A Smooth Transition: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Experiences of First-time, Full-time, Provisionally Accepted Black Male Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate first-time, full-time provisionally accepted Black male students and to achieve a clear understanding of their lived experiences to enhance campus-wide social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy to improve opportunities for academic success. This study is significant because it explores the gap in existing literature and research on the impact of Black male students' precollege characteristics, experiences, and perceptions of their academic success and self-efficacy. Notable retention theorists Astin (1984), Bean (1985), and Tinto (1993) provided a great introduction of the issues affecting retention and the barriers impacting students' desire to persist, but there is a gap in the research. These issues include, but are not limited to, lack of academic and social involvement, failure to adapt, and self-efficacy. Students' admission type seems to be overlooked in the literature.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the lived-experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students and to discover the essence of those experiences while providing a platform for implementing new policies, procedures, and, if necessary, pedagogy for state colleges and state universities and their social network systems within the University System of Georgia (USG), Georgia's public colleges and universities, I conducted a phenomenological study. Eight participants were interviewed at four USG schools. Two were state colleges and two were state universities. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus groups addressing the three research questions related to this study: 1) What are the lived experiences of provisionally

accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at

state colleges and state universities in

Georgia? 2) What are the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-

time, Black male students that influence their academic success at state colleges and state

universities within the University System of Georgia? 3) How do social network systems,

student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time

provisionally accepted, Black males' academic success?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation and all of my academic achievements would not be possible without a supportive family. So, I dedicate this dissertation to my family and especially to my son Bryson who I was two weeks pregnant with when starting this academic journey. With love, continue creating foot prints on the sand that cannot be washed away with the tide.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Students who are accepted provisionally have institutional-based limitations.

These limitations include a maximum of two attempts in support courses before receiving

an academic calendar year suspension, students do not earn institutional credits toward

graduation for the support course, complete self-registration, access their academic

records, or apply for admission to schools that enforce their admission requirements

(University System of Georgia (USG), 2016). Conversely, traditional admits (students

who meet the institution's admissions requirements) earn college credits for each of the

courses, self-register, and have at least four attempts to pass a course before receiving

academic penalty (USG, 2016). These limitations coupled with the socioeconomic

factors, precollege experiences, and self-efficacy may have an additional impact on

provisionally accepted Black male students' social and academic experience within the

higher education setting (Harper, 2012).

According to the USG (2016), provisionally accepted students have two attempts

to satisfy learning support courses. Learning support courses are designed to meet the

specific learning needs of these students to prepare them for college level courses.

Students who fail to meet the minimum requirements of the learning support courses are

placed on academic suspension and not allowed to apply to any other school within the

USG for 1 year (USG, 2016). Students may be enrolled in learning support courses

because they have not met the minimum admission requirements for the USG, met

USG's minimum requirements but not the institution's, or volunteer to enroll in the courses (USG, 2016). Those who volunteer to take remedial courses are not considered provisionally accepted.

According to the USG (2016), 37% of the student population at 2-year state colleges and 18% of the student population at 4-year state universities required remediation. There was only a 5% completion rate difference for learning support courses between 2 and 4-year state institutions (USG, 2016). More specifically, in comparison, 2-year state colleges had a 93% loss of provisionally accepted students because only 7% graduated within 3 years; whereas, 4-year state universities had a 75% loss of provisionally accepted students as only 25% of them graduated within 6 years (USG, 2016). Each of the institutions (both 2 and 4-year) provide remediation courses for provisionally accepted students. However, data is not available to show the graduation rates of provisionally accepted students by gender, race and ethnicity.

State colleges and state universities are responsible for the most significant increase in graduation rates over the past 10 years because of their accessibility nationwide (Doyle, 2010). State institutions provide admission and learning opportunities for students who otherwise would not be eligible to apply for admission to select USG 4-year institutions such as Research and Comprehensive Universities. According to the USG (2016), both research and comprehensive universities do not admit students who do not meet their admission requirements. Minimum admission requirements usually include acceptable scores on standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT and minimum high school grade point average (GPA) (USG, 2016).

Harper's (2012) qualitative report, "The National Black Male College Achievement Study," focused on Black, undergraduate men. This study was conducted at 42 different college sites with 219 participants. His participants were Black males who were successful in postsecondary education. Prior to Harper's (2012) qualitative report, he discussed the many factors influencing the academic success, retention, and graduation of Black males as categorized in three areas: precollege socialization readiness (family support, K-12 experiences and college preparatory resources), college achievement (classroom experiences, engagement outside of class, and supplemental educational experiences), and post-college success (enrollment in graduate schools and career readiness). He found less than 50% of Black males graduate on time compared to nearly 80% of White males. With graduation rates at the lowest, the graduation rate of Black males was less than 4% in 2009, nearly the same rate reported in 1976 (Harper, 2012). Moreover, Harper (2012) suggested financial stress was a major factor hindering academic success for black males as 47% of them withdrew for financial reasons.

Understanding the lived experiences of this unique, yet growing population of students who will ultimately transition into the general population of students warrants close scrutiny through the lens of qualitative research. In this case, the research may provide useful information for improving the social, instructional, and educational environment of provisionally accepted students. Capturing the unique, personal experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students, within the context of these institutions, during their first academic year, will provide insight for the development of more inclusive strategies for assisting and retaining provisionally accepted Black male students. This study is significant because it explores the gap in

existing literature and research on the impact of Black males' precollege college characteristics, experiences, and perceptions on their academic success and self-efficacy.

According to Jenson (2011), there are several factors affecting student retention on an individual level (educational achievement, assertiveness, and contentment), institutional (academic commitment), and social and external level (social and familial support). These factors illustrate the multi-layered obstacles students encounter as they try to matriculate and successfully adjust academically and socially. These factors also influence student success (Jenson, 2011). Jenson suggested students' ability to integrate and immerse themselves in a new environment is based on the students' individual past experiences such as their academic performance in high school, characteristics, social skills, and study habits. Black male students often struggle with this transitional and integrative experience (Jenson, 2011). Students, especially this group of students, learn best when there is autonomy and action involved (Hoover, 1996).  Moreover, my goal is to understand their current and past academic experiences to both improve and build on those experiences to enhance the students' learning experiences that ultimately lead to opportunities for academic growth.

Though retention is not the focus of this study, it is imperative to introduce the dynamics influencing the academic success of Black males and develop strategies for assisting and retaining provisionally accepted students. Notable retention theorists Astin (1984), Bean (1985), and Tinto (1993) provided an introduction of the issues affecting retention and the barriers impacting students' desire to persist, but there is a gap in the research. These issues include, but are not limited to, lack of academic and social

involvement, failure to adapt, and self-efficacy. Students' admission type seems to be overlooked in the literature.

The purpose of this study is to investigate first-time, full-time provisionally accepted Black male students and to achieve a clear understanding of their lived experiences to enhance campus-wide social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy to improve opportunities for academic success. In doing so, the insights gained from this phenomenological study will help faculty, staff, and stakeholders understand more clearly how provisionally accepted Black male students' lived experiences influence their self-efficacy, sense of autonomy, and collegiate experience and initiate early intervention opportunities for these students to become more engaged in their academic journey. The research questions address students' perspectives of challenges and significant issues faced during the first academic year as well as factors contributing to the success of those students participating in this study.

*Research Questions*

The research questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities in Georgia?

2. What are the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students that influence their academic success at state colleges and state universities within the USG?

3. How do social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males academic success?

*Significance of the Study*

I will address a distinct cohort of Black male students, identified as provisionally accepted at both state colleges and state universities in the USG. Through defining and studying these students' experiences, I aim to provide a platform for implementing new policies, procedures, and, if necessary, pedagogy for state colleges and state university within the USG. Investigating students' perspectives of what works for provisionally accepted students and what does not may provide valuable information regarding student success, retention, and graduation. Potential institutional barriers affecting retention rate and student success may also be revealed.

*Conceptual Framework*

To gain an in-depth understanding of the lived-experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students, it is essential to also discover the essence of those experiences by analyzing relevant literature and reputable research. For this study, I will establish a research focus on the participants' pre-college experiences and self-efficacy through the lens of Pascarella's General Causal Model. According to Pascarella's (1985) General Causal Model, there is a significant relationship between the organization, its environment, and student retention.

There are five major factors affecting student retention: students' circumstantial-pre-college experiences that develop their characteristics, the organization as a whole, the overall institutional setting, student interactions with other students and faculty and

staff, and the value of student determination (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). It is possible

the limitations and restrictions along with other varying factors and experiences by first-

time, full-time, provisionally accepted students may have an impact on retention and

graduation rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

There are many factors that influence student persistence and academic success,

student retention, engagement, motivation, and ultimately their lived-experiences

(Pascarella, 1985). The following experiential framework illustrates how students'

precollege characteristics and experiences along with their perceived self-efficacy

influence their lived experiences (Figure 1). Pascarella's (1985) General Causal Model is

significant for evaluating the effects of varying college environments as it relates to

student learning and cognitive development.



**The Lived-College Experience**

**Precollege Experiences & Characteristics**
- Socioeconomic demographics
- Academic success & preparation
- Student disposition
- Familial involvement

**Self-Efficacy**
- Motivations
- Self-concept
- Self-perception
- Resiliency
- Experiences
- Emotional and behavior responses
- Predictors of academic success

**Student Engagement/involvement**

Environment
- Academic & social activities
- Integration opportunities

Individual
- Student perception
- Cognitive development
- Classroom experiences
- Out-of-class experiences

**Persistence & Academic Success**

*Figure 1.* Experiential flow chart for the lived college experiences: How experiences and self-efficacy influence the college experience, persistence, and academic success.

Definition of Terms

*Traditional accepted students*. Students who meet regular admission requirements for both University System of Georgia (USG) and the institution.

*Provisional admission/accepted student.* Student who does not met the minimum standardized test requirements for admissions for the USG or the institution.

*State college.* Institution of higher education that offers associate, certificate, and baccalaureate programs along with learning support programs and educational opportunities for a varied student body. These institutions also help support technical programs to meet the growing needs of economic development (USG, 2016).

*Four-year state university.* Institution of higher learning that offers a diverse body of students' educational opportunities for academic success. These institutions also offer academic assistance and developmental support for students who have academic deficiencies. These institutions provide baccalaureate, masters, and sometimes specialist degree options (USG, 2016).

*Admission requirements.* Admission requirements vary depending on the institution or institution type: State College or State University. Admission requirements typically consist of ACT/SAT test scores and high school GPA (Grade Point Average).

*Self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy is defined as one's own understanding or perception of personal capabilities to overcome challenges (academic). Self-efficacy is an indicator for success and is influenced by one's characteristics and background (Bandura, 1994).

*Retention.* A measurement of student matriculation from year to year (fall-to-fall) typically within the first year of students who share similar characteristics such as first-time, full-time students. Retention may also be used as a measurement of institutional effectiveness (USG, 2016).

*Graduation rate.* The percentage of students within a cohort (group) who graduate from an institution within a given time. For example, state college graduation rate reflects completion of a program of study within 3 years and for state university graduation would occur within 6 years (USG, 2016).

*Cohort.* A group of students who begin college at the same time.

*Student engagement/involvement.* Student interaction on campus with faculty, staff, and other students especially in clubs and campus organizations. Clubs and campus organizations represent opportunities for academic success.

