

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE  
STUDENTS

by

ANISSA KENYATTA HOWARD

(Under the Direction of Jolie Daigle)

ABSTRACT

The college completion crisis continues to plague institutions of higher education. Years of research have implicated various factors and contributors to college completion which include access problems created by developmental education programs. Remediation, or developmental education has been implicated as a major barrier to degree completion for students of color. Despite prolific research in developmental education and reform, little research exists on subgroup experiences in developmental education. Particularly, African American male college students enrolled in developmental education via co-requisite remediation. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education via an access partnership between a small rural college and rural university. Participants age 18 and older within the first of developmental course enrollment participated in individual interviews and a focus group to help find the essence of factors that contributed to their perceptions of their abilities to achieve success within the developmental learning context. Six themes emerged through data analysis: quality of faculty staff interactions, in-class experiences, peer interactions, perception of learning support involvement, and personal academic responsibility.

INDEX WORDS: Developmental Education, African American Males, Phenomenology

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Helen Crockett and all the students of promise in developmental education programs across the country, but more specifically to the amazing students I encountered during my employment as Student Success Center Advisor, GAP Program Advisor, and Assistant Professor at Gordon State College. Your encouragement, stories of resilience and persistence inspired me and encouraged me to trudge along this journey.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Student enrollment in degree earning and vocational training programs has been linked to issues related to persistence and retention in post-secondary education for decades. Several years of research have been devoted to understanding the intricacies of retention and persistence in higher education. Specific research interests have focused on identifying factors that impede minority student progress towards degree completion. The purpose of this chapter was to outline information necessary for understanding the way college performance and institutional funding relate to one another at the dawn of the performance-based era of funding for higher education programs. This chapter briefly explored how enrollment in developmental education posed challenges to minority college students in the areas of persistence, resilience, and motivation. This chapter concluded with a brief overview of the proposed methodology for studying African American males enrolled in a developmental education access program.

According to the results of a recent public opinion survey administered by the National Association for Foreign Student Advisors (2011), education in America is revered as a key ingredient to the nation's global competitiveness and future economic success. From a microsystem perspective, postsecondary education remains integral to individual career advancement, economic security, and access to upward mobility in American society (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Center for American Progress, 2008; Flores, 2014). Although the importance of education has been established with regards to economic gains and global competitiveness, many issues involving postsecondary enrollment and completion continue to warrant attention and

concern. Colleges continue to face difficulties with degree production and ultimately student retention. Additionally, college enrollment and completion statistics for individuals of color, who are projected to be the population majority soon, paint a bleak picture for America's future global competitiveness. To ensure stabilization within the U.S economy, a shift in focus on how best to reform the higher educational system is warranted. This reform however, must consider how the implementation of certain educational policies at the federal and state level influence enrollment and completion rates.

### **The College Completion Crisis**

In 2013, President Obama revealed a three-pronged strategy for increasing college accessibility for all (Slack, 2013). He highlighted the importance of competition between colleges to encourage student success and educational affordability and emphasized the importance of linking financial aid to school performance. While the latter of his approach has been embedded in federal financial aid quality assurance programs across campuses in the U.S. for several years, the former components however, continue to be of concern to many college administrators and stakeholders alike (34 CFR 668.34; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008). Furthermore, colleges nationwide continue to struggle with attrition, for a considerable number of American students from various ethnic backgrounds start, but do not complete college (Tough, 2014).

Often referred to as the "college completion crisis," student persistence towards degree completion continues to be an issue of concern for public universities. Current trends revealed that students of color and students who lived below the federal poverty line were least likely to persist towards degree completion (Flores, 2014). As the cost of college tuition continues to increase, so too does the burden of debt for most students. The burden of debt however, is most

felt by students of color and students who live below the federal poverty line. According to Flores (2014), declines in state investments in public college education countered by increases in tuition, contributed significantly to the burden of student debt. Borrower statistics suggested that students from the lowest income group borrowed two times more than students from higher socioeconomic statuses to fund their college educations (NCES, 2008). Additionally, first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color took longer to graduate which suggested that these students were more likely to borrow more during their post-secondary educational pursuits.

### **Performance-Based Funding in Higher Education**

The Center for American Progress (2009) proposed that changes in the availability of financial aid and changes to remedial education for students who attended two year colleges could help with degree completion and persistence issues. As the federal government's funding structure for postsecondary institutions shifts to a performance-based structure, institutions were left with the challenge of facilitating student progression within degree and certificate programs in a timelier fashion. Extensive research has well documented the many obstacles that interfere with student progression towards degree completion. Remedial course delivery and design were amongst these obstacles. Many colleges offered traditional developmental education programs, which consisted of a sequence of courses aimed at providing academic remediation for underprepared students who performed below skill level in specific subject areas (Barbatis, 2010).

Complete College America (CCA) led the nation in the design of metrics for performance based funding for states based on student degree completion. Per CCA's recommendations, not only should policies related to developmental education programs be changed, but CCA also

encouraged the use of financial incentives for low-income students and students who majored in high-demand fields (Complete College America, 2009). Other recommendations included: placement of students in college level gateway courses with mandatory instructional supports, the intertwining of reading and writing instructions, the enablement of students to enroll in mathematics courses that match career demands, and the alignment of program curriculums with real work demands (Complete College America, 2009).

Given current changes and challenges faced by higher education today, there is much to be learned about how institutions can employ strategies to improve educational outcomes for students. The focus of this research study was to learn how such strategies could be implemented to impact the academic experiences of students enrolled in developmental education coursework. The goal of this chapter was to provide an overview of research that explored various aspects of student achievement to include motivations toward achievement. There are numerous studies that pinpointed various aspects of the student experience related to African American male college students. This chapter offered brief coverage of problems that influenced various aspects of the student experience of developmental education.

### **Statement of Problem**

Although college persistence is key to individual success and economic competitiveness in a global economy many students, specifically those who start at two-year colleges, were least likely to persist towards degree completion (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Amongst those students were Hispanic and non-Hispanic students who often attended smaller colleges and universities. Hispanic and non-Hispanic students were most likely to be academically underprepared and were least likely to graduate or complete programs as expected (Bailey, 2009; McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Furthermore, minority students were more likely to be required to take remedial



coursework which meant that their opportunities to earn college degrees depended largely on their abilities to pass remedial coursework. Complete College America [CCA], a non-profit organization that aims to work with states in increasing the number of adults who receive advanced career training opportunities, has devoted many resources to offering recommendations to colleges for closing the attainment gap for underrepresented groups (Complete College America, 2014). Such efforts were essential to understanding how many American institutions of higher education contrived of the place of developmental education amongst the array of programs offered in post-secondary education.

### **Rethinking Developmental Education**

Several institutions of higher education have taken CCA's recommendations into consideration with regards to the restructuring of remedial programs to allow more students opportunities to work towards degree completion. Prior to the CCA's current "Game Changers" initiative, research suggested that less than 50% of students who attended college at public colleges and universities would go on to earn a bachelor's or associate's degree after having been required some form of remediation (Complete College America, 2013). Recent CCA research suggested that when allowed the opportunity to complete college requirements alongside remedial requirements, students were more likely to persist towards degree completion and were also more likely to complete in a timely manner. CCA encouraged institutions to enact five "game changers" which were believed to be instrumental in increasing student retention and degree completion. These "game changers" included performance funding, corequisite remediation, structured schedules, guided pathways, and 15-hour schedules for full-time study.

Performance funding encouraged the use of metrics to link state funding of educational programs with student progression and degree completion. Performance funding could also be

used to provide financial incentives to low-income students in fields of high demand. In addition to combining reading and writing instruction, co-requisite remediation encouraged institutions to default underprepared students to college-level courses with the provision of mandatory instructional supports (CCA, 2013). Corequisite remediation allowed students to enroll into college level courses with support instead of having to complete longer prerequisite course sequences (CCA, 2016). Findings from recent studies revealed that students enrolled in co-requisite remediation courses were twice as likely to succeed in English and five to six times more likely to succeed in math. Data released from states such as Colorado and Tennessee suggested that corequisite remediation was an effective means of helping students of color advance towards degree completion however, no such specific data has been released that further delineates that relationship (Zinshteyn, 2016).

Enrollment in 15-hours of study was expected to provide students with tuition reductions, caps on degree credit requirements, and more transfer credit portability between institutions within states. Structured scheduling was encouraged to provide a degree of predictability in student's schedules to compliment school, home, and work obligations. Guided pathways were suggested to channel students into structured degree plans which could make it easier to complete degrees within specified time frames. While all components may prove beneficial to student progress, such measures would require resources and funding for institutions that may already be limited in funding and staffing for such efforts.

### **Enrollment, Funding, and Developmental Education**

Since the year 2007, higher-education funding per full-time student has declined by 30% in 15 states ("Sagging State Funding Jacks Up College Tuition," 2013). Unfortunately, two-year colleges were most likely to have limitations in financial resources and staffing to implement all

five recommendations. There were several factors identified that impacted student persistence and degree attainment related to institution type. According to recent statistics, although two-year college enrollment comprised a sizeable proportion of overall college enrollment, only about 50% of first-year students who begun their college careers at a two-year college persisted towards degree completion (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Students who attended two-year colleges were more likely to be of non-traditional age and were also more likely to be employed, enrolled part-time, of minority decent, and from families with lower socioeconomic standing (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009; Windham, Reh fuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Lastly, individuals who attended two-year colleges first were often less academically prepared when compared to peers who started off at four-year institutions.

Students who were less academically prepared upon enrollment at two-year institutions were more likely to require remedial education prior to degree completion, which increased years towards degree obtainment, and ultimately increased costs for obtaining such degrees (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). When identifying educational attainment differences between sub-populations of minority groups, research has elaborated extensively on academic outcomes and persistence towards degree completion for African American students (Eisele, Zand, Thomson, 2009; Gaskin-Butler & Tucker, 1995; Keltikanga-Jaervinen, 1992, Wood & Turner, 2010). Issues that affected African American college student enrollment included under preparation, low enrollment, and poor retention rates. Similar issues related to the persistence, graduation, and academic achievement of students attending Associates degree granting institutions presented further concerns (Cuyjet, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hamptons, 2001, 2002; Wood & Turner, 2010).

## **Access Programs and College Completion**

The retention of first year students continues to be a priority for institutions of higher education. Several institutions have implemented programs specifically for first year students to help students successfully obtain college degrees. Organizations such as the National Urban League and the National College Access Network [NCAN] have published several outcomes reports related to access programming and educational collaborations involving high schools and colleges (Rawlston-Wilson, Saavedra, & Chauhan, 2014; NCAN, 2016.) Outcomes studies and reports involving access partnerships between two-year and four-year colleges are sparse to non-existent within developmental education literature.

Traditional access programs were implemented to improve college readiness and enrollment for high school students. These programs included accelerated learning options such as dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate programs (Bailey & Mechur, 2003). Several state community colleges and universities have created access programs specifically for underrepresented students with developmental education requirements. The primary purpose of such programs was to increase access to four-year colleges by providing students who did not meet regular admissions criteria with an opportunity to complete developmental education requirements before matriculating into the desired four-year institution (Harvill, Maynard, Nguyen, Robertson-Kraft, & Tognatta, 2012; Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between individual and institutional factors that influenced the educational experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education programs. Specifically, the researcher explored how enrollment in developmental education coursework impacted the academic

experiences and perceptions of African American male college students. By exploring the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in an access program, the researcher aimed to identify possible strategies and procedures that could be implemented to further aid in the success of this group of students at the community college level. The interests of the researcher stemmed from a desire to gain insights into the perspectives of males while they navigated through the institution's developmental education program. There were minimal amounts of peer-reviewed research on African American males in developmental education.

The theoretical frameworks that informed the study were Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and critical race theory. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy provided a socio-cognitive explanation for the various means that individuals employ to achieve specific ends and the driving forces behind such pursuits (Bandura, 1994). In the academic setting, motivation is key to understanding persistence and resilience. Critical race theory in education provided a lens to explore how disparities in American society permeated educational structures, causing further disparities. Self-efficacy theory provided the researcher an opportunity to examine individuals' perceptions of their ability to control aspects of their academic performances. Critical race theory exposed the saliences of race in the perceptions of students. Murrell's situated mediated identity theory, an applied extension of critical race theory, posited that such disparities could be understood in the context of education with several personal variables under consideration (Murrell, 2007). The application of the theoretical tenants of critical race theory and self-efficacy theory provided a great platform for phenomenological research where the lived experiences of African American male college students could be explored by appropriate selection and use of relevant data collection and analysis techniques for qualitative studies.

### **A General Overview of Research Methodology**

For the current qualitative study, the researcher used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of African American male college students attending college in a rural community. Qualitative methodology afforded the researcher a means to explore the lived experiences of African American male. This methodology considered the individuals' experiences as depicted via personal narrative alongside constructs such as student motivation, academic resilience, and persistence in context. The use of personal narratives has been well documented in research and was essential to the researcher's exploration of the phenomenon of interest. By using a phenomenological approach, the researcher gained access to the multiple realities of individuals with the experience of developmental education. The researcher was also able to garner an appreciation for the multiple realities that arrived from participants' experiences with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007).

### **The Research Questions**

The guiding questions used to explore the perspectives of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education were as follows:

1. How does enrollment in developmental educational coursework in a rural state college access program influence the perspectives of African American male college students as it relates to academic achievement?
2. In what way do institutional factors influence perspectives of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education in a rural state college access program as it relates to academic achievement?

The selected questions were designed to focus on participants' experiences with respect to their race and perceptions of their abilities to achieve academic success during their

educational pursuits through remedial coursework. The research questions aimed to provide the researcher with both collective and individual perspectives of the phenomenon of interest. Through the implementation of specific procedural techniques, the researcher was equipped to answer the essential research questions. Other components central to the implementation of the research study, according to its design, included information specific to participants, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness.

### **Participants**

Targeted participants of the study were African American male college students entering their first year of college at a selected state college. Only individuals who fit the established criteria for the study were invited to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed due to restrictive population of interest. Factors of consideration included ethnicity, gender, age, and earned credit hours. Participants were at least 18 years of age or older, enrolled in developmental education courses, and self-identified as African American males.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Two primary modes of data collection were used for the research study. The selected method, known as the phenomenological based interview, comprised of individual, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview (Siedman, 2013). Both methods were used to capture in-depth specifics related to various aspects of the participants' lives. Interview protocols were used for focus group and individual interview sessions. Data was analyzed using transcendental phenomenological procedures proposed by Moustakas (1994). Analysis using this method required adherence to steps useful in the identification and organization of important themes and textural descriptions from participants' transcribed interviews.

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, often described as a construct akin to validity in quantitative methodology, relates to the level of trust the researcher can have in the study's findings (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Reflexive journaling, member checking, field notes, triangulation of investigators, and the use of an audit trail were implemented as strategies of trustworthiness. Reflexive journaling allowed the researcher to engage in critical self-reflection. Member checking provided research participants an opportunity to confirm data collected and challenge inaccurate interpretations. Field notes provided a mechanism for the notation of observations and conversations through the implementation of the research study. An audit trail in qualitative research requires the maintenance of research related records and items in a systemic manner for retroactive assessment of research conduct (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012).

## Definition of Terms

Below are definitions of terms used throughout this dissertation study:

**Academic Achievement:** As defined by Mandara (2006), academic achievement, in a general sense, refers to empirical and conceptual outcomes related to school achievement such as grades, academic motivation, and behavior problems.

**Academic Persistence:** The extent to which an individual maintains continuous enrollment while in pursuit of a post-secondary degree.

**Academic Resilience:** Consistent with the Martin and Marsh (2009) definition, “academic resilience” is defined as the capacity of a student to overcome adversities that would otherwise have an impact on educational processes.



**Academic Self-Efficacy:** As defined by Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow (2008), academic self-efficacy refers to “an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits.”

**Access Program:** an academic transfer program designed to provide students who do not meet certain GPA and/or college entrance exam scores an opportunity to enroll in college level courses on a conditional basis.

**African American:** Citizens of the U.S. who are of African ancestry. The terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably.

**Co-requisite Remediation:** Developmental coursework sequencing that allows students an opportunity to complete general education coursework while maintaining dual enrollment in required developmental education courses. Students enrolled in co-requisite courses must pass the developmental course component of the course sequence before college credit can be awarded.

**Developmental Education:** Also referred to as “remediation” and “remedial education,” refers to academic services designed to help students raise their skills to college standards. Can include coursework and other supplemental services such as study skills and tutoring.

**Learning Support:** Supplemental post-secondary coursework in mathematics, English, or reading that is undertaken as a condition of enrollment at either a two-year or four-year institution. “Learning Support” is a term specific to developmental education services provided by University System of Georgia public colleges and universities.

**Motivation:** As defined by Albert Bandura (1994), motivation is a cognitively generated process that requires forethought and belief in one’s ability to act.

Recent emphasis on retention and persistence in higher education contributes heavily to proposed policies and procedures linking institutional accountability and educational funding in postsecondary education. At the core of the “college completion crises” is the student educational experience and factors that can either enhance or detour students away from completion. These factors include motivation, resilience, and persistence. Students who attend two-year colleges are more vulnerable to the nuances posed by the numerous factors impeding upon student degree completion. As a sub-population of the college-going populace in America, minority students face greater challenges and are more likely to face challenges with issues pertinent to academic motivation, resilience, and persistence. The research study aimed to learn how various factors influenced the educational experiences of African American male college students in a developmental education access program—an educational ancillary program that employs policies which may hinder degree completion and ultimately influence persistence towards degree completion. By employing the methodology of phenomenology, the study explored the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education coursework.

### **Summary**

Institutions of higher education continue to face several issues related to student degree persistence and retention. In recent years, more focused attention has been on the adoption of policies and procedures at the national and state level that will enable students to successfully complete degree and career certificate programs in a timely manner. Such emphasis may place tremendous pressure on institutions to graduate even students who may be underprepared for college. Students who are underprepared for college pose the greatest risk at improving institutional retention and degree completion rates. African American male college students

enrolled in developmental education programs are one such example of underprepared students.

The purpose of the qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in a developmental education access program housed at a four-year public institution. Phenomenological research helped the researcher explore aspects of the students' experience in the contexts of critical race and self-efficacy theories.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the research study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of African American males as first-year college students enrolled in developmental education courses (DECs) in an access program. Although little information is known regarding African American male experiences within developmental education programs, a plethora of literature exists about the educational experiences of minorities enrolled in general education programs in higher education. Additionally, there is an abundance of research on the implementation and effectiveness of developmental education programs towards the end of student retention. For this reason, the study aimed to explore how enrollment in developmental education coursework impacted the educational experiences of first-year African American male college students.

Chapter two begins with a general overview and discussion of developmental education as well as an overview of literature related to self-efficacy theory and related academic concepts. The review of literature highlighted the importance in understanding how DEC enrollment could potentially impact student perceptions of opportunities for academic success. This chapter also introduced the primary theoretical underpinnings of the study which include self-efficacy theory and critical race theory. Chapter two concludes with an introduction to Peter Murrell's situated mediated identity theory, which is an applied extension of critical race theory within an educational context.

## **An Overview of Developmental Education: History, Assessment & Placement, Enrollment, and Completion**

The pathway through higher education for many college students is often complex and multi-faceted. There is much variation in the range and degree of educational experiences of college students. Postsecondary remediation, often referred to as developmental education, can potentially impact these educational experiences. Developmental education refers to a set of course offerings and services at post-secondary institutions designed for helping students successfully complete coursework in postsecondary education (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). Typical components of developmental education have included subject specific coursework and ancillary support services such as tutoring, academic and career advisement, and academic skill development workshops (Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010; Perin, 2002). Closer examinations of paradigmatic shifts in relation to remediation and placement revealed systemic efforts to improve graduation and retention rates of students who enter college with academic deficiencies.

Students who enter college or university settings with developmental education needs are often thought of as having deficiencies in skill areas fundamental to success in the post-secondary educational environment. Common areas of deficiency include basic arithmetic, reading comprehension, and general writing skills (Silver-Pacuilla, Perin, & Miller, 2013). Contingent upon institutional policies governing placement, students begin prescribed coursework or sequences within semester long courses and are required to exhibit some level of proficiency in these courses, prior to enrolling into college level coursework. If the student does not exhibit proficiency over a period of time within remedial courses, they are not granted another opportunity at post-secondary education.

Researchers and practitioners in search of ways to improve remediation for students have examined several approaches to placement, teaching, and support in developmental education (Markle & Robbins, 2013). While other alternatives such as accelerated learning and affective based placement have been considered, it is necessary to look back in the past to understand how developmental education came to its current state (Markle & Robbins, 2013; Saxon, Levine-Brown, & Boylan, 2008). To this end, the history of developmental education in the United States as well as the underlying philosophies that support such approaches to remediation in higher education should be examined. A brief survey of the history of developmental education and its impact on the higher education trajectory follows.

### **A Brief Examination of the History of Developmental Education**

According to Boylan and Bonham (2007), developmental education “refers to a broad range of courses and services organized and delivered in an effort to help retain students and ensure the successful completion of their postsecondary education goals.” Developmental education is characterized as one of several services offered to students under the theoretical underpinnings of adult development and learning theories (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). The 1970s marked a decade of significant changes to the field of developmental education. Prior to the founding of the National Association for Remedial/Developmental Education in Postsecondary Education in 1976 (later to be renamed the National Association of Developmental Education in 1984), there was very limited support for developmental education in public policy, media, or legislation. Additionally, very few professional organizations and journals existed during this time of emerging developmental education which was suggestive of the infantile status (Boylan & Bonham, 2007).

In 1984, as the field of developmental education began to gain some momentum in recognition, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published its first report on developmental education. This publication seemed to suggest a federal acknowledgement of remedial courses and developmental education in general. The act set precedent for research on developmental education at the national level and the inclusion of such statistical information within educational reports (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). By examining such statistical reports, researchers and practitioners identified significant information related to enrollment trends for students within this sub-group of college students. Specifically, as indicated by NCES reports, the percentage of college and university students enrolled in one or more developmental courses has not changed significantly over the history of developmental education in the United States (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). More information regarding enrollment trends in developmental education will be explained and discussed at a later point of the literature review.

The latter end of the 1970s provided additional momentum to the developmental education movement as state chapters began to form and join the National Association for Developmental Education's ranks. The first state was South Carolina. The New York College Learning Skills Association was founded and operated independent of the National Association for Developmental Education until the 1980s. This organization also created a journal titled *Research & Teaching in Developmental Education* in 1987, therefore making it the second prominent journal of the field. National conferences and learning institute revitalization took place to support college-level practitioners and to identify best practices (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). In 1986, the first doctoral program in developmental education was established at Grambling State University (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). The formation of other institutions and organizations as well as continued efforts marked the positive strides that the field had gained

from a national perspective well into the 1990s. From the formulation on the National Tutoring Association, to the implementation of self-evaluative tools and the first National Conference on Research in Developmental Education in 1992, developmental education made several positive strides towards gaining recognition and significance in the higher education trajectory (Boylan & Bonham, 2007).

As an examination of the history of developmental education solidifies its significance in post-secondary education so too should an examination of placement, enrollment, and achievement data. Research shows that a very large portion of community colleges and universities offer remedial coursework to prepare students to complete higher education programs of study (Gerlaugh, Thompson, Bolyan, & Davis, 2007). While there is no one policy or regulation governing placement, teaching, completion, and eligibility criteria for developmental education programs within and across states, the one common factor that all programs have shared is that of the goal and purpose of developmental education. Ideally, developmental education programs are designed to provide students who enter college with weak academic skills an opportunity to enhance skills (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). The process typically entails multiple levels of developmental education and entry into college level courses that can complicate, confuse, and/or discourage individuals involved in the process.

