academic preparation between first-generation students and other college students, a gap that is supported by first-generation students' self-ratings with regards to math and writing ability. Nonetheless, Hannon (2014) cautioned that other factors also influence postsecondary success and completion, such as social, personality and cognitive influences. Participation in rigorous college preparatory coursework is dictated well before high school. Often math placement at the transition from elementary to middle school is used to set the short and long trajectory for high school course placement and subsequent college eligibility.

Hannon's (2014) findings showed that academic ability does not guarantee academic success but as Collier and Morgan (2008) noted, success also requires students to become adept at the role of college student. Such adeptness permits students to comprehend the implicit expectations of professors and employ their academic skills accordingly. Collier and Morgan (2008) held that students must possess the skills necessary to understand the university's and

professors' expectations and recognize and utilize the strategies needed to negotiate academic life at the university level. A student who is firmly rooted in the college student role will not have to search out the information needed to determine the best course of action out of many. This exposure provides them with an assurance that they can determine not only what they must do to fulfill the professor's and the university's tacit requirements to succeed. Making this implicit knowledge explicit to first-generation students and providing that knowledge to them before they enter the university would help eliminate a significant impediment to first-generation students' college success (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

Noting that first-generation college students tend to perform less well and face more obstacles than their peers, Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) conducted a randomized controlled trial to determine the influence of an intervention designed to reduce the gap in achievement between first-generation and second-generation students. The intervention consisted of older students sharing their experiences with new freshmen students. Emphasis was placed on the process of transitioning into college, including the challenges and successes, taking into account how their particular social backgrounds influenced on their experiences. The intervention was aimed at teaching students how and the reasons why their specific backgrounds were relevant to their college success and empower and enable students to handle any challenges to success that came their way. The researchers targeted first-generation college students. An intervention also was used with a second group that did not refer to the importance of students' backgrounds. Stephens et al. (2014) found that, as a result of the intervention, first-generation participants were able to achieve higher GPAs at the end of the year and used more college resources associated with achieving college success than their peers. Furthermore, they found that all students, regardless of generation status, were able to acquire a more profound

understanding of the importance of students' background and perspectives on their college experiences and performance resulting in smoother transition into college with decreased stress and alienation.

Research by Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella (2012) confirmed these finding by analyzing data from a national study to determine the influence of proactive education on first-generation students. They found that first-generation students tend to experience a delay in psychosocial and cognitive development during their first year of college. However, when first-generation students are exposed to undergraduate best practices before entering college and immediately engage those practices, the likelihood of academic success and positive social integration increases while attrition declines.

Resilience and Protective Factors for African-American Students

The road to educational success through high school to college can be challenging for many students regardless of background as evidenced by national college completion rates. For African-American students, the barriers are exacerbated by confounding issues related to race and class contributing to decreased success metrics in overall academic achievement and sustained discrepancies between African-American students and their white or Asian counterparts on the number of educational measures. These metrics referenced in multiple studies include elementary reading and fluency, math computation skills, grade level promotion, gifted program identification and participation, access to rigorous college preparatory coursework, state and national assessments, high school graduation assessments, as well as college entrance exams (Fry, 2017; Hannon, 2014; Kena et al., 2016; Prescott, & Bransberger, 2014). Researchers have investigated how students remain on the path despite setbacks and or

challenges to educational aspirations and goals through the exploration of educational resilience and protective factors.

To promote resilience and identify academic achievement strategies for students, Williams and Portman (2014) focused on experiences of high achieving African-American urban youth. The working definition for the purpose of their study outlined resiliency as an individual's capacity to recover from or bounce back from difficult situations. Additionally, the researchers posited that educational resilience can be described as the ability of youth to succeed in an educational setting despite individual and community challenges. Educational resilience is an interactive, interconnected system of context specific experiences between the individual and environmental resources. College students shared their retrospective experiences in a focus group setting resulting in six identified themes: (a) shared responsibility for educational outcomes,(b) being a part of the solution, (c) parental involvement by any means, (d) natural support systems, (e) school counselors as change agents, and (f) community collaboration to raise a scholar (Williams & Portman, 2014). It is important to note that while resilience is often described by researcher Angela Duckworth (2016) as grit and an individual attribute, the research confirms the additional roles and external influences of environmental supports, safety nets, and protective factors provide a critical buffer for student challenges and ultimately contribute to short and long term student academic success.

To that end, researcher Nan Henderson (2013) posited that schools are natural environments for helping all students cultivate and reinforce resilience. The conditions that promote resilience include caring adult relationships and role models, concrete and balanced guidelines, examples success despite adversity, and encouragement to explore and think about the positive possibilities of life. These conditions can be introduced and reinforced within a

positive school climate and provide a foundation for students and educators. Building on the idea that the power of the educational community as a critical partner in student achievement, researchers Bailey and Bradbury-Bailey (2010) also identified effective academic enrichment program strategies that engage parents in student success. Regardless of student background, but particularly for students of color, a positive school climate contributes to academic success. Moreover, internal and environmental protective factors are strengthened when educators expect and acknowledge student strengths to help students see themselves as actively engaged participants in their personal success story no matter the situation Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter will discuss the purpose of the current phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) and the methodology utilized to explore the college preparation, persistence and completion experiences of second-generation African-American college students. Senior-level college students slated to graduate within the academic year and recent college graduates were recruited to participate in this study, to understand the factors, resources, and success strategies that influence their aspirations and attainment of an undergraduate degree.

Research Tradition

The phenomenological research tradition draws from the work of philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and further was expanded by John Paul Sartre and Maurice Marleau-Ponty (Smith, 2016). Husserl's thought is characterized by the rejection of the idea that things or objects in the external world have a separate and independent existence and questions the reliability of information regarding things or objects in the external world. All that a person could be sure of, Husserl asserted, was how such things appeared in his or her consciousness. Husserl proposed that to know anything about the external world required one to ignore all that was beyond immediate experience, thus reducing the external world to the contents of one's consciousness. To put Husserl's theory succinctly, knowledge of anything that cannot be experienced is questionable (Pivcevic, 2014). Heidegger, who was a student of Husserl, introduced the concept of "being-in-the-world", as the world that people live in and interact with and are inseparable from. Researchers are not exempted (Heidegger, 1962). Thus, both philosophers suggested that the validity of any data that researchers may amass cannot be objective. The phenomenological approach to research was developed to address this problem.

The phenomenological research tradition holds that the researcher and the subject are engaged in a transactional relationship in which each constructs and interprets a situation. As a result, the researcher does not merely observe a situation objectively, recording data that is pure in form. Rather, the researcher is unavoidably involved in the construction of that data. At the same time, the approach acknowledges that as the subjects may lack the full understanding of their experiences, the researcher must interpret those experiences.

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study typically begins with first-person descriptions of situations presented in ordinary language. The researcher then engages in reflective analysis to determine the implicit meanings of these descriptions and to get to the essence of the experience as lived by human beings. In the end, this process is conducted to produce a description of a particular lived experience as it has been perceived by those who lived that experience, with an emphasis on the importance of the subjectivity and knowledge of the subjects of a study (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this study was to understand the lived college preparation, persistence, and completion experiences of second-generation African-American college students and to gain insights into the influences, motivations and behaviors.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1997) ecological systems theory (EST) and Spencer's (1997) phenomenological variant ecological systems theory (PVEST) provided the theoretical foundation for this study. Both theories share an acknowledgment of the role of familial, social, cultural, and community experiences in human development (Moustakas, 1994). However, Spencer's (1997) theory is particularly relevant because it adds a phenomenological component to Bronfenbrenner's original theory and specifically incorporates racial identity development for African-American students.

Bronfenbrenner's (1997) theory held that individuals are influenced by the systems they become situated in during their lifespan. Bronfenbrenner (1997) identified five of such systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. A microsystem consists of the groups with whom an individual is in direct contact with and who have a direct influence on the individual's development. Examples of microsystems include family, friends, fellow students, and neighbors. Persons in the microsystem not only have experiences in a microsystem but are also involved in the construction of that system (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2013). The mesosystem arises from interplay between microsystems, such as the relationship between the family microsystem and the school microsystem, each of which can influence the other. The exosystem consists of social contexts in which the individual is not actively involved yet can influence on the individual's development (e.g., a workplace that so consumes a parent's time resulting in limited parent-child interaction). The macrosystem consists of the broader cultural context in which an individual resides, including the political and economic system (Belgrave & Brevard, 2015). Finally, the chronosystem refers to the changes that take place during the span of a person's life. For example, divorce, death, remarriage or illness are changes that can have a significant influence on the life of a child (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2014).

By adding a phenomenological component to Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory, Spencer (1997) not only considered the influence of the five systems on the individual but also considered how the person may see the world. Moreover, Spencer's (1997) theory outlined that these individual perspectives are variants as they vary from individual to individual (Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2015). The contribution of including a phenomenological component with EST addresses the interaction between an individual's perspective and the influence that myriad the social, cultural, and historical forces upon an individual's development. One way to think

about PVEST is that the way African-American youth view the world, their beliefs about their particular situation, and the supports they receive from different ecological systems provide safety nets that contribute to resiliency and success in academics and beyond (Cunningham, Corprew, & Becker, 2009).

According to PVEST, identity formation consists of five components:

- Net Vulnerability level: history of prior experiences and coping outcome;
- Net set stress engagement: actual experience that challenges individual's well-being;
- Reactive coping methods: employed to resolve dissonance-producing situations;
- Emergent identities: coping strategies are repeated, become stable, and combine with self-appraisal to form identity;
- Life-stage, specific coping outcomes: identity affects future behavior and outcomes (self-esteem, achievement, and health. (Spencer, 1997)

Spencer (1997) asserted that PVEST expands on the concept self-organization by placing the individual in the context of broader micro- and macro-systems. Striving for self-organization is key to an individual's self-development and resilience is an ability to engage in self-correction in the face of difficulties. Furthermore, Spencer (1997) contended that an approach that takes into account the unique experiences of minority youths and which goes beyond focusing on the deficiencies of those experiences should be used as an investigative tool.

Study Procedure

To meet the ethical requirements of conducting a doctoral research project, the study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval, the researcher began participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The researcher employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques based on the researcher's knowledge about the

participants and to assist in select cases that were information rich (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Individual interviews were used to understand the essence of the experiences of second-generation African-American college students and recruitment efforts were designed to yield eight participants. Following an initial screening interview, the in-depth interview was scheduled for 60 minutes, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The following criteria guided the sampling selection: (1) identify as Black or African- American, (2) have a parent(s) and/or guardians with whom they lived completed an undergraduate degree, and (3) be a participant within one year of completion of an undergraduate degree or currently classified as a senior level student enrolled in an accredited institution. Participants were recruited through multiple in-person and online channels including email, social media, professional networking, and affinity groups to leverage formal and informal professional, church, and social connections. The researcher posted the recruitment message with a study description, participant eligibility criteria, and contact information requesting participation in an individual interview.

Study Instruments

There were three instruments used in this study. First, the researcher's subjectivity was the main instrument. Second, participants completed a demographic sheet. Third, an individual interview protocol grounded in phenomenology and ecological theory was used to capture additional meaning and insight to support individual and collective understanding about second-generation African-American college student experiences.