In this chapter, I included an introduction of first-time, full-time, provisional accepted students at state colleges and state universities. Also in this chapter, I have provided a general explanation of this study, the conceptual framework, the research questions, and relevant definitions important to the study. Furthermore, I highlighted the significance of this study as it may bring forth a new understanding of the growing population in both state colleges and universities. In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature in a manner that helps me determine what is known about the factors that influence academic success for those who are provisionally accepted.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creswell (2014) suggested the literature review should provide the platform for creating a means for establishing a standard for paralleling the results of other research relevant to this topic. In this chapter, I will begin with a broad review of the limited literature related to first-time, full-time, provisionally-accepted, Black male students and their experiences at both state colleges and state universities within the USG. Next follows a review of literature related to retention, organizational impact on student learning and social networking, student engagement, and self-efficacy.

An initial review of the literature revealed limited research on the lived experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students. Therefore, I will introduce literature relevant to factors affecting academic success for African American male students compared to other genders and ethnicities and races in K-12 schools. Dewey (1938) believed students' prior learning experiences impact their ability to learn. Therefore, the precollege experiences of Black males may be helpful in understanding what happens when these students enter the college environment. In 2015, researchers from The Schott Foundation for Public Education, reported over 40% of Black students are enrolled in poor performing K-12 schools that are under-resourced. Moreover, this population of students represented 80% of students enrolled in special education courses (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Despite the prior achievements of Black male students, they were less likely to be registered or identified

as gifted. Though Black males represented less than 10% of the enrolled student population in public schools, they more than doubled the representation of students identified as mentally retarded (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). With less than half of the population of Black male students graduating from high school, only 11% graduate from college (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015).

The computation of graduation rates varies state by state. According to Governing (2016), these rates vary due to undocumented requirements established by the states' Department of Education. More specifically, graduation rates are computed by dividing the number of students receiving a diploma by the number of students enrolled in ninth grade together (Governing, 2016). The divisor also includes the number of ninth graders at school X who may have potentially transferred in or out of the school and other potential factors like death. The authors of Governing (2016) also list the state graduation rates of all students, low income students, children with disabilities, and by race and ethnicity.

The national graduation rate of Black students is 69%, whereas Caucasian students graduate at a high rate of nearly 90% (Governing, 2016). At the state level in Georgia, the graduation rates of Black students was 70% and the rate for low income students was 61% based on the graduating class of 2012, but the total enrollment of Black students was much lower compared to other ethnicities and races (Governing, 2016). The data is significant to this study because it includes Georgia's overall graduation rates and the rates of low income and Black students over the past 3 years.

In his study, Harper (2012), developed a framework for improving the academic success of this population of students including all parties involved such as

administrators, educators, and other researchers interested in this topic. This framework was established by asking relevant questions about the students' educational characteristics, personal, pre-college characteristics, academic engagement, and attrition. The sample chosen for Harper's study represents one-third of the criteria I seek to study, Black males. Apart from the race and ethnicity of Harper's participants and the potential participants of this study, this study aims to gain an understanding of those Black males who have been accepted on a provisional basis.

Superville (2015) asserted there was an increasing graduation rate gap between Black and Caucasian students by nearly 20 points from 2009-2010 and 2012-2013, nationally. In 2012, the national graduation rate for Black males was 59% and 80% for White males (Superville, 2015). Superville noted of the 48 reporting states, 35 states reported Black male, high school graduation rates were the lowest of all races and ethnicities (20%). Georgia was included amongst the bottom six states with low Black male graduation rates, more specifically Richmond County (27%) and Chatham County, Georgia (27%) (Superville, 2015). Superville contended it is difficult to find true data regarding graduation rates as it is often times manipulated by the state. The information from this article provided insight on pre-college factors and missed opportunities to learn like the excessiveness of Black male students identified as special needs and out-of-school suspension. These factors may have a direct effect on this group of students' college readiness as only 16-20% graduate from college in Georgia (Superville, 2015).

Harper's (2012) research sites included public and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Liberal Arts Colleges, Highly-Selective Private Research Universities, Public Research Universities, and Comprehensive State

Universities. The results from the research sites showed black men represented nearly 37% of full-time undergraduates at both public and private HBCUs compared to nearly 4% at all other institutions. There were no schools in his research that represented state colleges, and there were no participants identified as first-time, full-time provisionally accepted. Harper's research focused on the success of Black male students and introduced the many pre-college factors that hinder success of African American male students. The information acquired from his study provides the background for a deeper understanding of those pre-college characteristics as they may affect the academic success of provisionally accepted, Black male students.

*Paying for College*

The cost of tuition and fees, books and supplies, and living expenses differs amongst state colleges and state universities within the USG. According to the 2016 Georgia Tuition Statistics, the average cost of in-state tuition for state colleges was $4,401.00; this is an 85% increase from 2012. Apart from the cost of tuition, students are also responsible for books and other supplies such as laptops, internet services, calculators, notebooks, and daily commute. The average cost of books and supplies is approximately $1,333 (Georgia Tuition Statistics, 2016). On the other hand, the average cost of in-state tuition for state universities is $5,676, and the average cost of books and supplies is $1,451 (Georgia Tuition Statistics, 2016). Collectively, the overall cost of in-state tuition and fees for both state colleges and state universities rose nearly 99% over the past 10 years (Georgia Tuition Statistics, 2016). In April 2015, the USG Board of Regents approved a proposal for a 2.5% tuition increase for twenty state universities and state colleges; ten institutions had increases from 3% to 9% (USG, 2016).

According to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2016), the graduation rate of Black students is 42%. According to Olbrecht, Romano, and Teigen (2016), paying for college is one of the main contributing factors influencing academic success and college retention and graduation rates. Students who receive merit-based aid are more likely to succeed and persist. Olbrecht et al. (2016) research followed freshmen students' success and persistence through their first and second year. No students were identified as Black male or provisionally accepted. However, Olbrecht et al. indicated the greater the family's monetary support, the less likely the student would drop out of college.

Kantrowitz (2011) suggested Caucasian students are 40% more likely to receive private scholarships compared to minority students. For minority students, only 12% of African American students received private scholarship funding. Kantrowitz's study also shows Black students represented 10% of all enrolled, full-time students at 4-year institutions, and minority students represented 53% of Federal Pell Grant recipients. First-time, full-time, provisionally-accepted Black males may also be represented in the population of students who drop out because of financial reasons. This population of students was not, however, mentioned in the study. It is important to discuss this factor as state funds like the Hope Scholarship do not pay for remedial courses.

*Organizational Impact on Student Learning*

Walker and Greene (2009) asserted students have higher levels of cognitive dissonance and poor academic performance if they were found to be disengaged in both the campus community and classroom. So, students are driven and motivated to complete given tasks if the given tasks are found to be practical and meaningful

(Blackborn, 2005).  Hence, pre-college characteristics, self-efficacy including students' motivation and resiliency, and student engagement all influence persistence and academic success (Harper, 2012; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). So, state colleges and state universities have opportunities for students to succeed, while countering the factors limiting student success. According to Complete College America (2014), 75% of the country's colleges and universities admit students provisionally. Once accepted, students are enrolled in specified remedial courses (math or reading) and must pass within a predetermined period of time (two semesters) (USG, 2016).

*State Colleges and State Universities*

Flowers (2006) reported Black males struggled with academic and social integration at both 2-year state colleges and 4-year state universities. He noted Black males experienced lower levels of academic and social integration and engagement at 2-year colleges than at 4-year institutions. In short, what works at 4-year colleges may not hold true at 2-year colleges for Black males. The mission of community colleges is to provide "open-access to post-secondary opportunities for under-served communities" (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 2). Wood and Williams (2013) stated Black male students represented 55% of enrolled students at 2-year institutions. Of the total Black male population enrolled in 2-year institutions, 82% of Black male students will enroll in public 2-year colleges. In their research, Wood and Williams used 2-year colleges and community colleges interchangeably. The authors asserted this population of students enroll in community colleges because the institutions are flexible and facilitate a smooth transition while meeting their social and economic needs.

Although community colleges provide open opportunities for the under-served, Wood and Williams (2013) suggested factors influencing persistence, achievement, and graduation caused nearly 12% of Black males to drop out 1 year after enrolling and 83% after 6 years without completing their program of study. The purpose of their study was to inform administrators of community colleges of the factors that affect academic success and persistence of Black males. Wood and Williams (2013) bridged the gap in literature by exploring the experiences of Black male students enrolled in community colleges compared to those enrolled in 4-year institutions.

As the institutions' characteristics may differ, the student population differs as well. Black men enrolled in community colleges are typically identified as low-income, head-of-household, or have chosen to delay enrollment into college compared to those who are younger with fewer responsibilities at 4-year institutions. Flowers (2006) referenced a number of theories relative to the success of Black men, including Tinto's (1975) theory of departure, perspective of persistence and environmental factors affecting student behavior, and student engagement. Flowers' study, though significant for understanding the varying differences between 4-year institutions and community colleges for Black men, does not discuss those who were provisionally accepted.

*Student Engagement*

The faculty at Paradise Valley Community College (2016) in Phoenix, Arizona assessed their students' levels of engagement by measuring students' behavior and the institution's best practices using The Community College Student Report (CCSSE). Using this tool, the faculty reported limited or no student engagement leads to students dropping out prior to the start of their sophomore year or prior to achieving their personal

and academic goals (Paradise Valley Community College, 2016). Student engagement, according to the CCSSE, has to meet five distinct benchmarks including: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners in and out of the classroom (Paradise Valley Community College, 2016). Faculty and staff can help students reach these benchmarks by providing, promoting, and fostering opportunities of engagement and interaction through service-oriented learning (volunteering or community service) during their first semester in first-year experience (FYE), Greek and residence life, and programs for transfer students (NSSE, 2011). There is no set standard for implementation of these campus-wide initiatives. They are dependent upon the needs of the student population.

First-time freshmen students, through service-learning, can build lasting relationships with the faculty, staff, and most importantly the community (NSSE, 2011). According to NSSE, students who were involved in service-learning activities were found to have a sense of inclusion and responsibility to the community in which they are a part of. In the meantime, residence hall staff have a more intimate interaction with students allowing them to create opportunities for engaging a student body with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences (NSSE, 2011). According to NSSE, students living on campus are more involved and engaged in co-curricular activities, have meaningful conversations with faculty, staff and other students to improve their personal values, and nearly 75% of those students (living on campus) attended campus activities compared to the 59% of students living off campus.

Students who were involved in Greek life were more engaged in collaborative learning opportunities and learning communities (peer mentors, peer advisors, and study

groups). These same students were engaged with faculty outside of the classroom and had an overall elevated educational experience (NSSE, 2011). According to the NSSE, these students also had a more enriched educational experience and were immersed in their social and personal development. Lastly, the NSSE asserted transfer students were less engaged on campus than their peers. For this adverse level of disengagement, there were a number of contributing factors impeding opportunities for engagement including an age difference (a number of transfer students are older than 24), being a minority or underrepresented racial or ethnic group, having a disability or enrolled part-time (NSSE, 2011). For this population of students, offering evening on and off-campus activities in an environment conducive to support their needs help students transition and become more engaged (NSSE, 2011).

Student involvement and interactions, within the college environment, is critical. Pascarella andTerenzini (1991) suggested both students' academic and social involvement positively affected their intellectual development. The use of the input-process-output model parallels students' academic success alongside their academic environment. In his theory of student involvement Astin (1984) described the relevance of student interactions as the outcome of a more efficient learning environment. According to Astin, both internal and external motivation (stakeholders, faculty, and administrators) play a major role in students' involvement, hence students are more apt to acquire knowledge when they are engaged. Astin asserted the level and quality of instruction provided, at any institution, are impacted by students' engagement.

Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) research showed human behavior is influenced by both the physical and social environment. According to Vygotsky, students' actions,

attitudes, and ultimately aptitudes are the end result of a very abstract psychological process. This process, influenced by students' societal and inner motivations, is responsible for stimulating the students' self-development and the realization of their potential (Vygotsky, 1978). Student behaviors are influenced by their previous experiences and relationships resulting in what Vygotsky (1978) described as a social form of behavior and social attitude. Vygotsky suggested institutions must revise their approach to providing intellectual and interrelated opportunities for engagement.

Gellin's (2003) research supports the benefits linked to student involvement and engagement. He discovered a connection between student involvement in on-campus organizations and extracurricular activities and students' internal motivation to be socially active. Involved students are more apt to commit, to participate, and are exposed to a more diverse experience (Gellin, 2003). Gellin suggested students who are engaged on campus are also critical thinkers, a skill necessary for academic success. Dewey (1938) contended the learner, himself, is the creator and common factor of his experiences, while educators and stakeholders are responsible for providing and guiding those experiences into those that enhance relative, informational, and educational experiences. Derby (2006) asserted students who are actively involved in organizations on campus are more likely to be persistent and academically successful.

Vygotsky (1978) suggested such engagement ensures opportunities of increased levels of autonomy to perform and improve students' decision making skills as they learn and use these experiences to improve their performance, self-perception, and efficacy. Perception is a vital function influencing student behavior. Vygotsky argued how one perceives himself is the end result of a transformative process of perception and intellect.

Therefore, behavior is the outcome of perception. Perception is influenced by a stimulus prompting the individual to assess his academic capabilities and to focus his attention and determination to either succeed or fail. This is a direct representation of the general-causal model discussed in the conceptual framework.

Chickering (2006) declared the academic experience is improved when there are increased opportunities for student development and academic growth in campus clubs and organizations. Students have the ability to rebuild their self-perception, thus removing themselves from previous experiences affecting their present in an environment conducive of such growth (Vygotsky, 1978). Creating alternatives, from a social constructivist perspective, requires one to acknowledge students' natural memory closely related to their self-perception. External stimulus is a direct influence on perception (Vygotsky, 1978). It can be identified as the institution and its environment. The environment is inclusive of its culture, policies, processes, faculty and staff, standards, and its quality of immediacy (Vygotsky, 1978).

*Precollege Experiences and First-year Students*

Pascarella's (1985) General Causal Model provides a formative understanding of how students' pre-college experiences affect their ability to transition, integrate, persist, and succeed academically. Institutions of higher education have been forced to analyze their assessments and efforts to support the academic success of first-year students (Gonyea, 2006). Gonyea argued institutions have vested an unbalanced amount of time and resources for returning students to ensure their success and have neglected the same efforts for first-year students. First-year students enroll in college with varied pre-college experiences and backgrounds, so Gonyea examined the outcome of student engagement

of this population of students to determine if their pre-college experiences affected their ability to succeed academically. One of Gonyea's questions asked if students' background characteristics have conditional effects upon the relationship between student engagement and learning assessed by grades, individual academic achievements and skill building.

The goal of Gonyea's (2006) study was to add to the growing literature regarding the effects of student engagement on the success of first-year students. Gonyea defined the success of first-year students as a progressive movement to achieve their academic and personal goals by initiating and maintaining meaningful relationships and establishing a sense of well-being and purpose. Gonyea argued Black and first-generation students either stop out or drop out at higher rates compared to other ethnicities; therefore, cultural differences along with pre-college experiences and characteristics affect these students' ability to obtain academic achievement and persist. Though Gonyea's study provides a contextualized foundation for understanding how the precollege experiences and characteristics of Black students affect their ability to persist, there is no mention of how pre-college experiences and characteristics affect provisionally accepted Black males during their first year of college.

*Social Network System*

Davis (1995) referenced the gap in literature connecting social networking systems to college campuses as a method of social support for both academic and personal growth, more specifically for Black students enrolled at Black Institutions. Davis found Black students enrolled in predominantly Black institutions were more successful than those enrolled in predominately White institutions because of the social

and academic support of faculty, staff and each other. Because there were increased opportunities for social adjustment, Davis found Black students enrolled in predominately white campuses were also less likely to have role models and personal attachments with the faculty. The availability of student-centered services also lends itself to the level of social support for all students for their personal, cognitive, social and academic growth (Davis, 1995).

Community colleges, according to Cooper (2010), provide growing academic opportunities for millions of students. These institutions have policies that support open admissions for students with college deficiencies, have flexible course schedules, and are cost efficient. Cooper focused on the social support and services of community colleges to compare the success of students to larger universities. These support services improved the academic success, including retention and persistence of students needing remediation (Cooper, 2010). The following are examples of social support systems found on the campuses of community colleges to help improve the academic success of students requiring remediation according to Cooper (2010):

- Academic guidance and advising
  - The epicenter for student persistence, engagement, and academic success
  - Proven tool to enhance the academic experience of those with academic deficiencies
- Student Success Courses
  - Prepares students for college life and helps them identify their learning styles and critical thinking skills
- Learning Communities

- o Co-requisite courses (paired courses) with same professor to help satisfy students' unique academic needs
- Informed Financial Aid Advice and Support
- o Sufficient funding to cover tuition, fees, and other expenses
- Social Networks
- o Three categories: Counseling, Mentoring, and Peer Networks
- o Dependent upon the students' pre-college experiences, characteristics, and college readiness.

Universities and colleges are social systems that permit students to become socially integrated by adhering to common standards and inclusive social expectations (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Social network systems can also be defined as social support systems. These support systems, according to Davis (1995), help students create and maintain social bonds and relationships necessary for integration necessary for the institution's social climate and culture. Dewey (1938) suggested student engagement is composed of a collaborative personal and social effort. Katz, Lazer, Arrow and Contractor (2004) emphasized the social network is the social exchange and engagement of small groups for establishing and maintaining relationships for an individual (the student) and organization (the institution).

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is critical during students' first year (Katz et al., 2004). Strong ties or bonds are significant for establishing lasting relationships and encouraging student engagement (Katz et al., 2004). How institutions demonstrate their ability to support the individual student through multiple formal and informal student-centered organizations directly influences the students' overall outward

views and actions (Katz et al., 2004). Parrish (2008) affirmed engaged students demonstrate a more optimistic perspective about themselves and their abilities; therefore, there is a sense of connection to the institution which leads to student success and persistence.

Additionally, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lamp (2007) suggested when college students employ opportunities for social networking and involvement; they are apt to pursue and gain increased knowledge and persist. Early predictors of student engagement and persistence are based on students' behavior, their cognitive and emotional and their personal interests (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005). Therefore, there needs to be opportunities for students to be actively involved and connected to the institution (Russell et al., 2005). Creating increased opportunities for student engagement will allow provisionally accepted Black male students to participate in a smooth transition into the overall college experience, hence countering potential pre-college characteristics developed in K-12. Though there is very limited literature on social network systems and Black male students, there is, however, no literature on social network systems and Black male students provisionally accepted at state colleges and state universities in Georgia.

*Self-efficacy*

Zimmer (2000) asserted levels of self-efficacy have been used to provide assurance or indicators for students' internal motivation and ability to learn. Bandura (1994) contended self-efficacy is the personal belief in one's ability to be successful in specific areas, responsibilities, and challenges. Students' self-perceptions regarding their efficacy are dissimilar from motivational constructs like familial influence because of their

particularity and association to given academic performances (Zimmerman, 2000). There is a conceptual and psychometrical difference within the environment of either individualized situations or academic performance tasks (Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-efficacy is related to students' academic motivation and learning and their self-examination of their ability to set and attain goals within the academic context (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy is multidimensional; therefore, the level of self-efficacy depends upon what is required of the students and the level of difficulty (Bandura, 1994). The level of difficulty and what is being asked of students determines the strength of the students' perceived efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). To improve self-efficacy, according to Zimmerman (2000), students must have opportunities to assess their self-knowledge of the given academic expectations. In short, when students become self-efficacious they become greater participants and are more active and persistent with minimal emotional responses to academic anxiety (Zimmerman, 2000). So, the students' understanding of their perceived abilities creates an emotional influence that decreases the likelihood of mental instability, thereby managing the demands of their academic responsibilities (Zimmerman, 2000).

Cooper (2010), Harper (2012), Davis (1995), Flowers (2006), and Wood and Williams (2013) contend Black male students enroll in college with multiple factors influencing their ability to persist. However, there is a lack of research that discusses the self-efficacy of Black males provisionally accepted into both 2-year state colleges and 4-year state universities. The factors influencing their high departure rates and inability to persist and succeed influences their self-perception and self-efficacy. Identifying and understanding the benefits of self-efficacy as opportunities to encourage and provide an

atmosphere that promotes a positive affirmation of self-assurance may reduce the anxiety brought forth by the need to perform academically (Bandura, 1994). Increased motivation and increased autonomy for learning produces students who are self-efficacious and exhibit improved academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). This action precedes students' enrollment as it will assume a significant role for improving their academic motivation. In short, there is linkage between students' academic success, self-perception of themselves and their capabilities, and the internal motivation to achieve (Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-efficacy is one part of the students' self-system (Pajares, 1996). This self-system controls both cognitive and emotional responses and behaviors. Behaviors influence motivation, hence self-efficacy. Individuals' efficacy beliefs impact their emotional reactions and individualized efforts and time spent preparing for an activity, the length of time the individual will persevere during difficulties, and their resiliency (academic, social, or environmental) (Pajares, 1996). Increased self-efficacy equals increased resiliency, persistence, and effort (Pajares, 1996). Individuals with low self-efficacy experience the opposite. One's individualized self-efficacy should be investigated to build understanding of the internal, self-existing, self-perceived competence of provisionally accepted Black male students.

Students' perceived self-efficacy influences their ability to perform in different aspects of their life, in this case academics (Bandura, 1994). The level of efficacy is significant to one's outlook, goals, accomplishments, failures, and anxiety (Bandura, 1994). Students' self-efficacy is also influenced by their learning experiences that are continuous and interactive (Dewey, 1938). These experiences are then measured both

longitudinally and laterally (Dewey, 1938). Longitudinal experiences are chronological and continuous contributing to the students' depth of knowledge, whereas lateral growth is a collection of interactive, personal, and social experiences contributing to the range and scope of knowledge gained (Dewey, 1938). Dewey developed his ideology of continuity in terms of lived, real world experiences and believed knowledge is the outcome of enhanced prior learning experiences.

Hibbs (2012) found a relationship between Black and Hispanic students' self-efficacy and academic success in middle school. Black and Hispanic students who experienced failure at least three times on standardized tests were more prone to exhibit negative self-efficacy thus affecting their performance in other subjects (Hibbs, 2012). Identifying and understanding the benefits of self-efficacy as opportunities to encourage, promote, and provide an atmosphere that promotes a positive affirmation of self-assurance, may reduce the anxiety induced by the need to perform academically (Bandura, 1994). Increased motivation and increased autonomy for learning produces students who are self-efficacious and exhibit improved academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). This action precedes students' enrollment as it will assume a significant role for improving their academic motivation. Overall, there is a connection between students' academic success, self-perception of themselves and their capabilities, and the internal motivation to achieve (Zimmerman, 2000).