In some circumstances, individuals were expected to complete several tests and multiple classes in subject areas before they could enroll in certain college level courses (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Regardless of the process undertaken however, it was clear that “college readiness” and what this process entailed looks different at various institutions and even within states. This variation posed great difficulty to efforts aimed at examining the effectiveness of such programing. Since developmental education looked differently across the nation and within



states, it was important to have a general understanding of the roles that assessment and placement had in facilitating that variation. Assessment and placement were two often conjoint and equally important processes that initiated the developmental education process.

### **Assessment and Placement**

Although it is common for institutions to require students to meet some form of admissions criteria prior to full admittance into an institution, it is equally common for students to be required to take certain placement exams for full admittance. Twenty U.S. states mandate that all new students seeking admissions must be assessed for developmental placement (Prince, 2005). Many states have adopted systemic policies to guide developmental placement decisions. These policies include: general assessments of academic preparedness by the community college of entrance, the use of specific tests and tools, and adherence to standardized cut-off scores (Prince, 2005).

As is the case with several community colleges across the nation, students could gain admission through placement testing and coursework in developmental education. According to research, approximately 3 million students who attended community colleges in the United States have taken at least one developmental course in reading, writing, or mathematics (Boylan, 2009; Silver-Pacuilla, Perin, & Miller, 2013). Recent changes regarding placement policy however, encouraged institutions to allow students more opportunities to complete developmental education requirements through corequisite enrollment. This practice, when implemented in one of three ways, allowed students an increased chance at successful completion of such requirements by providing them with needed support in entry-level courses (Complete College America, 2014).

## Assessment Types

Admittance into most institutions of higher education required the completion of one or more standardized assessments. Institutional policies often required additional standardized assessment and placements within a developmental education program (Hodara, Jagers, & Karp, 2012). Often mandatory, these developmental education placement assessments were deemed integral to the implementation of a successful developmental program (Gerlaugh et. al., 2007). The rationale for standardized placement tests, according to Prince (2005), is varied with many potential benefits. These benefits included increases in academic performance and persistence in graduation rates and enhancement of states' abilities to monitor and examine the effectiveness of developmental learning programs. Many states used several different assessments and adopted very different cut-off scores even when the same placement exam was used (Bailey & Cho, 2010). While placement accuracy cannot be guaranteed in terms of developmental education referrals, institutions often relied heavily upon assessments as measures of college readiness.

The most common placement tests included the computer adaptive COMPASS® or ACCUPLACER® created by the American College Testing and Educational Testing Service respectively. For high school students who took the SAT or ACT, scores would be used determine readiness to begin college-level coursework. Depending on how students fared against such criteria, they were then placed in developmental education courses. It was however, important to note that there was very little information in the literature that could be used to differentiate students who scored within the range of scores above and below cutoff scores. This notion suggested a degree of discontinuity in the way in which cutoff scores were used to differentiate between “remedial” and “college ready” students (Bailey & Cho, 2010). In a

general sense, much is known about how developmental education requirements impacted progression through post-secondary education programs; however, very little information existed about how requirements impact the motivation, resilience, and persistence of sub-groups of students.

### **Enrollment Trends in Developmental Education Courses**

According to a report issued by the Education Commission of the States (2008), there are three primary ways in which remedial courses are delivered. These types of course delivery methods included standard remedial courses, modified remediation, and special programs. Standard remediation comprised of semester or quarter based courses that included classroom and lab components. Modified remedial courses consisted of a variety of components which included study skills courses, tutor-based instruction, and accelerated coursework. Special programs referenced approaches that were specially-tailored to students with higher needs. An examination of developmental education course enrollments in terms of student characteristics identified significant findings. An examination of enrollment trends at two-year colleges revealed that approximately 54.7 percent of traditionally aged, African American students required remediation compared to 58.3 percent of Hispanic students. Approximately 39.1 and 20.6 percent of African American and Hispanic students who entered 4-year schools required remediation respectively. Additionally, approximately 64.7 percent of students who attended two-year schools and required remediation were classified as low-income students (Complete College America, 2012).

Recent estimates regarding the cost of developmental education coursework, projected to be \$1.9 million to \$500 million dollars spent annually at community colleges and at four-year schools (Strong American Schools, 2008). It is reported that individual states spent several

million dollars annually to support remediation (Bailey & Cho, 2010). The state of Florida, for example, was reported as having spent over \$100 million for its developmental education programs which included costs for facilities, salaries, and support services (Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability, 2006). Other costs related to developmental education coursework are bore by students. These costs often surmounted in tangible and intangible outcomes for students.

Students with developmental education requirements often received very little financial assistance to pay for these courses. Developmental coursework often amounted in credits that were attempted, but not applicable towards grade point averages or college major program requirements (Guided Pathways to Success, 2012). Furthermore, students could lose financial aid eligibility while attempting to complete developmental sequences. These circumstances could contribute to frustration and ultimately departure from college for these students (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

### **Acceleration and Completion Pathways**

A primary concern with regards to higher education today involved the percentage of college degrees within a reasonable amount of time. Research reported that only 35% of college students graduated with a bachelor's degree within four years. Less than one-quarter of full-time students who sought associate degrees graduated within three years (Guided Pathways to Success, 2012). While numerous degree pathways existed to help students advance towards degree completion, these pathways were often corroded by lengthy developmental course sequences which necessitated the adoption of practices of efficiency in developmental education. National dialogue has begun around revising developmental education practices which discouraged completion of degree programs. Institutions are now encouraged to adopt more

“progression friendly” policies which allow students to take college-level coursework while completing developmental requirements. These policies included corequisite remediation, learning pathways, and learning communities.

More than fifty percent of developmental education students do not make it through college-gateway Math and English courses (The Game Changers, 2013). Corequisite remediation involves the integration of support for students in college level gate-way courses. Three ways to implement such an approach include single-semester corequisites, one-course pathways, and parallel remediation. Single-semester corequisites involved enrollment in college level gateway courses with mandatory tutoring or computer lab components. One-course pathways expanded single-course offerings over the span of two-semesters. Parallel remediation addressed academic shortcomings within a student’s program of study and were most appropriate for career technical or applied degree programs (The Game Changers, 2013).

In recent years, other alternatives concerning the placement of students into needed developmental course sequences have evolved to help students gain more progress towards degree completion. Co-requisite remediation, in alignment with the nation’s robust Complete College America initiative, provided students with an opportunity to register for college-level gateway courses and developmental education courses simultaneously. This new approach also called for the combination of reading and writing instruction in addition to the alignment of mathematics with potential programs of study (The Game Changers, 2013). Unlike prerequisite remediation, co-requisite remediation moved placement from a single-score cut-off placement system to a system that afforded students the opportunity to complete a developmental education course along with a college-level gateway course. There are three methods considered most

effective in the higher education community. These methods included single-semester co-requisites, one-course pathways, and parallel remediation.

Learning pathways are another way in which institutions aim to help students accelerate towards degree completion. Although not specific to students in developmental education, this approach can be used to help students make informed selections of programs of study. Also referenced as guided pathways, this approach was designed to help institutions monitor student degree completion by limiting a student's ability to take courses unrelated to a specific major pathway, which often resulted in students taking more credits than needed to earn a degree (The Game Changers, 2013). With this approach, students have the option of selecting a complete academic program, which will serve as a clear completion path. The program is designed to provide guidance with regards to course selection for each "meta-major," or broad area of concentration for specific collections of majors. One such example of a "meta-major" could be social science (The Game Changers, 2013). After the "meta-major" is selected, students take a predictable sequence of courses each semester of enrollment until graduation is achieved.

Learning communities are comprised of pedagogically interdependent courses that provide curricular and community building components to students (Lorch, 2014). The term "learning communities" has been used to refer to several different types of intentionally developed learning arrangements utilizing various modalities to foster student learning (Love, 2012). The goal of a learning community is to improve student outcomes in higher education. With this goal in mind, learning communities can foster the development of positive relationships with faculty and peers while also assisting in the enhancement of academic performance through community building, curricular connection, and motivation (Lorch, 2014).

Students enrolled in learning communities have been shown to complete remediation and continue to degree completion (Lorch, 2014).

### **Progression and Acceleration in Developmental Sequences**

Although developmental education has made several gains with regards to establishing legitimacy in the field of education, there is still some discussion around the effectiveness of developmental education programs across the nation. In recent years, there has been several published research studies suggesting the ineffectiveness or costliness of developmental education programs. One recent report issued by *Complete College America*, stated four claims against the effectiveness of remedial courses in higher education. This report highlighted the following: too many first-year students were required to start off in developmental education courses, remediation was ineffective, very few students completed gateway courses in remedial sequences, and few students who started college with remediation needs graduated (Remediation: Higher Ed's Bridge to Nowhere, 2012). Supporters of this line of thought suggested that students instead be provided additional built-in supports and academic co-requisites to be successful in college (Remediation: Higher Ed's Bridge to Nowhere, 2012). Additionally, very few rigorous evaluations and reviews of outcomes existed to attest to the effectiveness of such programs (Bailey & Cho, 2010).

When addressing the needs of students enrolled in developmental education courses, it is important to consider the added level of complexity that these requirements adds to the lives of students required to enroll in these courses. Students are exposed to additional requirements that prolong the course of study. These courses are typically required as conditions of enrollment that must be completed in addition to other major and institutional requirements (Bailey & Cho, 2010). Research shows however, that less than 25 percent of community college students who

enrolled in remedial coursework completed a degree or certificate program within an eight-year time frame. When compared to peers who are not required to enroll in developmental education courses, research finds that about 40 percent of these students go on to complete certificate and degree programs within the same time frame (Bailey & Cho, 2010).

Many courses are offered under the developmental education program heading at most institutions. These courses include remedial coursework, which consist of noncredit teaching courses. These courses focus on the delivery of pre-college content, and support services. A wide spectrum of Support services are typically used to address the cognitive and affective needs of learners through courses such as “critical thinking,” “student success,” and study skills and strategies” (Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Perin, 2002). Most developmental education courses are typically organized and implemented under two main approaches which are mainstreaming and centralization. Mainstreamed courses are typically housed in respective academic departments such as Mathematics or English whereas centralized courses are house in a department separate from disciplines. The purpose and function of this separate department is simply to manage the offerings of pre-college level courses (Perin, 2002).

Regardless of the developmental education program’s organizational structure, students who have several academic deficiencies are often referred to developmental sequences that usually comprise two or more courses in a subject area. These courses are designed to prepare a student in a sequential manner for college-level courses. The sequence’s initial phase begins with some form of assessment that determines appropriate placement along the sequence. Examples of course arrangements include developmental math enrollment in basic or intermediate algebra prior eligibility for enrollment in college level math (Bailey et. al, 2010).



Between the years of 1999 and 2008, students who attended public institutions reported larger percentages of enrollment in remedial coursework than counterparts attending private institutions (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). According to Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2010), more than 50 percent of community college students enrolled in at least one developmental education course while attending college. Surveys conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that 28 percent of first year students who entered programs offering associate's and bachelor's degrees between the years of 1995 and 2000, were enrolled in remedial coursework. Similar trends were noted between first and second year students enrolled in public two-year colleges, where approximately 43 percent of these students were noted as having enrolled in at least one remedial course (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Longitudinal data collected by Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levely (2006), found close to 60 percent of community college students had taken at least one remedial course. The study also found that roughly 40 percent of community college students had taken between one and three remedial courses, with roughly 10 percent of these students having been required to take more than three courses.

With regards to selectivity, institutions with stringent selectivity criteria were found to have lower numbers of students report having taken remedial coursework. Selectivity, which only applies to 4-year institutions, is measured by the absence or presence of an open admissions policy, number of applicants, total number of students admitted, SAT/ACT scores in the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles, and the absence or presence of test scores required upon admission. This concept has significance in current dialogue around higher education due to an increased national focus on performance-based college funding (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). By default, performance-based college funding necessitates the examination of performance and degree progression in students enrolled in developmental education programs.

## Outcomes Data

Scholars in the field of developmental education have acknowledged the difficulty in determining the effectiveness of developmental education programming in institutions of higher education. These scholars have taken steps to advocate for the use of best research and practices by institutions when implementing developmental education programs (Bailey, Jeong, & Choo, 2010; Bailey & Cho, 2010; Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Markle & Robbins, 2013). On the other hand, there are several researchers who believe that remediation is an ineffective, time consuming, and costly endeavor (Boatman & Long, 2010; Complete College America, 2012; Gallard, Albritton, Morgan, 2010).

Research has pointed to the significance in understanding the impact of student retention on enrollment trends at colleges and universities (Astin, 1993; Aitken 1982; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Engberg and Mayhew 2007; Grayson 1988; Hunter 2006; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Tinto 1993, 1998). Institutions worldwide have allocated many resources to learn more about effective ways to address issues related to the retention and success of first-year students (Clark & Cundiff, 2011). Research has revealed that more than 50 percent of first-time college students completed their degrees within six years. Close to 30 percent of these students did not return to complete coursework for a second year (Clark & Cundiff, 2011). Nationally, in terms of overall completion rates, only approximately 34 percent of all college students in the general population graduate from college (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). This rate decreased to about 30 percent for college students who started and graduated with Associate's degrees at community colleges within 3 years (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2009). When compared to global education systems,

the United States ranks sixth in postsecondary attainment among 25-64-year-olds (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2011).

### **Barriers to Student Achievement in Developmental Education**

Remedial education requirements, alongside typical transition issues experienced by first-year students add pressures and increase risks for attrition within this student sub-population. Previous research has identified the impact of several pre-enrollment variables on the subsequent success of students in post-secondary education (Woosley & Miller, 2009). In addition to common transition issues such as living away from home and balancing academic and social pressures, first-year students who meet certain demographic variables are less likely to succeed in developmental education courses. Students who attend community colleges often have multiple responsibilities related to work, family, and finances all of which can ultimately influence overall academic achievement (Tommaso, 2012). Students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have been found to participate in remedial course-taking at higher rates than their counterparts (Howell, 2011).

More disparities in attainment exist as subject specific completion rates for these students are explored. When examining completion rates for two of the most common deficiency areas, Math and English, research has revealed contradictory findings. Specifically, research stated that students in need of remediation in Math and English, unfortunately, are more likely not to remediate successfully. These findings pose contradiction to the idea of remediation as a proponent of the academic success for students with developmental education needs. Despite having similar levels of attainment when compared to students enrolled in college level math courses, only about 31 percent of students enrolled in developmental math courses pass the entire developmental math sequence required. Students with English deficiencies were found to be

more successful at completing related developmental sequences. Data indicated that 68 and 71 percent of students required to complete English and Reading developmental courses passed these courses (Bahr, 2008a, 2010; Bailey, 2009; Boatman, 2010). This number, however, does not reflect the percentage reported for completion of the developmental sequence in reading. As with most data pertinent to developmental education completion rates, too many inconsistencies exist to determine the overall impact of developmental coursework.

Vulnerable student groups, such as those required to take developmental education courses, face many barriers in higher education (Clark & Cundiff, 2011). When academic preparedness is excluded, research has indicated that several students enter college without having adequate knowledge about general processes, support, and finances, in addition to having a multitude of responsibilities outside of school (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). General trends in student characteristics at community colleges reveal that students were typically older, poorer, more likely to be a student of color, and female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Fischer (2008) identified three prominent factors that contributed to the adjustment woes of first-year college students. These factors included minority status, socioeconomic disadvantage, and being a first-generation college student. These factors have been shown to drastically impact enrollment and ultimately retention at public universities and colleges across the nation. Variables such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status were also defined in the literature as well-established affiliates of college success and degree obtainment (Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010). There are several other key factors that influence student retention. These factors include motivation, resilience, and persistence.

### **Academic Motivation, Resilience, and Persistence**

There are several “constants” that are recognized as essential parts of the educational experience that students endure during their journeys from primary to post-secondary education. These “constants” include academic achievement and degree achievement (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Various influences along the way impact the individual’s experience and expectations of self and others within the educational environment, however. These influences have both direct and indirect impact on the ways in which individuals perceive their academic abilities and motivations for such pursuits. More research is needed to further understand the dynamic interplay between academic perceptions and motivations.

An exploration of the literature afforded an opportunity to examine connections between student success, academic resilience, motivation, and achievement. One rather necessary task is to explore ways in which constructs have been used to describe student development across educational levels. This notion proposes that a certain level of fluidity in vocabulary exists which may influence how student development is conceptualized across the educational trajectory, for fluidity in language could potentially influence how reflections of resilience, motivation, and achievement may impact the educational journey of African-American male college students.

When an examination of the terms used to describe certain educational phenomena is conducted, several similarities can be noted regarding the way these terms are used to describe various aspects of student development in secondary and post-secondary education. Specifically, as the literature indicated, and for the purposes of this research, there were three broad categories of which the current study referenced when classifying often cited terminology used to describe an individual’s relationship to an educational institution—affect, behavior, and cognition

(Özdemir & Kalayci, 2013; Jimmerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). The affective categorization looks at student feelings about relationships with peers, teachers, and school. The behavioral dimension includes observable actions or performances, while the cognitive dimension captures student perceptions and beliefs as they relate to self, peers, school, and teachers (Jimmerson et al., 2003). While no one term can be completely described by one characteristic or another, it does help to define the terms within these categorizations to gain a fuller understanding of their functionalities and the types of information they can supply regarding student development and progress within the educational context. By examining academic motivation, resilience, and institutional commitment and the ways in which these terms have been defined across the educational spectrum, researchers can begin to develop a better understanding of the static nature of these terms and the information provided about the characteristics that impact the educational experiences of sub groups of students.

When examining the relationship between academic motivation, resilience, and institutional commitment, it is necessary to review these terms as they are presented in the literature. It is equally important to examine these terms within the contexts under which they are most frequently used and understood to formulize broader conceptualizations of these terms to explore transparency and utility in various settings and with different sub-groups. First, a brief explanation of school attachment and bonding and the ways in which these terms have been used to capture various aspects of the educational experience in primary and secondary education is provided. Next, academic motivation and resilience will be explored to further explicate differences in the use of terminology in context and to discuss how these terms related to the overarching concept school bonding. Persistence and its relation to academic achievement will be explored. By exploring the relationship between these terms, more can be understood about

the affective underpinnings of the general educational experiences as it occurs in higher education. Lastly, an overview of the theoretical framework that guide the study will be presented.

### **School Bonding, Attachment, and Academic Achievement**

Research has long established a relationship between school bonding, attachment, and academic achievement (Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Johnson et. al., 2001; Libby, 2004). School attachment, a concept akin to concepts such as school bonding, commitment, and involvement, has been defined in several ways throughout the literature however; the definition employed for the purposes of this research is the definition that embraces this concept as a subscale of the larger overarching concept of school bonding. Examinations of literary conceptualizations of this construct reveal that attachment to schools, teachers, or classrooms is determined by the student's associated feelings about those components of the educational environment; therefore, capturing both the affective and cognitive characteristics of this complex construct.

School bonding, described in the literature as an overarching construct related to school attachment, relates to the following: student experiences at school, the degree to which students feel they are cared for and valued by their teachers, degree of attachment to school, student level of participation and involvement in various activities around school, and the level of the students' dedication to the values and beliefs of the institution (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Catalane & Hawkins, 1996; Jimmerson, et.al; Libbey, 2004; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). In another sense however, school bonding has been often referred to as an evasive concept in the literature which has taken on several definitions and features (Jimmerson et. al, 2003). For the purposes of this study however, school bonding will be discussed contextually as a construct

with three distinct elements that include attachment and commitment to school, and belief in the values of the school (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

If present in high levels, research indicated that positive youth educational outcomes such as increased academic motivation, self-efficacy, and better grade performance can result (Goodenow, 1993; Jimmerson et. al, 2003; Merchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001; Osterman, 2000; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Wetzel, 1997, 1999). Lower levels of school bonding, on the other hand, have been linked to negative outcomes such as youth problem behaviors (Oelsner, Lippold, & Greenburg, 2011). Additionally, research suggested that certain normative changes occurred in levels of school bonding in that youth academic achievement, problem behavior, and even gender influenced changes in school bonding (Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Oelsner et. al. (2011) found a general developmental difference in school-bonding growth between girls and boys where boys were found to experience a steeper decrease in school bonding over the course of middle school. Such research suggested that these changes in school bonding paralleled adolescent development which highlighted the significance of the social context, the experiences within this context, and the impact that these experiences have on the overall school experience (Oelsner et. al, 2011). Aside from gender, other differences in terms of school bonding attachment and achievement can be noted within sub-groups of students —particularly, African American students.

### **African American Male Achievement in Education**

The achievement literature for African American students is very complex. While there are no single contributors to academic outcomes that can be identified from the literature, research has pointed to a combination of interpersonal and contextual variables that have been



indicated as predictors of academic outcomes (Eisele, Zand, Thomson, 2009). Academic self-concept has been linked to possible relationships with academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). Amongst these variables included global self-worth, a measure of self-perception found to be equivocal with academic achievement for both African American and non-African American adolescents (Gaskin-Butler & Tucker, 1995; Keltikanga-Jaervinen, 1992; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Zand & Thomson, 2005). Research has well established achievement gap differences between African American students and their peers of other ethnicities. Several studies indicated that African American students have consistently underperformed in comparison to their White counterparts (Rothstein, 2004). This observation must be considered in lieu of the fact that such results are further complicated by sex and income (NCES, 2009).

A review of relevant literature revealed limited information related to the experiences of specific sub-groups of students, let alone African American males in developmental education programs. The existence of such programs on the campuses of U.S colleges and universities however, are far from miniscule (Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan, & Davis, 2007). Very little information is available in terms of the demographics of developmental education and the efficacy of programs across the nation. Institutions that have implemented developmental education programs have little in common in terms of measures of retention and academic progress in various courses (Gerlaugh et al., 2007). Developmental education programs generally differed in terms of the mechanisms employed to the end of promoting student success. A general question remains as to how academic success is obtained by African American males in enrolled in developmental education courses at the post-secondary level. Very little information is known about this sub-group of students at the college level. It is therefore necessary to examine the performance of African American males within other sectors of

education such as primary and secondary education. Information as it pertains to the African American male population in primary and secondary education was prevalent in the literature.

### **African American Male Student Motivation, Resilience, and Persistence**

To understand African American male motivation resilience, and persistence in developmental education courses, there was a need to review primary and secondary education literature to gain a fuller understanding of the ways in which academic success, retention, and persistence were conceptualized and examined within this population. Academic success, retention, and persistence were defined in the literature as key areas of focus in terms of understanding trends within the student population. Next, a brief overview of the literature in the context of information pertinent to the academic achievement and retention of African American male college students was presented. By establishing connections across educational sectors educators and student affairs personnel can have a better understanding of issues faced by developmental education students in higher education. It was therefore beneficial to understand the ways in which African American males have progressed in education as defined in the literature in terms of achievement, resilience, and persistence. A brief examination of self-efficacy literature will supplement the context by which a deeper understanding can be extracted.

### **Academic Self-Efficacy: A Closer Look at African American Male Students in Education**

Several critical educational issues were identified in the literature that disproportionately affect African American male students (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011). These issues included high rates of placement in special education courses, low graduation rates, and higher incidences of certain types of disciplinary actions taken against them (Kaufman, Jaser, Vaughan, Reynolds, Di Donato, Bernard, Hernandez-Brereton, 2010; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008; Whiting, 2006). Population projections as provided by the U.S. Census

Bureau (2010) indicated a greater need to examine these disparities as they occurred within minority groups.