Researcher Subjectivity

Throughout my preparations to conduct this research, including the initial thoughts of general topics of interest, research question, and overall research design, my positionality as a college-educated, African-American female with two children pursuing undergraduate degrees is a prominent factor to acknowledge for this study. Moreover, I have committed to pursue and attain undergraduate and graduate degrees which reinforce my commitment to continuing education. Hays and Singh (2012) agreed that qualitative researchers should not underestimate their role in qualitative inquiry and recognize the role researcher positionality within the research process. The researcher cannot be fully removed from the study, which is the strength and challenge of this approach (Bourke, 2014).

I am an educator by vocation and training and consider myself to be a lifelong learner committed to transforming knowledge into affirmative action in the lives of young people. I believe in the reciprocal power of education, in general, and higher education, in particular, to encourage and drive change for individuals, families, systems, social structures, and communities. To that end, I understand that my personal experiences may have influenced the various aspects of my study in the development, research design, engagement with study participants, data collection, and interpretation.

My father and mother earned graduate degrees, advocated for education, participated in social justice endeavors, and communicated that their two children would, without hesitation, earn at the minimum, an undergraduate degree. The path had been laid so that I would benefit from their experience, struggles, and insight. Education, as evidenced on my maternal side, was a significant family business. As a child growing up, I listened to allegories of my maternal grandparents encouraging each of their 12 children to continue their formal education to and through secondary education or beyond. if they so chose.

While college was not the easy road, I and others assumed it should be. My undergraduate experience helped me understand, define, and embrace growth and my responsibility to others the community, particularly children and young adults. I know personally and professionally that there are so many additional individual, community, environmental, and social influences that support and detract from student success, persistence, and completion. I realized regardless of my parents' educational attainment that I was not guaranteed an unencumbered road to success in the search, experience or attainment of an undergraduate or subsequent advanced degrees. However, as my parents modeled the importance of education in their personal, social and professional commitments, I internalized the direct and indirect lessons that became a natural part how I saw and interacted with the world on my way to my the future.

Twenty-five years later, that lesson presented itself again in my decision to pursue and attain a doctorate degree. Initially, completing coursework and requisite requirements was a familiar and easy cycle: class, reading, papers and exams. However, closing the dissertation writing loop has been one of the most challenging experiences of my academic life resulting in a five-year hiatus punctuated by fits and starts to get to the finish line. However, the added variables of career realities and family responsibilities diverted my ability, belief, and momentum to start, commit, and complete the final phase of the doctoral program. This was one thing in my academic life I could not figure out how to get it all done until the final opportunity was presented to remind me of the goal I set for myself.

This personal experience reminds me that I am whom I examined with this study. I fully acknowledge the numerous influences from within and without that can facilitate or tear down the framework for a student's success. My experiences with both steady and stalled academic progress helped me connect with the participants' desires to set and attain educational goals

through realistic and unrealistic expectations for completion. However, before and throughout the process, I was concerned about being overly connected to the topic and the participants. I did not want to lead responses or be perceived as judging their experiences or observations should they mirror or contradict my own understanding or interpretations.

Often, challenges to progress for high achievers are attributed to Clance and Imes' (1978) "imposter" phenomenon where individuals, likely with perfectionist tendencies, are unable to internalize and accept their success. They often attribute their accomplishments to luck rather than to ability, and fear that others will eventually unmask them as a fraud (Imes & Clance, 1978). More accurately, for many women like me, the "superwoman syndrome" (Shaevitz, 1984) is a significant aspect of life in juggling the responsibilities of educational aspirations, career, immediate family, aging parents, social relationships and feelings of guilt when efforts and products are missing or out of sync. In my experience, key people and situations validated the right and necessity to slow down to clarify what is important and sensible in relevant contexts. The individuals, from parents to friends and family, reinforced the importance of self-care and timing to understand and accept that prioritizing activities and responsibilities is not selfish but necessary.

Similarly, the immediate and extended circle of individuals encouraged continued progress based on their knowledge of my abilities, goals and future contributions. While I did not know exactly when or how I would fully re-engage to jump the final hurdle, friends, family, a retiring advisor, and current professor continued to bring doctoral completion to the forefront, which helped me move it from my periphery into focus.

These interconnected perspectives were helpful in listening to the participants' responses and in the coding of themes as shared by the participants, particularly young women looking to

the future planning to find success in all endeavors. Conversely, my doctoral experience provided context of understanding for those who have experienced a delay or diversion from the path to completion but connected with others who planted seeds, pushed, prodded or opened doors to help them along the way. Finally, as a result of my personal experiences as a second-generation college graduate. I had to constantly revisit my thoughts and perspectives related to the journey of students to access and complete a secondary education and undergraduate degree with a variety of different challenges and assumptions due to second-generation and class status.

I understand my positionality shapes, contributes to, and may have hindered interactions, understanding, and interpretation of the major themes and findings that resulted from this research study (Carter, Lapum, Lavallee, & Martin, 2014). To that end my positionality makes me prone to researcher subjectivity, which, as shown below, was addressed via the use of reflexivity.

Demographic Sheet

Prior to the interview, each participant completed a demographic sheet (Appendix B) that confirmed each participant's eligibility for the individual interview and captured information about each participant's age, gender, race/ethnicity and highest educational level completed by the one or more custodial parents and/or guardians. Additionally, the demographic sheet included questions for participants to identify their current major and anticipated date of college graduation. A participant summary is listed.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information

	Age	Gender	Race	Grad Date	School Type
1 Nora	21	F	B	2018	Public HWI
2 Reba	21	F	B	2018	Public HWI
3 James	21	M	B	2018	Public HWI
4 Ashley	22	F	B	2018	Private HBCU
5 Erica	22	F	B	2018	Public HWI
6 Jennie	24	F	B	2018	CC Transfer 2 year Public HWI
7 Cassie	21	F	B	2018	Public HWI
8 Michael	22	M	B	2018	Private HBCU

Note: HBCU = Historically Black College and University; HWI = Historically White Institution.

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol developed by the researcher was used in eight individual interviews (Appendix C). Each interview was digitally recorded and the recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy and provided to participants to validate their responses (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Participant comments and feedback were used to develop and clarify themes, inform analysis, and findings. For the purpose of maintaining the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were used for this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

To determine participant eligibility, the researcher screened prospective participants via phone and email, depending on what was best for each prospective participant. The researcher arranged for a time and location to meet in person or by Skype to participate in a semi-structured individual interview. The researcher reviewed and provided each participant an informed consent form (See Appendix A). The researcher read the informed consent aloud and provided an opportunity for each participant to ask questions or share concerns about the study. Each participant confirmed their participation in the study by signing the informed consent form which was collected by the researcher for recordkeeping. An audio recorder was used to record each individual interview session. Each session was transcribed by a professional transcription service and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher.

Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process to organize data into categories, identify patterns and relationships between the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Data collection and analysis are recursive processes that allow for refinement and cross-checking of analysis and interpretation. According to Moustakas (1994), there are several steps essential to the process of phenomenological data analysis as adapted by this researcher (Figure 1). The coding procedure is outlined below.

The first step of phenomenological data analysis began with bracketing or epoche and required the researcher to set aside prejudgments related to the researcher's experience with the phenomenon. This necessary first step allowed the researcher to view the phenomenon from the participant's point of view (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The second step in the process required the employment of horizontalization to identify specific statements in the transcripts to provide information about the experiences of the

participants. These significant statements were gleaned from the transcripts to identify the range of perspectives about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

In the third step, the researcher extracted the meaning of the texts using quotes and statements and assigned codes using key words. Also, the researcher eliminated irrelevant, repeating, and overlapping statements. The researcher identified and organized significant statements and statement clusters into themes or meaningful units(Moustakas, 1994).

In the final step, the researcher developed structural themes by synthesizing textual themes into patterns. From this thematic analysis, the researcher developed a description of what was outlined in the textual narratives and examined how they were experienced in the structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout the entire process, the researcher recorded researcher notes in a journal and reviewed the entries throughout to support reflexivity (Moustakas, 1994). Figure 1 reflects the steps of phenomenological data analysis and the role of the researcher.

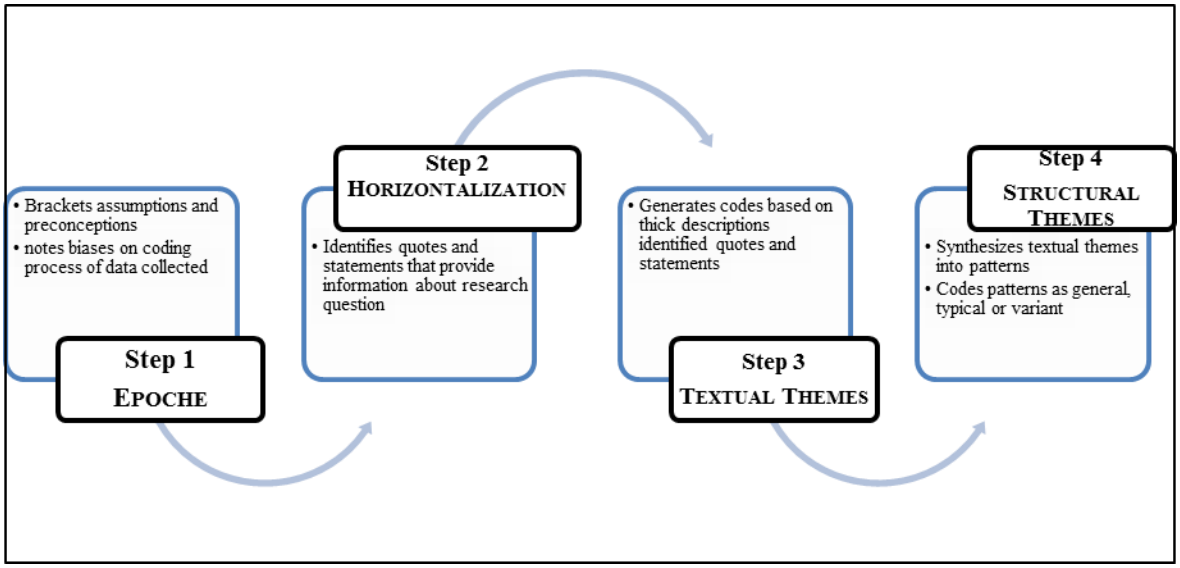

Figure1. Phenomenological Data Analysis Steps and Role of Researcher (adapted from Moustakas, 1994)

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of any qualitative study. For instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four factors that determine the trustworthiness or validity of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, while researchers Hays and Singh (2012) outlined additional tenets of authenticity, coherence, sampling adequacy, ethical validation, substantive validation, and creativity. More recently, Amankwaa (2016) and Kornbluh (2015) suggested that novice and seasoned researchers employ specific activities and strategies aligned to meet the goals and tenets of trustworthiness.

To demonstrate credibility, researchers take steps to demonstrate that the study presents an accurate picture of that which it investigated. To promote the credibility of this study, the researcher put forth every effort to create an environment in which the participants felt comfortable enough to offer honest responses. The researcher provided each selected participant an opportunity to refuse participation in the study before the commencement of the interview session. Only those who were truly interested in fully and honestly participating in the study were selected. It was also crucial that the events taking place in the individual interview were accurately recorded and transcribed. The researcher used the equipment suitable for producing a clear recording of the sessions and checked to make sure that the recordings were accurately transcribed.

Transferability is demonstrated by providing enough detail that other researchers can decide on the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher, within the confines of the study, reported data in detail through verbatim data transcription.

Dependability refers to the ability of a study to be repeated and, using the same methods, produce a similar outcome (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher presented the methods used so that any researcher can replicate those methods.

Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to show that the findings emerge not from the researcher's biases but directly from the participant data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity, a key to meeting this criterion, is described later in this text. Hays and Singh (2012) described authenticity as the representation of the participant's authentic perspectives and coherence as the assurance that the research study aligns to an appropriate research tradition. Sampling adequacy addresses the appropriate size and group characteristics. Ethical validation evaluates the practicality, relevance and ethical practices of the study. Substantive validation highlights the significance and quality of the study. Finally, creativity involves the inclusion of innovation in the research study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Researcher subjectivity tends to result from selective observation, selective recording of information, and allowing one's personal views and perspectives to influence how research is conducted and how the resultant data are interpreted (Krieger, 1985). Reflexivity, the active engagement in critical self-reflection to identify potential biases and predispositions, is the key strategy used to address researcher subjectivity. Through reflexivity, the researchers became more self-aware and monitored in the attempt to control biases.

Krieger (1985) affirmed the idea that researchers bring to their studies a host of biases and points to the impossibility of achieving objectivity. Social research, she argued, is not only contextual but also interactional, mandating self-examination on the part of the researcher. Accordingly, she presented a simple three-step approach to dealing with her positionality. The first step consists of a self-assessment that takes place before conducting interviews. This self-

assessment consists of identifying any prejudices and agendas that she may bring to her study. The second step is assessment during the interview process. This is an intensified version of the first step in which an awareness of prejudices and possible agendas remain in the forefront of the researcher's mind, and their influence on the subject and the research procedure, in general, are examined in greater depth. The third step consists of analyzing the notes recorded while conducting interviews. This process was used in this study to reduce researcher bias.

Although Krieger's (1985) process is specifically designed to address the possible researcher subjectivity issues that may arise in a study, her simple three-step process provided a general and useful organizing framework for this study. The use of a journal is a key to reflexivity and was a utilized throughout the research process. As Watt (2007) noted, recording thoughts on paper when they occur is the first step in reflexivity, permitting the researcher to discover thoughts that they have been oblivious to. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to make thoughts tangible so that they can be examined and scrutinized. Using a journal allows researchers to engage in a dialogue with themselves on an ongoing basis, permitting them to discern what they know and how they may have gained such knowledge. Notes in a journal can be reviewed repeatedly and can help researchers appraise their thoughts, feelings, and biases, all of which may be influencing how they conduct their research and interpret their findings. During this study, the researcher kept a journal during the pre-interview, interview, and post-interview phases of the study. The researcher continuously reviewed and scrutinized all journal entries.

In addition to maintaining a journal, it is also important for researchers to get feedback from peers and an advisor who can help them identify biases and agendas of which they are unaware. Advisors and peers can help researchers view their thoughts and their work in ways researchers would never consider. This requires researchers to be open about their beliefs,

assumptions, values, and positions. Feedback specifically was sought from dissertation advisors, two professionals with doctorates in education, and a licensed professional counselor during this study. The researcher consulted with a three person advisory group consisting of fellow researchers, scholars, and instructors who self-identified as African-American. The individuals, each second or third-generation college students, were interested in the study and provided insight to contribute to the authenticity of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

With this phenomenological study, the researcher investigated the perceptions and experiences of eight African-American second-generation college students whose stories have not been widely represented in the research. Qualitative inquiry can yield a depth of information that is not well represented in the literature or can provide a hint of issues requiring further study. Accordingly, the researcher conducted semi-structured individual qualitative interviews to generate additional knowledge and expand the literature within the fields of K-16 education and policy, school counseling, and student affairs. The resultant data should be considered a starting place for researchers, educators, and policymakers interested in extending the present understanding of African-American educational experiences beyond a deficit model approach.

This chapter includes findings from eight individual interviews with African-American second-generation college students within one year of college graduation. Participants' viewpoints represented both positive and negative reflections and interpretations of their educational experiences at each academic level and also reflected individual differences in how their experiences and influences were interpreted and meanings were ascribed.

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) that provides information about the action or experience and the context to ensure that others can understand or make meaning of the behavior. Use of thick description provides support for comprehensive findings, accurately reflect the participants involved in the study, and assists in replication (Hays & Singh, 2012). Geertz (1973) described the practice of thick description as a way of providing cultural context and meaning that people place on experiences.

Thick description is a strategy of trustworthiness as it provides enough context so that individuals outside of the phenomena being studied can make meaning of the behavior.

This study highlighted experiences and perceptions that merit consideration and discussion of three major themes identified through the transcripts of the participants. The data reflected both the diversity and commonality of participants' experiences and recollections along the path through elementary, middle and high school to college graduation. The analysis of the participant transcripts outlined important factors that contribute to second-generation African-American college students' preparation for, persistence in, and completion of an undergraduate degree. Three themes were identified from the interview data that represent the experience of African-American students in preparing for persisting in and completing a college degree. As the goal of phenomenology is to identify the experiences of participants as they have lived them, the findings are presented via textual and structural descriptions (i.e. the what and how of those experiences as shared by the participants).

Themes were developed using inductive and deductive research strategies and required the researcher to thoroughly and repeatedly examine the data, identify and label relevant codes using the smallest meaning unit, and compare similarities and differences of codes to be grouped or serve as stand-alone categories or themes. The researcher identified three overarching themes related to the experiences of second-generation African-American students to prepare, persist and attain an undergraduate degree. The first theme, expectations and interconnected support systems, included three sub-themes: (a) parent and family influences, (b) community influences, and (c) educator influences. The second theme, influences of school culture and climate, included two sub-themes: (a) academic rigor, and (b) co-curricular involvement and engagement. The third and most salient theme communicated by participants, participant self-knowledge and

future focus, included three subthemes: (a) racial/ethnic identity and awareness, (b) motivation and inspiration, and (c) resilience. Using participant quotes to support the findings, in this chapter, the researcher will examine the themes and subthemes identified within the data and supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory (EST).

Expectations and Interconnected Support Systems

Parents and immediate caregivers are the first level of influence in a child's environment (i.e., microsystem) and their first-person accounts highlight overt and subtle factors that affect their experiences and expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As students grow and mature from pre-school through college, the frequency and intensity of direct parental involvement in students' educational experiences change as students progress toward independence. However, the data also reflect that the scope and depth of parental influence do not completely disappear, yet are consistently noted as key influences in decision-making, solution-finding, and future planning for college-age students in the study. Moreover, as parents' prominence in educational decision making shrinks, the student's circle of active engagement and influence expands to include and rely on peers, faculty, and other non-familial adults to help students navigate the world of college and future preparation for the life beyond the "ivory tower".

Participants often reported that parents and extended family members, including grandparents, actively were involved in their education and set the educational tone within the home by selecting, supporting and advocating for students in school settings. Participants shared that their parents communicated, modeled, and reinforced the priority of educational preparation, attainment, and success. During the interviews of all the participants, there were physical reactions noted in facial expression and tone of voice when describing memories about the expectations and circle of support extended or absent in their engagement with adults at home, at

school, and in the community. A variety of adults and peers played a significant and long-lasting role in the educational experiences of students in this study who openly shared positive and negative examples. The depth and interconnected influence is detailed within the context of the identified themes. Within the subsequent subtheme, relevant student interview data about family and extended adult influence is included to reflect areas of alignment and divergence for and between students participating in the this study.

Parental and Family Influence. Parental and family influence refers to the influence of parent(s) or other family member(s) on a participant's educational and school life. This influence can be explicitly communicated expectation, direct engagement, and advocacy or modeled behaviors as observed by the participants. In the literature, there is a wealth of research focusing on students whose parents have not earned a four-year college degree. The studies consistently investigate and regularly reconfirm the scope and breadth of disadvantages for college access, persistence, and success (Aud et al., 2012; Shaeffer, Akos, & Barrow, 2010).

Conversely, students, particularly African-American students with college-educated parents. are assumed to be guaranteed for success on the road to and through college graduation. This assumption has contributed to a dearth of research to learn about and from legacy or innovative success strategies. Interestingly, multiple participants in this study simultaneously had met the criteria for either or both disadvantaged and advantaged status due to timing of parent(s) pursuit of undergraduate degrees during student's elementary experience school or disparate educational attainment levels within parental relationships. For example, John, a current senior at a Historically White Institution (HWI) in the South's, stated his mom dropped out of school upon becoming pregnant in high school but completed her degree when he was in middle school. He stated, "She didn't graduate from college until the end of my sixth-grade year. . . and got her

GED sometime before that." His parents' actions imparted the importance of education as he remembered making index cards to help his mom and his step-father study for college and barber certification respectively; however, he also recounted their inability (not unwillingness) to help him with his coursework before or since enrollment in college. To that end, as reflected by the data, it is important to acknowledge that documented disadvantage does not equate to impossibility and assumed advantage does not equate to automatic success in earning an undergraduate degree. For many students exposure to adults modeling academic achievement set the tone and timber for personal goals.

Nora's description inferred that parental and extended family advanced educational experiences contributed to active parental involvement in school-related activities as well as reinforced the priority of educational success habits.

> My parents were very involved, probably more than they should have been. But my mother specifically always wanted to be a part of every parent-teacher association or anything she could get involved with . . . . I was majority with my mom for the most part because my dad, he went to law school, so he had to move away a couple of years to get his law degree . . . But he was still very much involved or called all the time. . . . But my mom was mainly the one helping me education-wise. And, of course, the support of my grandparents and I have two aunts who were also teachers . . . Both my grandmother and my great-grandmother were former teachers or were current teachers at the time . . . they were just extremely involved. Whenever I had to go to grandma's house, she always made sure I had my homework . . . . it was a good level of support and knowing that and just instilling in me that homework and school always comes first, before social, or

> anything like that . . . . So that was a huge influence for them specifically just being there through every process of my school [experience].

Reba, however, indicated that. while her mother did not explicitly push her educationally, she did have discussions that pertained to her education: “My mother never said –‘Go, do the AP class,’ but she was never opposed to it…there was always conversations, I’m pretty sure definitely during senior year of high school about college. It came from my mom.”

John downplayed the role of his parents’ direct engagement on his daily educational experiences given their delayed educational attainment. However, he noted that they would offer advice and words of encouragement and indications of support if he decided to attend college:

> My mother worked when I was growing up. But she knew that I could [excel academically] -- I was always the independent kid. My mother spent the time that she had working with my sister knowing that I will be fine. While in the middle of returning to college to get her degree, I remember them saying, ‘You don’t wanna be 30 doing this. sitting on a bed with your child and getting them to help you study. You know, if you want to go to school, you know you can go to school . . . . I'm not going to pressure you to do anything you don’t want to do . . . I’m going to support you and help you out to go, but I’m going to need you to have a plan if you’re not going to go to school. What is your plan to make sure you’re not out here living check to check?’

Conversely, Ashley spoke of the active and motivational encouragement she received from her parents. “My parents always encouraged me, ‘Do not dumb yourself down for anybody, don’t. Be proud of your intelligence and be proud of who you are’.” Similarly, Erica, a Nigerian born student, also spoke of her parents’ encouragement while noting that a standard had been

established for her and her relatives. She reflected on the influence and expectation to continue or build upon the legacy as a second-generation college student.

> My stepmother…influenced me to keep going and not stop. At the same time, she was completing her masters, too…My parents…hold a standard for us, and I have so many family members who look at the children and [compare and] see what they've all accomplished and things like that. Not necessarily that was pressure, but it wasn't ever, 'Oh no, I'm not going to college.' That thought never crossed my mind.