Hibbs (2012) suggested educators should work to not only improve Black students' self-efficacy but to also improve their mastery experience. So, if a student has a deficiency, educators should work to help him master that subject. A number of strategies for improving academic achievement and self-efficacy for Black students

27

include: (a) involve peer tutor who demonstrates mastery in the required subject, (b) incorporate opportunities for a smooth transition and integration, and (c) initiate and maintain learning environments (Hibbs, 2012). These self-efficacy strategies also influence (a) both indirect and direct social persuasion, (b) emotional and biological states, and (c) mastery experiences (Hibbs, 2012). Though these strategies are geared to improve the self-efficacy of Black male students, there is a gap in the literature that provides methods for how to improve the self-efficacy of Black males accepted provisionally in post-secondary education as the majority of self-efficacy research discusses the white student population.

*Departure and Change*

The elements of Tinto's (1993) theory of departure exemplify the relationship between students' involvement or the lack thereof within academic and social systems that may cause cognitive dissonance (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1975) asserted if institutions modify their approach to creating an atmosphere that fosters inclusion of all students and their values, there will be increased opportunities for student assimilation and retention. Moreover, institutions have opportunities to foster positive relationships between students and faculty and staff (Tinto, 1975). The absence of these relationships creates a faulty social system that fails to promote social integration for students (Tinto, 1975).

Student progression and growth are determined by student involvement and the institution's commitment to enact creative and innovative means for academic achievement (Tinto, 1993). In his theory of departure, constructive and affirmative relationships within the social system create an ideal atmosphere that promotes vigorous interactions helping students assimilate (Tinto, 1993). This also leads to higher student

retention though each experience and encounter will not be positive. It is, on the other hand, the institution's responsibility to counter those experiences through thorough assessments (Tinto, 1993). In contrast, opposing experiences may lead to greater dropout rates as students, at this point, are unable to assimilate within their social or academic realm (Tinto, 1993).

According to the cognitive dissonance theory, each person has unique, individualized ambitions that foster or reduce their connectedness to the learning environment (Festinger, 1957). According to McLeod (2008), there are three ways to counter cognitive dissonance: changing the disposition of the individual or group, familiarize oneself with a variety of resources, and eliminate or diminish the level of importance of unrelated ideas. When there is a shift, for the better, in policies and procedures, the learners will then have a change in their self-perception and the institution, and thereafter have a shift in their behavior synonymous to Pascarella's (1985) General Causal Model. Changing the disposition of provisionally accepted Black male students warrants further investigation as McLeod's research shows Black male students struggle with integrating themselves in the college experience.

Dewey (1938) proclaimed education should be inclusive of the school's ordinary real world, life experiences and behaviors. McLeod (2008) declared the mental disconnect stems from situations related to internal and external conflicts and the students' beliefs about themselves and their behavior. The cognitive dissonance theory relates to this study as it provides greater understanding of how pre-college academic and social experiences enhances or deters the students likelihood of integrating themselves socially and academically in college. These lived experiences, within the learning

environment, influence the students' interactions with other students, faculty and staff, and their engagement (Dewey, 1938).

*Conclusion*

In Chapter 1, I introduced the conceptual framework for the study. I provided an overview of the key concepts surrounding first-time, full-time, provisionally-accepted, Black male students. Because there is limited scholarly literature relevant to this group of students, discovery and discussion is necessary. The research questions were presented as an inquiry for exploring and understanding the lived experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally-accepted, Black male students. This chapter provided a review of the literature based on the points of inquiry proposed by the research questions. I aim to examine the experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally-accepted Black male students during the first academic year at state colleges and state universities. In Chapter 3, I provide an explanation of the methodology used to answer the research questions

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provided the methodological framework for this study. The chosen methodological framework included an explanation of the participant and site selection, data collection process, and a description of the data analysis procedures. I explored the lived experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black male students at state colleges and state universities to address the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities in Georgia?

2. What are the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students that influence their academic success at state colleges and state universities with the USG?

3. How do social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males academic success?

*Research Design*

*Phenomenology*

In this study, I examined the phenomenon of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black male students in a comprehensive manner and provided an awareness of their lived experiences. By allowing participants to reflect on their experiences as first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black male students, I gained an understanding of their experiences and defined accurately their lived experiences as a participant of the phenomenon.

I asked the participants to reflect on their lived experiences within the phenomenon. I examined individuals' experiences through the exhaustive accounts of each participant through interviews and focus groups. To achieve the goals of this research, I used a purposeful, inductive approach to identify similarities of responses within the emerging data and to identify relationships between the participants and their personal experiences and the context in which they both exist.

*Sampling Techniques*

*Site Selection*

For this study, I first identified the schools that admit students provisionally within the USG on the USG website. Then, I listed the state colleges and state universities by graduation rate for each group starting with the highest. Next, I chose two state colleges and two state universities with the highest and lowest graduation rates. According to Cooper (2010), universities and colleges have varied network systems. It was important for me to understand how these differences manifest amongst the

participants enrolled in a state college and state university with high graduation rates and participants enrolled in a state college and state university with low graduation rates.

By identifying the state colleges and state universities with the highest and lowest graduations rates, I compared the graduation rates of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students to the overall graduation rates at these institutions to examine how institutional social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance, and self-efficacy influence the participants' ability to be academically successful. I assigned a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the selected institutions. For example, pseudonym RS1.1 represented the state college with the highest graduation rate, and RS2.2 represented the state university with the lowest graduation rate. After identifying the four schools, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for each institution. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Valdosta State University IRB (see Appendix A).

*Participant Selection*

Phenomenological research typically requires three to ten participants (Creswell, 2014). To have an equal representation of participants from each of the four sites, I selected eight participants. To identify the list of names of those in the population, I asked a representative from the Office of Institutional Research at each selected site to provide a report on enrolled, first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black male students including their expected family contribution (EFC). The EFC is used by each institution to determine how much financial aid each student receives based on what his family can contribute. The lower the EFC, the more financial aid the student receives (Sallie Mae, 2016).

A goal of this study was to gain an understanding of commonalities (patterns found from coding) within a reasonably homogenous population at the research sites. Using purposeful sampling, I selected the participants with the highest and lowest EFC because these students would provide varying perspectives of how socioeconomic status may play a role in their pre-college experiences and characteristics and how those experiences influence their ability to succeed at state colleges and state universities. Based on the review of the literature, socioeconomic status and pre-college experiences and characteristics play a major role in the academic success of Black males (Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1993; Bandura, 1994; Harper, 2012).

The participants' socioeconomic status will be identified by their EFC score. I stratified the list of students by EFC to identify the participants. I chose two students from each site: One student with the lowest and one with the highest EFC. After selecting the participants, I emailed them and provided a brief biography of myself, the title and purpose of the study, the time frame of the study including the potential schedule of interviews and Skype focus group, consent form, and compensation for participation (see Appendix B). Each participant received a restaurant gift card. If a student did not respond, I removed the person who declined from the population and selected the next participant with the corresponding highest or lowest EFC from the list.

*Data Collection Procedures*

I collected data using two 90-minute interviews, a Skype follow-up interview and 90-minute Skype focus groups. The allotted time was revised dependent upon the pilot interview and first 90-minute interview. I conducted a second 90-minute interview because the first proposed interview did not allow for data saturation. Each participant

selected a neutral location for their interviews. The interviews took place in the library

and a conference room. The richness of data from the in-person interviews helped

construct the questions for the follow-up Skype interview and focus groups. I tape

recorded, wrote shorthand notes, and transcribed data after each interview and focus

group to track participants' responses and the repetition of words, phrases, or body

language. Each participant was asked to read, sign, and submit a consent form on the day

of the interview (see Appendix C). Before the participants signed the consent form, I

asked them if they had questions. This signed consent form served as a documentation of

permission to record the data from both the interview and focus groups. At the end of

interview, the participants received a copy of their consent form.

*Interviews*

I conducted interviews to obtain an accurate description of the participants' lived

experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. The interview process spanned

over 1 week to allow for an adjusted work schedule, travel, and member checking. The

interviews, at each institution, occurred on the same day to reduce travel expenses. I

conducted 6 days of interviews (1 day at each of the four sites) and 2 days of Skype

follow-up interviews.

I conducted 90-minute interviews to accomplish the goals of this research and

establish rapport with the participants. To reduce the likelihood of general responses, I

asked open-ended questions.  I developed and used an interview protocol to help assure

the consistency of the process for each interview (see Appendix D). The review of the

literature was used as the foundation to create the interview questions (see Appendix E).

Experts in the literature found that pre-college characteristics and experiences,

socioeconomic status, self-efficacy, student engagement, and social network systems are important to the academic success of Black male students (Harper, 2012; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; Governing, 2016; Superville, 2015; Wood & Williams, 2013). I used this list of characteristics to create the structure for topics to be covered during the interviews.

Interviews were necessary to have a first-hand encounter with the unique experiences of these participants and to understand their experiences. I used a semi-structured interview protocol to discover alternative means for understanding this phenomenon (see Appendix D). I began each interview question with words such as "describe," "define," and "recall" to stimulate the interviewee's episodic memory and to provoke reflection, engagement, and discovery. The questions were formative to construct a narrative of their experiences and to allow the participants to (a) describe their experiences at the institution as a provisionally accepted Black male, (b) discuss the level of involvement or lack thereof based on their potential limitations, (c) find meaning of their experiences, and (d) define success, and help answer the research questions. Saturation is critical for producing reputable data. Hence, for the purposes of this research, I conducted at least three interviews with each participant until data saturation occurred.

*Pilot Interviews*

To test the usability of the interview questions, I submitted a request to Institutional Research for a list of all enrolled first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students at my home institution. I next chose two students: one with the highest and one with the lowest EFC. Once the participants were selected, I emailed each

student seeking their participation and disclosing the significance of the study. In the interest of time, if the student did not respond within 48 hours, I returned to the original list and selected the next student. Conducting a 90-minute interview in the school's library, I first defined the scope of the study, then asked each participant a series of specific, first-hand experience questions related to the three topics: pre-college experiences and characteristics, social network systems and student engagement, and persistence and academic success (see Appendix E). Briefly, I explained to the participants my goal was not to expose or embarrass them, but to seek an understanding of their real-world, lived experiences as first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students. After each question, I asked the participant if he understood the question fully. What does this question mean to you? What do you think I am asking for when I ask this question? If the participant was unable to comprehend the context of the question, I made a note on that question describing the participant's original response and rephrased the question. I also noted the differences of the responses of both the original response and the response of the rephrased question. I repeated this process for each question. By piloting the interview questions, I gained an understanding of how the participants perceived the purpose of the study and its significance, identified potential problems that may arise during the interview, assessed how the interview questions build on the purpose of this study, and engaged the participants.

*Focus Groups*

I conducted two focus groups to develop a holistic and in-depth understanding of how participants considered their experience as first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black male students. The groups had similar characteristics: group one

included all participants with the lowest EFC; group two included all participants with the highest EFC. According to Harper (2012) and The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015), socioeconomic status is a significant pre-college characteristic influencing the academic success of Black male students. I aimed to gain an understanding of how this characteristic and their self-efficacy are influenced by the accessibility of social network systems on their campuses. I analyzed the data from the interviews to add to the sample focus group questions to elicit data relative to the participants within the phenomenon (see Appendix F). The initial focus group questions were created based on the responses from both interviews. To ensure I obtained rich data, more questions were compiled from emerging themes from the participants' interviews (see Appendix E). To keep the interest of the students, the focus groups took place 1 week after the last participant's interview. I used an open-discussion method to offer the participants an opportunity to discuss their experiences.