As recent reports continue to suggest a state of crisis as it pertains to the educational needs of African American males in American educational systems, it is important to look at the ways in which academic performance are impacted by personal factors such as self-esteem and beliefs in one's ability to succeed. Self-efficacy, for example, provides a lens to explore an individual's perception of their ability to manage a situation. Originating from a larger theoretical context of social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is defined as a motivational construct that proposes a relationship between people's beliefs about their capabilities to organize, learn or execute behaviors at certain performance levels and their expectations regarding outcomes from those efforts (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1994; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Referred to as a self-regulatory system, self-efficacy encompasses cognitive, affective, and referential mechanisms that assist individuals in perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behavior (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). According to Bandura, strong self-efficacy results in improvements in human performance and in general personal well-being (Bandura, 1994).

Self-efficacy influences how people approach tasks and how they think, feel, inspire themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1994). Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs impact individuals' task choices, efforts, persistence, resiliencies and accomplishments (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Higher levels of efficaciousness and confidence in one's ability to complete tasks despite barriers can result in personal accomplishments, which may also contribute to stress reduction and lowered susceptibility to depression (Bandura, 1994). From an academic standpoint, student performance on academic tasks is reflective of the cognitive and affective processes that guide behaviors in this setting. The amount of efforts put forth towards attempting a task to this end,

involves the individuals' assessment of his or her own perceptions of capabilities to learn, excel, persist, and achieve mastery (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

When examining the concept of self-efficacy in academics, it is important to understand from which the expectation of education achievements stem and the relationship such beliefs have on performance. Bandura (1994) proposed four main sources of influence for efficacy. Among the influences named were mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and the alteration of negative emotional tendencies and misinterpretations of the physical states of these tendencies (Bandura, 1994). Mastery experiences, which were identified as most effective for creating strong senses of efficacy, take the previous successes of an individual into account and the way in which these successes impacted an individual's personal efficacy. A second influence on self-efficacy, vicarious experiences, refers to those experiences that individuals obtained by observing the successes of role models like them. Social persuasion considers the role that verbal encouragement plays in mobilizing greater effort and motivation from individuals. Lastly, Bandura proposed a reduction in the occurrences of negative emotional tensions as such events contributed to misjudgments in an individual's perception of personal efficacy (Bandura, 1994). All four influences were key concepts for understanding the role that academic self-efficacy played in student achievement and motivation towards success.

### **Academic Self-Efficacy Defined**

Given the academic disparities descriptive of African American male academic struggles, it was important to consider both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors responsible for various outcomes amongst African American male students in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. To understand the personal experiences of these students however, it was important to examine the concept of academic self-efficacy. Much like self-efficacy, academic self-

efficacy encompasses the beliefs of students as they relate to one's capabilities to learn or perform acts in the academic setting (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). A brief look at the academic outcomes of African American males in higher education, suggested that African American males lagged their peers in terms of enrollment and graduation rates. According to Aud et.al (2010), recent trends in data indicated that the graduate rates of African American students in secondary education was approximately 20 percent lower than that of their White peers.

According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010), less than 50 percent of African American males graduated on time from high school compared to close to 80 percent of White male students. Various research reports indicated that Black male students were often less prepared than others for college coursework and were over represented on revenue generating intercollegiate sports teams (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006; Loury, 2004; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Lastly, African American male college completion rates were lower than females and males of other U.S. ethnic and racial groups (Harper 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010). Given the well-established literature on the academic outcomes of African American males in higher education, it was important to consider the ways in which certain outcomes are amplified by developmental education requirements. It was therefore, necessary to explore the ways in which African American male students have persisted and bounced back throughout their educational experiences.

### **African American Male Persistence and Resilience in Education**

Ogbu (1992) pointed to the importance of considering historical and comparative perspectives when seeking to gain a fuller understanding of the educational experiences of minorities. Ogbu (1992) argued that previously established research failed to account for differences in the school adjustment and performance of minority students when compared to

others who shared the same demographics, similar barriers, and cultural distance from White, middle class students. Ogbu additionally argued that such inter-group differences could not be accounted for simply by considering the systemic influences of wider society. Ogbu asserted that such explanations could be suggested to account for the impact that individual minority community forces have on varied educational outcomes.

According to Ogbu (1990, 1992), community forces are comprised of four major factors: a) cultural models b) cultural and language frames of reference c) degree of trust or acquiescence in relation to White Americans and institutions they control and d) educational strategies.

Cultural models reference an individual's frame of reference for making sense of their worlds and their actions within this world. Cultural/language frames of reference, both ambivalent/oppositional and non-oppositional result from contact situations between minority group members and members of the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1990; 1992). Degrees of trust and compliance in relation to White Americans refers to the perceptions of the levels of trust that minority group members feel that they can afford to White Americans and institutions controlled primarily by White Americans due to previous experiences with disparities and inequalities.

Educational strategies refer to minority actions, or the lack thereof within the domain of education. Educational strategies, Ogbu argues, are influenced significantly by the other factors that define community forces (Ogbu, 1990; 1992). This perspective is relevant to modern discussions as dialogue continues to explore the ways in which educational disparities continue to persist in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. One example of such examination would be to take an intimate look at literary examinations of African American male academic achievement in higher education. When the progress of African American males in general education is examined, it cannot be refuted that many studies have established the

significance of the achievement gap in primary and secondary education (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Cokley et.al, 2011). There are several studies that point to the various factors that lead to academic underachievement of African American males in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. According to one report, only 47 percent of black males graduated from American high schools on time (Aarons, 2010). Examination of assessment data revealed that college enrollment rates were lower whereas some 32 percent of African American 18 to 24-year-old students enrolled in a college or university during the academic year beginning in 2008 (Aud et al., 2010). Other reasons cited to explain academic underachievement included various psychological and cognitive factors such as motivation, academic disidentification, and home/school dissonance to name a few (Cokley et.al, 2011). To understand the various factors that contributed to the academic underachievement of black males, it was important to extrapolate and elaborate upon a few of those various causes as presented in the achievement literature.

For the purposes of the current study, while there are many concepts that are prevalent in the literature, only concepts deemed most relevant to the age and academic statuses of the students were of interest to this study. Concepts are categorized into two broad categories: psychological and social. Psychological concepts as defined by this study are those concepts that reflect operations of the individual psyche and or individual thought processes that results in or contributes to an intangible output. Concepts organized under this category include motivation, persistence, and resilience. Social concepts as defined for the purposes of this study include those concepts that are influenced by the interactions of intra and interpersonal factors such as culture and other socially defined constructs. These concepts include teacher expectations, racial identity, masculinity, and intelligence. By understanding the ways in which African American

student experiences are impacted by enrollment in developmental education courses, practitioners and researchers will gain a fuller appreciation for the experiences of these students and can perhaps devise more effective ways of providing support to these students in higher education. To garner more appreciation for social concepts and their influences on African American student motivation, resilience, and persistence, it is necessary to explore the theoretical constructs that influence the conceptualization and analysis of these concepts in academic contexts and beyond.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Staunch differences in academic achievements have been documented between students belonging to various ethnic groups in the United States for several decades. Analysis of achievement differences more times often than not point to disparaging educational experiences and matters reflective of grander sociocultural issues such as race, poverty, and access to resources. General problems related to race, poverty, and access to resources are often reflected in social and institutional policies adopted by private and public institutions such as education. Critical race theory provides a framework from which educational inequities and race are used as analytic tools for understanding school inequity. CRT challenges hegemonic narratives of colorblindness and meritocracy and instead centers on the centrality of experiential knowledge (Harper, 2009). Situated mediated identity theory is presented as one of many practical applications of critical race theory in educational research. When considered together, both theories provide a strong foundation for expanding upon knowledge of African American student achievement in post-secondary education as mediated by a culmination of educational experiences in Pre-Kindergarten and beyond.



## Critical Race Theory and Education

Critical race theory has origins in the critical legal studies of the 1970s which criticized American jurisprudence and the role it played in preserving racial and economic oppression (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Bell (1992), American jurisprudence has been used historically to perpetuate racial inequality and mask the reality of economic and political disparities between blacks and white in America. Bell (1992) argued that abstract principles such as equality continue to be used in the court system to cover policy choices and value judgments, which formed the crux of important historical legal decisions impacting blacks such as those rendered in the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision. Through the subversion of civil rights laws to whites, Bell (1992) argued that black rights continue to be undermined and suppressed by the legal system. By adopting *Racial Realism*, blacks could gain a broadened perspective on events and problems that contributed to the racial subordination they were subjected to (Bell, 1992).

Arguments for the application of critical legal studies in explaining educational inequities centered on three propositions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The first proposition maintained that race continued to exert significant influence on determinations of inequity in the United States and is engrained as a normal part of American society. As an untheorized, ideological paradigm, race was often combined with the likes of ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality as if interchangeably sufficient for explaining variations amongst the population (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Furthermore, research suggests that racial inequity within education is documented by statistics related to public school demographics, high school dropout rates, suspension rates, and incarceration rates (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pew Research Center, 2014; Simpson 2014; Howard, 2008). For example, according to a study published by Pew

Research Center (2014), students of color have comprised a majority in public schools since 2014 due to privatized education and white flight.

A related meta-proposition of race purports that class and gender intersect race and altogether can better account for educational achievement disparities between whites and students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The second proposition held that the structure of U.S. society was based on property rights. As it pertained to education, better property often equated to better schools which impacted resources and opportunities to learn (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The third proposition maintained that the intersection of race and property provided a platform of analysis from which further understandings could be developed for social and ultimately school inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “whiteness” is valuable and lauded as the ultimate property to possess because it afforded opportunities of use and enjoyment, disposition, reputation and status property, and the unconditional right to exclude; therefore, white privilege was conceptualized as a disadvantage to ethnic minorities. To further understand the social ramifications of the absence of “whiteness” for persons of color, it was necessary to examine how critical race theory was used to inform critical race methodology in higher education.

### **Critical Race Theory and Higher Education**

Although higher education is often lauded as a place of opportunity, its often-controversial policy efforts and expanding achievement gaps continue to contribute to access and equity issues for students of color (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). There are many obstacles to African American student success that stem from race, power, and privilege. Opportunity and achievement gaps between students of color and their white counterparts continue to persist in higher education (Harper, Patton, Wooden, 2009). Howard (2008) argued that the current state

of education for African American males in PreK-12 reveal a high level of concern for the underachievement and disenfranchisement in schools and society. Several educational scholars point to dominant deficit and at-risk discourses that are often used to conceptualize the educational experiences of students of color (Harper, 2009; Wiant & Griffin, 2012). Such discourses however, inadvertently blame students of color for academic problems (Wiant & Griffin, 2012).

Students of color often feel that their experiences, cultures, languages, and histories are often neglected or minimized in formal educational settings (Bernal, 2002). Research from one study revealed that students of color were more likely to be exposed to discrimination on college campuses and were more likely to report difficulties with campus integration and the establishment of meaningful relationships with peers (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013). As a theoretical framework, CRT has been used to explore student family and community relationship dynamics to learn how students develop resources and strategies for surviving and navigating through educational systems with these supports (Savas, 2014). By posing a challenge to white hegemony, CRT helps scholars in education explore the ways that culture and knowledge have influenced the lived experiences of students of color (Savas, 2014).

Jain (2009) asserted that critical race theory is a valuable tool for exploring complexities involved in transfer experiences, race, and gender as they related to the experiences of student leaders of color at community colleges. When considering race relations and its impact on higher education in America, it is important to consider the way in which mitigating influences of race and counterintuitive policies have influenced the quality of educational experiences of students of color. Research has well established that race and counterintuitive policies, have unfortunately contributed to inequities within education. Critical race theory provides a

mechanism for such an undertaking. Additionally, critical race theory may provide a mechanism for understanding how and why students of color may adopt various survival mechanisms laden in cultures, strong family ties, and community relations to survive within the educational system (Savas, 2014).

### **A Brief Note on Critical Race and Qualitative Methodologies**

As a theory that thrives off experiential knowledge, CRT lends itself to the personal narrative can be used to aid in understanding the experiences of marginalized persons. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), “stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting.” By attempting to interject marginalized discourses about the experiences of persons of color, critical race theory aims to reconstruct “truth” and ultimately society in general (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The narrative as counter-story, poses a challenge to the “master narrative,” or discourse on race which is laced with stories of deficiency, white privilege, and other forms of subordination as experiences by persons of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

As a methodology, critical race theory can be used to organize research inquiries concerning race and racism. CRT can also be used to provide a lens from which to examine the ways in which race and racism intersect with other forms of subordination to influence the experiences of students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race methodology seeks to extrapolate theoretical, conceptual, methodological and pedagogical questions concerning the experiences of persons of color. Critical race methodology also challenges notions such as objectivity, meritocracy, and equal opportunity in the educational context.

### **Applied Critical Race Theory: Murrell's Situated Mediated Identity Theory**

Murrell's situated-mediated identity theory provides a framework from which the tenants of critical race theory can be applied to explore the academic achievements of students of color within the educational setting. To explore the complex interplay between identity, achievement performance, and mediating factors that impact schooling performance, Murrell (2007) proposed situated-mediated identity theory. Situated-mediated identity theory, an examination of the student educational experiences-in-context, stems primarily from the conception of situated identity. Murrell examined identity development in relation to achievement efficacy in school settings. Race, per Murrell was a factor that exerted influence on identity formation, which was integral to the "situatedness" of identity formation in relation to historical time and setting. According to Murrell (2007), social identification in school was a developmental process that progressed in three phases: situated identity awareness, positioning and positionality awareness, and agency.

Situated identity awareness relates to an individual's ability to recognize that different identities are portrayed in different settings. When an individual achieves awareness of positioning and positionality, that individual has developed a realization of how they adapt to present a desirable persona to others. Agency is achieved when an individual has developed a critical and conscious understanding of both positionality and situation regardless of setting or context. Successful progression through each phase leads to greater achievement efficacy. The following premises were central to Murrell's (2007) theory (pg. 56-57):

- (1) Relational activity, such as communication, provides a means of socially constructing the self and realizations of self-identity.

- (2) Identity is situation and fluid and is best understood as a representation of self that is put forth to the world.
- (3) The representations of self taken on by an individual (role or positionality) are situated roles that individuals assume and express (consciously or unconsciously) in various settings.
- (4) The set of roles assumed in academic settings have a strong impact on achievement and school success.
- (5) Local culture, which shapes school performance and sense of self, is formed by shared situated identities created and facilitated by common experiences in school settings.
- (6) Local culture, which encompasses the immediate cultural-social context of school settings, combined with the situatedness of a learner's performance—can be structured to facilitate the development of positive and productive academic identities in ways that can lead to school success.

By adopting Murrell's Situated Mediated Identity theory as a framework, the researcher was provided with an applied example of how mediating factors such as identity development, context, and race can influence the academic achievements and educational experiences of individuals within various educational settings. The framework as proposed by Murrell as used as a lens from which to understand academic experiences as they related to the achievements and motivations of African American males enrolled in developmental education. In a broader sense, both self-efficacy theory and situated mediated theory informed the research questions and guided the researcher in exploring the phenomenon of interest.

Literature related to general student and African American male experiences within higher education is abundant. Several studies pointed to factors that influenced the educational experiences of students in higher education. These factors can be broadly categorized in the areas of motivation, resilience, and persistence. Many studies have largely neglected the impact of developmental education on retention, degree completion, and the overall educational experience of students. An understanding of the impact of developmental education coursework on the educational experiences of students warrants an overview of developmental education's history and the role that placement and assessment played in its implementation. Self-efficacy theory and critical race theory provided overarching frameworks to explore how motivation, resilience, and persistence of African American male students impacted by enrollment in developmental education programming.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a general overview of research related to developmental education and specific academic constructs that accompanied a generalized explanation of variables of interest related to student success in education. This chapter also provided a theoretical review of critical race theory, related research, and applications of this theory in an educational setting. Through the examination of individual and institutional factors that have been known to influence the academic resilience, motivation, and self-efficacy of students in the past, the researcher aimed to develop a richer understanding of the mitigating factors of student success in higher education for African American male college students. The phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education courses. The study also aimed to identify strategies and institutional

procedures that could be employed to encourage the academic success of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education courses.



## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter was to present information related to the research method and procedures selected for implementing the study. Specific information provided in this chapter included research design, research questions, participants, locale, data collection and analysis. Additionally, an examination of undergirding confidentiality policies and ethics, trustworthiness, and limitations within the study were discussed. This chapter concludes with information regarding the background and role of the researcher.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education courses [DECs] at a rural community college. Essentially, the researcher wanted to learn how enrollment in developmental education courses affected the educational experiences of African American male college students. Two central questions guided the study:

1. How does enrollment in developmental educational coursework in the access program influence the perspectives of African American male college students as it relates to academic achievement?
2. In what way do institutional factors influence perspectives of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education in the access program as it relates to academic achievement?

The guiding theories for this study were Murrell's situated-mediated identity theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Appendices A and B contain copies of the individual and group

protocols. To truly understand the rationale behind exploring the lived experiences of the participants, it was necessary to establish a foundational understanding of phenomenological research and the qualitative research methodology in general. The sections that follow focused on the establishment of a philosophical rationale for the use of qualitative methodology for the study. Topics such as phenomenological research and phenomenological data analysis procedures were discussed. Additionally, specific information concerning the research site, participants and recruitment methods used, and the IRB process were discussed.

## **Research Design**

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative methodology was selected as an appropriate approach for the exploration and interpretation of the personal experiences of African American male students within the access program. While employing the social constructivist philosophical worldview, the researcher embraced the notion of individuals being able to create subjective meanings from their experiences of the world (Creswell, 2009). Social constructivists hold that people seek to understand the world by developing subjective meanings of their experiences. Multiple and varied meanings are derived from these experiences which results in complex understandings (Creswell, 2007). The knowledge generated from these experiences are reflective of the social and historical influence of the human experience. Social constructivism provided a framework from which the researcher could examine the access students' experiences of the world as they saw it.

Berger & Luckman (1966) maintained that knowledge consists of anything that is regarded as worthy of knowing by society. From this worldview, reality is a socially constructed concept. The object of research then becomes to capture, as close as possible, a participant's

view of the experience. Knowledge of this experience however, although subjective in nature, is influenced by interactions with others and norms as perpetrated through history and culture (Creswell, 2007; Hosking & Morley, 2004). Researchers have often focused on the process of interaction with others in addition to the contexts in which people operate from daily (Creswell, 2007). Through the examination of the contexts from which individual interactions occur, the researcher could develop a fuller understanding of the individuals' experience in the context of social relationships. It was important to develop a full understanding of the participants' experiences with the access program and the developmental education coursework. The participants were enrolled in the access program using a learning community which had a major impact on the frequency of interactions between participants and faculty. More information about the site and the program are provided in another section of this chapter. Considering the nature of the access program and the impact that the program had on the interactions between participants, qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate methodology for exploring the participants' experiences.

When considering complementary ontological approaches, the researcher selected the constructivist epistemology. Constructivist researchers acknowledge how their personal, cultural, and historical experiences influence their interpretation and "positioning" within the research process (Creswell, 2007). From this worldview, the researcher was better able to embrace her unique individual experiences as they were filtered through culture, history, and personal experiences. When examining her personal experiences, phenomenology equipped the researcher with access to the lived experiences of individuals as they encountered the phenomenon of developmental education in the access program while considering how her

previous experiences with programming on campus could impact how she perceived of the experiences of the research participants.

### **Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenological research aims to explore the meaning of participants' lived experiences with an identified concept or phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012). Phenomenology describes both a philosophy and a research strategy. From a philosophical standpoint, phenomenology is a research strategy of inquiry vested in the philosophical assumptions that aims to identify "the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2009). Inherent within the inquiry process of phenomenology is the idea that participants have a shared experience by which patterns and relationships of meaning can be extracted (Creswell, 2009). The general idea behind phenomenology is to describe a common experience of participants. In capturing the "universal essence" of individuals, the researcher identifies an aspect of the lived human experience. When exploring such lived human experiences, the researcher construes meaning from original descriptions of the situation from which the phenomenon occurred. Moustakas (1994) described this best as represented by the following quotation: "phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given..."

According to Creswell (2009), phenomenology vests on three primary philosophical underpinnings. These underpinnings include a study of the lived, conscious experiences of people, and the development of descriptions that capture the gist of these experiences. Originating from the works of Descartes, Brentano, and Husserl, phenomenology represents a departure in scientific thought from traditional positivism (Creswell, 2009). There are two approaches to phenomenology that are well referenced in the literature: hermeneutic

phenomenology and empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutical phenomenology is a type of research that is oriented around lived experiences and the hermeneutics (“texts”) of life. An educator by the name of Van Manen (1990) described phenomenological research from this perspective as an interaction of six research activities. According to Van Manen (1990), a researcher must first discover a phenomenon of interest and then reflect on themes that constitute the nature of the phenomenon. Next, the researcher must write a description of the phenomenon that balances the writing and adheres to the topic of inquiry. Van Manen (1990) regarded phenomenology as an interpretive process that aided the researcher in the interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences of participants.

Phenomenology as a transcendental or psychological philosophy, proposes a methodical and disciplined approach for knowledge generation where the researcher relies on reflection of subjective and objective acts (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, the descriptions of the participants are prioritized over those of the researcher. Emphasis is placed on bracketing (*epoche*) and setting aside the experiences of the investigator so that a new perspective can transcend (Creswell, 2012). Transcendental phenomenology procedures, as described by Moustakas (1994), consist of the following procedures: (1) Identification of the phenomenon of interest (2) Bracketing of the researcher’s experiences and (3) Collection of data from several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (4) Analysis of the data by the researcher through the process of reduction and theme generation (5) Creation of textural and structural descriptions to convey the overall essence of the experience. The researcher will provide further details concerning how the above-referenced procedures were applied to the current study in a later section. Given the limited amount of research available concerning

African American males and developmental education, the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education program were best broached using transcendental phenomenological procedures. The next section outlines selected procedures and participant information along with other information pertinent for understanding how the researcher utilized transcendental phenomenological procedures.

### **Procedure and Participants**

Although phenomenological research is regarded as both a methodology and a philosophy, there are several procedures that are essential to the implementation of phenomenological research. The researcher utilized the transcendental phenomenology approached outlined by Moustakas and will provide specifics regarding the data analysis selected. Other topics outlined in this section include the role and background of the researcher, sampling frame, and information on the research site and participants.

### **Role and Background of the Researcher**

As the primary researcher and individual analyzing the data collected, the researcher had to ensure that undue influence and bias did not occur during the research process. Several authors pointed to the essential role that the researcher plays in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012). The utilization of the phenomenological frame of reference made it very important for the researcher to make efforts to maintain objectivity. The researcher achieved this process by engaging in systemic and methodical methods to set aside prejudgments related to the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, p 22, 1994.) In highlighting the important role that the researcher plays in phenomenological research and qualitative research methodology in general, it was important for the researcher to launch the research study in a context that was as devoid as possible of any preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon under

investigation from prior experiences and professional studies (Moustakas, 1994). From this perspective, the researcher aimed to explain experiences that had influenced the researcher's approach to the study.

The researcher identified as an African American, heterosexual female who has occupied professional roles of faculty advisor and Assistant Professor of Psychology and Human Services at Carter State College [CSC]. Prior to the current teaching professional appointment at CSC, the researcher worked as an academic advisor for students enrolled in developmental education coursework. The researcher's role as an academic advisor relied heavily upon the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the institution's developmental education policies regarding placement and progression towards degree completion. Additionally, the role of academic advisor required keen understanding of the student population and various factors that influenced student enrollment and persistence through required developmental education courses. The ultimate purpose of the advisor position was to monitor and track student progress towards degree completion at the Associate's degree level by understanding academic and social factors that contributed to student success while also helping student connect to campus resources to enhance success opportunities.