Michael also affirmed that his parents were very involved and supportive of his education. He stated, "My parents are supportive and were pretty helpful in my education choosing the best schools/systems that they could have me in when we did move."

Cassie also noted that the direct influence of immediate and extended family members in the prioritization her education experiences. Her comments made the implicit connection of how college-educated parents or extended family members directly communicated their expectations for her. "[My parents] were there - very present…. I have a total of three grandmothers, and they're all educated. They are very old school and wanted my main priority to be education" she stated. Similarly, Ashley reported that her parents, "were very active in our educational attainment, very active in school like PTA stuff. When had that very big problem, my mom will come to the school, she won't call the school, she will come to the school, in order for her to know [directly] what happened."

Community Influences. While parental expectations provide significant influence of educational expectations and experiences of African-American children, their pivotal role is augmented by the direct and indirect support of the community in achieving higher academic performance (Miller & Davis, 1992). Data reflect consistent increases in the mean educational

level of African-Americans over the last 100 years, and the individual and collective influence of adults upon the educational aspirations, student opportunity, and achievement continues to highlight the positive common denominator for student outcomes (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). Educational research consistently supports the importance of teacher and adult expectations in determining school outcomes. To that end, steps taken by individuals and groups, in formal and informal ways, reinforce multiple messages to students about their value.

Participants indicated varied individual and organizational community influences along their academic journey in elementary through high school. including those related to church, unique or ad hoc opportunities, and unstructured experiences leveraging an expanded support system knowledgeable about college preparation and completion. However, for their collegiate years, student influences and activities expanded beyond primarily church references to include those experiences such as structured and unstructured advisement resources including mentorship, study abroad, internships and special program opportunities as examples of recent influences of persistence in college and the attainment of an undergraduate degree.

Most prominent responses in the years leading to college centered on church-related activities and interactions. Nora shared that her church had “recognition or honor roll Sundays to highlight students and let the congregation know the progress they're making.” Reba also commented:

> So the youth ministry, the lady who’s like in charge, Ms. Belinda, she was big on like college. As we grew up, my graduating class, she wanted to know where we all were going and stuff like that. She wanted us all to go to some schools; she wanted us all to go to her college.

Similarly, Michael shared that the reason he attended his college was based on a passing comment by a church member.

> The whole reason why I was at X College even was because (I don't even know the lady to be honest) . . . just one day after service, [she said], ‘You know, you look like an X College Man to me’, and I [asked], ‘What is that?' And my mom [said], ‘Oh, actually you know that’s a good school. You should check it out.’

The church community was an influence on Ashley as well, as she described herself as “growing up as a Christian girl” and reflected that her church was the number one community influence that supported her goals and preparation for college. “They encouraged me much like my parents . . . making sure they were looking out for you . . .financially . . . morally . . . and making sure that you are okay.”

Participants’ reflections did not include a wealth of detail about their specific beliefs and religious influences. However, each student referenced having faith, drawing strength from his or her faith, understanding that opportunities, achievements, challenges, and attributes were gifts from God not to be squandered or taken for granted. Moreover, in their reflections, they were exposed to religion early in the form of parochial elementary schools and church attendance and related participation in church-sponsored activities with other believers.

Participants’ experiences mirrored the sentiment of an often quoted phrase, “It takes a village to raise a child.” To that end, students described formal and informal experiences created or facilitated by individuals and groups who were a part of a circle of influence. Nora, described the individual influence of her pediatrician.

> She would always ask me questions just about school, and if I thought about college and what do, I want to be when I grow up. So just seeing her and how she interacted with

> patients. And then she actually let me volunteer at her office for a couple of hours during the summer each week.

As a longtime member of a track team, Ashley described the influence of the group as,

> a community of women and men who were like really encouraging. We became a family after…spending years running. [And committed to each other since high school] 'once you guys get in college… make sure to check in every once in a while to make sure everything is good.

However, all community support and influence is not based on personal relationship and interaction. Structure and opportunities available within the general school community are influential in student exposure to and support for college knowledge and aspirations for all students despite the perceived advantage of being second-generation African-American college students. For instance, Erica shared:

> We would have college fairs and things like that. . . It was more so just my high school community that helped me apply for school and what to look for and all the factors before deciding on what school to go to. And then my stepmom's friends, they would give me advice on what schools to look out for, what schools would be best for the major that I was going into.

Educator Influences. Elias and Haynes (2008) posited that teachers are important in facilitating or hindering student adjustment to school, encouragement, and perseverance. Jennie described herself as a slow learner who needed more academic assistance and support in learning within the classroom than she received. Often ridiculed she "…didn't trust teachers" due to multiple negative interactions with regular education and special education teachers in various K-12 settings. As she struggled academically and socially, "… teachers became less

helpful…they weren't patient, and they weren't understanding." These experiences with teachers contributed to negative circular thinking, poor self-image, and frustrating self-fulfilling prophecy. Jennie did not want to ask questions to avoid additional attention; however, not asking questions put her further behind in processing necessary information and understanding assignments. Ashley also highlighted the influence of negative teacher interactions related to her educational experience, pointing out the role of race. "…I saw teachers who didn't expect much out of the 10 to 15 black kids within whole gifted department . . . I was confident in my abilities [but when] you're impressionable, it can waiver you . . .[make you] second-guess [yourself]," she explained.

Matthew revealed a similar experience with "one teacher that I felt like it was a little racist side who stereotyped, me I guess you could say." He noted that the teacher attempted to "discourage me from taking the AP exam, saying, 'Don't waste your money', things like that. I still took it. I still got my credit for my college credit, so that was kinda 'in your face!" James shared a combination of experiences with school personnel. However, he noted personal connections and positive experiences with teachers, an administrator, and school counselors.

> …in high school, I did have some teachers who really looked out for me. I had good teachers. I had really great teachers who cared about their students. Having Ms. Pena in high school [was a positive influence]. She was my counselor for my whole high school thing. She like told me her story…her upbringing up with her parents, having to leave Cuba. Them trying to give her a better life…so, I kinda compared my life to her story. So I felt like it was good [to know and use the experience to motivate me.]

When students described educators at they identified as helpful, the characteristics highlighted adults who take time, expressed a personal interest in the student, provide a space for

encouragement and accountability, and communicated respect in their presence and on their behalf. James shared, “In high school, [teachers and administrators] don’t take time to talk to you…they just try to get you the curriculum.” In the absence of an appointment with his school counselor but in need of respite from class, James maintained he, “would just come in and sit down. And we just chilled out there.” In affirming the importance of positive teacher expectations and support throughout the educational trajectory, Cassie identified that her English professor was instrumental in her participation in a study abroad program in Jamaica.

> He just really believed in me, and I guess that was so important, and he still has an impact on my life… [and] my journalism professor really believed in her students…Every time I came up to her for a project, she was just so energetic about the situation…That really helped me.

Influence of School Culture and Climate

A recurring theme throughout the literature on school achievement and effective educational leadership strategies highlights the importance of a clearly communicated vision that is reinforced in signs, symbols, and behavior (Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2007). To that end, while administrative leaders are generally tasked with setting and maintaining standards that facilitate a positive, productive, and accountable learning environment, stakeholders including school counselors, teachers, students, parents, and community contribute to or detract from school climate and culture through direct or indirect action, assumption and perception. The culture of the school contributes to a climate where values and beliefs are aligned, prioritized and embedded in the fabric of all aspects of the school community.

School culture and climate are the sum of perceptions and emotions attached to the school as held by students, faculty, administrators, parents, and the community at large. Second-

generation African-American college students in this study consistently referenced diverse and generally supportive school environments throughout all educational settings and levels with access to basic and accelerated academic, enrichment and extracurricular offerings including academically gifted and honors programs and classes, sports and academic enrichment clubs, and examples of experiential learning. These opportunities were directly aligned to the priorities shared by parents about the importance and priority of educational opportunity.

While participant observations did not directly attribute the availability of such opportunities solely to their second-generation college student status, review of supplemental statements and actions of their engaged and active parents and families reinforce that selected school settings, course options, opportunities, and participating activities were not by happenstance or luck. There was a pattern of school selection and involvement that included expectation and opportunity for rigor and challenge modeled and orchestrated by parents to ensure that their children were immersed in and consistently exposed to educational challenge opportunities and achievement.

Michael reinforced that, despite multiple job related family moves, his parents “were pretty helpful in my education and . . . chose the best school system that could possibly have me in when we moved”, resulting in enrollment at top rated, public and parochial college preparatory schools that provided a foundation for his enrollment in a top rated Historically Black College and University (HBCU) to pursue a major in engineering like his father. Graduate school for his parents and their subsequent job relocations resulted in the family living in locales in the Pacific Northwest, Southern California, the Midwest, and the Southeast. In each of these settings, school quality and educational rigor guided the home purchase. The research indicates that African-American parents’ involvement, regardless of income level, positively influences

student academic achievement and reflects their position that educational attainment is a viable means to a successful educational future for their children (Beard, Stansberry & Brown, 2008; Jeynes, 2007).

In addition to the critical influence of parental involvement, Sanacore (2004) contended that educators who provide a caring environment that fosters learning also increase the chances of African-American children to lead successful academic and personal lives. This requires educators to develop an understanding of and a sensitivity to their students" culture (Sanacore, 2004). A consistent culture of success is tantamount for underrepresented student populations, in general, and African-American students, in particular, as evidenced by commitment to academic rigor and meaningful connection between the learner and educator to change mindsets and heart-sets (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Second-generation African-American college students in this study spoke to specific examples of nurturing and encouraging school climates and learning cultures in every setting elementary through college. Study participants were able to readily identify names and situations with details as crisp and clear from long ago to their most recent collegiate semester highlighting the ongoing influences upon student success and achievement.

Academic Rigor. In response to an interview question to describe their K-16 school, some participants chose to primarily describe the physical appearance of the school buildings while others significantly focused their discussions on academic rigor, course content, teacher quality, and interpersonal relationships. The participants provided diverse descriptions of the multiple elementary, middle and high schools they attended in various locales of the United States due to family relocations, job reassignments, natural disasters, or other undisclosed circumstances. In providing examples of primary and postsecondary educational experiences,

second-generation African-American college students also provided a “breadcrumb trail” leading to college eligibility, exposure, and participation in rigorous coursework.

Each participant shared vivid and assorted recollections of the academic rigor encountered during their elementary, middle and high school experiences. Nora, a very engaged and personable college senior at a public HWI in the South, provided great detail about her experiences and influences throughout her educational journey and compared her early instructional experiences in both private and public elementary school settings, noting that in the private school setting:

> I can remember having a lot of [homework] assignments that were just very detailed to our curriculum, so whatever subject we were learning usually the assignment was very much correlated….We learned a lot of different things, different languages, and not just Spanish.

While Nora remembered a challenging and relevant academic environment, Erica, a fifth year senior originally from Nigeria, reported that her elementary school experience “wasn’t that challenging for me because the curriculum …wasn’t as rigorous” as her previous school. Similarly, John indicated, “The stuff wasn’t hard…I didn’t have a more difficult time like some of my associates.” These descriptions highlight the difficulty in developing and ensuring that all students are exposed to and benefit from coursework that is meaningful and developmentally appropriate. Additionally, it is disconcerting as these students reported not being challenged in the formative years of school. For these students, whose background was grounded in educational engagement and expectations for academic growth and opportunity, it is important to note that students in the study were able capture the essence of their academic experience their academic strengths and unique needs in both traditional education and special education settings.