Due to the great distance between the schools, I used Skype to conduct the follow-up interviews and the two focus groups (see Appendix G). Skype was cost efficient and saved time on travel. Skype is one of many web-based, synchronous environments used for collecting data (Sullivan, 2012). Sullivan defined synchronous environments as in-depth, web-based environments that are inclusive of real-time communications. Web-based interviews such as Skype offer both the researcher and participants a comparable experience to face-to-face interactions (Sullivan, 2012). Because I was able to see and hear the participants and vice versa, I was able to not only document and record their responses but also their reactions to the questions and partial body language.

*Data Analysis Procedures*

Transcribing the interviews and focus groups immediately afterwards mitigated the possibility of speculations of what the participants may have stated. As part of the data analysis, I listened, reviewed, and continuously took notes from both the interviews and focus group transcripts. During this process, I identified relationships and developed categories from the data. These categories allowed me to differentiate similarities and differences and focus primarily on the similarities. The following steps guided my plan for data analysis of both interviews and focus groups:

1. Analyzed the interview data to establish the focus group questions.

2. Thoroughly reviewed the transcribed interviews and focus groups to connect with the data and to obtain a sense of interconnectedness with each participant's experiences and linkage to the study.

3. From the transcripts, I identified significant and repeated statements that either directly reflected the study's research questions and phenomenon or recurring themes that did not relate to the research questions.

4. I developed interpretive meanings of each of the recurring statements and integrated the findings into themes by coding and categorizing.

5. To identify the essence of the phenomenon, I included, within the findings, a report highlighting exhaustive descriptions for coding and interpreting the identified themes.

6. I provided a summary of the exhaustive descriptions to the participants to authenticate the conclusion and my process for interpreting meaning. If the

participants believed I had inaccurately captured and interpreted their responses, I

revisited the transcripts to address areas of concerns.

*Coding*

Because of the importance coding played in the analysis process, a more robust

description of how it worked follows. Coding is a form of data analysis. Immediately

after each of the participants' interviews and focus groups, I wrote down reflective notes

and transcribed the recordings to gain a deeper understanding of the participants'

responses to particular questions for coding and categorizing. Seidman (2012) asserted

verbal and nonverbal responses may signify common themes, attributes, or attitudes of

the participants that may lead to varied meaning of the dialogue and other identified

matters. I translated the data into findings to safeguard its representation, to communicate

what the data revealed, and to ensure trustworthiness and rich data analysis. After

consistently reading over the transcripts, listening to the interviews and focus groups, and

creating memos from each encounter with the participants, I began to analyze the data

even further to identify units of data that create meaning and themes by coding (Maxwell,

2012). By coding the data, I gained a different perspective of the participants' lived

experiences and identified the emerging themes to pose questions regarding the data. I

coded data during and after data collection to find linkages of patterns, themes, and

recurring references. Coding is one of the most significant aspects of this analytical phase

(Strauss, 1987).

I coded data, continuously, as an interpretive and repetitive act to ensure the data

was representative of the participants' responses. The data analysis process coincided

with member checks. I coded the data using a single or several words or phrases. After

the coding process, I reviewed and analyzed large segments of data to find the essence of its meaning also known as decoding (Strauss, 1987). It was my intent to capture the true essence of this phenomenon during the research process.

I established categories and analyzed their connections after I successfully coded and merged data according to patterns of similarity, frequency, causation, and sequence also known as classification reasoning (Strauss, 1987). For example, if I was able to identify several patterns of similar characteristics such as: instructional resources and instructor availability, both of these subcategories will be grouped under instructor responsibilities. For the purpose of the example, I categorized the response by causation and correspondence.

*Biases*

I contend inferences are difficult, if not impossible, to separate or ignore. My interpretations and assumptions, prior to the research, were purely based on suggestive, adverse theories, and the stories and experiences relative to the phenomena, and my position at a state university. Moreover, inferences can turn into biases; they can be identified and countered by what van Manen (1990) described as a validating circle of inquiry. My current role and prior experiences also shaped my understanding of this phenomenon. Thus, through this phenomenological process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, I continuously clarified and explicated the meaning of this phenomenon by exploring theoretical explanations of the data.

I am familiar with the current processes and policies regarding provisionally accepted students. At my current institution, provisionally accepted students cannot register themselves for classes. These students are also limited to the courses they can

take depending on the deficiency. Holds are placed on their account preventing access to unofficial transcripts and other forms. A hold is a preventive block on the students' account. Access is one of significant differences between traditionally accepted students and provisionally accepted students.

As an alumnus and academic advisor at a state university, my roles have allowed me to become familiar with the processes and restrictions placed on the population of students similar to those of the study. My knowledge of participants' experiences may have led to a misrepresentation and analysis of the findings. Secondly, my prior research, and training contributing to new knowledge and experiences as both a former student and current employee at a 4-year state university did not impact my perception of the phenomenon. As an adjunct and advisor, I have had a unique opportunity to gain a different perspective of provisionally accepted students in an immersed setting with other students. I have insight on how these students collaborated with others socially and cognitively within their disciplines through group work, speech presentations, debates, and other assessments. So, to limit the impact of my biases, I employed several strategies to ensure trustworthy data and findings. A description of those strategies is included in the following section.

*Trustworthiness*

It was critical to use multiple means for collecting and analyzing data to ensure the study's trustworthiness and to substantiate the findings. I continuously analyzed the data and reflected on both the interactions and responses of the participants during the interview and focus group. Using multi-method triangulation as a reflexive process, I aimed to ensure the interpretations of the participants' responses were accurate and were

unbiased. Once the participants agreed their responses were reflected accurately, I then considered the data trustworthy.

*Triangulation*

To ensure both methodological approaches support the limited ideologies of this phenomenon, I employed multi-method triangulation using interviews and focus groups to build a rationalization of the themes and to ensure internal credibility. I used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to capture the individual account of the phenomenon. To collect a general account of the phenomenon, I conducted focus groups to verify and test the trustworthiness of the data retrieved from the interviews. By integrating the data from the individual interviews with data from the focus groups, I added to the limited knowledge of this phenomenon by establishing a systematic guide for further research. Hence, as I triangulated the data from the interviews (individual responses) and focus groups (group responses) data, I aimed to further the understanding of how first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black males conceptualize their circumstances based on their pre-college characteristics and experiences. Using operational memos and member checks, I continuously triangulated my data collection process as a reflexive process before, during, and after data collection. Triangulation was confirmed by answering yes to the following questions:

- Was data collected from different participants at different times and locations?

- Was data collected using two or more instruments?

- Do the findings of the study make sense?

- Was each step of the data collection process (procedures) documented to ensure the study can be replicated?

- Were the findings from both sources of data trustworthy considering the population and the readers of the study?

- Have I established an accurate account of what I am researching? (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2012)

*Reflexivity*

During this process, I established a sense of awareness of my misperceptions and biases of the phenomenon. For the sake of the trustworthiness of this research, I adopted a reflexive disposition to secure the credibility and confirmability of the research. I recorded the participants' responses in a journal and on a tape recorder. During the data analysis process, I engaged and immersed myself in the lived experiences of the participants. Reflexivity required a sense of awareness of the impact of my own subjective influences on the collection and interpretation of data (Birks, Fernandez, Levina, & Nasirin, 2013). I reviewed the data and memos simultaneously.

*Bridling*

van Manen (1990) suggested the world of lived experiences is both the source and the object of phenomenological research. I used a reflexive process called bridling as a means for consistent, methodical reflection on all that might hinder my conceptualization of meaning of the phenomenon and to maintain impartiality of the investigation by:

- Continuously member checking the transcripts and analysis of both data collection methods (interviews and focus groups). Through member checks, I will seek clear understanding from the participants by restating their responses,

- Notating my prior understanding, experiences, and assumptions of the phenomenon that may hinder the trustworthiness of the study and keeping past

experiences and dispositions from disturbing the goals of the research by monitoring and recording all thoughts about the phenomenon before and during research using operational memos. The memos also included my questions, thoughts, emotions, contradictions and agreements. (Frogstuff, 2012)

- Controlling and restricting the threads of intentionality by monitoring and excluding premature intentional meaning and, with a regulated lens, navigate the progression of the inquiry also known as bracketing. (Vagle, 2014)

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, I used member checking. During this process, I collected and analyzed the data from the interviews and focus groups and returned the findings to the participants to allow them to review and verify if my interpretation of the data was accurate. I updated inaccuracies based on the participants' responses. Understanding my role as the researcher and previous experiences with the phenomenon, I was a complementary asset to the participants by ensuring my interpretation of data they have provided was trustworthy.

Next, I used operational memos to track and outline my process and rationale for the decisions made throughout the data collection process. I have both a professional and personal relationship to the phenomenon. Writing memos enabled new opportunities for sensitivity through an analytical engagement with the data. Therefore, writing memos was a major priority, not only during the data analysis phase, but also during the initial phase of the research. Writing memos allowed me to capture and retain thoughts and behaviors, simplify, and formulate the foundation which the design of the research should follow from start to finish. Altogether, memoing further explained my decision-making

process as a continuous account of the different phases of the research. During this process, I developed a succinct style for note-taking to ensure consistency with color codes. For example, notes written in yellow represented notes from the beginning of the study; green represented the notes from the research process (interviews and focus groups); red represented thoughts and suggestions from the dissertation committee.

I tape recorded my thoughts after each interview and focus group session to capture my immediate thoughts of the sessions in terms of the differences in body language, the use of time management, and the participants 'comprehension of the questions. I used a purple notebook for coding and capturing emerging themes. Each theme has a distinctive heading. Under each heading, I included dates and times, participants' pseudonym and a brief summary to synthesize the memo. These headings allowed me to cross reference common areas of interests within the phenomenon.

All the strategies I have described ensured I have successfully bracketed. In addition to utilizing these strategies and after utilizing these strategies I continuously asked myself the following questions to ensure I have properly bracketed my biases as I collected and analyzed the data, conducted member checks and wrote operational memos:

1. Did I put aside all prior knowledge and embrace a new perspective regarding the phenomenon?

   a) Was I willing to learn about the perspective of other provisionally accepted students at other state institutions?

2. Did I have a clear understanding of the research topic to justify its significance after developing the literature review?

3. Were the interview and focus group questions open-ended?

a) Did the questions allow the participants to present issues I have not previously considered?

4. Were interview questions relative to the study's research questions?

5. Was the interpretation of the data representative of the participants' responses and experiences? (Chan, Fung, Chien, 2013)

*Conclusion*

In this chapter, I provided an overview and justification for the phenomenological research methods I used to gather and analyze data. Also discussed in this chapter were strategies used to promote trustworthiness as I explored the lived experiences of first-time, full-time, provisional accepted, Black male students. The sampling process for identifying the sites and participants were also identified and explained. Two state colleges and two state universities, within the USG, were selected to gain access to eight participants using purposive sampling. A protocol for the interviews was established. In Chapter 4, I discuss the results of the data collected.

Chapter IV

INTRODUCTION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students at state colleges and state universities. In the first chapters of this dissertation, I presented an introduction to the problems Black male students face that hinder their ability to succeed academically. A review of the literature supports how precollege experiences, social network systems, self-efficacy, and cognitive dissonance influence their ability to become academically successful. To explore this phenomenon, I conducted individual and comparative analyses with all data sources to address the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities in Georgia?

2. What are the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students that influence their academic success at state colleges and state universities with the USG?

3. How do social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males academic success?

Results of Interviews with Participants with Low EFC Score

To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Four low EFC students participated in three interviews: face-to-face, Skype,

90-minute phone interview. They also participated in a Skype focus group (see Appendices C, E, and F). Participants were all first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black males with EFC scores of 0. Each student was identified as a provisional admit. These students did not meet the minimum standardized test score requirements for admissions at their institution. Two attended state colleges and two attended state universities within the USG. Each of them had earned at least 15 credit hours. All participants in this group were traditional students. The oldest participant was 20 years old.