Awareness of developmental education policies and procedures afforded the researcher a unique opportunity to encounter student perspectives and interpretations of such policies during advisement sessions and other communications specific to the individual students' educational experiences with the institution. From these encounters, the researcher developed an awareness of systemic issues that impeded student progress at the individual and institutional levels. The researcher's professional and personal experiences within education and various human services capacities impressed the researcher to further explore how developmental education

opportunities were perceived by students. The researcher has worked in various human services capacities such as a professional counselor and case manager which have allowed the researcher to serve individuals from minority, underrepresented, and low-SES backgrounds. In working with these populations, the researcher contends that issues related to social justice often infringe on the experiences of these populations and can permeate different sociological contexts. In the educational context, issues related to social justice include and are not limited to access, participation, equity, and harmony.

In considering the culmination of such experiences, the researcher had a vested interest in social justice advocacy and in improving opportunities and outcomes of minorities involved in social systems. To enact the epoche process, the researcher constructed non-leading questions that focused on capturing positive and negative aspects of the developmental education experience. The epoche process affords the phenomenological researcher a chance to view phenomenon from a vantage point that encourages a natural attitude and openness while discouraging presuppositions and ordinary perceptions.

Although the researcher currently did have any active involvement with the direct enforcement of policies and procedures related to the developmental education program, the researcher recognized that current and previous positions as an academic professional could influence participant responses during interviews. Due to the like-li-hood of participants being former advisees or students of the researcher, the researcher opened the research pool to students at all of CSC's campuses during the Fall 2016 school year. The researcher did not select students from classes she was teaching at the start of the data collection.



### **Epoche (Bracketing)**

The procedure of bracketing was used prior to the start of data collection and analysis to decipher between the elements of the experience identified by the study's participants and the researcher's awareness of the experience (Brannick & Cogan, 2007). Bracketing is regarded as an important component of phenomenological analysis and is an ongoing process throughout the research experience. For this reason, the researcher maintained a reflexivity journal for ongoing bracketing. The following statement from the researcher contains the researcher's preconceptions about the developmental education experience prior to the start of data collection:

*My previous experiences as an advisor has made me think more specifically about what I consider to be unique issues of students of color in developmental education. Having the experience of being in developmental education alone is unique and can perhaps be considered a negative. I recall students that I met with during the past complaining about how demeaning it felt to be in Learning Support. Perhaps there is some sort of stigma associated with being a first-year student with learning support requirements. I often thought that maybe students felt that they weren't smart enough to matriculate into the institution under standard admissions criteria. Many of those same students also implied that they felt that they were being targeted and ostracized by the institution at large due to their limited opportunities to adjust to college life because of the institutionally deemed academic deficiencies that could perhaps serve as mere reflections of their primary and secondary educational experiences...or maybe even their socioeconomic backgrounds. Either way, I am concerned that these thoughts may lead me to feel that my students have a racialized educational experience narrative that accompanies their experiences in developmental education. Then again, maybe not.*

*Maybe these students have instead developed narratives of resilience and opportunity that will drive them to and through their post-secondary experiences. Not sure that I am ready for this, but here goes.*

### **The Local Setting**

The study was implemented in a small town located in the middle Georgia area. During the Spring of 2016, Carter State College entered an agreement with Peach State University [PSU] which led to the creation of access program for students denied admission at PSU. The details of the agreement outlined a specific course sequence utilizing the learning community model for students with developmental education requirements. Upon completion of 30 hours of transferrable credit with CSC, students would be eligible to transfer into PSC. To protect the identity of participants and the institution, the program will be referred to as the CA [College Access] program. Although the CA program was housed at Peach State University, it was considered one of several satellite campuses of operation for Carter State College; hence, the need for the researcher to obtain the permission of CSC's Human Subjects Review Committee. Students admitted into the program were officially CSC students and therefore interacted with the advisor as a representative of CSC's administrative team responsible for the implementation and management of the CA program.

As one of CSC's satellite campuses, PSU is a historically black, state and land-grant institution with a student population of over 2,000 students (C Smith, personal communication, January 10, 2017). Located south of metro Atlanta, CSC is a public, residential state college. CSC was one of a few higher education institutions in the state which offered developmental education coursework to students. CSC is a public college accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). CSC offers undergraduate degrees in Associate's

and Bachelor's degree programs. CSC's student enrollment beginning Fall 2016 consisted of 3,901 students, of which 37% were African American, 55 % White, 3% Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1% Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native ("Fall 2016 Quick Facts, 2016.) Considering that the focus of this study was on the academic experiences of African American male students in the access program, a single-site phenomenological approach was most appropriate.

### **Institutional Review Board Process (IRB)**

The researcher adhered to procedures outlined by CSC's Human Subjects Review committee as well as The University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board with regards to conducting research using human subjects and participant selection. Specifically, the researcher completed a full-proposal review for research as outlined in the Human Subjects Review policy for research involving human participants at CSC. The researcher received approval from CSC prior to seeking approval from the University of Georgia's IRB to ensure that compliance procedures were followed thoroughly. The Human Subjects Review Committee application and UGA IRB application were completed and submitted by the researcher upon approval by dissertation committee after the successful defense of the dissertation prospectus.

### **Sampling Frame and Recruitment Techniques**

Once the researcher obtained IRB and Human Subjects Review approval, the researcher began the recruitment of eligible African American male participants enrolled in developmental education courses on the CSC main campus via posted invitational flyers (Appendix C) in high student traffic areas on campus. The researcher obtained assistance from the directors of CSC residence life and student activities for recruitment opportunities at high student attendance events. The researcher obtained a research study interest list from male students who at the time

were members of the minority advisement program on campus and emailed interested participants an interest email (Appendix D) and follow-up email (Appendix E). Only one participant responded out of a total of 17 potential participants in the first round of recruitment efforts. This participant eventually declined participation due to personal reasons. The researcher expanded recruitment to CSC's satellite campus at PSU once recruitment efforts on campus were exhausted. Consequently, all participants were students enrolled in developmental educational coursework with CSC via the access program.

The researcher utilized the same recruitment procedures implemented on CSC's main campus to recruit seven of eight male students enrolled in CA program at PSU. Participants were first-year college students and were members of the first cohort of students for the access program. The cohort was comprised of 22 students who were initially denied admission into the four-year university due to low SAT scores and/or high school GPAs. Students were offered conditional enrollment at CSC which would then provide students with a chance to fulfill developmental education requirements via the access program on the campus of PSU.

Participants were natives of Georgia who met participation criteria as previously established. Each participant signed an informed consent (Appendix F) for participation. Each participant could provide consent to participate given their ages. Information outlined in the informed consent included the nature of the study, participant expectations, incentive opportunities, and potential risks and benefits of participation. Upon receipt of the informed consent, the researcher began the coordination and scheduling of individual interviews. Participants were required to complete a participant demographics sheet (Appendix G) where participants completed demographic questions and created pseudonyms for confidentiality.

Purposive sampling techniques, also referred to as judgment sampling, were employed to recruit participants for the current phenomenology study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Bernard (2006) maintained that nonprobability sampling was most appropriate for research that is in-depth and culturally based. Bernard (2006) argued that a nonprobability sampling methods were always appropriate when the researcher aimed to undertake in-depth study of a few cases and when performing research on special populations. Given the epistemological premises implied by social constructivism in general, nonprobability sampling is most appropriate for the current phenomenological study. Through nonprobability sampling, the researcher could solicit the participation of individuals who meet the specific criteria of interest to the research topic.

As a nonprobability sampling method, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select participants who possessed knowledge about the phenomenon under study (Abrams, 2010; Dworkin, 2012; Tongco, 2007). Although an inherently biased method, purposive sampling has been used in a variety of research contexts and can still be used to provide data that is reliable and relevant (Mammen, Sano, 2012; Tongco, 2007). Only individuals with current experience with CSC's developmental education program were eligible to participate in the study.

As with any qualitative study, concerns regarding sample size are always problematic because qualitative sampling is not intended to be representative to the general population. In qualitative research, researchers cannot establish a basis for a normal distribution for the experiences, relations, or locations under study. Researchers are encouraged to adopt sampling strategies pertinent to conceptual frameworks and questions posed (Abrams, 2010). Random sampling methods are not necessary for the unique insights provided by participants of qualitative studies and are instead more preferred for instances where the researcher wishes to generalize to a larger population (Abrams, 2010; Dworkin, 2012). Normal distribution is

however, inherent to the process of random sampling and quantitative methodologies in general (Abrams, 2010). According to Lester (1999), sample sizes of qualitative studies are contingent upon the topic under study and the engagement of participants.

Much debate exists around the identification of specific sample sizes for a given qualitative methodology (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). In qualitative research, depth of data is a determinant of sample size sufficiency (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Although there were established guidelines that exist within the literature, which ranges from 5 to 50 participants, thematic/data saturation is typically held as the standard for data diversity (Dowrkin, 2012; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Nastasi (n.d.) maintains that sample sizes for qualitative studies can be estimated based on saturation and variation within the target population. Saturation is achieved when the researcher can no longer identify any new information that enhances his or her understanding of the subject (Creswell, 2007; Siedman, 2013). The section that follows identifies how such ideal saturation could be obtained.

### **Instrumentation**

Hays and Singh (2012) recommend that researchers use multiple methods for research inquiry. The current study consisted of two methods for data collection: individual, semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The specific type of interview approach used is referred to as the phenomenological based interview approach. The phenomenological based interview approach as outlined by Seidman (2013) was used to capture life history information and focused, in-depth information on the developmental education experience.

The phenomenological based interview provided a framework from which information could be analyzed, interpreted, and disseminated (Siedman, 2013). Specifically, the phenomenological approach to interviewing allowed the researcher a method from which participants were asked to

reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences from high school and college. In doing so, the subjective prevailed and the very nature of the human experience was exposed (Siedman, 2013). Siedman held that meaning could be extracted from the act of attending to the experience and that the lived experience was the foundation of the phenomena under investigation. The phenomenological interview approach, as presented by Siedman (2013) consisted of a three-interview series. The first interview provided a context for the participants' experience. The second interview provided a platform for the reconstruction of the details of the experience in consideration of the context. The last interview, encouraged reflection of meaning. Given the researcher's focus on the participants' current experiences in developmental education and the time sensitivity for data collection, the researcher limited participant interviews to one individual interview which incorporated each area targeted by Siedman's three interview series. The following section outlines data collection and analysis procedures which highlighted how protocol questions were structured to encompass the focused life history, details of the experience of developmental education, and the participants' reflection of meaning of the experience.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for the current study was comprised of individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview. Each interview was recorded via a password protected phone recorder and a digital recorder for accuracy. The researcher recorded her thoughts and reflections from each interview in a reflexivity journal. A contact summary sheet (Appendix H) was also used to ensure trustworthiness and to highlight discrepancies, thoughts, and comments related to the research data collection process. The contact summary sheet was also used to help derive preliminary themes as suggested by Hays & Singh (2012). Upon the

completion of the interviews, each interview was transcribed and coded. Transcripts were managed via the use of NVivo 11 software.

### **Interview Protocol**

The individual interview protocol comprised of 41 open-ended questions. The use of the semi-structured interview approach was important for allowing participants an opportunity to provide insights regarding their experiences in developmental education in as least restricted manner as possible. Each semi-structured individual interview was conducted face-to-face by the researcher as the sole interviewer which allowed for the establishment of rapport and trust as co-researchers in the investigative process (Boylorn, 2016). Interviews were scheduled for 90 minute increments, but on average lasted approximately 30 minutes or less. The types of questions included in the semi-structured interview protocol were developed using the current literature on developmental education and academic success (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Burley, 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008) and critical race theory in higher education (Hernandez, 2016; Bailey, 2009).

### **Focus Group.**

The second method employed by this study was that of the focus group. Creswell (2007) suggested the use of focus groups when interactions between participants are likely to yield the best information, when participants are likely to share similarities and be cooperative with one another, and when participants are hesitant to provide information in a one-on-one setting. The focus group was used to assist the researcher in gathering additional data about the phenomenon under study with the homogenous group (Hays & Singh, 2012). By facilitating a focus group, the researcher aimed to gather additional insights on the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of



research participants which could further the researcher's understanding of the developmental education experience (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Interview Site**

Since all participants were full-time students enrolled at the access program site, all but one interview was conducted in the office of the researcher for the convenience of the participants. The researcher's office was within a central location familiar to and convenient to all participants. Additionally, the researcher's office was most ideal in protecting the identity of the research participants. The other interview took place at the access site's library in a private study room due to the researcher's inability to obtain access to the office space on the weekend the interview was completed.

### **Data Analysis**

In accordance to the systematic methods of transcendental phenomenology outlined by Moustakas (1994), specific steps were implemented to analyze data and for the assembly of the textural and structural descriptions. These specific steps were outlined by the modified Van Kaam as discussed by Moustakas (1994). This method of analysis was utilized by the researcher to extract the participants' experiences with faculty and staff in developmental education courses while also considering high school experiences, personal motivations towards success and achievement, and experiences of being African American in a developmental education program. Per Moustakas (1994), the seven steps that encompass this analytic process included the following: (1) listing and preliminary group (2) reduction and elimination (3) clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents (4) validation (5) individual textural descriptions (6) individual structural descriptions and (7) textural-structural descriptions of the essence of the experience.

After data was collected and transcribed, the researcher reviewed the interview transcriptions and identified statements from participants that enhanced the researcher's understanding of how the participants experienced developmental education in the process of horizontalization. Horizontalization is one aspect of the phenomenological reduction process. Phenomenological reduction describes the experience of the phenomenon in the most objective way possible while also considering the internalized perception of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). A horizon is referred to as a key statement that is derived from transcription that conveys meaning or provides insight into the experiences of participants. To initiate this process, the researcher provided the participants with a copy of their transcriptions to verify accuracy and to offer corrections. All interviews were accepted as fair and reflective of accurate depictions of the participants' experiences.

After reviewing each transcript multiple times, the researcher began organizing the data into invariant constituents, also known as meaning units. These meaning units, or clusters of meaning were then generated into themes. The researcher identified 28 meaning units which were depicted as codes and were documented in a codebook (Appendix I) maintained by NVivo 11 software. Codebooks are used to maintain lists of codes, sub codes, and patterns and can also include definitions or descriptions of codes. The researcher also referenced Creswell's (2007) suggested template for coding a phenomenological study when identifying codes of significance to the study.

### **Meaning Units and Theme Development**

According to Moustakas (1994), a meaning unit is a piece of data that stands out from the set, is most relevant, or has special value to the research topic. Meaning units were constructed from the basis of multiple reflections on the participants' transcribed interviews. The researcher

organized and clustered participant responses into meaning units as they stemmed from protocol questions aiming to highlight some aspect of the developmental education experience. The meaning units were grouped into themes thorough the process of reduction and elimination.

Emergent themes were noticed by the researcher prior to and during the transcription process with the aid of contact sheets and reflexive journaling. The researcher identified invariant constituents by testing expressions to determine a moment of the experience that was necessary for understanding and labeling the experience. Test questions included the following: (1) Does the expression contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding it? (2) Is it possible to abstract and label it? Once the researcher, initiated the “test” for each statement, the next step was to “check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant.”

The researcher then used the validated expressions and accompanying themes to construct a textural description of the experience which included verbatim statements from the transcribed participant interview. A structural description of the participants’ experiences was contrived and prepared for all research team members. The process of imaginative variation allowed the researcher to vary perspectives and frames or reference as depicted by the various interviews of the research participants. The final step in the process required that the researcher provide each research participant with a textural-structural description synthesizing the meanings and essences of the experience. Each individual textural-structural description was used to develop the composite account of the meanings and essences of the experience of developmental education of the group in its entirety.

### **Trustworthiness**

Given that the research study was conducted at an institution where the researcher has a current affiliation, several techniques were enacted to increase transferability, credibility, internal validity, and dependability as suggested by Creswell (2009) and Hays & Singh (2012). The researcher utilized six strategies of trustworthiness. These strategies included reflexive journaling, field notes, member checking, collaboration with a research team, triangulation of investigators, and the use of an audit trail (Hays & Singh, 2012; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Reflexive journaling was used to assist the researcher in notating how involvement in the research process impacted the researcher professionally and personally. Fields notes assisted the researcher in describing and analyzing research findings as they developed during the research process (Hay & Singh, 2012). Member checking was used to provide participants with opportunities to be involved in the research process while also ensuring that accurate portrayals of their perspectives were included in the research. The researcher accomplished this task by asking the participants to review interview transcripts. The focus group was also used as a means for reviewing overall findings of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). A research team was utilized for the duration of the study for the purposes of data analyses and to arrive at consensus on domains and themes as presented in the data. An audit trail was used to aid in systematic data collection and analysis efforts. To this end, the researcher maintained a timeline of research activities, interview protocols, transcriptions, audio recordings, all drafts of the codebook, and summary sheets for participant contacts.

### **Summary**

The qualitative methodology and constructivist worldview provide the ideal framework for exploring the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in a

developmental education program. Phenomenology allows the researcher to explore the intersectionality of personal, cultural, and historical experiences and the ways that such experiences can exert influence on the research. Inherent to phenomenological research are specific procedures best suitable for conducting the proposed research study. By outlining specifics regarding the researcher's role, background, chosen instrumentation, data collection, and analysis for the phenomenological study, the researcher proposes a study grounded in the principles of the qualitative methodology.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology for the phenomenological study. The stated intent of the research study was encompassed in two research questions targeting a thorough understanding of the experiences of African American male college students in developmental education. The epistemological underpinnings of constructivism afforded the phenomenological researcher with the vantage point of exploring the experiences of research participants with a phenomenon as they present in the subjective worlds of the participants. Specifics regarding the role and back ground of the researcher, relevant procedures, instrumentation, and information specific to the local setting were introduced in this chapter.

## Chapter Four

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to outline key findings of the study which utilized phenomenological procedures. The goals of the study were to explore the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education courses within an access program housed at a historically black university in the southeast. I aimed to extract the essence of African American males' experiences as students enrolled in a developmental education access program. The two research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. How does enrollment in developmental educational coursework in a rural state college access program influence the perspectives of African American male college students as it relates to academic achievement?
2. In what way do institutional factors influence perspectives of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education in a rural state college access program as it relates to academic achievement?

The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group interview with a total of 7 participants which were scheduled for 90, but lasted approximately 20 minutes each. Each participant was a first-year college student enrolled in an access program for students with developmental education requirements hosted at a southeastern public university. Each participant was a native of Georgia. Following are brief descriptions of the research participants with pseudonyms included. Table 4.1 provides a summary of participant pseudonyms and pertinent information.

### **Participants' Individual Narratives**

Brandon Meeks was an 18-year old African American male, enrolled in the College Access [CA] program. Brandon aspired to attend Peach State University [PSU] prior to learning that his SAT scores were too low to gain regular admission. As a result, he enrolled in the CA program to complete developmental education courses [DECs] with the goal of matriculating into PSU to major in Criminal Justice and eventually governmental affairs. The CA program was an access program created through an institutional partnership between PSC and Carter State University [CSU] for students who did not meet the full admissions criteria for PSU. Students enrolled in CA program would have an opportunity to matriculate into PSU upon completion of DECs and other credit hour requirements.

King was a 19-year old African American male who enrolled in the CA program after learning about the program through a college fair at his former high school. King had taken a year off from school to work and had originally planned to enlist in the Army. After not obtaining his desired ASVAB scores, King decided to embark on a college career. He hoped to major in Computer Science.

Carter James was an 18-year-old African American male who enrolled in the CA program after receiving a letter of denial for admission into PSC. Carter learned about the CA program through the admissions office of PSU. Carter, although somewhat baffled about how he got to the CA program, planned to major in Business and then venture into real estate development.

Thrasher was an 18-year-old African American male who enrolled in the CA program due to what he termed as low SAT scores. Thrasher had originally planned to matriculate into

PSU, but failed to make the minimum ACT score requirement for regular admission. Thrasher planned to major in Biology once he matriculated into PSU. He aspired to become a nurse.

SJ was a 19-year-old African American male who aspired to major in Veterinary Technology at PSU upon full admission from the CA program. SJ's decision to attend college was partly due to his preference for college over a career in the military. SJ hoped to work with small animals in either a veterinary clinic or private office upon graduating from PSU. Like many of the other participants, SJ had applied to PSC, but was denied admission due to low test scores.

Don, an 18-year-old African American male, aspired to attend college with his friends from high school however, he was denied admission to his institution of choice prior to his matriculation into the CA program. After following the advice of a friend, Don decided to apply to PSU only to be denied full admission due to low SAT and ACT scores. As a result, Don was deferred to the CA program. Upon completion of his DEC requirements, Don planned to major in Biology at PSU.

Retro was an 18-year-old African American male who aspired to become a Criminal Justice major at PSU prior to the completion of his DEC requirements. Originally, Retro had planned to attend a Division I school due to what he deemed as a successful high school athletic career however, he was unsuccessful at gaining admission into the schools he was interested in. Retro hoped to take over the family bail bondsman's business back at his home town. Like many of his CA program peers, Retro was denied regular admission to PSU due to low SAT and ACT scores.

Topics of race, gender, perceptions of and contributors to academic success were discussed by the participants in the interviews. The impact of faculty, staff, and personal



interactions inside and outside of the classroom setting related to one's perceived ability to be academically successful in the developmental education environment were also discussed by participants. After the interviews occurred and were transcribed by the researcher, each participant was provided with a copy of their transcript for member checking and to encourage additional engagement with the researcher.

The next section of this paper relates to the identification of themes essential to my understanding of the phenomenon of enrollment in developmental education as experienced by African American male college students. Each theme accompanied by supportive participant statements are presented here. Figure 4.1 depicts a Composite Textural-Structural Representation of Developmental Education Experiences. The figure provides a visual representation of the two previously identified themes accompanied by their respective subthemes as aspects of the developmental education experience.

### **Discussion of Themes**

Two major themes and five subthemes emerged from the data. These themes included (a) Variables of Influence to the Development of the Academic Counterspace and (b) The Color-Blindness of Success. Variables of Influence on the Development of the Academic Counterspace included the following subthemes: (1) Positive and supportive faculty/staff interactions during the program (2) Varied peer interactions during program enrollment and (3) Transitional experiences between high school and college. The Color-Blindness of Success consisted of the following subthemes: (1) Perceptions of developmental education experiences (2) Success As An Outcome of Individual Merit and (3) A Look At Opportunity Beyond Race

### **Theme 1: Variables of Influence on The Development of the Academic Counterspace**

Many of the participants reflected on the totality of their educational experiences from high school to college while emphasizing various aspects of their personal and social lives that constituted academic experiences during and after high school. Participants discussed events that influenced perceptions of their abilities to achieve success in high school and beyond. As participants discussed their transitional experiences between high school and college, many expressed sentiments about individual changes to academic related behaviors such as attitudes towards education related activities like studying and completing coursework. As participants reflected on their developmental education experiences, many provided insights on in-class and out-of-class interactions with faculty and staff from the access institution and Carter State College. Additionally, participants discussed how family and hometown peer expectations encouraged college going behaviors and persistence towards degree obtainment. Participants also highlighted positive and negative aspects of peer interactions that influenced their experiences within DEC.