Participants discussed their exposure to academic rigor as a natural occurrence, not as an exceptional feat they accomplished or that required special recognition or detailed explanation or insights. Michael indicated that his first elementary school in the Midwest had “MacBook computers” and that the subsequent elementary and middle schools he attended in the Pacific Northwest “offered different language courses” beyond Spanish, including “Japanese or Chinese.” He noted shared that “keeping up with the coursework wasn’t hard.” The student’s ‘matter of fact’ approach and lack of deeper descriptions about the courses and programs they participated in may have been influenced by assumptions that given the topic of the study the researcher had or should have familiarity with educational college preparatory course work and options or it could be the internalized understanding and instilled that this is just what smart, gifted, college-bound kids do. In the middle and high school years, many participants referenced eligibility for, access to, and enrollment in accelerated, gifted and talented education, honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Such specialized coursework often began during middle school and carried over into the high school curriculum and lay the necessary foundation for college admission eligibility and achievement.

In describing the secondary academic experiences, the students did not note them as something out of the ordinary or an exceptionally different course of action within their primary or secondary school community. The standard was set long ago and the education environments coupled with parent and caregiver expectations and support created a framework for student progress and achievement. For example, Cassie, a current dean’s list scholar indicated, “I’ve been an honor student since middle school.” Nora's high school “was a science and technology high school…so you had to test in to get in our program.” Similarly, Erica, Ashley, Reba also took AP classes and several honors courses. Ashley additionally indicated that during high

school she “never had a CP [College Prep] class except for my electives…but gifted classes were very hard.” John recounted his experience that despite being in honors and AP courses, “I don’t feel like I was challenged in high school…I would skip for two, three days and still show up and take the test and make an A on it and do the same thing again.” In their observations, students did not recount detailed daily experiences beyond their enrollment and participation in rigorous coursework; however, they were able to clearly connect the specific opportunities that resonated with a notion of rigor and appreciated challenge.

Of the reflections related to high school courses, specific day-to-day experiences were not included by the students. While the students did not provide deep or thorough observations about their high school courses, all students directly acknowledged the availability of and participation in rigorous coursework such as AP, honors, or gifted, which confirmed standing academic achievement and college completion research of the importance of basic and academic skills and knowledge for all students (Conley, 2010).

Additionally, students did not specifically identify their high school coursework as a critical factor in their college experience beyond admission. The students’ consistent exposure to and participation in rigorous coursework supports the research that indicates high school GPA and participation in rigorous college preparatory curriculum are strong predictors of college success and completion. Most students in the study were completing degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM), which may be linked to the academic foundation while in high school. Nonetheless, the students who completed challenging courses, participated in honors or gifted programs in high school, and actively engaged in extracurricular activities also were successfully completing advanced level degree requirements at the collegiate level. As such, the connection between academic rigor and completion is best evidenced by the students’

acknowledgement of their recognitions as consistent members of the dean's list, honors programs, and dual degree programs and most importantly their impending college graduation.

Co-Curricular Involvement and Engagement. While all respondents reported participating in or exposure to various degrees of academic rigor and challenge in the classroom throughout their secondary and postsecondary experiences, seven of the eight participants provided specific references to K-12 extracurricular or co-curricular activities, including school leadership, clubs, and athletics, and all providing multiple examples of significant involvement at the collegiate level. Their activities included serving as class vice president, participation in a youth leadership program, debutante program participation, and involvement in the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) business club, National Honor Society, National Spanish Honor Society, Environmental Club, Black Student Association, and track, cross country, volleyball, and/or football teams. Additionally, two students also reported holding regular part-time jobs while attending high school.

The pattern co-curricular involvement and continued participation in college reflected students individual interests related to career, majors and fueled their personal growth and need to contribute to and benefit from the interactions. Building on Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement, more recent research reinforces that involvement in co-curricular activities such as student organizations, leadership positions, and activity in campus residence halls has a positive correlation with collegiate retention and academics (Kuh & Pike, 2005). Similarly students in this study indicated consistent involvement in co-curricular activities at the collegiate level. For example, Cassie reported ongoing involvement in many activities, including National Business Honors Society, Beta Gamma, and four other collegiate organizations. She also held an internship and stated, "Long story short, I'm very involved. It has really helped me, and I have

gained a lot of connections and worked with people from all over." Because of the positive aspects of co-curricular involvement on student retention and graduation, universities encourage students to become involved. These students in this study exemplified what involvement looks like for second-generation college students with a history of engagement with parents and significant others, as well as with their personal involvement modeled by parents and significant others.

James reported being a mentor advocate since his sophomore year in college, as such a program helped him transition to college when he was an entering freshman. "As African-Americans, we come into colleges and there's a lot of stuff that we don't know and its's not like it's because we're stupid; it's just because that information was not around us growing up." He described using his acquired social capital due to his campus involvement to advocate and advance opportunities for others. He realized that he could step in and support other African-American students, "when they needed something" because he had the "reach for certain things" that the students did not. James advised his mentees, "They might not get it for you, but if I [ask] they might get it for you." Students in the study understood that these experiences through their participation on campus contributed to their expanded knowledge of self and positioned them for life after college. Erica shared, "When you go to college, there are so many different opportunities, different people around you…get involved in different organizations, put yourself out there, meet new people because you make connections that way…that sets you up for later in life."

Participant Self-Knowledge and Future-Focus

Throughout the transcripts, participants made references to academic and social strengths as well as the challenges they had to overcome to access, persist, and succeed in college. While

not a formal definition, for this study, these descriptors are categorized within the final theme of self-knowledge and future and support three subthemes of (a) racial identity and awareness, (b) motivation and inspiration, and (c) resilience to access and persist in college. Student discussions and statements included experiences at the K-12 and collegiate levels and were significantly focused on thoughts about, connections to, and specific steps to attain and surpass their academic goals. Their experiences as shared highlighted that they were fully self-aware within the context of their educational and personal experiences as well as comfortable, confident and excited about their commitment to forward progress and future success.

Racial Identity and Awareness. In examining experiences shared by second-generation African-American college students, it is clear that their parents' educational attainment did not exempt them from negative racially motivated or influenced comments, expectations, or encounters. Parents of second-generation college-students may have attempted to pre-empt negative experiences by enrolling students in early educational settings that encouraged knowledge of black history and immersed students in religious based, racially homogenous student and teacher population. Nonetheless, Jennie recounted, "I went to a racist private Christian school," in response to one of the interview questions asking her to describe her K-12 school.

Notably, all of the participants referenced school and teacher demographic makeup in response to this question. Nora, for example, noted that she attended "a black private elementary school…[where] they spoke a lot about black history, which I know a lot of public schools shy away from." Reba remembered her teachers by name and ethnicity. She stated, "My favorite kindergarten teacher, she was white… Miss Johnson… might have been like Dominican…. My high school was predominately White, very, very, very White." Other participants provided

examples of racially-influenced and/or offensive interpersonal interactions, experiences, and conversations. Participants told of incidents they experienced along their educational journey that they attributed to racism and stereotypes of African-American students. Ashley reported that moving from a "very Black, very religious" school "was a big culture shock for me." Ashley felt that her teachers treated her differently:

> [I was one of] maybe five or six of us in middle school and gifted [program classes] differently. Just overall I could tell I was far surpassing their perception of my ability. They knew I was in gifted but it's like they questioned, 'Okay, why are you, how are you here? It made me second-guess myself, to an extent.

Study participants' assessment of racial identity in college centered on personal development and expansion of their understanding about racial interactions. Ashley summarized the journey of her racial, ethnic, and gender self-discovery and shared the following:

> [I was] taking on [the] position of the people around me who were placing statements and labels on me and I really didn't know who I was [in high school]. [In college] I took some African-American studies classes and…and started [understanding who I am] like really as a woman…as a black person in America and as a black woman… and also a black and Latina woman….It's been so awesome for me. College has really elevated that [self-knowledge] for me!

This level of introspective racial awareness and appreciation was not evident in students' recollections from early years in elementary through high school. While many students detailed racial demographics of K-12 school setting, peers, and teachers, students did not communicate a depth of personal understanding or connection related to racial identity until their reflections through the lens of their college experience and exposure.

> As I look back on it now, the interactions were stereotypical. [A peer used to call her Sheneneh.] I didn't notice [the racial identities ascribed] in the moment but now remembering it, I could easily go and knock someone out. High school was very, very, very filled with micro-aggressions and I didn't [have] that epiphany until maybe a year or two ago. I never really thought about it until after I started taking African-American Studies classes and…started expanding my knowledge.

It is important to note that for Ashley and students like her, the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender compound the experiences of discrimination due to the realities of multiple minority identities. The process of self-discovery is critical to personal development and success in identifying and combatting the overlapping influence of racism and sexism. The key is a positive sense of self reinforced by a supportive network of family, friends and professionals within a learning environment that encourages self-understanding, personal growth and development

Motivation and Inspiration. The participants identified a diverse set of factors that positively contributed to their educational journey, including but not limited to immediate family, extended family, and community. Participant responses were often simultaneously global, individual, and future-focused when it came to the source and maintenance of motivation. As second-generation college students, many reflected on internal drive to succeed, responsibility to continue the legacy, expectation of experience a full and meaningful life, serve as a role model to others, and not let their parents and family members or others down. "My parents did it, and now I have little cousins looking up to me," Nora shared. Summarizing these motivating factors would seem like a weighty burden to shoulder; however, all students communicated a communal expectation and a communal opportunity of support and encouragement that speaks to an African adage, "Many hands make light work." The sense of

responsibility second-generation college students described in their responses was framed with a sense of opportunity, new experiences, and positivity for the future. For instance, Michael shared:

> I have always been kinda self-driven, but after high school once I realized how the world works…I realized at least I have the opportunity to get that and that's once you are educated, nobody can take that away….God has blessed me with the able mind to get me to school. So I'd either utilize it and we have come to believe or at least be able to help other people.

Another participant, Cassie, indicated that she wanted "better for my children and I want to have what they need and more so I am thinking about my future….College is what keeps me sane." According to Jennie, "I just want to make my family proud…I want a good life, I want a better life for my mom, and I want to live my dream…the support from all my friends…a whole support system just keeps me together". Nora also detailed her motivation to persist in college, sharing:

> I think just encouraging myself. Just college has been a very interesting time for me to just learn independence…So I really had to learn how to stand on my own two feet, how to encourage myself and have the right mindset. Just making sure that we were following the right path to do so.

Second-generation college students in the study shared that it is an honor and responsibility to be the next generation of college-educated African-American students. Students expressed confidence in their abilities, enthusiasm for the process of discovery and learning, and commitment to see graduation as the next logical step on their lifelong journey that began well before they attended any school to learn about themselves and the world around them. They

communicated confidence in themselves for a successful future based on their abilities, previous personal insights, and multi-dimensional support systems and strategies cultivated thus far.