The data analysis included listening to the audio recordings at the end of each interview and Skype sessions, transcribing the interviews and Skype sessions, and executing a line-by-line analysis. After these processes, categories were identified and placed in a thematic matrix. After analysis of the categories, themes were identified. Profiles were developed for each of the eight participants based on the information from the interviews and Skype group session.

Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' age, classification, major, institution type, and participation in student support services and involvement in clubs or organizations. The participants' profiles have the same details including their classification and major. Additionally, the participants profiles include the participants 'institution type (state college or state university), precollege academic performance and behaviors, involvement in afterschool supplemental instruction or standardized testing preparation.

Table 1

*Participant Profile Table-Low EFC*

| Participant | Age | Classification | Major | Part. Stu. Supp. | GPA | Inv. Organization | S.C. S.U. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hawk | 19 | Sophomore | Chemistry | Yes | 2.0 | No | S.C. |
| Larry | 20 | Junior | History | Yes | 2.5 | No | S.U. |
| Ralph | 19 | Freshmen | Chemistry | Yes | 2.0 | No | S.C. |
| Ronnie | 19 | Sophomore | Comp. Info | Yes | 2.6 | No | S.U. |

*Note: S.C.= State College        S.U.= State University*

*Brief Profiles of Low EFC Participants*

*Hawk.* This participant is a sophomore majoring in Chemistry at a state college. He was a B student in high school, never suspended, and participated in an after-school tutorial program for math and partook in SAT/ACT preparation programs sponsored by his high school. He described his early, precollege struggles with English and writing. He attributed his passing of those courses to the help he received from his teachers. He claimed his struggles in English and writing was not associated to his skill level. Instead, he had a high level of preferred disinterest in the subject as he stated, "With math, it just comes to me easily. I just can put it together in my head. I'm really not interested in what we have to do in those [English] classes." He responded "yes" when asked if there is some type of challenge or disinterest in the subject, or do you just disregard it? His cognitive dissonance, due to low interest, resulted in his struggles in English rather than his skill-level. He demonstrated a higher level of academic growth, as he stated, "I mean I

50

am not like that now. I have grown to understand if it has to be done so I can move to the next level, I try harder to pass. But I just know what I like and what I tolerate in terms of subjects here." To him, trying harder has two main benefits "passing and not having to retake the courses."

Hawk began to think about college in the sixth grade and his potential career during his freshmen year of college. He credited his freshmen year experience class for helping him decide what he wanted to become, "I kind of figured out what I wanted to do my freshmen year in Freshmen Year Experience (FYE). I had to research potential careers in my major, and pharmacy stood out the most. I mean like the sciences and math and that was what I was good at." He was, originally, apprehensive about college due to the potential workload. Based on his experiences thus far, "the work isn't as difficult as I first thought." Hawk's original reason for attending school was football. He stated, "I really came to this school because I wanted to play football, but the um… the athletic trainers lost my medical forms, so I was unable to tryout. So, it's like I basically wasted a whole year here, and now I do want to transfer." The participant perceived he would be more focused if he was closer to home. When asked if being away from home was a distraction, he stated, "Yes, major distraction. It feels like I am missing out on something."

During interview one, when asked to discuss his thoughts about the faculty engagement and how he felt about being admitted provisionally, Hawk chose to skip those questions. In the second interview, the participant began to open up more about his experiences about being accepted provisionally and his engagement with his teachers. There is very limited engagement in the classroom with his professors; the participant

explained, "I mean in class I am mostly listening to them, but outside of class I will ask them about homework assignments and what stuff is due and like the requirements for it." His engagement was restricted by his dislike for talking in front of others. He explained, "It is better with just talking with them one on one. They don't mind." So, the lack or limited engagement was preferred and not based on the teacher's inability to engage the student. Hawk described his one-on-one interaction with his professors as very important because it "lets the professor know I am interested in the class and not just there to listen and just go home. It shows that I am interested in passing the class." Ultimately, it made a difference in his grade. He alleged increased engagement with his professors outside of class improved his chances of passing based on his previous experiences with one of his professors when he stated, "You know that is what one of my professors told me. He said, "I was on the edge of passing because I had something like 65 or something, but because of how I kept trying and he knew I went to tutoring, he gave me an extra assignment to help bump me to a C."

Hawk confirmed his interest in wanting to experience more interaction or time with his professors to continue to discuss his grades and ways for passing his courses. According to the participant, to ensure his academic success, "I let them [professors] know that I have been going over the lecture maybe and the key terms and ideas to show them I have tried it on my own. I would find a specific problem that I tried working on to show my effort. I would ask them what would be the best way to solve it." These moments of engagement, according to the participant "made me feel that I had support to help me get through this course and…I mean other courses."

Hawk's initial perception of the roles and responsibilities of his professors was described as "mainly to lecture and get paid." His experiences countered his initial perceptions. He perceived his experiences have "shown me that they do care about their job, and they want their student to pass because they had to go through the same thing to get to their position; they do want to help the students because they know what it is like." The participant said "professors are also responsible for helping students reach their academic goals." In order to accomplish that task, professors "must have a conversation and an understanding, so that they know like our strengths and weaknesses and things like that and basically go from there."

In order to achieve academic success, Hawk discussed a number of important characteristics on-campus personnel should possess. Professors should have the following characteristics: "confident," "a comic side," "know when to be serious," and "trustful." He acknowledged trust was the most important characteristic a professor should demonstrate. He stated, "If I feel like I can trust you and that I can trust that you won't put me down when I ask questions. I am a quiet person and don't talk often. So, it takes a lot for me to feel comfortable when I am around you." Hawk explained academic advisors should possess the same characteristics. One of the main differences is the advisor must be knowledgeable of the course requirements for his major. Though the participant had not been assigned a mentor, he identified the following characteristics as important: "like a big brother or uncle," someone who "will show me like a side of me that I never see in myself." He described the mentor as someone he could relate and look up to. Financial aid counselors and his experiences with the overall process were discussed. He mentioned in order for him to be academically successful, financial aid

counselors must be relatable and "know money management, and manage their own money if they want to help kids with their financial aid. I mean a person in financial aid need to show how they are paying off loans…or even tell us what not to do because they made those mistake." Lastly, when asked to describe the important characteristics of a tutor as knowledgeable in a specific content area. Hawk stated, "A tutor should be good in one area or specialize in one area so they can really help you with your weakness and not just think I know it already."

Hawk was not familiar with the term, "learning community." When provided examples, he stated, "I have not participated in learning communities. I don't know if we have those on campus." He mentioned tutorial, Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and the Writing Center as the only on-campus, academic services he knew of. He admitted those services plus more are available to him but he "just don't utilize them" not only because he does not live on campus but also because he is "lazy." He expected those services "be open past business hours like past 5:00 p.m., need to know what they are doing and understand the task at hand," and should be able to help him reach his academic goals.

One issue he believed impacted his ability to succeed was not staying on campus. Because he did not receive housing last semester, he had to find an apartment off campus and was bound by a year-long lease; therefore, he was not engaged in the on-campus activities, clubs, and organizations. The participant defined student engagement and involvement as "getting together…like getting in clubs and stuff and career center… like getting engage in the activities in the school." He believed there was no difference between involvement and engagement when he stated "if you are involved with others and in organizations and stuff like that, it kind of forces you to be engaged with others."

He explained "being around the same people who have the same goals as you do…make each other better;" therefore, engagement and involvement improves your chances of being academically successful. He claimed he was now finding ways to become more engaged in and out of class by first "talking more and study with people more."

Hawk was unable to define self-efficacy. After discussing self-efficacy and talking through some examples, he stated he had an understanding of the meaning. When asked to describe his perception of how self-efficacy influenced his ability to be successful, he stated "it's pushing me more towards like chemistry, I am better in chemistry, so that's why I am pursuing in that field. I think that first I would have to try to be somewhat interested in it." Furthermore, he suggested self-efficacy impacted his ability to succeed because "if you keep telling yourself like you can't do it then that part of you is just going to shut off and not going to do it, and I know I make excuses."

Hawk's biggest motivation to succeed was family and God. He was disappointed when he learned he was required to enroll in learning support courses. According to the participant, he has not faced any unique challenges, and there was no uniqueness to being a provisionally accepted, Black male student. He stated "we have to take those extra classes that other students don't have to take. That's about it…can't say it is the worst thing but others don't have to take it, and we don't get credit for it." In fact, one of his accomplishments during his first academic year was not only passing his support class but passing all of his courses along with returning the second semester though he was home sick. His first year was rough because he did not have football as a "good distraction." Based on his lived experiences, he recommended future students to "apply early…like find out where you want to go to college like ahead of time and don't wait

until the last minute. Overall, the teachers and advisors…they are alright especially advisors, and get involved even though you may not be on campus."

*Larry.* This participant was a junior majoring in History at a state university. He was a B student in high school and was never suspended. He stated, "I did not really struggle in high school. So, I did not receive tutorial services." In high school, his strongest subject was math where he maintained an A average. On the other hand, his weakest subject was English. His grades were not as good as his math grades not because of his skill level but because of his preferred disinterest in the assignments. He stated, "I really didn't have the time…I didn't have the time to read and look for the answers. I just didn't like to read."

Larry also participated in every opportunity for SAT/ACT preparation sponsored by the TRIO program; this was when he began to think about college. He stated, "I really didn't have career goals. Honestly, at first, I wanted to just come to college and play basketball." Basketball was his outlet and kept him focused during his first year of college. Both of his parents attempted a year in college, but did not finish. His sister also attempted a year or so in college; she later returned home. His goal was to finish and graduate from college. He stated "because nobody finished…just in case I have kids, that's something I can say I finished."

Larry described his freshmen year as the year he was most focused. He stated, "All I can say is that I kept my HOPE scholarship my freshmen year. Sports provided a sense of stability and held me to a certain standard. I didn't have a job, and I had more time to study. I was required to spend like 8-10 hours in study hall. So, I had more time to be a student and athlete than someone who now had to work." Towards the end of his

second semester of his freshmen year, he had to get a job to help support his family. He

said, "Being that I grew up in a single parent home… and wanting to take care of home, I

had to take care of home and be able to get some of things I wanted and not have to count

on my mom. So, I felt like I had to." At this point, his grades dropped as he began

"working more…partying more…not studying like I used to my freshmen year of

college. I feel like I became a different student." When he stopped playing basketball, no

one noticed the change in his grades and attendance. He stated, "no one really said

anything or mentioned anything because technically I wasn't failing. I mean I missed a

few more classes because I working some."

Extra funds were needed to support home and school because he was only offered

a partial basketball scholarship. Larry described his frustration as "I felt like I was being

played and honestly it was only enough to pay for one book. It made me feel

unappreciated." He stated he did not know anyone on campus to help him find additional

means to pay for school. He shared, "I didn't know anyone on campus at the time. I

talked with my coach and decided to stop playing ball and began working." He revealed,

"I found out honestly after I started working. By then it was too late. Financial aid

people…you only see them when it's too late or after the fact. So, before no…after yes.

When I was an athlete, coach handled all of that stuff."