Critical race theory has been used as an analytical tool for exploring the ways that educational policies and procedures perpetuate racial inequality (Su, 2007). Such inequalities often appear in policies that indirectly emphasize “color blindness”, meritocracy, and racism. When exploring the educational experiences of African American males enrolled in the CA program, it was apparent that, on the surface, many of the participants’ reflections encompassed a counternarrative of resilience and persistence—an account that withstood the influences of racism, meritocracy, and color blindness. For many of the participants, their transitions from high school to college were espoused with opportunities for advancement through their

individual merits. Their accounts minimized the influences of racism and colorblindness during their academic experiences.

Bandura's maintains that academic self-efficacy is an important contributor to academic development (1993). By understanding the ways in which self-efficacy is influenced by cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective properties. In addition to understanding students' perceptions in the context of external influences, it is also important to understand how self-regulatory variables can impact academic experiences. As participants reflected on their academic experiences in the access program, many participants alluded to having been subjected to the influences of self and interactions with self and others in the educational context. This often included referenced to motivation and purposive human behavior. Participants were enrolled in the access program so that they could eventually gain full access to the host institution, Peach State University. To gain such access however, participants had the task of demonstrating and believing in their intellectual capabilities.

### **Positive and Supportive Faculty/Staff Interactions**

As participants highlighted various ways that personal and social variables influenced their educational experiences, participants often described such experiences in relation to the quality of their interactions with faculty/staff during high school and within the developmental education program. While most participants reported favorable interactions with teachers from high school, these interactions served as a gauge for participant expectations of faculty/staff in the CA program at PSU. For example, when asked to describe his relationship with his teachers, Don stated the following:

I had a close relationship with my teachers...I always came to talk to them and

stay after school and I would get tutored by one of my teachers...I had more than one teacher that I got close with and that helped me out.

Don revered his relationship with his teachers as an essential part of his high school educational experience which afforded him with the support he needed to transition through high school. Other participants such as King and Thrasher used words such as “ok,” “cool,” and “nice” to describe their relationships with their teachers, for such relationships were revered by the participants. One participant Brandon, however described his high school teacher relationships as “a little good,” as he discussed challenges he encountered due to the classroom behaviors he exhibited and the impression that these behaviors left on his teachers.

During enrollment in the DEC courses, students reflected on in-class and out-of-class experiences with faculty who taught the DEC courses as well as interactions with staff who provided supportive services to students in the access program. Interactions with faculty and staff were favorable and supportive in nature much like the interactions the students had with their high school teachers. There were varying degrees of interactions with faculty and staff amongst the participants. The differences in interactions were largely contextual and qualitative, but essential to the participants’ experiences in the access program.

For many of the participants in the access program, interactions inside and outside of the classroom were essential to their feelings of support while enrolled in the developmental education program. There were variations amongst the study participants regarding the frequency and type of interactions they had with faculty and staff, but all participants reported having had some form of interactions with faculty and staff on campus. For the most part, individuals reported pleasant encounters and exchanges with faculty and staff however, some

participants indicated that those exchanges were often formal in nature—specific to expressed needs at the time of the encounter.

Participant interactions with staff on campus were reported as infrequent and specific to housing and campus resource needs. For example, participants like Don and Carter James described their interactions with staff members on campus. Don talked specifically about his interactions with the Career Services director on campus and recalled his interactions with her as being “supportive” and uplifting. He stated the following:

Every time I see her around she’s talking to us and she’s very supportive. She’s always talking and saying something positive...it’s like motivation because even when you have those days where you’re just kind of off or you’re just relaxing...just that one person saying something that can be that spark that can get you back going.

Similarly, Carter James stated the following:

For the most part they are very, very, helpful...When you have questions, they may not have the answers but they know someone who does. They will direct you to that person that does have the answers. They are all about getting your questions answered...I appreciate that. I like that.

For Don, interactions with staff on campus served as a source of motivation and support. On the other hand, Carter James’ interactions served a facilitative purpose. Don’s interactions with the Career Services director, although not a required component of his access program participation, proved to be impactful towards his feelings of support and need for motivation on campus to persist through the program. Carter James regarded his interactions with outside staff as a necessary and welcomed part of his acclimation to college campus life in the access program by pointing to ways that such encounters were beneficial. Nonetheless, both types of interactions

were welcomed by the students as they navigated through the developmental education experience at the access institution.

Several of the other participants discussed interactions with affiliated staff, and self-imposed limitations to interactions with faculty. For example, King, Carter James, and Retro described their interactions with the housing RA as being supportive and helpful. King and SJ also mentioned having benefitted from the support of the GAP program advisor (the researcher), but did not provide specifics as to how this relationship was significant to their learning experience. Generally, participants, like Thrasher mentioned that he would reach out to staff on an as-needed basis and found those instances helpful.

While only a few participants talked specifically about their interactions with staff around campus, several participants reflected on their interactions with faculty in the program. These interactions consisted of in-class and out of class interactions and discussions with faculty related to assignments and exams for the courses. For many of the participants, interactions with faculty were an unavoidable, yet central aspect of the developmental education experience. Even when participants noted that they had not visited their professors' offices, most expressed intentions to talk with their professors during office hours or during class. Participants regarded their faculty interactions as a reflection of their overall experiences in the program and a gauge of their received levels of support with coursework.

Many of the participants regarded faculty interactions as being a vital component of their classroom experiences whereas others regarded those interactions as formalities that accompanied program participation. Brandon Meeks talked about the "positive vibe" established by his English professor in the classroom and how that "vibe" was essential to his learning experience and feelings of being a part of a positive learning environment. King described his

interactions with the same course professor in a unique way. King stated the following about his interactions with the English professor:

...she wants to help us so...she forces us to learn and you enjoy coming to her class...she helps you...remember stuff.

For King, his in-class interactions with his English instructor made him enjoy coming to class. Particularly because the way his course professor interacted with the class made him feel that she really wanted him to excel in her class.

Two participants, Don and Carter James indicated that they engaged formally with faculty outside of class for matters related to class assignments. Don noted that he met more regularly with faculty outside of class for clarification with subject matter and to help with preparations for the upcoming class meeting. Similarly, Retro Marley noted that he asked several questions of his professors during class to aid in his mastery of subject material. SJ and Thrasher stated that they had never visited with the professors in their offices, but had talked with course professors after class about questions pertaining to subject matter, tests, and grades.

Brandon provided insights regarding his in-class interactions with faculty through the following statement:

Oh, it's great. I legit enjoy it. Like with Miss Pitts, I go in and say, "Good morning Miss Smith" and she says, "Peace and love be among you." And when you hear that you automatically feel comfortable like this class is... the atmosphere is nice. There's no negative vibes or negative energies. And that's what I like about the professors... it is that you never get any negative vibes. I'm all about positivity and uplifting."

Brandon pointed to "vibes" or a nice classroom learning atmosphere set by the professor as being an important part of his interactions with faculty inside the classroom. Another participant, Don,

while describing his interactions as “great,” pointed to specifics regarding his out-of-class encounters with individual faculty members. He indicated that such interactions were “helpful” and essential for his understanding of classroom materials when challenges to his understanding presented.

One participant, Carter James, compared his interactions with his DEC professors to those of his high school teachers. When asked to describe his interactions, Carter stated, “they’re different from high school. I haven’t really established a relationship yet. It’s kind of different...also they have this personality...I don’t know them on a personal level. It’s not about fun and games, you know what I am saying?” For Carter, there was a significant difference between the personalities of his college professors and his high school instructors which seemed to communicate to him an impersonal environment of seriousness distinct from that of high school.

SJ and Thrasher described their interactions with faculty as being limited to the classroom. For example, SJ stated, “well I haven’t been to any of my professors’ offices, but in class, I talk to them in class and after class. Thrasher stated the following, “I haven’t really interacted with them. Just in class they’ll just talk about what’s going on in class and that’s it really. SJ and Thrasher had intentions to talk with professors during office hours only if they deemed it necessary, but expressed that they interacted with faculty inside of the classroom.

Although participant perceptions of their interactions with faculty and staff were key to their experiences in the access program, there were some differences in how participants chose to interact with staff as well as with faculty inside and outside of the classroom. Some participants interacted mainly with faculty inside of the classroom while others interacted with faculty inside



and outside of the classroom. A few of the participants cited their interactions with staff and others at the access institute as an integral part of the developmental education experience.

Proponents of critical race theory assert the importance of “counterspaces” or “safe spaces” which serve as outlets for marginalized groups to express counterstories (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2001). According to Ballard and Cintrón (2010), members of minority cultures often experience an internal conflict when forced to accommodate to dominant culture. “Safe spaces” make it possible for members of minority groups to share understandings and negotiate power through intercultural communication. Safe spaces, in the academic sense, serve as havens for emotional and mental survival as minority group members work through the complexities of their lives (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010). For the participants of the CA program, individual encounters and interactions with faculty and staff in the educational system helped to create safe spaces conducive to learning and the development of positive academic self-efficacy. It was not until many of the participants had developed agency and comradery with teachers that such a space could exist. The participants came to value such a space in high school and aimed to create and maintain that space during their involvement with the access program. This safe space was extended to peers, which through some interactions, jeopardized the sanctity of the space.

Essential to the learning environment in self-efficacy theory are the related notions of possessing and utilizing knowledge and skills under less than ideal or adverse circumstances. This also includes the notion of “social comparison influences” (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 2005). Social comparison influences refer to the ways by which individuals assess their capabilities in relation to others. Social comparison also affects an individual’s performance because as people compare themselves to others, they also make judgements about their abilities. These

comparisons impact the individuals' self-efficacy. Through the adoption of social role models, participants were afforded opportunities to enhance their self-beliefs of efficacy. As participants reflected on their faculty, staff, and peer interactions in the access program, it was apparent that such relationships were regarded as important evaluative components of self in the access program.

### **Varied Peer Interactions During Program Enrollment**

Several interviews captured participant reflections of their peer interactions within the learning support program and the roles of these interactions on developmental education experiences. There were two types of peer interactions, positive and negative, that reflected participants' ideas about their relationship with program participants. Several participants expressed positive sentiments regarding their peer interactions in learning support classes. Participants like King and Don used words and phrases like "family" and "get along pretty well" to express their perceptions of peer interactions. Brandon reported a less than satisfactory interaction with his peer group as termed by his use of the word "rocky" to describe the interactions. Several of the participants reflected on intragroup divisions or "cliques." SJ reported his peer relationships as favorable despite noted divisions within the learning support peer group. Two participants expressed neutral stances on peer interactions. Carter James emphasized that he would not affiliate with his learning support peers outside of the program and described the relationship as "hate-love." The other "neutral" participant, Retro Marley, acknowledged some difficulties with female classmates of which he did not elaborate on. He focused his discussion more on the quality of his relationship with two other peers while highlighting "drama" as an influence on peer interactions. Participants experiences albeit

positive, or negative significantly impacted their overall perceptions of their involvement with the access program.

### **Positive Influences.**

Participants offered many statements regarding the value of their peer interactions within the CA program. When asked to describe interactions with peers in learning support classes, it was noted that the participants generally reported mixed relationships with one another due to personality differences and frequency of contact, yet there seemed to be a valuing of peer interactions amongst participants. Participants like Thrasher spoke very favorably about his peer interactions. He stated that he gets along well with his peers and often studies with his peers. He also added that he considers his peers as a source of motivation. Thrasher's sentiments are best captured in this statement:

...we've become real acquainted and close and I've been studying a lot with them and that's been helping me out a lot...us motivating each other to just don't quit and win.

And whenever we're down, we just help each other up..."

Don shared similar sentiments to Thrasher as he reflected on the usefulness of peer study groups and the positive influences exerted from his peers. He stated, "...we are all in a group together and we don't try to go persuade ourselves to do stupid stuff...we're working hard with each other trying to stay on each other like that. We're not trying to let nobody fail." Like Thrasher, Don likened his peer interactions as useful, positive influences that provided accountability and a source of motivation.

SJ talked a little about his experiences with peers in the GAP program, but described his experiences from both social and academic perspectives. When asked to reflect on his experience of college, SJ stated the following:

It's changed...at the beginning I just stayed to myself. Really didn't hang out with the others...I'm doing good. I never fail anything, but if my grades itself would increase more after I found a group...a good support group of friends.

For SJ, enrollment in the CA program sparked the development of new friendships and necessary supportive relationships for success. Similar sentiments were expressed by Retro, Carter, and King as they reflected on their newly established friendships with one another. For participants like Thrasher and Don, the access program provided a structure that enabled participants to develop supportive relationships with one another. The valuing of positive peer influences, therefore was deemed important to the experience of being in developmental education and was a necessary component for success in the program as well as the sanctity of the safe space that the developmental education classroom provided.

### **Negative Influences.**

Although many participants identified several benefits to the cohort model of the program and with peer interactions in general, several participants pointed to negative experiences and potentially negative outcomes when one succumbed to negative peer influences. Don stated that he gets along with some of his peers, but was not particularly fond of the others due to infrequent casual conversations and unpleasant interactions. He maintained that there was a difference in the types of social activities that many of his peers were involved in, some of which he disapproved and felt resulted in negative outcomes for students enrolled in the CA program. Brandon Meeks also reflected on the quality of relationships with his peers and its impact on in-class experiences. Brandon stated the following:

Most definitely a little rocky. We are all in one program as CA but we definitely do have our little cliques.”

Brandon's statement suggested a lack of cohesion amongst program participants which was viewed negatively. SJ cautioned against negative peer affiliations. He stated the following concerning his views of peer interactions in the program:

I would say if you are the first into the CA program...I would say don't jump into friends so quickly...stay back and watch the people around you and then pick who you want to be around...find a group of friends that will make you grow and not people who will make you fail...It's the people you hang around. That's the only way it can hinder you from your success.

For SJ, negative peer affiliations in the group could result in negative outcomes for participants. He emphasized care in peer group selection from the program. Like Brandon, SJ also noted divisiveness amongst the cohort, yet he did not seem to be against the divisiveness due to his stance on negative peer influences. Retro also commented on the divisiveness amongst the cohort. From Retro's perspective, the development of "cliques" contributed to classroom disturbances occasionally, which could pose challenges within the learning environment. Carter James also commented on potential negative outcomes from peer groups as he stated that it was important for him to affiliate with "a group of people that are on the same track" because not doing so could result in distractions and failure to apply self in the learning environment.

Peer interactions between participants played an integral role in their perceptions of their relations to one another in the access program. For those participants who enjoyed positive peer relationships, there were the added benefits of having a support group that helped to motivate participants towards success while also providing them with social reference groups of choice. Participants also pointed to negative peer interactions and their potential for negative outcomes in the learning environment. Despite the existence of negative peer interactions, participants

generally agreed that the cohort of peers in the DEC's provided some much-needed support in assimilating to and transitioning through the program. Peers of the participants were members of the shared academic counterspace, created on the margins of mainstream higher education. For the participants, peers in the CA program were allies in the struggle to gain “normal student status” at Peach State University. In this regard, the participants regarded themselves as individuals on the margins of higher education.

### **Transitional Experiences Between High School and College**

The third sub-theme identified in the context of variables of influence on the development of the academic counterspace concerned participants' transformations in attitudes and actions within the context of education. Many participants reflected on perceived differences between “self as high school student” and “self as college student,” yet there were some variations amongst participants with regards to the types of changes they experienced in high school and college. Some participants emphasized more than others on ways that various in-class and out-of-class high school experiences impacted their educational experiences and achievements.

#### **High school experiences.**

Several participants highlighted personal events from high school that impacted their abilities to achieve success and ultimately graduate from high school. For many of the participants, the access program served as a reminder of previous academic performance deficiencies and as a symbol of transcendence in academic attainment. Such experiences were related to the participants' in-class behaviors and expectations of self in the classroom setting. One participant, Thrasher, cited having no difficulties with transitions in high school. SJ cited transition difficulties, but placed emphasis on middle school to high school transition difficulties

and struggles related to becoming acclimated to high school. SJ did not elaborate on the extent of these transition difficulties when asked, but did instead focus on overcoming his transitional woes to ultimately graduate from high school. Three participants reflected on in-class behaviors as being a memorable part of their academic experiences in high school.

Both Brandon and Carter reflected on their self-appointed roles of “class clowns” and discussed how these roles impacted their academic performances. For Carter, being the “class clown” meant that he could entertain his classmates and teacher while putting forth very little effort to complete coursework and earn decent grades. Carter described his role in the following statement:

For me, high school, I didn’t have to really apply myself...it was a breeze. I am a class clown, but I was just funny...I knew when to turn it off.

Brandon described his role as “class clown” in the following way:

My high school experience was great, but it started off a little rocky because I didn’t take my work serious. I was a freshman, I like to joke a lot. So, it didn’t click until my senior year that if you just did the work and study, it would be a bit easier and your teachers will learn to respect you more...”

Brandon and Carter recognized that part of their high school student identities revolved around the “jokester” image that they portrayed. It was not until they progressed through high school that they were able to shed those identities to portray more seriousness towards academics through self-regulation. This was a necessary change for the two to be able to ultimately transition to college. Although Don did not describe himself as a “class clown,” his educational transitions in high school were much like those of Brandon and Carter. Don, like Brandon and

Carter had to alter his school behaviors as he progressed throughout high school in preparation for postsecondary education. Don's transition is best described in the following statement:

I knew I could have did better. Every time I finished, I was like I could have done just a little bit better than that because I could have stopped playing around. But my last year in high school, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I made all A's and one B. I was trying to get all A's so I could get my GPA up higher, but academic-wise it wasn't hard...I wouldn't really prepare myself so I was trying not to do that in college.

Like Brandon and Carter, Don recognized the need for a change in his academic related behaviors towards the latter end of his secondary education journey. He discussed how his improved efforts towards school work in high school enabled him to earn better grades and to prove himself in the academic space. Don categorized his high school experience as a progressive means for improvement. He cited his "not taking it serious" and "playing around" as reasons for his lack of achievement during his early high school experience however, he noted that once he decided against those "vices," he was able to achieve success and increase his GPA during his senior year of high school. Thereby making him better prepared for post-secondary options.

Two participants, Retro Marley and King discussed how their experiences as high school athletes influenced their abilities to enjoy success in the classroom. For example, when asked about his experiences in high school, King stated the following:

So, long as you played football you good. I did good in math. I was actually top three in my math class. I actually did good... in both. I graduated so...that's it.

Similarly, Retro stated the following:



My GPA like in high school was a 3.5...I was an intelligent guy...I played football and I was really good so...The teachers gave me a little lead way, but they were always right there to tell me, “[Retro] do this” “[Retro] do that” ...They just reminded me a lot...like a player with his coach.”

As student-athletes in high school, both King and Retro performed well in the classroom with the support of their teachers, yet they seemed to give partial credence for their academic success to their athletic statuses and to their relationships with their high school teachers. Retro’s reflections on his high school experiences as a student-athlete indicated that he attributed much of his success in high school to the guidance, encouragement, and support of his teachers. To Retro, this support seemed to impact his ideals about academic success in high school. King’s experience with teachers from high school was different in the sense that when he transferred to another high school, although he continued to play football, he did not feel that he had the support that he had received from his previous high school. The following excerpt from King best captures this sentiment:

I went to Tucker High School...I was good when I went to Tucker. I actually was learning stuff. Then when I went to Stephenson...it was a football thing...so long as you played football you are good...At Tucker they actually try to help you pass...

King struggled with his transitions between high schools as his level of support received from teachers changed. Other participants expressed having experienced challenges in high school as well however, such challenges were often attributed to personal shortcomings. Regardless of whether participants saw their challenges in high school as a reflection of their personal shortcomings or not, a consensus among participants was that these high school experiences and related behaviors were a part of their educational foundation going into the DEC in the access

program. Participants recognized that their high school educational experiences established a foundation for what was to be expected from teachers in college.

Critical race theory posits that counterstories are often used to cast uncertainty on existing myths and ideas espoused by dominant groups (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). The participants' stories of their experiences in education are one such account. Harper (2009) discusses how black male collegians are often expected to have tumultuous transition experiences from high school to college. Harper (2009) added that low-expectations from primary and secondary teachers follow male students into college which result in feelings of being overwhelmed and ill-prepared when faced with academic rigor. Furthermore, collective belongingness for these black male collegians can also be threatened by dominant discourses that not only reinforce racist stereotypes, but also stigmatize males as criminals, dumb jocks, individuals with mediocre intellectual competence, and/or underprepared and at-risk. Such preconceived notions are racist in nature and perpetuate an agenda that demeans the academic self-worth of black male students. Nonetheless, despite being faced with negative discourses around black male success in college, the participants created a counternarrative that embraced their imperfections and motivations towards self-actualization in their educational pursuits.

### **College experiences.**

While many of the participants posed difficulties with high school transitions as challenges to their abilities to achieve academic success, several participants pointed to newly developed insights around what it would take for them to be successful in college. Participants pointed to academic habits such as studying, time management, and perseverance as factors deemed important for success. When reflecting on his experience of college, King stated the following:

I came to college to get away from everything that was happening in Atlanta and to get more knowledge and... learn about new stuff and experience new things and meet new people. I didn't know anybody when I came down here. I don't know anybody so...yea.

[Experience of college] It's been good. I'm starting to get used to everything.

King's statement implied a transition in his perception of self as a student which required some adjustments to his school attending/going behaviors so that he could acquire more desired experiences. King expressed having had an experience of "learning support courses" which seemed to normalize his experiences in college with developmental education coursework. King explained that having had the experience of supportive coursework as a freshman in high school, he was accustomed to supplemental educational services. For participants like Don, Brandon, Thrasher, Carter, and SJ however, transitioning to college meant changes in study habits and an adaptation to the college learning environment in general.

### **Expectation.**

Many participants discussed how many of their family members had attended college before their starts with the access program, so college attendance, in general, was a cultivated expectation. Participants like Carter James discussed how he was groomed by his parents to attend college at an early age which also resulted in his attendance at a high achieving charter school for his secondary education. He maintained that his attendance at the charter school afforded him opportunities to be challenged and to be among high achieving peers who would go off to college to attend Tulane, Georgetown, and Georgia Tech. Brandon Meeks discussed how his father, uncle, and sister's college attendance paved the way for him which created a family legacy of college attendance particularly at the access institution. For Brandon, enrollment in the CA program provided him an opportunity to fulfill the legacy of college attendance at the access

institution for males in his family. Retro Marley discussed familial influences on college attendance and how expectations of others in his family led to his decision to attend college. Like Brandon, Retro had older siblings and relatives in college who fostered the expectation of college attendance. This sentiment was expressed in Retro's following statement in response to a probe about how his family felt about his pursuit of college:

It was not an option. It was either you go to the military or you go to college. Either way you're getting out of the house in 9 months (laugh).

Retro's college attendance was an expectation cultivated in his family as all his siblings were currently enrolled in full-time study at universities within the university system. For participants like King, college attendance set a precedent for younger relatives to follow therefore, encouraging a culture of college going amongst members of his immediate and extended family. Similar sentiments were expressed by Don who expressed that he received support from his family and was also encouraged to go to college or enter the workplace upon graduation.

Many of the participants talked candidly about expectations amongst their peer groups to attend college. King, who took a year off from school after graduating from high school, talked about how his friends from his neighborhood were happy to learn he had planned to go off to college upon acceptance into the CA program. He explained that he was "working, partying, working, partying..." before he came to the program. Retro Marley stated that his peers had bigger expectations regarding his college attendance because of his participation in sports in high school. Still other participants, such as SJ and Don reflected on positive peer conversations and congratulatory bids as members of their peer groups departed for their respective colleges. For many of the participants, the expectation of college attendance was cultivated amongst peer groups and families and was endorsed by all parties involved.