Resilience. For the purpose of this study, resilience is not that "heroic" notion that tacitly places all responsibility and burden of success solely upon the individual (Estevao, Calado, & Capucha, 2017). The concept of resilience expands beyond an individual attribute, response or ability to confront and overcome challenges. In keeping with Bronfenbrenner's (1997) tenets of interdependent environmental and societal influences, resilience is presented in an interconnected context to deeply understand, access, and acquire knowledge, skills, and strategies to endure and overcome challenges encountered throughout life. Reviewing data shared by the students in this study, participants described a variety of academic, social and interpersonal challenges and setbacks. Michael's early collegiate experience reinforced the need get off to a positive start in his courses and build a cushion against the possibility of low test scores or grades late in the semester. He indicated this was especially helpful for difficult classes. Michael provided the following explanation:

> Calculus II, yes the infamous Calculus II. [In] Calculus I, I wasn't too shabby, [and] all my other math classes I never had a problem with. But Calculus II, that is my first class I had to like repeat - basically that's where I learned the lesson on it's better to kind of just be on top of easy stuff in class, that comes first. And then just hang on and at least you and again try your best. If you got to, just hang on.

Second-generation college students were not immune to academic challenge and setbacks. It could not be assumed that their parent's experiences precluded them from encounters that were not in keeping with their personal expectations for academic success. Nora shared:

> I worked so hard to get into the nursing program. I applied for it once and got rejected. And it wasn't even my grades; it's just so competitive that every applicant is qualified. So that was like a huge blow and my, like, self-esteem and everything because I was so used to being the one that had the grades all the time from middle school, high school, being in the top of my class and all that so going to something where finally I got rejected for something it was just like, whoa, what's wrong? There's something wrong with my application? 'Yeah, there's nothing wrong with it, just someone was better than you.'

College students experienced additional obstacles in figuring out the best fit path in coursework and degree completion that impacted traditional completion timeline. Erica, who began college as a biomedical sciences major, contended the following:

> [I] changed my major to nursing [then] changed my major to clinical health informatics. And then [I] changed my major to public health, which probably is the best thing that happened, to be honest. But just going in and that realizing, okay, I don't want to do this. This class is way too hard for me or I can't grasp the concept. So now, I ended up being a fifth-year senior. That term was super senior. It doesn't discourage me in any way.

While students shared challenges they experienced, they also communicated diverse internal and external factors that contributed to problem-solving and regaining a firm foothold necessary for immediate and long-term success. Jennie connected her ongoing challenges rooted not to her learning disability but her response to personal and external perceptions about who she was in the context of her learning disability. "I don't want you to think I am stupid and I don't want you to think I don't care but…since I was 5-years-old, that's pretty much in the back of my mind." She elaborated on her efforts to combat the challenges. Jennie noted, "because I didn't ask for help I actually graduated a semester later from the community college". Jennie realized she could

continue being held back by her response and insecurity about the realities of her disability. Conversely, she decided, “I can ask questions.” Presented as a standalone statement, her assessment appears to be an individual “heroic” example of resilience (Estevao, Calado, & Capucha, 2017), which is the equivalent of pulling oneself up by the proverbial bootstraps. However, it is also important to look at the interdependent experiences she acknowledges to have influenced her challenges and achievements.

> My mom’s side of the family, they’re really educated…so it’s pretty much it wasn’t a choice like I don’t want to go [to college]…anytime I had issue I had my neighbor…my stepsister… my friends… a whole support system keeps me together. (Jennie)

After “losing confidence” from negative experiences with teachers and students in elementary and high school, Jennie shared that joining student government in college helped her because “I just did not know how to really talk to people.”

The other participants in this study also expressed personal strategies and institutional resources they tapped into during college that were helpful to them including a sense of the viewing the current challenge as a temporary experience. Beyond looking to the individual to develop and become resilient, communities and institutions are also instrumental in facilitating opportunities for students to engage and thrive. As a result of gaining confidence through empowering collegiate activities and other supports that validating her asking questions, she completed an associate’s degree, enrolled in a four-year institution, and was recognized on the dean’s list twice. Most recently Jennie was accepted into the Honors College despite a time when she “didn’t know if I would be able to graduate from high school.” As evidenced by Jennie’s and other students’ experience, resilience practices are not created or operate in a social or environmental vacuum (Spencer, 1997).

Similarly, Erica shared that realizing that classes in her initial major were “way too hard and [she] could not grasp the concepts” was a challenge that brought her to realize that she would rather graduate in the fifth year and have a job offer rather than in four years without means to pay back student loans. Conversation with her father guided her to look and consider financial influences related to college selection, course selection, and graduation planning. Supportive professors and institutional advising options have been made available to contribute to her decision making and solution-finding strategies. Following inaccurate course advisement from the college advisory team, the public health advisor contacted her to inform her that the error would preclude her from planned graduation in May. He suggested the option of submitting a petition or changing her major. “No one’s stopping me,” Erica recalled. Following her submitted and approved petition, the advisor commended her for do so as it confirmed her May graduation status and shed light on other students who had also be inaccurately advised by the advisors in the student advisement center.

While Nora, Jennie and Erica identified concerns that manifested during their college matriculation, James recounted holdover issues beginning in K-12 that negatively impacted college progress. He too shared the multidimensional influences that broaden the base of responsibility and opportunity for success.

> There were challenges that I experienced from high school to college because in high school, I didn’t go to class, I wouldn’t have to go to class. I would come out to take the test and go. But in college I actually had to come to class. I actually had to, and I never took notes. I actually had to learn how to take notes.

James created study group sessions with his friends that helped reinforce the need to have structured time to study and reaffirmed his peer group’s prioritization of education. Resilience

may be commonly presented as an individual mindset however, as Bronfenbrenner's (1997) nested ecological theory asserted, there are multiple interactive systems that include but are not limited to the individual. Students who persist to and through college do so not because of an absence of challenge but in spite of challenges encountered. To that end second-generation African-American college students are not immune to the dynamics that are noted at individual, micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem levels. The data reflect that generation status may provide a head start on the connections to expect, grow and expand a network of support based on the multiple systems encountered. Moreover, second-generation African American college students do not succeed or fail based on their individual merits alone. Jennie captured the sentiment of multi-dimensional resilience as described by the second-generation college students in this study, "There's always different ways for work to be done, ways for [problems] to be solved…always try to find different ways for you to understand and never ever just be stuck."

The findings of the study highlight the varied experiences of second-generation African-American college students and reflect the interplay of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1997). Study participants identified the individual, converging and contradictory influences resulting in three themes, expectations and interconnected support systems, influence of school culture and climate, and participant self-knowledge and future focus. The first theme is characterized by the significant and long term influences of parental, familial, and community experiences on K-16 educational opportunity and decision-making for students in this study. The second theme is characterized by the K-16 schooling experiences identified by the study participants. The third theme, participant self-knowledge and future focus, highlights the growth mindset communicated by the participants and reflects the experiences of self-understanding, goal setting and planning experiences for second-generation African-

American college students. These themes align directly to Bronfenbrenner's (1997) nested systems theory of the bi-directional influences within and between the individual, the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem. The themes highlight the interconnected web of influence and support contributing to students' knowledge, understanding and development along the trajectory to and through college completion.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of second-generation African-American college students' preparation, persistence, and completion of an undergraduate degree. The following research question guided the study: "What are the college preparation, persistence and completion experiences of second-generation African-American college students?" The intent of this study was to develop information that can help empower and encourage students, families, school counselors, K-16 faculty, staff and administrators, community leaders and policymakers to develop effective recruitment, advising, support, and retention strategies grounded in the success models evident within the experiences of second-generation African-American college students.

Bronfenbrenner's (1997) ecological systems theory (EST) provided the framework for understanding the dynamic and interconnected experiences of students throughout their educational trajectory and the meaning ascribed to these experiences by the students. EST posits that individuals influence and are influenced by interconnected systems within and between the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels. EST requires that experiences be examined in the context of this dynamic interplay of a student's environment that includes nuclear and extended family, friends, neighbors, teachers, and the school community. Eight participants (six females, two males) were purposively selected and interviewed for the study to generate data for analysis.

The findings confirmed literature on the importance of immediate family members in setting expectations and communicating formal and informal information about academic

achievement, preparation and college success for second-generation African-American college students. The findings of this also indicate the significance of extended family and community members as a part of expanding circle of influences contributing to the academic success, preparation and persistence of the study's participants.

The findings support research by Miller and Davis (1992) that discovered parental expectations are the fundamental influence of K-16 educational expectations and experiences of African-American children. Furthermore, the research shows that students whose parents did not attend college tend to be less successful in college and often do not complete their studies. Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) found that these students tend to have lower first-semester grade point averages (GPAs) and are about twice as likely to drop out of a four-year institution in comparison to students whose parents are college graduates. They also found that students whose parents did not attend college tend to have lower educational aspirations (Vuong et al., 2010).

The experiences communicated in this study supported the research of Conley (2010) and Vuong et al. (2010) that indicated that students who did not have a parent with college degree tended to not fare as well as their second-generation peers due to a lack of familiarity with what could be referred to as “college knowledge” or “the ways of college,” (i.e., knowledge of the unique processes that any student must know to persist and achieve college success). Participants in this study shared that parents strategically and directly assisted in secondary school selection, advocated for access to college preparatory coursework, participated in college selection, and advised on college costs and financial considerations. In contrast, Vuong et al. (2010) noted that first-generation students often do not possess the requisite knowledge and familiarity with the

college admission and financial aid application process to help them obtain the available funding to finance their studies.

As Lohfink and Paulson (2005) discovered, grant aid had a significant positive impact on the persistence of first-generation students and that as aid increased, first-generation students were more likely to persist in college. Furthermore, increases in student loans were inversely related to persistence, and as student debt accumulates, the likelihood that students will drop out of college increases. The second-generation African-American college students in this study reported the direct actions parents engaged in to encourage achievement and a solid academic foundation. However, the students also indicated that the indirect support provided by parents and extended family members encouraging their success in times of challenge and accomplishment was significant because the students felt that parents knew what the students were going through given the parents' personal experiences in pursuing an undergraduate degree.

The above suggests that where second-generation students in this study experienced benefits related to their status as second-generation college students, the findings also support the important role that parental expectations play on academic achievement and the decision to attend college. The findings for this study supported those of Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2005), whose research indicated that parents" expectations strongly influence academic achievement, and Jeynes (2007), who found that parental expectations are more predictive of educational outcomes than other measures of parental involvement. Similarly, the parents of the participants generally expected students to attend college and provided specific opportunities through the selection of elementary and secondary schools, direct and indirect communication about education, and exposure to academic programs and activities in the community and church aligned to academic achievement and college preparation. Significantly, many of the students in

this study expressly maintained that not attending college was not an option and parental support and encouragement was a motivating factor for their persistence and college completion. Students in the study reported being able gain valuable insights into “the ways of college” from their parents, such as when to best apply for college admission and financial aid and, once admitted, how to deal with administrators and how to appease professors. First-generation students, by definition, lack access to such direct and “built in” resource. This finding is supported by results of Collier and Morgan (2008), who found first-generation students tended to lack the implicit knowledge they needed to optimally meet professor expectations, knowledge that other students, having parents who had already successfully navigated the college experience, had conveyed to them either implicitly or explicitly, supports this conclusion as well. According to Collier and Morgan (2008), lack of this implicit knowledge made navigating college a challenging and frustrating experience for first-generation students.

The findings presented for this study also support the conclusions in the current literature, which helps to explain why, as Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) found, first-generation students are close to 70% less likely than second-generation students to enroll in a four-year college and 60% less likely to graduate. In short, the results of this study show that students with parents who have attended college are able to gain insights into “the ways of college” from their parents. At the same time, these findings suggests that well-timed interventions or practices that inform first-generation students of these “ways” while they are attending high school could help mitigate, if not surmount, this stumbling block. Indeed, Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella’s (2012) research found that when first-generation students are exposed to undergraduate best practices before entering college and immediately engage those practices, they are more likely to be successful and complete their studies.