Larry stated he was not aware of all the resources available on campus to support

academic success during his freshman year other than study hall because it was required

for student athletes. After learning of the support available to him, he stated, "I guess…I

felt unachieved or kind of low because I could have continued pursuing what I wanted to

do originally." He acknowledged his interactions with his professors were merely

question and answer. He said "My interactions were moderate. I mean if I have questions, I go to them to ask my questions or whatever." His description of moderate interactions was "I really don't talk with them like that because what we do in class, I kind of got. So, for me, it wasn't really a need for me to go to them like that out of class." Overall, he claimed there "wasn't no interactions really. It was more so lecturing."

Other than assigned group projects, there was no collaboration or other opportunities for engagement with other students. Larry considered the importance of engagement as the "key to a successful student to have interactions with your professors." He asked, "How else would you know how to get problem solving skills or to know how to do the work…the assignments given if you don't understand?" He acknowledged one of the important factors of engagement with his professors is "you won't know if you don't interact with them." At the end of our discussion about interacting and engaging with his professors, he promised that his level of engagement "will be increased. I got to do better for myself. I know I can be more involved in the classroom with my classmates and my teachers and stuff."

Larry's interactions, or lack thereof, had not influenced the way he thinks about the school as a whole. He said, "Overall, this is not a bad school. It could have been some things on my part I know I could have done better on my part. So, now my teachers or my interactions with them doesn't make me feel some kind of way about the school." Moreover, he believed the role and responsibilities of his professors is for them to "show you the ways to solve a problem…or accomplish the assignment that needs to be done. I think they supposed to just help you understand the course."

His conclusion of the roles and responsibilities of his professors started his first

semester. He stated, "I guess after I got acclimated to college and not stuck in the same

mindset from high school because that was all the teacher would do in high school. They

would sit there and go over it over and over again til we got it. I was thinking and

expecting the same thing here at least my first semester. It's not like that though." He

compared the roles and responsibilities of his college professors and high school teachers

as "I just felt I had to learn on my own…versus being helped along the way." For

example, he reflected on his high school experience by stating, "If I had a problem, if I

came to something I didn't know versus high school…if I needed help, the teachers

would be there. In college, I would have to schedule an appointment and hope our

schedules don't clash before the due date or test or something." He said, "I feel like you

shouldn't have to go to nobody to help because if you do seek help from others, who's to

say the way they showing you is the right way the teacher wants it done. I think no matter

if I did or didn't, I still think the teachers should be there to help you no matter what."

For the purposes of understanding the significance of the academic resources on

campus, Larry discussed important characteristics he looked for in his professors,

academic advisor, mentor, financial aid counselor, and tutor. Some important traits the

participant looked for in his professors were: knowledgeable, welcoming and caring. He

stated, "I looked for a professor who cares about seeing his students excel in everything

and doesn't have an attitude or with the attitude that I got mine you got to get yours, and

one who is knowledgeable about his subject." Advisors should also be knowledgeable,

"They should make sure their advisee gets…has the right classes and concerned about the

student overall." Though he has not been assigned a mentor, he is being mentored by men

who have graduated from his high school in his hometown. He suggested mentors should be "somebody who is persistent and stays on you and make sure you got your grades…make sure you are an upstanding citizen."

His perceived characteristics of financial aid counselors were based on his bad experiences. He stated, "One day I was talking to my advisor and somehow we got to talking about financial aid, and she brought up subsidized and unsubsidized loans. It wasn't until then I found out the difference. This was way after I took them both out." No one explained the differences between the two loan types before he accepted them. So, the important characteristics for financial aid counselors are knowledgeable of the process and thorough. He stated he looked for someone in financial aid who "won't mess up my money truthfully, doesn't have me to do unnecessary stuff, and gives me the right information." Lastly, tutors should be knowledgeable about the subject, good problem solving skills, and patient." Patience, according to the participant, was the most important because "the tutor can't give up on them because honestly they knew they needed help."

Larry's expectation of the institution as a whole included having the ability to "excel in my degree and to be able to use the knowledge I gained." He described the school as being responsible for having good teachers, organizations, and programs that you can join to help you do well in your major leading up to graduation. He believed, "the school should help me somewhat with finding a job after school." Larry concluded he is also responsible for his academic success. He stated, "I know there is a lot more for me to do on my own as well." Furthermore, he concluded, "I think there could be some improvements altogether from me as a student and the school as whole like creating programs that are major specific and have programs that prepare us for after graduation."

One flaw the school should address, according to the participant was "financial aid people can take the time to explain stuff to us especially our first year when we don't know much about this stuff."

Student engagement and involvement, according to the participant, was "being active in different organizations, communicating with teachers, communicating with school officials and participating in school functions." During Larry's academic year, he was not involved. He said, "As I grow more as a student, I am starting to get more involved because a lot of my friends on campus are getting into different things." He attributed his desire to become more involved to his close friends who are busy with a number of clubs and organizations on campus and "sometimes when I reach out to them to hang out and stuff I can't reach them or they don't have time because they are always busy with or doing something like service events on campus and stuff." He believed being engaged and involved on campus will impact his ability to be academically successful because to "keep being in those organizations you got to do what you got to do to keep your GPA up." He acknowledged, "It's a cost to be involved and engaged because other students are looking up to you to do the same, and it pushes you like it's pushing me to do more and to do better."

Originally, Larry was unable to define self-efficacy. After learning the meaning of self-efficacy, he described his, in terms of being academically successful. He declared, "I have honestly been successful so far working my way to where I want to be and doing the things I want to do. I mean I struggled a bit." He further discussed his academic journey from being an A/B student-athlete to one who was working, partying and not studying as before. He explained in order for one to be academically successful, one must

acknowledge "it's a process." The measure of success and efficacy may vary as the participant stated, "I may not measure up to other people's success. I can say I feel good about my progress; I know I can be academically successful." Moreover, self-efficacy is "All about trusting yourself and knowing what you can and cannot do and where to go and who to call on when you can't. Knowing those things like where to go and who to call make you feel good about doing what you need to do to get it done."

Larry described his family as "always supporting me with me being in school. It is pretty much a big thing each semester and each year I finish…so I can say my family motivates to succeed." When he was informed he would be admitted provisionally at his state university, he did not get discouraged because it was one step he had to take to reach his goals. He affirmed "if you are not confident in what you can do, then your work will show it for real." He stated there was no uniqueness to being a provisionally accepted student. He stated, "If I didn't have my learning support class, it could have been something else. I mean I don't think there is one student on this campus that feels like everything was perfect." Moreover, the participant described his accomplishments as passing his support class his first semester, playing basketball, and most importantly was able to make his mother happy because "I stayed in school." He acknowledged, "A lot of people from my neighborhood either don't go to college or don't stay." He recommended to future provisionally accepted, Black male students "to talk to your teachers starting on the first day of class, so they can get to know you and for you to get to know them, to kind get a relationship with them, learn about financial aid," and "get involved as early as possible because being involved would make you do well in your classes."

*Ralph.* This participant was a freshmen majoring in Chemistry at a state college. Both of his parents graduated from a community college. In high school, he was a C student and never suspended. He initially had a nonchalant demeanor towards his experiences and academics in high school as he stated "I guess they [grades] were like C's because I didn't really care like that." He said, "Being lazy was the cause of me not participating in class and putting in effort towards my success." When asked if his thoughts about academics were the same now as they were in high school, he stated "It's about 50/50." He was enrolled in special education courses and required an IEP for the majority of his classes. Though enrolled in remedial courses in high school, he believed, "I have always been good at math and chemistry. I was always eager to do math homework in high school." His grades were good based on his homework assignments, but there were perceived barriers during quizzes and tests. He stated, "The crazy thing about it is I would get good grades on homework assignment, but I wouldn't do well on the test, especially if it was timed." When asked if he submitted his 504 to Disability Services on campus to receive accommodations and modifications for the delivery of his courses, he said "no, I didn't know I could. I guess I should tell my mama about that huh?" He did not partake in SAT/ACT preparation that was sponsored by his school. He stated, "I was never really good with taking tests anyway."

Ralph's perceived self-efficacy in high school and during his first year of college, regarding him doing well in college, was low. He affirmed that he had to find a way to overcome test anxiety in order to be academically successful. The strategies he and his mother used were transferred over when he enrolled in college. He stated, "I had to figure out how to not really stress. My mom would pick some questions out of the book at home

and time me. That helped a bit and grades improved a bit then. I am trying to get in the habit of doing that now." Though he struggled a bit, initially, especially in his learning support class, he stated "my support teacher kind of saw it in the beginning of my first semester. He told me to come to his office and would give me a practice quiz in his office. Sometimes, he would use what I made on the practice quiz in his office as the grade for the quiz in the class. That was pretty cool." Those experiences improved his self-efficacy as he continued to work with other teachers, like his chemistry teacher, who saw his struggle with test anxiety. He stated, "I think he knew something was up because I would do my lab reports and homework assignments right, but not so good on the test. Overall, I think I am growing out of it. I can't play around with chemistry."

Ralph explained he has experienced a high level of growth and maturity since being admitted. He stated, "I know I have changed a lot." Acknowledging his growth and the necessity to put forth more effort in his academic success, he stated, "I think it is a process. I am definitely not the same student." He blamed his need for remediation in high school and college was due to lack of effort and not self-efficacy when stated "I think that is why I had to take those remedial courses in high school. Looking back now, I was much more smarter than everybody else in the class."

When asked to describe his understanding of self-efficacy and its impact on his ability to succeed, he stated, "It influences me a lot. Because if I feel like I know I need to get a task done, I am going to do it." Moreover, he suggested self-efficacy relates to self-motivation not necessarily one's ability when he acknowledged "if I didn't have the self-motivation…like I feel like the task won't get done." Furthermore, when he was motivated, he believed his "skill level really is not a huge factor." In this discussion, he

reflected on his initial struggle in chemistry. He stated, "because of my test anxiety, I got

discouraged in the beginning but I ended up getting help from my math teacher, I could

have been like dang…if the teacher won't help and I already don't understand what is the

point? I didn't though…because that is not who I am." According to the participant,

"academic success is merely mind over matter because I know I have to pass this class to

get to the next and next class to the next class I have put into my mind failure is not an

option, but passing despite how I start. I think skills are like muscles. You have to

exercise them often so they can become stronger."

Ralph credited utilizing the academic resources on campus as way to exercise his

skill-level. He stated, "I try to go to my teachers, the writing center or wherever else for

help and eventually I become stronger." He had mixed descriptions of his interactions

with his professors. He stated, some are very friendly. Some are not." He does not see his

professors much outside of class. His interaction with his professors were nothing more

than him asking questions in class. He described his interactions with his chemistry and

math professors as fruitful and as engaging opportunities that helped build his efficacy to

diminish his test anxiety.

Ralph mentioned one bad experience during his second semester. This particular

professor did not provide assistance in class when he needed it the most. He stated, "She

was just kind of frustrated with everyone and especially me when we didn't pass the test

as a whole and when I would raise my hand to ask questions about it." Moreover, "She

would be like if y'all studied y'all would know how to do this and stuff." He described

that experience as one that pushed him to mature mentally and academically when he

stated "Again, I ain't who I used to be. I care a whole lot more than high school and even

my first semester. I would still raise my hand." Knowing his learning style, he affirmed "I like the one on one because it seems like then they show me how almost step by step. I think I learn better that way because I am a more hands on person. And then if they can't show me everything, then they'll tell me well come to my office."