Expectations play a major role in the sustainment of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993). According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), expectancies and values directly influence performance, persistence, and task choice. Expectancies and values also influence an individual's perception of competence, task rigor, and self-schema. All of which in turn are influenced by how individuals conceive of the expectations of others' attitudes and expectations for them along with their own interpretations of previous achievement outcomes. In other words, as stated previously, individuals' self-efficacy is influenced by how they think of themselves and how others may perceive of them. This stance was evident in the participants' reflections of their experiences and their desires to fulfill expectations imposed by themselves as well as others as it pertained to college-going behaviors. The same sentiment resonated in participants' perceptions of what it meant to be successful in the access program.

### **Theme 2: The Color-Blindness of Success**

The second theme comprised of participant perceptions of the developmental education experience in addition to statements concerning one's ability to achieve success within the developmental education access program. Many of the participants regarded college attendance as the next logical step for their career goals. Essentially, college attendance through the access program helped the participants capitalize on an opportunity to attend college even when institutional policies hindered them from being able to attend the institution of choice. The developmental education program was therefore regarded dually as an obstacle and vessel of opportunity by the participants so that they could embark upon their original college plans. This alternative perspective on involvement with the CA program stemmed from the participants' perceptions of their developmental education experiences.

CRT is used to analyze the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and oppressed groups in policies and institutions (Hiraldo, 2010). Racism, when regarded as an intricate part of American society, privileges White individuals over people of color even within institutions of education. Unfortunately for participants, although perhaps well-intended, the systemic reality of the CA program was that the institutional policies and procedures that created it were also responsible for the subjugation of the participants within the higher education system. Such subjugation, when masked as an opportunity to access higher education, resulted in the adoption of color-blindness philosophies by participants.

An additional layer of complexity related to the participant's perceptions concerned that of "whiteness as property." As participants were subjected to exclusionary policies that limited college admission and engagement in student activities at the host institution, it was apparent that some of the participants were aware that what was deemed as an opportunity was also an extension of White Supremacy in the domain of higher education. Despite many of these revelations however, many of the participants' perceptions of their developmental education experiences were therefore, regarded as unique experiences devoid of the vestiges of racial stigmatization and white privilege. These perceptions therefore, could have perhaps been reflective of their self-efficacy and ideas about their capabilities of being successful given enactment of the right cognitive, affective, motivational, and selection processes.

### **Perceptions of Developmental Education Experiences**

Participants tended to agree on the beneficial nature of learning support course enrollment whereas most indicated that their learning support coursework did not impact their views of their abilities to become academically successful. Several participants stated that learning support classes were helpful and allowed them opportunities to get more time with

teachers. On the other hand, one participant, Retro, likened his learning support experience to that of students in a special education course from high school. Retro also seemed to think that his non-learning support counterparts would make attributions and insinuations regarding his academic abilities. Brandon also questioned how others would view his academic abilities due to his learning support enrollment. Carter James noted that he held some conflicting thoughts around learning support coursework's impact on his views of his ability to become academically successful. He cited workload and refraining from desired social activities as reasons for his indecisiveness regarding the impact of learning support enrollment.

For many of the study's participants, their perceptions of their enrollment in learning support coursework centered around their ideas about what other non-learning support students thought of their enrollment and how such enrollment was reflective of their academic abilities. For example, Brandon offered the following statement when asked to share his thoughts about what it meant to him to be in learning support courses:

It can make you feel kind of stupid or feel like you're more on "I'm not as far as everyone else" side. But that's not necessarily true, some people just need more help than others and that's what I believe it is. I'm not a good test taker. That was the biggest reason why I couldn't get into PSU. My GPA was all right but my test was ten points off so ..."

Several participants expressed statements like Brandon's while others expressed a different sentiment. Many participants regarded their enrollment in the access program's developmental education courses as an opportunity. Additionally, it was noted that regardless of the participants' perception of the impact of learning support enrollment, ethnicity as an African American male did not seem to impact their perceptions of their experiences. Although it was noted that many participants experienced differences and unequal opportunities, most did not

feel that such experiences were systemic or indicative of larger sociocultural issues. Participants seemed to regard the experience of learning support simply as a setback or barrier to be overcome.

Proponents of critical race theory in education call for a deeper analysis of the institution of education and the ways in which racism and color-blind approaches enmeshed in educational policy as opportunity have influenced the educational experiences of persons of color. Wells (2014) argued that “color blind” education policies often interacted with school systems and residential patterns that in turn were race-based and largely influenced where students attended school, resources and curriculum they would have at their disposal, and categorizations across academic programs. The influences of these factors are more pronounced in the “color-blind” policies of school choice and the standards/accountability movements of modern day schooling, for such policies emulate traditional patterns of inequality and fail to address societal or educational issues related to race (Ballard, 2010; Wells, 2014). Participants were benefactors of these defunct policies that further propelled the disenfranchisement of students of color while also increasing the achievement gap between students of color and Whites. For this reason, participants internalized their previous school failures and needs for remediation as reflections of their lack of academic prowess as individuals and not as the failure of the institution designed to cultivate such prowess. Therefore, the need for remediation was regarded as a failure on the part of the individual and not a reflection of the “color-blind” policies that contributed to ongoing disparities and unequal opportunities within primary and secondary school systems for students of color.



### **Learning support as a reflection of academic abilities.**

As the participants navigated the access program, many revealed, to their dismay, differential treatment on campus due to the nature of the courses and the learning community style of delivery for courses. Students enrolled in the access program were limited by course selections and housing accommodations which for some participants, led others to make insinuations about their “lesser” statuses on campus as access students. Several participants indicated that being enrolled in learning support courses was suggestive of some academic and peer status inadequacies at the host institution given the structure of the program. Many participants did not directly, nor explicitly implicate systemic variables that could have perpetuated the academic inadequacies. This sentiment is best captured from Retro Marley when asked about his learning support experiences as stated here:

When people ask me, “What class you going to?” I just say English. I don’t say learning support English...I guess it’s my pride. That others will look at me and think that I am not smart. You know like that class in high school that always stuck together no matter what you always see them go to lunch together and all (laugh). Like one of them type of classes (laugh).

Retro thought that if he disclosed to other non-CA program students that he was taking a learning support course, those students would assume that he was not intelligent. He compared his enrollment in the program to that of a student in a secluded high school special education classroom. Thrasher also pointed to some potential concerns regarding his academic abilities compared to his peers when he expressed the following:

I wouldn't say it hinders me it just feels like...I have a support class so I might not be as advanced as most people would be because I don't think most people have a support class.

Unlike Retro and Thrasher, Carter seemed to be baffled by his learning support requirements due to his high achievement background. He stated the following regarding his arrival in the GAP program:

I will just start with how I arrived in the GAP program. It kind of just happened because my high school is kind of like a choice. It wasn't like a public school. You have to have a certain GPA...certain requirements to get into the school, and certain requirements to stay in the school...if your GPA gets below a 2.6 you are out of the school. You had to stay in the program...It was all a surprise... how I got here.

Carter James had difficulty reconciling his academic background with his current reality of learning support. For Carter, learning support was an opportunity extended to "others" who did not come from the type of educational background that he came from in high school. Carter felt that his enrollment in learning support courses was a mismatch to his academic abilities, but nonetheless saw value in his enrollment in the program because of the access to college that it afforded him.

While some of the participants saw learning support coursework as an opportunity, others saw having to take the course work as a suggestion that they possessed inferior academic abilities when compared to their non-learning support peers at the access institution. This inferior academic ability seemed to also influence social status on campus with non-CA program peers. Participants displayed variations in their perceptions of their enrollment in learning support coursework and what these perceptions may have said indirectly about their intellectual

abilities. Although most participants saw their involvement with the program as a means of access to college, many of the participants saw such access as a negative portrayal of their academic abilities compared to non-learning support counterparts at the access institution.

The variations in participant responses suggested that learning support involvement meant different things to participants and was dependent upon background variables and if participants were concerned about what other students who were not enrolled in the program thought about their intellectual abilities. In that regard, while participants recognized the uniqueness of the developmental education experience, they also had to contend with the concept of being “different” from other non-learning support peers. In this sense, the participants were marginalized students enrolled in a program that resulted in further marginalization under the guises of access. Even though the students were attending an access program housed at a HBCU, their feelings of inferiority were amplified because of their remedial requirements and academic failures that were perhaps facilitated by exposure and subjection to defunct racist educational policies in primary and secondary education. Such policies were representative of the “color-blind” and “whiteness as property” philosophies which were integral to the participants’ educational experiences throughout the course of their lives.

While many participants credited their college attendance to influences from relatives and peers, several participants noted an intrinsic value to college. In other words, several participants expressed that college attendance provided them with an opportunity to fulfill career goals. For example, Retro, discussed how earning a Criminal Justice degree would afford him with an opportunity to help his grandfather with the family bail bondsman business. He also stated that earning his degree would enable him to ultimately earn his own income to take care of his aging grandparents. The following statement from Retro best reflects this notion:

I just want that degree. With that degree, your money can...jump by a lot of digits. Retro saw his earning of a Criminal Justice degree to increase his earning potential. The same can be said for Thrasher and Brandon Meeks whose identified career interests require undergraduate degree completion. Thrasher indicated that his desire to earn money while helping others was his reasons for pursuing a college degree. Brandon indicated that he hoped to pursue a career in government affairs where he could embark on a career with the US Secret Services. Many of the participants felt that attending college in the access program meant that their career aspirations could materialize and that their experiences thus far had not been influenced by color which was far was not entirely accurate. For the participants, these aspirations would materialize at the one place where they did not expect to succumb to the perils of racism—a HBCU. In this regard, attendance at the HBCU meant that the participants could reconcile the disagreeable notion of race being an influential part of their educational experiences. Participants' appeared to contend that, by discounting the significance of race, they in turn would be taking responsibility for the course of their lives and all that may have happened in between. Participants did not acknowledge how external and covert variables could shape their educational experiences and opportunities of advancement within the system.

### **Success As An Outcome of Individual Merit**

An additional aspect of the developmental education experience concerned the participants' perceptions of what it meant to be successful in the program and in general. Participant reflections on success were often centered on individual merits despite acknowledging the potential for systemic influence on opportunities within the educational system. Participants acknowledged that differential opportunities were afforded to counterparts of various ethnicities, yet many felt that the existence of these differential opportunities were

minor in comparison to what individuals could accomplish when they overlooked those things. Success in this regard, was deemed an outcome of individual effort and hard work, not a biased system or policies.

The “myth of meritocracy” perpetuates the social idea that, “those who are the most talented, the hardest working, and the most virtuous get and should get the most rewards” (McNamee & Miller Jr., 2009, p.4). This ideology affects the participants’ lives in the sense that higher education is regarded as the “great equalizer” in society and if it is pursued with fervor, one can expect numerous opportunities for advancement in society and within education. In another sense, the myth of meritocracy perpetuates a falsehood of self-blame for academic difficulties and under performance issues. In other words, if one does not work hard in school, one will not enjoy academic success, for the inability to obtain success is the fault of the individual. These conceptions of meritocracy were represented by participants’ reflections of personal responsibility for educational outcomes and life circumstances.

Participants like Don, were willing to acknowledge racial inequalities with regards to opportunities however, Don did not feel that such inequalities posed a challenge to his ultimate ability to become successful. When asked what it meant to be an African American male in a learning support course, Don stated the following:

That's a good question. This person of this race or something might have a higher chance than a black African-American. And I feel like even though I'm in a developmental course, even down the road, I'm not going to always be in it. So, I might move up and be on the same level as them. It's not like a competition to me, but just because of color doesn't mean that they can't do that. They still admit that their higher ...Even though I'm

in it right now, I feel like it's just the start because it's not the end and what I want to do down the road.

Carter James, elaborated on his stance in the following excerpt, “I think society makes it hard for black men to even want to grow...I don’t think they give them that. You’re supposed to build your own self-confidence. I don’t think society gives them that boost or confidence to believe that they can be a businessman or work on wall street and stuff like that...” Carter credited preconceived notions from society with negative stereotypes of black males, but maintained that the individual could make choices that were either consistent with or in opposition to societal notions. SJ shared a similar sentiment to Carter. SJ stated the following:

...just the stereotype of black men...most black men don’t carry themselves as well as others...like other races...some black men don’t really care or have the motivation to do other things.

Retro provided a deeply reflective sentiment regarding the impact of race on his experiences in developmental education as represented by the following quotation:

Our mind frames. I feel like most African Americans just blame it on white people.

Like, aww that white person... he didn’t like me because I was black...but you can’t say that...nah, that’s on us. So, I don’t really think that color has anything to do here at PSU.

For Don, Carter James, SJ, and Retro, African American male success in college was only limited by internal variables and matters of perception that were under the individual’s control. While Carter acknowledged societal contributions, all three participants underscored the importance of individual choice with regards to success. Participants like Thrasher and King mentioned various aspects of the individual’s personal situation, such as “family” and “lack of

support,” but again did not state that race was a significant factor in the developmental education experience. Thrasher expressed his sentiments in the following statements:

Not having a good support system. Like family...motivating them to do something positive, or just everybody bashing them...bringing them down and nobody to bring them up. Uplift them.

For Thrasher, African American males failed to achieve success when they did not have the support needed to help them feel uplifted and supported. The emphasis on the need for support was captured best in the following statement from Thrasher:

I guess it means that I might be...I don't know struggling, but might need help with a certain subject so that's why I have a support class.

For Thrasher, being in learning support meant that he needed additional subject specific help, not that he was incapable of being successful in an academic environment. King did not mention the concept of race at all when asked to reflect on what it meant to him to be an African American male in DEC's. King instead pointed to specific behaviors such as “partying” and lack of support from family that could impede one's progress towards success.

As participant reflections centered on success within developmental education, most participants did not place much emphasis on the required learning support coursework and related experiences. Like their reflections on success in general, many participants seemed to reconcile indifference to experiences in DEC's as matters of personal effort and responsibility. For some participants, success with learning support coursework required effort on the part of the individual and that any level of success or lack thereof would reflect individual efforts and not any undue outside influence. Despite having encountered challenges in secondary education, many of the participants' inculcations of racist ideologies perpetuated by White

dominant society resulted in internalized oppression and support for the CRT claim of racism being deeply ingrained in society—even within the psyches of the participants. Experiences of this nature are best captured in statements like the following from Brandon Meeks:

...As in we always think if the teacher gave us a “60” or “50,” it’s his fault that we got that “60” or “50” and we often get mad at that teacher...and that’s not necessarily true...

Brandon explained that African American male students often made personal choices that impacted the success they experienced while noting that sometimes taking responsibility for those choices was important for success. He cited making good decisions with newly found freedom as one of those choices. Statements from Retro Marley reverberated those sentiments as captured by the following:

I thought I was too good for it because I always been the smart type, but once reality kicks in and that teacher not helping you and reminding you, you really see if you smart or not. It’s not all about if you smart. It’s all about growing up.

Similarly, Don expressed the following:

It strives me to push hard because at the same time I’m noticing with the classes I’m taking now... You’re going to have some ups and down...When I get a bad grade back, that pushes me hard in that class because it makes me buckle down. It’s up to you. You’re the one that makes the decision. They give you the plan. They lay it out and you’ve got to go do it...

Although Retro Marley considered maturity as a matter of personal responsibility that could potentially impede his ability to be successful, Don revered the learning support class as a place of opportunity where students had ample chances to evaluate, improve, and be successful. Carter James expressed similar thoughts as he contended that participants in the program were newly



minted adults who were now responsible for obtaining information. Like Retro, Carter suggested that independence and maturity were a part of the developmental education experience. Personal responsibility in the academic environment, was something that participants needed to develop to be successful in the program. Success would come to those participants in the program who “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps” and relied on their own merits to advance. The ideology of meritocracy, although embraced by many of the participants, hindered their abilities to view their situations with the critical consciousness that challenged such a notion along with the idea of having to gain access to higher education through the access program and the requirement of “having what it takes” to gain full access to the host institution upon the completion of developmental requirements.

### **A Look At Opportunity Beyond Race**

Many of the participants expressed idealizations of their abilities to be successful in college. In other words, many of the participants shared statements that suggested that previous behaviors in high school, if continued, would result in less success. On the one hand, participants felt that it was necessary to take personal responsibility for educational outcomes within the developmental education program. On the other hand, participants revered the access program as an appropriate platform for exhibiting their true academic potentials. The exhibition of these potentials however, was illuminated in the contexts of meritocracy, whiteness as property, and color-blindness. Each participant expressed belief in their individual abilities to be successful in college given improvements in their school behaviors. Participants did not suggest changes in policies such as minimum test-score requirements and other specific admissions criteria that limited their access to institutions of higher education. Furthermore, participants did not comment on, nor reflect on limited access to supportive resources and being

a part of a cohort of access program students comprised solely of African American students.

When asked about his definition of academic success, Don stated the following:

Success academically in my definition comes from studying. Hard work, not just hard work in the classroom, but outside of the classroom. You've got to know how much time you can spend with your friends and how much time you've got to spend studying. How much time you can spend on the phone, how much time you've got to spend studying. Because practically, you've got to study a lot and you've got to be doing a lot of work. You've got to put your work first and your friends second.

For Don, being successful in college meant that he needed to exert self-discipline, prioritize his time, and study. SJ stated similar sentiments as captured in the following statement:

...doing your work...on time. Time management. You have to have time management to be an academic success and that's it.

Brandon described success in college as “anything that you overcame and now you love to do.” For Brandon, being successful in college meant that one had to “overcome” academic obstacles to develop a “love” for education. Participants like Don and SJ seemed to emphasize the importance of academic skills such as time management and study skills when striving to achieve academic goals in the college setting, for the establishment of those skills in college, from prior learning were deemed as more important for success. Thrasher stated the following concerning his ideas of what it took to become academically successful in college:

...applying yourself as much as you can and...trying to get the highest grade you can possibly get in a specific course.

While Don and SJ focused on grooming specific behaviors for success, Thrasher emphasized the importance of having high grades and “applying” oneself in the academic environment.

As participants reflected on their transitions, similar sentiments regarding success and its relevance to the transitions were shared. For some participants, general success was described as a refined habit that required the effort and persistence of the individual. Don stated the following when asked to provide his thoughts about general success:

Success in general... that's like a daily thing to me. You've got to be successful every day. You've got to do something successful every day. You can't one day just be down and then you stop because you're messing up your mission or your journey...

For Don, success was about the establishment of everyday habits and making efforts towards being successful every day. Similarly, Carter James stated the following when asked to share his definition of success:

Just doing the best you can and achieving it. You might not be good at math, but the fact that you took the time out to work hard at it, you do better than you thought you did. I think that's academic success.

For Carter James, individuals could strive towards academic success by working hard and persisting through difficulties. Although participants shared slight differences in terms of what it took to be successful in college, a transition, or change in academic behaviors were warranted for each participant as they reflected on their developmental education experiences. The merits of the individual served as a qualifier for success. The “right” to be in higher education was consequently related to how hard one was willing to work. The act of working towards this “right” however, was suggestive that participants did not have these prized behaviors to begin with, but perhaps there was another group of individuals who did possess these assets. e

### **Learning support as an opportunity.**

Many participants saw learning support enrollment as an opportunity to become a better student while others referenced opportunities to meet new people and experience “the college life” in general. Some participants referenced opportunities for social interactions with new people, the development of new friendships, and opportunities for support. Several participants expressed sentiments that learning support course enrollment was a normal experience.

Participants like King expressed that he had grown accustomed to supportive coursework from high school. SJ, on the other hand, stated that being enrolled in learning support courses had no bearing to him. When asked to state what it meant to him to be an African American male in a learning support course, SJ stated, “Hmm...I really don’t see it as anything.” Other participants indicated that learning support was more of an opportunity to perhaps develop skills needed to be successful in college. Such experiences were captured in the following statement from Don:

Learning support helps out. English, that's a quick catch up because she gives us our stuff back... our quizzes that day of our learning support class and then we get to go over it. And then I'll be like dang, this is where I've got to do better next time. So, it makes me want to go do better on my next exam or my next quiz.

Carter James expressed similar sentiments as indicated by the following statement:

It means that I am trying. I could easily not have gone to school and just work. I feel like I'm trying. I'm taking the steps I need to take to become a better learning, or a better scholar, or a better student.

As Don and Carter verbalized their thoughts related to being enrolled in learning support courses, they did not consider their enrollment in DEC's as a hindrance, but rather as an opportunity to improve. Other participants, like Brandon, commented more on the format of the

learning support courses as he found it particularly helpful to have a support class follow a general education course for the purposes of reinforcement and enhancement of learning.

For Retro, learning support course enrollment provided him with access to college however, he seemed to not feel that the courses were helpful towards the end of providing students with additional support. Such a statement was indicative of an issue with the policies of the access program and how such policies perpetuated unfairness while simultaneously limiting access.

The following statement from Retro best reflects this sentiment:

...We are worried about if our grades slip beyond a “C” we will get kicked out the whole program. We are worrying about embarrassment...just that one failing grade get us kicked out. We worried about a lot of stuff like that...We will be sent straight home...I don’t feel the support at all. If it’s a support class, I feel like it should be more hands on involved. What way do our students study better? What way do they learn the material better?

To Retro, involvement in the access program required a level of in-class support that he did not feel was being received by him and his counterparts. Retro also took issue with access program policies that required all students to earn “Cs” or better to progress through the program. Retro regarded the policy as punitive and non-supportive considering the students’ academic backgrounds and the idealized purpose of the access program. Of all the participants in the study, Retro was the only participant to verbalize his disdain for the policy. Nonetheless, other sentiments expressed by Retro and other participants suggested that their perceptions were just as important as their perceptions of what others thought about them in terms of their learning support involvement. Such preoccupations suggested that some of the participants were sensitive to stigmas around developmental education enrollment and were concerned with

program implementation. These preoccupations perhaps were reflective of a subconscious awareness of the systemic disparities that led to involvement with the access program along with disparate, racialized educational experiences that may have resulted in academic deficiencies.

### **Summary**

Data was collected from semi-structured and focus group interviews from seven participants. Demographic information and information specific to the research questions were collected by the researcher and were analyzed according to a modified van Kaam method of phenomenological analysis to reflect six themes and subthemes. The two invariant constituents identified included: (1) Variables of Influence on the Development of The Academic Counterspace and (2) The Color-blindness of Success. Related subthemes included: (a) positive and supportive faculty/staff interactions during the program (b) varied peer interactions during program enrollment (c) transitional experiences between high school and college (d) perceptions of developmental educational experiences (e) success as an outcome of individual merit and (f) a look at opportunity beyond race. Each theme was reflective of the participants' experiences prior to and during enrollment in the learning support program via the access institute and were viewed in the contexts of self-efficacy, meritocracy, racism, whiteness as property, and color-blindness.