The findings of this study indicated that a strong, diverse, yet often interconnected and dynamic support system that originates from the within the nuclear family is one of three significant factors that contributed to participants' college preparation, persistence, and completion experiences. This primary support system has been identified in this study by the theme expectations and interconnected support systems and aligns to Bronfenbrenner's (1997) individual, microsystems and mesosystems. The theme, expectations and interconnected support systems, reflects second-generation African-American college student experiences related to parental expectations, actions and behaviors that created a foundation for educational achievement necessary for college preparation and success. The literature and the results of this study, thus far, appear to suggest that without the influence and involvement of parents who attended and successfully completed college, first-generation students, who by definition do not have such parents, are destined to be thwarted by the college experience.

The results of this study also pointed to the importance of adult influences beyond that of parents, particularly, but not exclusively, in those cases where parents are not supportive. Indeed, the findings show that where parental support was absent, support from extended family and others outside the family, such as neighbors, school administrators, and exposure to college focused activities also made a significant difference in students' persistence and completion. The importance of such influences is supported by the literature. For example, Smith and Zhang (2010) found that positive adult influences generally have a significant influence on student aspirations and success. Dockery and McKelvey (2013) also recognized the importance of significant non-familial influences such as school counselors. Indeed, Dockery and McKelvey (2013) found that school counselors play a key supportive role in providing students with access to higher education. The literature also recognized the importance of other influential individuals

outside the immediate family in contributing to students' educational expectations and experiences as they transition from the elementary and middle school years.

The second theme, influence of school culture and climate, supported Bronfenbrenner's (1994) tenets related to mesosystem and exosystem and reflected important and integrated role of the school environment and personnel in shaping student opportunities, preparation, and perceptions about abilities, strengths, and challenges. Karadag, Kilicoglu, and Yilmaz (2014) found that a strong and effective school cultures enhance students' academic performance. Furthermore, they found that teacher perspectives can influence school culture and, in turn, student academic achievement.

Finally, the theme participant self-knowledge and future focus incorporates the influences of macrosystem and chronosystem and highlights examples of the individual characteristics of each student, motivation factors, resilience, individual identity development, and included intersections of race, class, and gender. In some experiences, the impact of racism and prejudice stood to interfere with the ability of some students to make educational progress. However, participants who experienced such racism and prejudice were able to recognize them when present, In addition, some students investigated and developed a deeper understanding of the meaning of the stereotypes to contextualize the experience in retrospect and sought additional knowledge and strategies to address specific situations. Confidence in their academic capabilities and grounding in the history of African-Americans were found to be factors that contributed to the students' ability to successfully negotiate racism and prejudice. As Byrd and Chavous (2009) noted, racial/ethnic pride can be a powerful factor, not just when it comes to dealing with racism but also when addressing the adverse impact of living in a less advantaged neighborhood.

Implications For Future Practice

The results of this study suggest that providing students with support and encouragement is essential to their success. Parental support was identified as an important influence from the data. However, all students are not always able to gain such support. In such cases, extended family support can also serve as in this significant role. Nevertheless, in the end, the source of support, involvement, and encouragement is often complementary to whether students are actually supported and encouraged. Parents, as well as extended family, educators, peers, educators, counselors, administrators, and other educational professionals should work together to create and support student success. Moreover, the message is clear: educational professionals must be mindful of the impact that their efforts to support all students. Their encouragement and engagement with students can have positive and long-lasting effects on present and future academic performance. As identified by Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, and DuPont (2010), educators have a significant responsibility to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity and specific supports to set, reach, and surpass academic, personal and career-related goals. Moreover, school counselors and college advisors are uniquely positioned to provide needed support for students on the path to college.

School counselors, in particular must not continue to give away or contribute to the usurping of their role as the college going experts in the building (Bryan et al., 2011; Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Johnson et al., 2010). School counselors must be able to leverage their knowledge of student development, academic advisement, post-secondary placement, and personal/social factors contributing to student success through relevant programming, individual advisement, and group guidance sessions (American School Counselors Association, 2005; Dockery & McKelvey, 2013). School counselors should take any measureable means necessary

to ensure that all students have an equitable opportunity to create and achieve their dreams. To be effective, school counselors must acknowledge and hone their professional strengths and shortcomings related to interpersonal skills and personal bias, professional development and training, and educational leadership strategies, beyond just having a “heart for children”. The research and data reflect that heart is not enough. Students, particularly African-American students, need advocates who have the visionary knowledge, skills, endurance and inspirational expectations for every student on the path (Johnson et al., 2010).

Students in this study, who by all commonly assumed measures were privileged given the perceived status of having parents who have completed a college degree, still experienced challenges in access to rigorous coursework, low expectations by educators teaching courses that serve as gateways to college preparation, and overt and covert discrimination in the environments expected to positively contribute to their development and achievement. School counselors should seek to understand the scope and depth of educational, social, and familial experiences students navigate while continuing to be inspired, motivated, and driven to embrace student experiences that serve as the standard bearers for college persistence and completion. School counselors have the power to guide and change school culture and also have the opportunity to contribute to changing disparate educational outcomes (Belasco, 2013).

Two ideas that school counselors could incorporate based on this study findings includes development of a Connect to College Network (CCN) program connecting high school students directly with junior or senior level college students to facilitate monitored information sharing about the college process and experiences to assist students as they prepare for life after high school. The CCN opportunity should be open to all students, not only those neither identified a “college material”, and should not excluded students with parents with college degrees. The

school counselor or counseling team can coordinate with higher education student affairs administrators, and academic departments to recruit and train college students in the development and implementation of meaningful activities aligned to ECT for high school students. Efforts could encourage to interactions through an online video chat series about topics supporting the goal of preparation and completion with interviews, guest appearances and support activities, recognizing the multidimensional influences of parents, extended family, community members and societal expectations (Anumba, 2015; Benner & Mistry, 2007; Brooks, 2015). Additionally, the program outline could incorporate an in-person or virtual meet-up event or have the college student to conduct a virtual personalized college tour of their campus to share with high school students. In collaboration with these efforts, school counselors can develop a school-wide campaign to include classroom teachers, administrators, and parents (Means, Bryant, Crutchfield, Jones & Wade, 2016).

Moreover, it would be important that school counselors work together with middle school colleagues to replicate a developmentally appropriate version of the joint college connection students program and similarly communicate with middle school students to extend the path of knowledge to earlier grades. The structure of the program is not as important as the program reflect insights provided by the second-generation African-American college students regarding the success strategies employed on their journey. Similar programs successfully implemented in a variety of settings reinforce research about influence and impact of school counselors on student achievement and student success (Belasco, 2013; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014). This research knowledge should be at the forefront of every school counselor’s interaction with administrators, parents, and student and inform programming and activities led by school counselors. To do otherwise contradicts the

purpose of school counselors as a resource to connect all students to achievement in elementary, middle, high school, and postsecondary education. As such, it is imperative that educational professionals at every level engage in transparent self-assessment, innovative approaches, basic and cutting edge training and refreshers to develop and grow the skills and resources necessary to effectively support and encourage all their students with a special eye to avoid implicit and explicit bias toward African-American students and other students of color.

The onus for student support, persistence and completion should follow the K-16 continuum and not rest in the elementary and secondary school environments. Higher education institutions can and should be intrinsically involved in efforts to provide and support preparation of students for higher education, including but not limited to four-year undergraduate degree attainment. However, transparency is key and colleges must first review the accuracy of college completion metrics in order to inform individual and collective higher education strategic planning. While significant flaws were attributed to the 2001 U.S. Department of Education legislation for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to gauge individual, group and disaggregated student progress in K-12 using a standard measuring stick, there are some learnings that higher education leaders who are sincerely committed to equity and access can heed to guide their next steps (Diorio, 2017). NCLB provided a common language across K-12 schools, states and regions; its implementation elevated the importance and power of shared data, and most significantly, it uncovered previously unreported data about student disparities in educational experiences, opportunities and outcomes (Diorio, 2017). As the research by DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, and Tran (2011) also suggested higher education follows a path away from this level of transparency should it continue to ignore important student characteristics that accurately predict graduation outcomes. To that end, higher education institutions must prioritize detailed

metrics about who they are educating and how successful they are with each student population that seek degree completion. To do so may contradict the long-standing narrative and initially impact their strategic position in the market to attract students, comfort alumni, and build endowments. However, if the overarching goal and individual institutional mission is for the public good to create an educated and contributing populace, identifying who is in the room will help all colleges understand how to proactively and systematically serve and support students to the finish line of college. The adage that says, “What gets measured, gets accomplished”, highlights that influence of data collection to inform and attain success.

Beyond this larger institutional and systemic responsibility in the higher education realm, these findings also challenge individual professors, administrators, and other campus based educators to connect by choice or by force to mentor and support college students informally or formally during their matriculation. These efforts reinforce the research that confirmed students who are engaged on campus have higher graduation rates. Higher education professionals can provide an environment that encourages dialogue between and among students, teaching professionals, and leaders to communicate and develop shared expectations, pool human and material resources, and undergird the mission of the college education in America.

Implications for Future Research

This study was exploratory and sought to fill a gap in the present research. As such, the findings of this study have several implications for further research. It should be noted that the sample size in this study included eight participants attending or affiliated with postsecondary institutions in the Southeast and all had secondary or post-secondary ties to a large southeastern metropolitan city. While the participants’ background included diverse geography in the K-12 experiences, it would be beneficial to repeat this study with a larger sample size and students

representing different college geographies. Furthermore, conducting qualitative studies that utilize a larger and more geographically diverse sample may uncover themes and subthemes not uncovered in this study.

It should also be noted that the researcher used individual face-to-face interviews as the method of data collection. The purpose of conducting individual interviews was to ensure individuals could share robust and candid details about their experiences and perceptions. Future research design would benefit from the inclusion of an iterative follow-up questionnaire and a focus group for comprehensive knowledge and understanding. Based on the results of such a study, additional research is necessary to determine the best way to implement the knowledge gained from second-generation African-American college students. In the end, knowledge of factors that contributed to the success of the participants should be formulated into a program or intervention strategies, the effectiveness of which would, in turn, need to be investigated. This study stands as the first step in helping to make first-generation students more successful in preparation, pursuit, and attainment of an undergraduate degree. Additionally, this study can provide support for current second-generation college students to recognize the impact of their experiences for encouragement and personal growth.

Implications for Future Advocacy

The results of this study suggests that educators must advocate for cultural competence, individual and systemic accountability for teachers, school counselors, and K-16 administrators in their work with students of color representing all learning abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family configuration. For each participant, regardless of academic background, participants detailed recollections of racial micro-aggressions in the form of overt and derogatory assumptions, diminished expectations, and barriers to academic opportunity. It is important that

the study highlights that negative stereotypes and interactions are not limited to first-generation students. The common denominator, as recounted and interpreted by the students in this study, centered on diminished expectations based on race. The difference in outcomes may rest with a foundation and system of support that counters the narrative experienced in the school settings. Therefore, the key is targeted educator training, goal development, and consistent evaluation accountability teachers' communication with and prioritized support for traditionally under-represented (not only under-resourced) students.

The information provided by this study can be used to develop training and targeted teacher interventions or programs to optimize the preparation of African-American students during their pre-college years. Such interventions must focus on providing the concrete support and encouragement that African-American students need to perform successfully throughout the K-16 educational experience in order to successfully navigate and complete and a college degree. Furthermore, the results indicate that such an intervention or program include an aspect that informs students about college knowledge as well as identify racism and prejudice and the effective strategies to successfully navigate beyond the assumptions and limitations. No such intervention would be complete without acknowledging the direct and indirect impacts while identifying the variety of strategies to be used to either combat or circumvent them.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study that examined the experiences of second-generation African-American college students for college preparation, persistence and completion. The study included eight participants which may limit the scope and depth of experiences for students along the educational path to college completion. While the participants had geographically diverse K-12 experiences, the participants were enrolled in diverse colleges

with ties to one large southeast metropolitan city. Second-generation students attending college at geographically diverse campuses would provide additional perspectives.

Given that the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, the participants had control over the responses they gave and thus the content of the information provided. Moreover, the duration of the interview was 45 minutes to one hour, which required the researcher to focus on the research question and the specific interview protocol. The time limit impeded the opportunity for deep probing for supplemental insights into the students' perspectives and experiences. Although the researcher probed to elicit as much information from participants as possible, respondents provided information to level of detail they felt comfortable and thought appropriate. As a result, the researcher could not verify whether the participants were fully answering the questions or answering the questions in a manner that they thought was expected of them. Revising the interview protocol would assist in capturing more detailed and nuanced data to further enhance the findings and next steps. Additionally, providing a secondary interview opportunity and an iterative questionnaire may provide additional insight for the future research.

Conclusion

As a college-educated, African-American woman, I am sincerely concerned with the disparate opportunities of all students to successfully access, understand and complete a college degree. Moreover, I am particularly appalled that, given the well documented research detailing the barriers faced by students of color, particularly African-American students, there continues to be a lack of concerted will to counteract what many seem resigned to accept: generations of students left out, left behind and ignored despite literally millions of tangible educational success models of college educated African-Americans and their offspring. Every student should have

access to quality educational preparation and support necessary to transition to and succeed in postsecondary education. The research confirmed what and where the problems are. In addition, the research identified potential solutions. Implementing these solutions might not be easy, but it is not impossible. Continuing the singular narrative that educational success is an impossibility for African-American students is dangerous at best as it absolves decision makers at all levels of the responsibility to connect students directly to opportunity and true fulfillment of their promise in the world. For students without support or encouragement, this drumbeat kills dreams before they can be formulated and snuffs out those that somehow attempt to float above the fray.

This study provided an opportunity to share or remind educators, parents, family and community members and students of the power of exposure and expectations for success. As a second-generation college student, I was surrounded by a drumbeat of aspiration, achievement, challenge and support. The findings of his study mirror the impact of an interconnected system of support and are aligned to research. In the midst of disappointment, I am also reinvigorated by the mere presence and shared experiences detailed by the participants in this study. This population is an untapped and under-utilized resource to inform and support meaningful action, intervention, and policy related family, community and educational guidance. I undertook this study to explore the lived experiences of second-generation African-American college students to understand, identify and elevate insights that help all of us to change our perspectives for all students.

The available research is clear and augmented with a daily drumbeat of negative reminders of the challenges and barriers African-American students face, regardless of generation status. Being able to share the stories of the students' success experiences with others serve as a reminder and guiding force about the power of those experiences to inform and shape

change. Educators and the research community are to be reminded that success has been possible and is possible for all students, if there is a will to make it so. Collaborating to support students in identifying and reaching their goals requires reframing the idea of resilience from an individual attribute and responsibility for success to a collaborative institutionalized, systemic conduit for support, information, comprehensive change. While preliminary, these and other student experiences can be used to help increase the number of first-generation African-American students who successfully navigate the path to college graduation by understanding the influences, positive and negative, upon students within and outside of the classroom setting. Although more research is necessary, at the very least, the information provided by this study motivates current second-generation college students to embrace the power of their unique experiences as important and prominent models for success for their peers, adults, and community members. Composer Weldon Irvine (1969) wrote the anthem of encouragement and perseverance that rings true today. As sung by Nina Simone:

> To be young, gifted and black,
> Oh what a lovely precious dream
> To be young, gifted and black,
> Open your heart to what I mean
>
> In the whole world you know
> There are billion boys and girls
> Who are young, gifted and black,
> And that’s a fact!
>
> Young, gifted and black
> We must begin to tell our young

There’s a world waiting for you

This is a quest that’s just begun

When you feel really low

Yeah, there’s a great truth you should know

When you're young, gifted and black

Your soul’s intact

Young, gifted and black

How I long to know the truth

There are times when I look back

And I am haunted by my youth

Oh but my joy of today

Is that we can all be proud to say

To be young, gifted and black

Is where it’s at

The lived experiences of second-generation African-American college students challenge the collective communities of influence to remember and reframe the narrative that educational opportunity and success for African-American students is where it was, has been, and “ . . . where it’s at”.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Second Generation African-American College Students:
Exploring College Access, Persistence and Completion

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anneliese A. Singh
Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Associate Professor, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services
The University of Georgia
Email: asingh@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
Thank you for your interest in participating in a qualitative research project conducted as part of the requirements for dissertation research in the Department of Counseling and Student Personnel Services at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this research study is to explore college access, persistence and completion as perceived by second generation African-American college students. Specifically, this proposed study aims to understand the factors and underlying processes that contribute to the successful preparation for, retention in and graduation of second-generation college students.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …
If you agree,

- You will be asked to participate in a individual interview to explore the particular behaviors, methods, and processes contributing to college preparation and success. The individual interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audio recorded to ensure data accuracy.

- You may be asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire, 2-3 weeks after the initial interview, lasting 30-minutes, to further confirm or clarify information from the individual interview.

Risks and discomforts

- You may experience one or more risks associated with being in this study. There may also be other risks that we did not anticipate associated with being in this study.
- During the individual interview, we will discuss your life experiences and situations that may have been difficult for you. You may be uncomfortable talking about these things with the researcher. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer, and you may end your participation at any time. If you have any concerns about questions, your responses, and the areas discussed, please inform the researcher

Benefits

- We are unsure if there will be any direct benefits to you for participating in the study. We do hope that being able to talk about your academic achievement will be an empowering experience for you.

Incentives for participation

- For participating in the study, students will receive a $40 gift card. Your retrieval of the electronic funds will serve as a receipt of payment.

Audio/Video Recording

If audio and/or video recording devices will be used, explain why the recordings are needed for the research and what will be done with them upon completion of the research (e.g., kept indefinitely, archived after transcription, destroyed after X years).

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

- To help protect your confidentiality, collected data (i.e., transcripts, audio recordings) will be coded and identified using assigned pseudonyms (false names), not your real name. All forms, notes, and recordings will be stored in a locked container or password protected computer files. Identifiable information will not be shared outside of the research team unless otherwise required by law. If we write a report or article about this study or share the study data set with others, it will be done in a way that you cannot be directly identified. To further

protect your privacy, all audio recorded interviews and other identifiable information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

- Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. Participation is voluntary and you can refuse to stop taking part at any time without giving a reason and without penalty. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Lauri Benton under the direction of Dr. Anneliese Singh at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Singh at asingh@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Initials _____ ID#_____

Today's Date: _____

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Race/Ethnicity/Class:
4. Highest Educational Level Completed by Custodial Parent(s) or Guardian(s):

	High School	College				
		Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate School
Self:						
Mother:						
Father:						
Guardian 1						
Guardian 2						

5. Your Major:

6. Date of College Graduation:

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Research Question: How do 2nd Generation African-American college students describe their preparation, persistence and completion experiences?

Interview Question	**Purpose of Question**	**Research Tradition Tenet Application**	**Theory Tenet Application**
1. Please give a general description of the elementary and middle school you attended.	To gain a sense of the participants' view of their educational backgrounds.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience.	Importance of participants' view of micro- and mesosystem.
2. How would you describe your elementary education?	To determine how participants perceive their elementary education experience.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience.	Importance of participants' view of mico- and mesosystem.
3. How would you describe the high school you attended?	To gain a sense of participants' view educational backgrounds and determine how participants view their high school experiences	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience, particularly their perspective toward that experience.	Importance of participants' view of various micro- and mesosystems.
4. Who were the people who positively influenced you?	To determine participants' view of impact of the microsystem on their educational experiences	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience; "being in the world."	View of microsystem's impact on educational decisions.
5. What are the factors contributing to why you decided to attend college?	To determine what participants perceive to be the most important factors influencing their decisions.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge.	View of ecological subsystems' impact on educational decisions.
6. Tell me about your parents' educational	To determine their view of their	Importance of participant subjectivity	View of the microsystem.

experience.	background on their education decisions.	and knowledge and lived experience; "being in the world."	
7. Describe how your community supported your academic goals and preparation for college.	To determine the impact of the mesosystem on their educational decisions.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience; "being in the world."	View of micro- and mesosystem.
8. What were the factors that kept you motivated to stay in college?	To determine their view of what factors most influenced their decision.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge.	View of impact of ecological subsystems on educational decisions.
9. What were some of the positive experiences you had in college?	To determine how participants view of college experiences.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience.	View of mesosystem experiences.
10. How would you describe your college education?	To determine their view of their college experiences.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience.	View of experience of mesosystem.
11. What do African-Americans need to prepare for and persist in college?	To determine the factors they view to be essential to African-American students' college success.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge.	View of ecological subsystems impact on African-Americans' college success.
12. What experiences in your environment challenged your academic progress or success?	To determine the detrimental ecological factors that they view as impediments to academic success.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience; "being in the world."	View of ecological subsystems impacting on their success.
13. Describe the significant influences and factors that contributed to your preparation and persistence in college.	To determine the ecological factors that they view as positively impacting on their college success.	Importance of participant subjectivity and knowledge and lived experience.	View of ecological subsystems impacting on their success.

Appendix D

Phone Script

(adapted from K. Shelton 2009 Dissertation)

Good evening/morning. My name is Lauri Benton and I am calling to follow up on your interest in my research study. I am a current doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Student Personnel Services at the University of Georgia. I am conducting this study under the direction of Dr. Annaliese Singh. The purpose of this research study is to look at factors of that influence college access, persistence, and completion for 2nd generation African-American college students. Do you think you might be interested in participating in this study?

{If No}: Thank you very much for your time.

{If Yes}: But before enrolling people in this study, I would like to ask you some questions to determine if you might qualify for this study. This should only take about 5 minutes of your time. All information that I receive from you during this phone interview, including your name and any other information that can possibly identify you {if applicable}, will be strictly confidential. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary. The individual interview will be 1.5 to 2 hours. If you do not qualify for the study all information will be destroyed immediately following this call. Do I have your permission to ask you these questions?

1. Are you a current senior level college student or recent college graduate from a regionally accredited institution?
2. What year did you graduate or when are you scheduled to graduate with a bachelor's degree?
3. Did at least one custodial parent or guardian complete an undergraduate/bachelor's degree?
4. Do you identify as African-American?
5. Do you feel comfortable sharing information about your experiences related to college access, persistence, and completion with others?
6. Do you feel comfortable in hearing about the experiences of others related to college access, persistence, and completion?

Thank you. You do/do not qualify to participate in this research study.

[If qualified] The individual interview will be held at _____ Date/Time_____. When you arrive I will further discuss the purpose of this study and obtain your consent to participate. You will receive 50.00 for your participation. Are you interested in participating in this study?

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at 404-908-6516 or email me at lsbenton@uga.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Appendix E

Recruitment Flyer