Table 4.1

*Participant Information and Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Demographic Information
“Brandon Meeks”	18	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate fulltime first-year college student; Public Administration major; single
“Carter James”	18	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate; fulltime first-year college student; Business major; single
“Don”	18	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate; fulltime first-year college student; Biology major; single
“King”	19	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate; fulltime first-year college student; Computer Science major; single
“Retro Marley”	18	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate; fulltime first-year college student; Criminal Justice major; single
“SJ”	19	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate; fulltime first-year college student; Veterinary Technology major; single
“Thrasher”	18	Black male enrolled in access program; High school graduate; fulltime first-year college student; Biology major; single

Table 4.2

*Theme Descriptions*

Theme	Description
<p>Variables of Influence on the Development of the Academic Counterspace</p> <p>Subthemes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty/staff interaction during the program</li> <li>• Varied peer interactions during program enrollment</li> <li>• Transitional experiences between high school and college</li> </ul>	<p>Variables of influence such as faculty/staff interactions, peer interactions, and specific encounters during high school and college that, when combined, represent the culmination of educational experiences from high school to college.</p>
<p>The Color-Blindness of Success</p> <p>Subthemes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Success as an outcome of individual merit</li> <li>• A Look At Opportunity Beyond Race</li> <li>• Perceptions of the developmental education experience</li> </ul>	<p>Participant reflections of involvement in the developmental education program related to perceptions of enrollment and opportunities afforded within the developmental education program.</p>



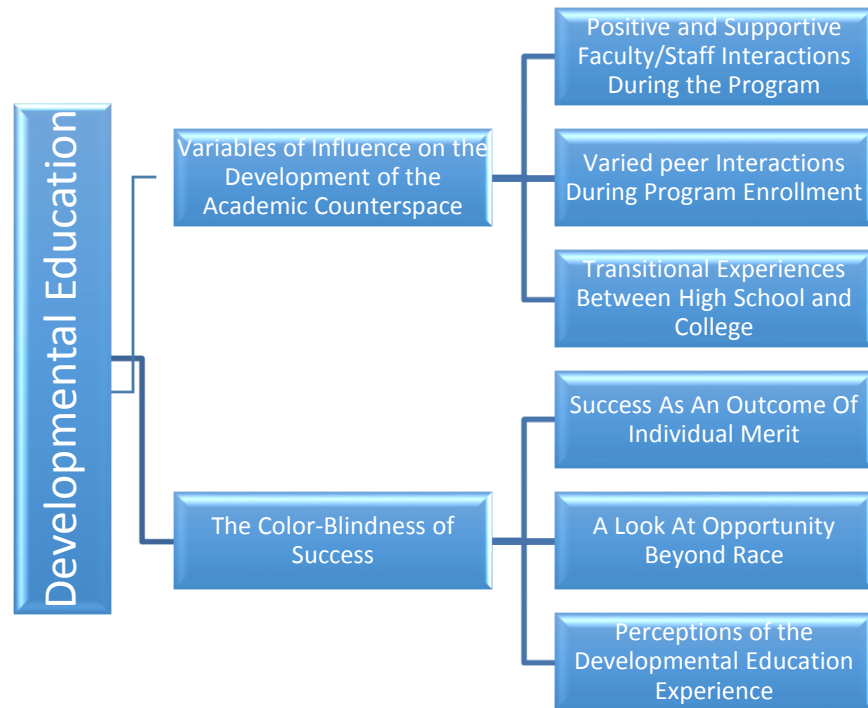


Figure 4.1 Composite Textural-Structural Representation of Developmental Education Experiences

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summary of research findings and a discussion of conclusions based on the current phenomenological study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American male college students enrolled in developmental education courses through an access partnership between a two-year college and a four-year institution. This study aimed to identify and comprehend factors that contributed to or detracted from the academic experiences of male students enrolled in developmental education courses through access programming. Guided by situated mediated identity theory, an applied version of critical race theory (Murrell, 2008) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977/1994), the two primary research questions of this study were: (1) How does enrollment in developmental educational coursework in a rural state college access program influence the perspectives of African American male college students as it relates to academic achievement? (2) In what way do institutional factors influence perspectives of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education in a rural state college access program as it relates to academic achievement? This chapter concludes with implications for higher education and recommendations for future research in developmental education.

A review of literature revealed very limited published, peer-reviewed research on African American male academic achievement and racialized experiences in college (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, 2012). Even fewer studies were found that focused on the educational experiences of African American males in developmental education. Too few current studies

center around minority student experiences in developmental coursework despite an overwhelming amount of statistical reports indicating that these students often constitute a majority within developmental programs (Bahr, 2010; Crisp & Nora, 2010; O’Gara Karp, & Hughes, 2009). Given the lack of literature related to the experiences of students in developmental education and major concerns involving college completion, this study aimed to learn how and in what ways does enrollment in developmental education courses influence black male college students’ perceptions of their abilities to achieve academic success. This study added to the literature on the experiences of students of color in developmental education. This study also added to the literature on African American males in higher education and the body of literature related to access programs and transfer partnerships. Additionally, this study also added to the body of literature on institutional factors (i.e., policies, support resources, programming, personnel, etc.) that impact student experiences in developmental education through the lenses of critical race theory and self-efficacy theory.

Through the utilization of phenomenological methodology, critical race theory, and self-efficacy theory, the researcher was afforded many opportunities to advance the literature related to developmental education, access programming and Black male students. Semi-structured and focus group interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to gather individual and collective information from participants regarding the phenomenon of interest. As with the traditions of critical race theory and the social constructivist world view, participants were provided with a space where their lived experiences within the developmental education program could be explored and where hegemonic discourses of black male underachievement could be juxtaposed to narratives of success and persistence. Participants shared many similarities in their reflections regarding interactions with peers, faculty/staff, and dynamics of the experience in general. The

focus group provided an additional opportunity for participants to share and exchange narratives in a safe space. A few participants used this space to challenge institutional policies that impacted persistence through the access program. No studies to the researcher's knowledge, have addressed the topics of developmental education and African American males in an access program.

CRT was important for capturing the realities of the participants within the institution of higher education as defined by experiences with oppression and racism. CRT posits that racism is endemic in American society and is an integral aspect of the lived experiences of persons of color (Tate, 1995). CRT was appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of African American males in the educational system because of noted disparities and concerns around achievement and opportunities within the system in comparison to white counter parts (Harper, 2009; Howard, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). In the context of developmental education, where such disparities and lack of opportunities were most apparent, CRT provided a means by which participants' direct and indirect experiences with meritocracy, racism, and color-blindness could be explored and understood. Through CRT, institutional factors involving biased policies and antiquated color-blindness philosophies were implicated as indirect influences upon the participants' educational experiences within the access program.

Several studies have utilized CRT as a theoretical framework in education research (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Savas, 2014; Su, 2007). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1994) argued that CRT was an appropriate framework to apply in the educational context given that endemic and ingrained racism exists and is pervasive enough to damage the educational outcomes of students of color. CRT has been used to challenge traditional educational scholarship that imposes white dominant ideologies, for CRT scholars in education recognize

that Eurocentric white culture has been infused in educational standards and has ignored the experiences of students of color (Ballard, 2010; Hiraldo, 2010; Savas, 2014).

Education is revered as the conduit for the “American Dream” which is expected to afford opportunities for advancement in society (Alvarado, 2010). Higher education affords greater opportunities for mobility within the rungs of society. Such opportunities for advancement however, rely on false pretenses of equal opportunity, for higher education is plagued with racial and class-based exclusion (Alvarado, 2010). Access to higher education is further limited by access to resources and prevailing notions of fairness, meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality in terms of the education of students of color (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999).

Although CRT was important for exploring how participant experiences in the access program were influenced by hegemonic forces, self-efficacy theory was needed to explore how such forces impacted the participants’ perceptions of their abilities to achieve success despite negative discourses. Self-efficacy examines how an individual’s beliefs about their capabilities and expectations can influence goal-oriented behaviors and desired performances (Bandura, 1994; Reid, 2013). Self-efficacy theory provided an analytical framework to deconstruct how various aspects of the participants’ personal and academic lives influenced their ideas of what they could achieve in the context of the access program. Several research studies have pointed to a relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, academic achievement, expectations regarding performance, perceptions of competence, and positive attitudes towards school subjects (Bandura, 1997; Ferla, Valcke, Cai, 2009; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Many participants’ reflections emphasized their perceptions of the necessary ingredients for success in the access program. These reflections captured cognitive and social sentiments as they were portrayed by the participants.

### Summary of Research Findings

Participants reported that many aspects of their experiences were largely influenced by individual choices, peer affiliations, interactions with faculty and staff, and overall perceptions of the developmental education access program. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed utilizing a modified van Kaam phenomenological analysis procedure. Two broad themes and complimentary sub-themes were derived from analyses and were presented in the *Composite Textural-Structural Representation of Developmental Education Experiences* (Figure 4.1). The two themes were (1) *Variables of Influence On The Development of the Academic Counterspace* and (2) *The Color-Blindness of Success*. Sub-themes identified for each theme provided further insights regarding the developmental education experiences of participants.

*Variables of Influence to the Development of the Academic Counterspace* included the following sub-themes (a) Positive and supportive faculty/staff interactions during the program and (b) Varied peer interactions during program enrollment. Collectively, both sub-themes encompassed variables of influence on the educational experiences of the participants beginning with high school and during access program enrollment. The three sub-themes related to *The Color-Blindness of Success* comprised of (a) Perceptions of developmental education experiences (b) Success as an outcome of individual merit and (c) A look at opportunity beyond race. These subthemes reflected participants' experiences in the developmental program as well as their perceptions of enrollment and opportunities afforded within the program. Collectively, both themes represented the multi-faceted experiences of the participants in the developmental access program. The following section will discuss the developmental education experiences of

participants within the contexts of relevant literature and the ideologies of self-efficacy and critical-race theories.

### **Discussion of Current Literature**

A review of the literature highlighted the relationship between students' experiences of developmental education and how such involvement could potentially influence students' perceptions of their opportunities for academic success (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2009; Fisher, 2008; Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010; McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). However, very few peer-reviewed, published works have described the experiences of students within developmental education programs (Crisp & Nora, 2009; Lesik, 2007, Moore, 2007; Skinner, 2014). Even fewer studies exist that hone in on the experiences of students of color within access programs and developmental education in general (Davis & Palmer, 2010; Melguizo, Hagedorn, & Cypers, 2008; Wood, 2012). Published research from *Complete College America* point to cost efficiency, lack of efficaciousness in traditional remedial education, and corresponding implementation policies as deterrents of degree completion for students (Remediation: Higher Ed's Bridge to Nowhere, 2012).

Bailey, Jeon, and Cho (2009) analyzed patterns and determinants of student progression through developmental education programs and found that many students did not complete their referred developmental education sequence. Results from the study suggested that less than 50 percent of students completed developmental education sequences and that men, older students, African American students, part-time students, and students in vocational programs were least likely to complete their full remedial sequences. While attempting to understand the perspectives of students enrolled in developmental education courses, it is essential to consider the various ways that access program enrollment can add further complexity to the educational

experiences of the participants. Two theoretical approaches provided the researcher with frameworks capable of capturing such complexity. These theoretical frameworks captured cognitive-psychological (i.e. affective, behavioral, cognitive processes) and sociological aspects of the learning experience (Özdemir & Kalayci, 2013; Jimmerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). The following section contains a discussion of themes derived from the study in relation to the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and self-efficacy theory.

### **Discussion of Research Findings in Context**

Participant demographics and findings from the study were presented in chapter four. Individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview was conducted with seven African American male college students enrolled in a developmental education access program. Participants identified a combination of factors and positive aspects of the learning support experience that contributed to their perceived abilities to enjoy academic achievement while enrolled in learning support courses. Most participants pointed to positive and supportive interactions with various faculty members as an essential part of their experiences while also acknowledging how their individual efforts could interfere with their abilities to achieve success. Although a few participants noted that different opportunities were afforded to individuals of various ethnicities, neither of the participants implicated race or racialized experiences as a deterrent to their abilities to become academically successful. On the other hand, a few participant responses suggested that internalized racism may have influenced their perceptions of personal responsibility and opportunities for success within the program.

Data analysis revealed that participants viewed their overall experience with the developmental education program as positive, although some participants reported challenges related to peer relationships and stigma around being in the program. Many of the participants



reported several benefits to being in the access program and described their experiences as an opportunity to become better students in preparation for future educational undertakings. It was determined from data analysis that participants did not conceive of many deterrents to academic success in the developmental education program despite academic difficulties experienced in secondary education. Participants weaved their experiences from high school into counternarratives of resilience and triumph that helped them maintain motivation to persist through developmental education. Participants were encouraged to attend college, overcome setbacks, and stay the course of college enrollment while completing learning support classes.

### **Positive and Supportive Faculty/Staff Interactions**

Frequent faculty/teacher interactions have long been implicated as an important component of the student educational experience (Reid, 2013). Years of established research point to the quality of student interactions with faculty members inside and outside of the classroom as being a significant factor of academic achievement and persistence towards degree completion and engagement in community college. The quality of the relationship between students, faculty, and staff at institutions greatly affect the student's overall perceptions of their experiences in the educational setting (Wood & Ireland, 2014). The current study confirmed that the frequency and quality of interactions with faculty and staff were very important to the participants' perceptions of their experience with the developmental education learning program.

Wood (2012) discussed how black male students often refrained from engagement in class due to apprehension and ambivalence towards establishing initial contact with faculty and staff. Wood (2012) maintained that such apprehension to engage was counterbalanced with the black male student's desire to engage. Such apprehension could explain why some participants interacted with faculty and staff more so than others. Nonetheless, the valuing of such

interactions was an essential part of the access program experience for several reasons. Many participants reported enjoyable encounters and exchanges with faculty regardless of the nature of the interaction. Such exchanges, as reported by the participants appeared to be welcomed and initiated by the participants on their own accords for reasons related to test preparation, assignment clarity, homework questions, and grades.

Situated mediated identity theory asserts that students and educators belong to a community of practice where each member has the potential to impact others' sense of worth in the educational environment. Through socialization of cultural practices within the educational setting, individuals can achieve school success. Another tenant of situated mediated identity theory maintains that identity and realizations of self are socially constructed through relational activities such as communication (Murrell, 2008). According to situated mediated identity theory, student interactions with faculty inside of the classroom have a significant role on their perceptions of their experiences within the educational setting.

Many of the participants expressed contentment with faculty interactions inside and outside of the classroom setting. Although a few of the participants mentioned visiting with their professors during office hours, all participants cited some form of interaction with the course instructors inside of the classroom. Satisfaction with faculty interactions inside of the classroom for many of the participants reflected their perceptions of the faculty members' abilities to create a classroom environment conducive to learning. Howard (2008) discussed how racial microaggressions were often presented in low teacher expectations for African American males, suspicions or surprise about academic successes and common acceptances of underachievement. He contended that counter storytelling provided males with an opportunity to come to grip with racial microaggressions as they are presented in school policies, curricular

programs, and teacher practices. For other participants, satisfaction with interactions related to individual perceptions of professors as being personable and approachable. Interactions with staff, further extended the community of practice concept, for many participants relied on staff outside of the classroom for support and information. Interactions with faculty were vital to the establishment of the safe space which was needed for participants to work through their complexities.

Self-efficacy beliefs have been linked to academic achievement, performance expectancies, and individual perceptions of competence (Reid, 2013). Research suggests a relationship between black male college student's success, heightened senses of self-efficacy and more satisfaction with faculty interactions. Furthermore, research shows that academically successful African American male college students are more likely to be academically and socially integrated into campus and are likely to hold racial identity and self-efficacy beliefs that contribute to their institutional integration (Reid, 2013). Study participants' sentiments regarding faculty staff interactions suggested that they perceived of themselves as capable individuals in the learning support environment given the right support.

When considering the four sources of self-efficacy as prescribed in Bandura's overarching social cognitive theory, one such source, enactive attainments, examines how previous experiences affect an individual's efficacy. In the case of the educational experiences of the participants, there were many statements pertaining to previous educational experiences that could have both positive and negative implications in terms of healthy efficacy development. As these experiences pertained to high school relationships with teachers, many of the participants pointed to positive, open, supportive relationships that helped participants graduate from high school. The existence of these relationships may have influenced the participants'

perceptions of what they could expect from their college faculty and what they saw as possible to achieve in the new learning environment of the college developmental education course.

### **Varied Peer Interactions During Program Enrollment and the Academic Counterspace**

Wood (2012) pointed to previous academic preparation and level of commitment to goals as two of the many challenges of black male college students. He also asserted that outside influences such as media portrayals, peers, and stereotypes added further complexity to the academic experience. Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) pointed to the significance of variables such as peer support, sense of belonging, and institutional commitment in terms of student persistence. Tinto (1987, 1983) theorized that persistence through college was largely dependent on integration into social and academic environments. The present study revealed that participants' perceptions of their interactions with peers inside and outside of the classroom were important to their persistence through the developmental education program. For some participants, a lot of emphasis was placed on what other non-learning support peers thought of their enrollment with the program. Other participants however, stressed peer interactions with program peers.

For most participants, peer relationships amongst participants were positive. Many participants credited the learning support program with providing the platform for the development of meaningful peer relationships with individuals in the program. While other participants described their peer relationships as less than ideal, they still noted the importance of quality peer relationships and considered them to be essential to individual academic achievement in the learning support program. Peer relationships were perceived as a form of support that complemented the experience. The positive nature of the experience enabled the participants to persist through the program.

Situated mediated identity theory asserts that social and cultural dynamics impact student participation and learning within educational settings. Murrell (2008) maintains that students of color are placed at a disadvantage when their schools do not provide or create meaningful opportunities for participation in the immediate cultural social context of instructional activity. Murrell further extrapolated that once the meaningful opportunities for participation were established, students could develop positive academic identities of achievement. The community of practice as described by Murrell, is a culture that can influence academic identity development, which leads to school success. When considering the design of the access program, it can be said that participants were able to immerse themselves in the local culture of the university life with their peers. In turn, such immersion allowed the participants to establish more meaningful relationships with each other.

Although Murrell considered the classroom as a space where positive academic identities could develop, an expansion of that space to include the larger contextual environment of the historically black university setting seems more appropriate for garnering a fuller understanding of the community of practice for the access program participants. Many of the participants cited activities of interest and opportunities to embark on the university college student life with like-minded peers as something of significance to their learning support experiences. Such reflections suggest that the student's sense of belonging was enhanced by the cohort model. Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) maintained that sense of belonging is essential to student models of persistence and is necessary for avoiding negative consequences in the future. From these interactions, participants were afforded an opportunity to learn more about the access institution outside of the confines of the program. Such interactions were necessary for successful transition upon completion of the program and were beneficial in helping participants

make sense of their dual academic identities as access and university students. Therefore, making the developmental education classroom a place of collaboration and a place where shared meaning of the experience could develop.

As it pertained to peer interactions amongst program participants, the cohort model design of the program enabled students to share experiences with one another inside of the classroom as well as in their living spaces. The cohort model, by design, made it possible for students to extend the community of practice outside of the classroom setting; hence, the reason as to why participants utilized their peer support in studying and completing course assignments. This extension of learning outside of the classroom setting can be perhaps attributed to the shared meaning systems that constituted the access program experience. McFeeters (2010) discussed the significance of student-to-student interactions in higher education with emphasis on outcomes such as enhancements in intellectual development and positive contributions to both academic and non-academic outcomes.

Peer interactions also seemed to play a role in the participants' perceptions of their experiences as African American male college students enrolled in developmental education coursework. For Murrell (2008), the community of practice encompasses the social life of a school which is influenced by collective cultural forms that influence the development of identities of achievement. Murrell (2008) also discusses a social-symbolic community where individuals share imaginal social and symbolic material. As used by Murrell, this term reflects a learning community that vests on the integrity and coherence of its members. The learning support classroom environment provides a good example of such an environment as students are often expected to interact with one another and foster an environment conducive to support and shared learning. Interactions amongst peers help to formulate the school community of practice

which articulates role opportunities, expectations, and practices in a cultural community conducive to academic achievement (Murrell, 2008).

Although peer interactions were regarded as essential to the participants' experience with the program, participant statements regarding those interactions shed light on the quality of those interactions and the role that such interactions played in the participants' individual academic experiences within the access program. According to Murrell (2008), equal care must be devoted to the healthy social development of the peer group environment and healthy social and cultural development of individuals. Within the social-symbolic community of the learning support classroom, participants, along with their peers, could formulate their own discursive practices regarding what it meant to them to be students in the learning support program. This social-symbolic community is akin to the notion of counterspaces within the academic setting. Many researchers have found the exploration of counterspaces to be beneficial towards understanding African American male schooling experiences in PK-20 (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Caton, 2012; Cummins & Griffin, 2012; Harper, 2009).

### **Transitional Experiences Between High School and College**

Although Murrell's original work was created with primary and secondary educational settings in mind, the major tenets of this theory can be applied to male college students in developmental education programs. Situated identity is comprised of a multifactored, fluid identity that is situationally determined. Further exploration of various situated mediated identity theoretical tenets hold that social identification in school follows a developmental progression that centers around three phases: situated identity awareness, awareness of one's positioning and positionality, and agency. Such statements are consistent with the notions proposed by Murrell's community of practice and the "acculturation" process which is necessary

for the development of situated identity, positionality and agency. Many of the participants cited previous high school educational transitions and experiences in the college setting as examples of such acculturation processes. Palmer and Young (2010) discuss the uniqueness of the HBCU in providing supportive campus climates for students of color. The researchers found that supportive a HBCU environment was critical to black male persistence.

For the participants, academic success inside of the classroom involved persistence and decision making outside of the classroom setting. Efforts towards persistence relate to the establishment of strong senses of self-efficacy. A strong sense of self-efficacy is needed to navigate challenges. This conceptualization is consistent with self-efficacy theory's assertions around the necessity of motivational processes in guiding actions and beliefs related to an individual's perception of their capabilities. In other words, an individual is motivated towards a prospective action when they have set goals and plan a course of action towards achieving that goal, for such an act is reflective of an individual's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1994). Wood, Newman, and Harris (2015) found that self-efficacy was a determinant of several academic integration measures for first-year African American males at a community college. These academic integration measures included talking with faculty about academic matters, meeting with advisors, and using the internet to access library resources (Wood, Newman, & Harris, 2015).

### **Perceptions of Developmental Education Experiences**

Participants highlighted both positive and negative experiences within learning support classes. Generally, most participants felt that involvement in the program provided them with an opportunity to be successful in college despite their less than desirable high school performances. For many participants, low SAT and ACT scores posed a barrier to their abilities to gain regular



admissions into the access institution. According to Davis and Palmer (2010), African American students are more likely to be subjected to institutional or systemic racism as embedded in many public policies in higher education. These policies include the use of standardized test score cut-offs to determine college admissions. Davis and Palmer (2010) assert that the use of such procedures in admissions processes undermine research that suggests that standardized tests are weak measures academic success potential for students of color. Considering that low test scores resulted in less than favorable admissions outcomes for program participants, it can be suggested that participants saw themselves as unfortunate benefactors of a defunct policy of customary practice that perpetuates racialized disparities and opportunity gaps. Participants however, did not verbalize dissatisfaction with the admissions test policy, nor did they consider such policy as an embodiment of institutional or systemic racism. Participants treated their low-test scores as a reflection of their abilities at test taking. The impact of the low-test scores was lessened by the presentation of the access program as a viable alternative to regular admission. These stances are more reflective of color-blindness and whiteness as property in education, for participants had difficulty verbalizing an understanding of how racially infused educational policies have infringed upon their educational journeys.

Although low test scores may have served as a subtle reminder of academic inadequacy, enrollment in developmental education may have further perpetuated ideas related to academic inadequacy and consequently self-efficacy. Many participants discussed how enrollment in the learning support program suggested that they had some academic deficiencies in comparison to their non-developmental education peers. Participants pointed to living arrangements and the cohort style of the program as distinctive features of the access program. Furthermore, participants were not allowed to take classes with non-access program students. In that regard,

peer affiliations, were inconveniences that led on to the nature of involvement with the developmental education program, and ultimately were considered subtle reminders of their provisional statuses. On the other hand, peer affiliations provided a sense of “sameness” or universality in the “plight”. Participants knew that there were in fact others on campus who shared their experiences.

Academic self-efficacy stems from Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy and is defined as the belief that an individual possesses the ability to meet the demands of the academic environment (Fife, Bond, & Byars-Winston, 2011). Individuals who are required to complete learning support coursework must believe that they can complete the necessary preliminary coursework that is required for non-provisional admission into a college degree program, yet many students often have trouble attaining success in these courses due to underpreparedness (Bahr, 2010; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2016, Orange & Ramalho, 2013). Considering that students enrolled in developmental education coursework are likely to experience challenges with self-regulatory skills and behaviors, it can be anticipated that such challenges may present as difficulties with coursework. Furthermore, according to research involving academic self-efficacy, student perceptions of their experiences in learning support courses play a strong role in how they perceive of their abilities to achieve success in the college environment (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2016). In other words, participants’ academic self-efficacy was largely influenced by their ideas about their abilities to be successful within the access program given their provisional admissions statuses.

One other aspect of the participants’ perceptions of the developmental education experience pertained to that of “whiteness as property.” “Whiteness as property” as a tenant of critical race theory asserts that whiteness can be regarded as a property interest that operates on

many levels (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). These levels of differentiation include the right to disposition, the right of possession, and the right of exclusion (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Hiraldo (2010) discussed how whiteness as property is a distinguishing feature of the division between those who have ownership and power in the system to impact change verses those who do not possess such power and influence. Hiraldo contended that institutions have a way of reinforcing the notion that being White is more significant and institutionally significant than being a person of color because of the potential for influence. Such an idea was perpetuated through the exclusion and inclusion of students selected to partake in the “opportunity” of the access program. Participants thought of themselves as the “contaminating” influence of their “kind” of black even though they attended an access program at an HBCU.

Although the participants had to agree to opt-in to the access program. The act of “opting-in” to the access program essentially meant that the participants would be not only “excluded” from traditional college entry, but also limited by what they could undertake via coursework and extracurricular activities. When considering the developmental education experience and the advent of the access program in general, the participants and their peers were regarded as students/property of Carter State College who had limited access to what would be colloquially referred to as the freshman year experience and all that this experience would entail. Furthermore, because students saw their developmental education requirements as a defining characteristic of their academic abilities, one could argue that the participants’ perceived “reputation” of academic inferiority encouraged the notion of “reputation and status property” which lends itself to the idea of “whiteness as property.”

In Murrell's (2008) discussion of academic identity development, he mentions two premises that relate to what he terms as shared situation identities and local culture. Per Murrell, shared situated identities, such as those of participants in the access program, are created and mediated by common experiences in the academic setting. These shared identities help to create a local culture that influences school performance and an individual's sense of self. The local culture, which is comprised of the immediate cultural-social context of the instructional setting, and the situatedness of the student's performance, is the medium by which positive and progressive academic identities develop. The developmental education classroom provided a means by which the participants could establish a sense of positive academic identity given the right instructional activities and positionalities.

### **Success As An Outcome Of Individual Merit**

Years of established research point to the importance of individual personal academic responsibility in primary, secondary, and post-secondary academic achievement (Baillie, 2015). While motivation, self-efficacy, and responsibility are key to academic success, it is well documented that students from ethnic minority and/or impoverished backgrounds may struggle with these attributes of motivation and self-efficacy. Furthermore, it has been suggested that deficiencies in the areas of motivation, responsibility, and self-efficacy may contribute to general difficulties with academic coursework (Baillie, 2015).

Although participants highlighted significant aspects of the learning support experience, they also discussed ways that individual choices and actions could ultimately impact their abilities to obtain success. Participants cited persistence, independence, and maturity as factors of importance to academic achievement in the developmental education environment. Participants mentioned that matters within an individual's control such as focusing on

coursework, completing assignments, and taking personal responsibility for one's experience would lead to success. Such sentiments are reflective of what is referred to as internal locus of control. Locus of control is defined as the degree to which an individual makes internal or external attributions to life circumstances (Albert & Dahling, 2016). An individual's academic self-concept, self-efficacy, and goal orientation are all related to locus of control.

Participants noted that studying and engagement in other academic activities such as tutoring were suggestive of taking responsibility for the learning experience. These activities were regarded as how one could improve overall performance in learning support classes. Most participants emphasized that success in the learning support classroom stemmed from personal effort and responsibility. In other words, participants felt that success with learning support coursework required effort on the part of the students.

Self-efficacy theory asserts that varied cognitive processes and the effects of such processes on self-efficacy have a strong role in human behaviors and efforts towards valued goals (Bandura, 1994). Most participants verbalized a desire to achieve success in general through their enrollment in the developmental education class. Success in the learning support program coursework meant that participants could achieve success in non-developmental courses. Goal setting links to one's appraisal of capabilities. Ideally, the stronger an individual's self-efficacy, the higher likelihood that more advanced goal challenges would be set by the individual. Higher goal challenges are accompanied by forethought which enables an individual to construct and rehearse anticipatory scenarios that could be detrimental to success. Such forethought also makes it possible for individuals to have confidence in their abilities to be successful.

Several participant statements were very consistent with self-efficacy theory's ideals concerning cognitive processes and the need for higher goal challenges and forethought with complementary goals. Bandura (1994) emphasizes that thought serves the role of enabling people with the ability to predict events and control events that will impact their lives. It is noted that such skills require a familiarity with predictive and regulative rules. Consequently, individuals must utilize knowledge from past experiences and then integrate that knowledge in a dynamic process of examination and prediction to inform future actions (Bandura, 1994). The information from high school academic performance was used as an information source, which in a Bandurian sense, informed the cognitive processes of participants. Enactment of the cognitive processes of participants afforded participants with the opportunity to establish long-term goals around college degree obtainment and personal career pursuits.

One aspect of academic identity that is addressed in situated mediated identity theory pertains to the racialized experiences of students-in-context to academic spaces. Per Murrell (2008), the educational setting is a space where the psychosocial development of African American learners is countered by racism. Murrell (2008) asserts that race influences the development of scholastic potential and compromises the developmental integrity of the social and cultural contexts of the school experience for African American students. For Murrell, racial identity and academic identity are interrelated processes. In the current study however, racial, and academic identities, for most participants, seemed to be regarded as two unrelated processes. This was best exemplified by participants' positions on personal academic responsibility and black male achievement, for their positions reflected who they considered themselves to be in the academic setting and how they perceived of their abilities in the developmental education setting.

While most participants regarded themselves as being capable of achieving success in the college developmental education program given the right behaviors, there was one participant who felt that when black males did not achieve success it was essentially his own fault. Bailey, Chung, Williams, and Singh (2011) described this concept as internalized racial oppression. Bailey et al. (2011) asserted that a system of racial oppression has to be maintained by a psychological component which is perpetuated by the individual. In this regard, the power of dominant society is reinforced through the individual's enforcement of racist ideals onto self. For one participant, a lack in achievement was not a reflection of societal barriers or systemic racism, but was rather a deficit in the individual; therefore, ironically, a reflection of the individual's internal locus of control.

### **A Look At Opportunity Beyond Race**

Despite having personal goals to attend college, many participants reported that family members and peers influenced their decisions to pursue college educations. For many of the participants, attending college provided a means to fulfill familial expectations and family legacies towards college completion. Bandura (1994) discussed fostering self-efficacy beliefs through the vicarious experiences provided by social models. Bandura asserted that seeing others succeed in areas that one desires to achieve success makes individuals believe that they have what it takes to be successful. Several participants reported having family members who had attended college prior to their matriculation which set a precedent. Participants could benefit vicariously from witnessing family members attend and persist through college. These experiences shaped the participants' expectations of college attendance.

In addition to modeling, Bandura (1994) also discussed social persuasion as an enhancement of self-efficacy. Social persuasion consists of statements made by others that

communicate expectations about an individual's capabilities to master activities. Bandura explained that social persuasion was needed for an individual to attempt mastery. When considering the amount of effort that students must exert to be successful in college, for many participants, social persuasion from peers and family were needed for self-efficacy building and ultimately for students to persist through the program.

### **Limitations**

Although several efforts were made to ensure credibility, trustworthiness, and dependability of findings, several limitations existed—most of which were inherent to the nature of the study. Some of the limitations from the study concerned the population of interest and the methods used to collect, analyze, and interpret data. One other limitation involved the study's setting and other programmatic features. Specifics regarding limitations follow.

Limitations were posed that related to the setting of the study and the manner by which participants were enrolled in the access program. Data collection was completed at a unique site and the researcher had a dual relationship with the participants. This dual relationship could have influenced how much information the participants were willing to share about their program experiences with the researcher. Although most developmental education programs are housed at two-year institutions, this program was housed at a historically black, four-year institution.

Additionally, the program was created as an access program for students who had a personal stake in attending the host institution. Since participants encountered the program after being denied admission to the host institution and that the access program was housed at a four-year, historically black university, study results were specific to the unique circumstances of the participants. Students enrolled in developmental education access programs housed at



predominantly white institutions may have different experiences than those of peers at historically black colleges. Furthermore, non-traditional and female students may also report different experiences within a developmental education access program.

Another limitation posed for the study concerned that of the timing of the study. Each participant was a first-year college student who matriculated into the access program during the fall semester of the academic year. Given the lack of experience with higher education and the need to become acclimated to the college environment during the course of the study, the researcher feels that participant responses to interview protocol items may have been limited by lack of knowledge concerning college, policies, finances and what constituted a “normal college experience” from an administration and program implementation standpoint. In other words, the access program provided first-year college students with a means to access college however, this access was very different from what other peers may have experienced at the host institution due to the concerted efforts that both institutions put forth to have the students’ complex enrollment situations ameliorated for the convenience of the students. Given these additional efforts, participants had no way of knowing or learning about the extent of the institutional agreements impact given that the program was in its first semester of inception.

### **Implications**

The outcomes of this study have implications for stakeholders and professionals responsible for the coordination and implementation of developmental education programs as well as for faculty and staff who may work with male students in higher education. Findings from this study provide insights into the developmental education experiences of African American male college students which can potentially inform policies and procedures regarding developmental education programming efforts as well as the creation and implementation of

retention and recruitment strategies designed to attract African American male college students. The participants, for the most part, described their experiences within the program as overall positive. Therefore, coordinators of developmental education programs should consider how co-requisite programming and cohort style organization can improve outcomes for students from various backgrounds within the developmental education setting.

Although participants described their experiences as positive however, it was noted that participants as individuals new to higher education, had limited understanding of what the college experience should and should not entail as it pertained to developmental education. As an experienced higher education professional, the researcher became privy to many resource issues that the participants were not aware of. These resource issues included the needed for additional supportive services and more convenient mechanisms for contacting Carter State College. The need for these resource issues were perhaps evident in the retention rate for the program at the end of Spring 2017. The access program lost seven participants which included three of the research participants. The loss of these participants is suggestive that many improvements in policy must be made for students of color to enjoy success in a program of this nature. The loss of the participants and peers also reverberates the influence of color-blind policies and the myth of meritocracy.

### **Implications for Research**

There is not an abundance of research in the areas of access programs, developmental education and the use of co-requisite remediation approaches in developmental education. Furthermore, there is not a lot of research on sub-groups in the context of developmental education and identity. Future research studies should consider conducting similar research with female participants enrolled in developmental education courses and should focus on identity

development and/or double consciousness in various education settings. It would be worthwhile to compare the perceptions of African American females to those of males at historically black institutions and predominantly white institutions. Researchers should consider both qualitative and quantitative approaches when aiming to develop insights regarding students in developmental education courses. Additionally, it would also be beneficial to determine if the perceptions of other ethnic minority groups would differ as it pertained to developmental education enrollment and academic achievement. Other populations of interest would be those of adult learners and faculty who provide developmental instruction. It would be interesting to know how the experiences of the groups would be qualitatively different from those of traditionally aged male and female students. Lastly, future research efforts should focus on access groups and their effectiveness in the delivery of developmental education programming with students of color as well as adult learners.

### **Chapter Summary**

A phenomenological study was completed to explore the lived experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental educational coursework within an access program housed at a rural four-year institution. Use of this methodology aided in the generation of six themes and accompanying sub-themes that encompassed the educational experiences of participants. The findings of this study provide a deeper understanding of the unique experiences of African American male college students in a developmental education access programs. The findings of this study revealed that enrollment in the developmental education access programs provided participants with unique interactions with faculty, staff, and peers that aided in their perceptions of their abilities to be successful in the learning support environment. An exploration of participant experiences from the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory,

self-efficacy theory, and existing literature added further context to the educational experiences of participants in the developmental access program. Implications and future research recommendations were also provided.

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## Appendix A

## Interview Protocol

	Questions
<p>Focused Life History</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please tell me about yourself and how you arrived at GSC?</li> <li>2. What was high school like for you in terms of your academic experiences? How would you describe your relationships with your teachers?</li> <li>3. How does your family feel about you pursuing a college education? How much support would you say that you receive from them?</li> <li>4. How did your peers from high school or from your neighborhood react when they first heard that you were going to college?</li> <li>5. What factors make it difficult for you to pursue a college education? How are you able to overcome these barriers?</li> <li>6. How do you define success (academic and in general)? How has the way you define success changed over time?</li> <li>7. Where do you hope to be in terms of your life and career 5 years from now? 10 years from now?</li> </ol>
<p>Details of the Experience</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How many learning support courses were you required to complete at the start of your enrollment at Gordon State College?</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. What reasons motivated you to enroll in college? What academic goals do you hope to accomplish?</li><li>3. What has your experience of college been like since first attending GSC?</li><li>4. How would you define academic achievement?</li><li>5. What out-of-class activities have you been involved in at this institution? How have these activities contributed to your success?</li><li>6. Describe your interactions with your professors at this institution? FOLLOW UP: How often do you visit your professor during office hours or go to them for help or clarification on an assignment?</li><li>7. Can you talk about your interaction with your professors, advisors, and other supportive staff? What (if any) types of support have you received from them? How important has their support been in helping you achieve your goals at this institution?</li><li>8. Are there any other important insights you would like to share about your experiences at this institution?</li><li>9. What (if any) support and encouragement have you received on campus? How important has this support been in helping you persist at this institution?</li></ol>
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	<p>10. What has played a significant role in your ability to become academically successful?</p> <p>11. When African American men do not achieve academic success, what are the primary factors you think make it difficult to achieve such success?</p> <p>12. Describe your own experiences (social and academic) as an African American male at this college.</p> <p>13. What are the primary institutional factors you think make it difficult/easy to achieve success?</p>
Reflection on the Experience	<p>1. What does it mean to you to be an African American male in a learning support course?</p> <p>2. In what ways does learning support coursework impact your experience at this institution?</p> <p>3. How does enrollment in learning support classes impact your views of your ability to become academically successful?</p> <p>4. Describe what you have enjoyed most about your enrollment in learning support classes. Enjoyed least?</p> <p>5. How often do you interact with the faculty of your learning support classes? Can you give examples of what those interactions look like?</p> <p>6. Please describe your interactions with peers in your learning support classes.</p>

	<p>7. What, if any, are some ways that your experience in learning support classes can be improved?</p> <p>8. Are there any important insights you would like to share about your experiences in learning support courses at this institution?</p>
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## Appendix B

## Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. What positive and negative experiences from high school have influenced your decision to attend college?
2. Give examples of when racial or ethnic stereotyping in educational setting has influenced your ability to fully engage in academic activities.
3. Give examples of experiences that make you feel like you don't belong here at GSC.
4. How had the support you received from faculty and staff helped or hindered you from achieving your goals at this institution?
5. Give examples of how services offered to you here on campus has made a positive and/or negative impact on your ability to achieve academically.
6. In what (if any) ways do supportive programs here on campus enhance your academic experiences at this institution? Please provide examples.
7. Describe the classroom activities that have helped increase your desire to learn? What were the least effective activities?
8. Please explain how faculty expectations of your performances in their classes influence your ability to learn in the classroom. Give examples.
9. Please explain how faculty perceptions and/or attitudes of you as a black male influence your ability to learn in the classroom. Give examples.
10. Give examples of how faculty and staff should motivate and inspire African American men to succeed academically and personally?
11. How important are your interactions with peers at GSC in influencing your decision to continue your studies at GSC? Please explain.

# Volunteers Needed for Research Study



### Participants needed for research study:

## “How Do African-American Male College Students Enrolled in Learning Support Courses View Their Experiences of College?”

**Description of Project:** Research aims to learn more about the attitudes and perceptions of first-year African American male college students enrolled in learning support courses. Participation in the study involves one-on-one interviews and participation in a focus group on the GSC campus.

**To participate:** You must be an African American male college student currently enrolled in learning support courses at GSC and must be at least 18 years old. Additionally, interested individuals must be within their first year of college.

Participants will be entered to win 1 of 2 \$50 gift cards to Best Buy and Belk

To learn more, contact the principle investigator of the study, Anissa Howard, at 478-238-3795 or [anissah@gordonstate.edu](mailto:anissah@gordonstate.edu).

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Jolie Daigle, Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia, and has been reviewed and approved by the Gordon State College Human Subjects Committee.

[illegible]

## Appendix D

### Interest Email

Hello!

Thank you for your inquiry for participation in my research study. My name is Anissa Howard, and I am a doctoral student enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Georgia's Department of Counseling and Human Development. The purpose of this research study is to look at the experiences of African American male college students enrolled in developmental education. We hope that this study will help educators and institutions implement best policies and strategies in developmental education with African American male college students. Do you think you might be interested in participating in this study? If you are interested in participating in this study, please continue reading this email. If not, you may delete this email and thanks for your time.

Before enrolling in this study, I need to ask you a few questions to determine if you are eligible for participation in this study. What I would like to do now is to ask you a few questions about your current course enrollment and age. This should only take about 2-3 minutes.

If for some reason you feel that that the questions that I am going to ask you makes you feel uncomfortable or distressed, please let me know. You don't have to answer the questions if you do not want to however, refusal to do so will automatically render you ineligible to participate in the study.

All information that I receive from you, including your name and other information that can be used to possibly identify you will be kept private and will be stored in the researcher's UGA Email.

Remember, your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to answer any questions at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If I have your permission to participate in this study, please respond to the following questions in a separate email addressed to [anissa@uga.edu](mailto:anissa@uga.edu).

1. What is your name?
2. Are you at least 18 years of age?
3. Are you currently enrolled at least half-time at GSC?
4. Are you enrolled in learning support courses at GSC?

Once I receive your email containing your answers to these questions, I will notify you via email if you qualify or not to participate in the study. If you don't qualify, all the information you provided will be immediately destroyed including all email correspondence.

Thank you. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (478) 238-3795 or you can call my faculty advisor, Dr. Jolie Daigle at 706-542-4106. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Sincerely,

Anissa Howard

## Appendix E

## Follow-up Email

Hi There!

A few weeks ago, you reached out to me concerning your interest in participating in my study. Unfortunately, I haven't heard back from you, so I was wondering if you are still interested in participating in my study. If you are still interested in participating in the study, please respond to my email no later than \_\_\_\_\_. If you are not interested in participating in my study, you do not have to do anything further. Thanks for your time.

## Appendix F

### Informed Consent

#### Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study titled, “HIGHER LEARNING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION,” conducted by Anissa Howard from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (706-542-1812) under the direction of Dr. Jolie Daigle, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, University of Georgia (706-542-4106). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. Your grades or course enrollment will not be affected in any way. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to gain insights into the experiences and perceptions of African American male college students enrolled in learning support courses. The researcher hopes to learn about factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students. Specifically, this study aims to learn how such enrollment impacts the educational experiences and achievement of African American male college students.

This may assist institutional administrators and staff in providing additional supportive services and programming for African American male students in higher education. Due to the nature of this study, I may be asked some questions where I may choose to disclose personal information that could potentially place me a risk of criminal or civil liability, or any other adverse action if disclosed outside of this research study. The disclosure of such information however, is not required for participation in this study. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in one-on-one interviews for a duration of 60 to 90 minutes
- 2) Participate in a mini-discussion (focus) group of 8-10 participants for a duration of 60 to 90 minutes
- 3) Take a vow of confidentiality, where information shared in the focus group should not be discussed outside the group

I will be asked a series of questions about my background and college academic experiences. All interviews and discussions will be audio taped to help the researcher accurately capture my insights in my own words. I understand that the mini-group discussion will be video recorded and audio recorded for the purpose of enhancing the researcher’s ability to distinguish data collected from each participant. Once data is extracted from the video files, they will be destroyed along with audio files. I am not required to answer all questions and may choose to pass on any question that makes me feel uncomfortable. You will not be asked to disclose any names or information that can be used to identify individuals not directly involved with this study. Additionally, you will not be asked to disclose any information that could potentially pose risk or harm if disclosed outside of this study. At any time, I may notify the researcher that I would like to stop the interview and end my participation in the study. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation. The researcher strongly encourages participants to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods being used at the time of the study. At the conclusion of the study, my name will be entered into a drawing where I will have the chance to win 1 of 2 cards valued at \$50 for Belks or BestBuy. Participation in the research study is not required to be entered in the drawing.



After recording, the interviews will be shared with a research team for the purposes of analyzing information provided, however my name will not be recorded on the tape. My name and any other potentially identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. All of my information and interview statements will be kept confidential unless a disclosure of such information is warranted by law. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. I will be assigned a pseudonym by which I will be referred for the duration of my participation in the study.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand the information above. I give the researcher permission to share recordings with the research team. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

**Anissa K. Howard**

**Name of Researcher**

Telephone: **478-238-3795**

Email: **[anissa@uga.edu](mailto:anissa@uga.edu)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

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

Additional questions or problems regarding my rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia; Telephone (706)542-3199; E-Mail Address [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)

## Appendix G

## Participant Demographics Sheet

Demographics of Student Participant
Pseudonym _____
Age: 18-24 _____ 25 or older _____
Race/Ethnicity: Caucasian _____ Black _____ Hispanic _____ Other _____
Gender Identification: _____
College: _____ Major _____
Fulltime student status (12 credit hours or more) _____
Part-time student status _____
Employed: Yes _____ No _____ #of Hours working per week _____
On campus employment _____ Off campus _____
Marital Status _____ Children _____

## Appendix H

## Contact Summary Sheet

## Contact Summary Sheet

Interviewee:

Interviewer: AH

Date of Contact:

Today's Date:

1. What were the main issues or themes that stuck out for you in this contact?

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2. What discrepancies, if any, did you note in the interviewee's responses?

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3. Anything else that stuck out as salient, interesting, or important in this contact?

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4. How does this compare to other data collections?

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## Appendix F

## Codebook Sample

Code Book:

Label	Description	Example(s)
<b>Academic Advantage</b>	References to extra benefits of being involved with GAP program or LS courses.	Very important because I feel like we are getting an extra head start on those students who might not be getting that push as in ...
<b>Access to Grades</b>	References to ability to monitor one's academic progress	I think we should be able to, like in high school, look at our grades too. To see how were doing. Why didn't we do so well. We would be able to come to you and talk to you about that. When we don't know, you see what I'm saying? I feel like we should have that so that we can know what we did wrong on the grade. So we won't have to do it again, you see what I'm saying?
<b>Barriers to Success</b>	Challenges and/or obstacles that interfered with success or academic pursuits	Like...I don't know like most black men kinda don't really carry there self as well as others...like other uhhh races. Like some black men kinda don't really care or have like the motivation to do other things.
<b>Campus Activity Involvement</b>	Activities, organizational meetings, clubs, extra-curricular activities mentioned by participants (may also include off campus events attended)	Umm... I haven't attended any so far yet. But I do plan on joining FFA
<b>College Environment</b>	Aspects of the university setting and or residence life that participants reference as having a positive or negative affect on the college experience	Uggh...I enjoyed just the environment. Just making new friends. Seeing new people. I just love new areas. And the thing I dislike the most (pause) Well, it's not nothing I don't really like. Yea. I like most things.