The student-professor interactions in the professors' office were described as more engaging than those in the classroom. The participant affirmed "it is a huge difference. I think the vibe is more personal because like some things I do want to ask in class. So, when I go to their office… ask what I didn't ask in class, and they will give me a clear answer." Meanwhile, he believed "those interactions are very important." He explained "increased interactions with my professors would be better because it could help me with grades…and how they see me in class if I spent a little bit more time out class. I feel like they would know more about me as a whole student and not just their English or math student." If there were more opportunities to be engaged with his professors out of class, he would have the opportunity to "learn about their culture, country and customs and why their teaching style is the way it is."

Ralph's perception of the roles and responsibilities of his professors included "being professional unlike my teachers in high school" who were described as "social." He described his relationships with his high school teachers as more personal and "relatable." He stated, "I feel like I can't talk to one of my professors like I would be able to with my high school teachers." He stated, "Professors are here to help me in the classroom and make me better." Moreover, when asked to describe important characteristics, he noted those who were willing help him become academically successful." He looked for professors who "give a demeanor like you can still come to

me" for questions and not make students "feel like you can't talk to them or you feel like I don't want to look dumb in a way. Essentially, he looked for professors who were "welcoming."

The same question regarding characteristics was asked about academic advisors, mentors, financial aid counselors, and tutors. He stated, "I really like my advisor." Her "personality and honesty draws something out of me." Therefore, an academic advisor must be "open and honest with me about where I am going and bring out the best in me even when I am not my best and knowledgeable." He said, "I like to feel I can just talk to them about anything." Next, though he had not been assigned a mentor, he believed a mentor should be "someone who has had both good and bad experiences in life and on campus; someone who is looking out for my best interest, and someone who is willing to help me, and knowledgeable."

Ralph described he had no personal connection with his financial aid counselor. He suggested a financial aid counselor should be "someone who is going to be able to try to help me" and "give me more details on what I can do to better my tuition." He also believed the financial aid counselor should be engaging. He stated he or she should be "someone who kind of have experienced the same things I did." Furthermore, the participant explained there is a difference in the interaction between his financial aid counselor and his academic advisor. The difference between the two according to the participant is "I can actually come talk to my advisor about whatever it is I am struggling with as far as class or anything. If I to talk to my financial aid counselor, they like straight to the point, and that's it. Then, I'm out of there." With his financial aid counselor, the

"meetings are always quick, and I don't get a chance to even explain my situation because they seem to be trying to get to the next person."

Ralph lacked engagement with other students. He described himself as a loner. He blamed his lack of involvement and success on his "being lazy." He stated, "I am working on becoming more involved both in and outside of the classroom. I don't know when that will be though." Though he was not a part of any on-campus organizations, be understood the significance of engagement and involvement with others. He defined student engagement and involvement as "a student who is willing to participate." This required students to "do things that they usually probably wouldn't do and step out of their comfort zone." Furthermore, student engagement and involvement improved academic success, according to the participant, because stated, "You would be more focused if you are engaged. Because if you are engaged, that means you care and you are willing to make a difference in your academic…academic success."

Ralph stated, "There was no uniqueness to being provisionally accepted." He encountered a unique challenge during his first term while enrolled in his college-level math course and support class. He stated, "I found myself sometimes, not all of the time, falling short in the main class. Because there were traditional students in the college-level math course, "that class kind of moved fast." He said, "When I talked to my professor about the college algebra class going fast, he slowed it down for me." Overall, he perceived being admitted provisionally did not hinder his self-efficacy or motivation. During his first academic year, Ralph perceived he felt accomplished because he was "more self-driven and self-determined and hardworking." He also mentioned "passing

out the learning support courses," "time management," and "talking to my teachers" were major accomplishments during his first academic year.

For future provisionally accepted, Black male students, he recommended "Don't be ashamed or embarrassed of being in a learning support class." The learning support classes will help you "figure out that it really gives that push that you need to be successful in your other courses." He also suggested "don't be afraid to ask questions no matter how intimidating the professors may look or be." Experience trumps perception as Ralph suggested to future students to not "allow other people's perceptions to define how you love your school."

*Ronnie.* This participant was a sophomore majoring in Computer Information Systems at a state university. He was a B student in high school and was never suspended. He sought tutorial assistance for his Spanish course in high school and partook in the SAT/ACT preparation sponsored by the school. He stated while in high school, he was not really engaged in his classes because "I stuttered a little bit." He struggled in math and Spanish classes. He received C's in both math and Spanish courses. According to the participant, he had a preferred disinterest in Spanish because he felt he was too old to learn a new language. He stated, "It's not English. I wasn't born speaking that language. So, now I'm 16/17 trying to learn a new language from a Spanish speaking teacher." Math was difficult to grasp because "everything had a different formula or different way to solve it. It was just too much for me." Ronnie described going to after school tutoring for those two classes which helped him pass with a C.

Ronnie's father completed high school and his mother attended a local technical college. He has a very involved family who supports his academic efforts and dreams. He

was motivated by his mother's struggle to provide for the family to pass his courses as well and to graduate from high school. He stated, "She pushed me and motivated me. She did a lot and sacrificed for me. That's why I am pushing forward here and trying best to make her proud of me."

Prior to enrolling into college, Ronnie was apprehensive about college at first because he did not know if he "would make friends, keep up with the assignments or make it to class on time because freshmen could not bring cars on campus." Those thoughts changed once he enrolled. He affirmed the work was not as difficult as he thought, "I struggled my first semester in college in math and a little bit in my composition course." At this point, he began to work closely with his professors. He stated, "I started to talk with my teachers about how I was going to do better." The professors created a "contract stating that I was going to come to class and participate and go to tutorial" to make him more accountable.

Ronnie suggested having a sense of responsibility for his academic success started with him being more engaged in his own academic process. He acknowledged "I am thankful that my teachers were willing and understanding to work with me. He described all but one of his professors thus far have been "pretty cool and helpful." It has been his experience that his professors "want you to ask them questions honestly." Moreover, his engagement with his professors was important because he believed "they saw and appreciated my efforts." With these engagement opportunities, he mentioned he has grown to be "thankful for them" and "having those relationship give me…confidence." They also "make me feel good about my work and what I can do." Ultimately, his overall experiences with his professors led him to believe "this school cares about the students."

Moreover, he expressed, "I feel good about my teachers and them wanting me and helping to succeed in my classes and wanted me to feel good about myself."

Thus far, Ronnie has made a number of friends. He reported, "I am quite engaged with both the teachers and other students outside and inside the classroom." He called himself "a people person." He described engagement and involvement as one in the same. He said, "It means being involved and doing stuff on or around campus with other students." Students can be engaged with each other "to work on projects and stuff and have shared responsibilities to get a project or assignment done."

Ronnie had knowledge of a number of social network systems on campus such as Greek Life and major-specific clubs. "Here, they do some community services too to help out the community as well." Though he was aware of the benefits of being engaged and involved on-campus and in the classroom, he confirmed "I have never been really good at talking to other people like that out of class. I am trying to work on it." He showed great interest in working in the community. He stated, "I feel like I want to do more in my community because I want to give back." Ronnie acknowledged being engaged with these on-campus clubs and organizations would help "you feel good about yourself," therefore, he "would do better in class." He wants to become more involved so he could do "something to give back to the community or helping others."

When asked how he felt when he was accepted provisionally, he stated "It didn't make me feel bad in the end." He acknowledged he demonstrated cognitive dissonance when he stated, "I kind of had an attitude because I had to take the support class. I was in my feelings sort of. So, I didn't do anything in that class and didn't participate or anything." By midterm, he realized "I had to take that support class and I think it helped

71

me once I started to let me help." Semester one he earned 3 A's, 2 B's, and 1 C. During his first semester, he did not live on campus.

Ronnie explained there was no uniqueness to being provisionally accepted. He concluded, "I don't think there is a real difference in me needing the learning support or being provisionally accepted other than me just having the learning support lab with my math class; that was it. I think being a Black male altogether is kind of rough though." The uniqueness was felt from a cultural standpoint not his admission type. He felt "like some people have different expectations of you as a Black male." This was his perception and not necessarily his experience. He said, "It would make me feel like I had to work harder than the next person." He used that opportunity as encouragement for him to push forward. He believed, "I had to expect more out of myself than others expected out of me." He did not "want to be what he saw on T.V." His goal was to have his professors and peers "see someone who is doing well and doing better than that number or statistic on T.V."

Ronnie believed living on campus now caused him to be a bit more distracted, but he was finding ways to improve his procrastination. He now goes to tutorials and the Writing Center often. After discussing the available on-campus resources to improve his chance to be academically successful, we talked about his self-efficacy. His perception of self-efficacy was "it deals with me feeling like I can do what I need to do to pass all of my classes." He suggested succeeding is the outcome of his effort. He reflected on a time when he struggled in Physics. He knew he would not receive an A in the course. He made the conscious effort to go to tutorial and join the study group for the class. He stated, "When I got in the group, the way I thought about it me passing it was different. I felt

like I could do it." He believed self-efficacy impacted his ability to succeed as he shared, "When you feel confident in something, you do better." Reflecting on his first semester, he stated, "When I was in my feeling about being in learning support, my attitude caused me to fail my classes in the beginning of the semester." The way I thought in the beginning, my grades showed it." When he began to think differently about the course and his purpose for being in college, he stated, "I made a difference by doing more because I thought differently too."

His self-efficacy was increased because his professors often "would say some encouraging words that helped motivated you to keep pushing through." Some important characteristics he looked for in his professors to help him be academically successful were helpful, understanding, and available. He mentioned, "When they are understanding and helpful, I find myself doing better in their classes." He concluded, "They are supposed to give you guidance, so you can kind of figure some things out on your own." He also discussed important characteristics of academic advisors, mentors, financial aid counselors, and tutors. He suggested advisors should be relatable and knowledgeable of the course requirements of his major. He stated, "Advisors should be good at getting me in the right classes for my major. They should also be relatable like having had some of the issues before when they were school could help out that situation." Next, mentors should "be like a big brother or big sister." He was a part of the big brother and big sister program in his neighborhood while in high school.

Financial aid counselors should "find money to help you with your tuition. Not only that they help you but without an attitude." It was his experience that "no matter who you talk to in financial aid, they either rushing, rushing you or have an attitude for

some strange reason…no matter how patient I try to be." Because of those experiences, he avoided going to financial aid. He stated, "I try to find out stuff on my own and search for scholarships on my own. I keep up with the due dates for financial aid and everything." Patience was the main characteristic he looks for in his financial aid counselor. Lastly, tutors should be "smart and cool to work with." To ensure he received the best service, he suggested "They can't just be tutoring in something because they like that subject or whatever. They need to be majoring in it."

Some of his major accomplishments during his first academic year include "going from one semester to another and passing all of my classes even though I struggled during the beginning of the semester." His return in the second semester was a major milestone because his mother lost her job over the Christmas break. He had a difficult decision to make to either return to school or stay home to work and help provide for the family. Because of his mother's encouragement, he returned to school and continued to persist. He recommended to future provisionally accepted, Black male students to not get discouraged about how they are admitted. He stated, "Don't let being in a learning support class blow you. The class is there to help you." Moreover, he suggested to future provisionally accepted, Black male students to "get and have your own experiences. Your perceptions can trick you." He mentioned, failure to have one's own experiences and not "really knowing what to expect, "you may become nervous and anxious and those things throw you off." Sometimes you miss out on good things and good people especially like joining groups and organizations on campus." So, "get involved and don't wait too late."

*Themes from Interviews and Skype Focus Group with Low EFC Participants*

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities in Georgia?

Research Question 1 was established to gain an understanding of participants' lived experiences within their first academic year and how their precollege experiences and characteristics impacted their ability to succeed. The interviews and focus groups transcripts were transcribed and analyzed to categorize topics, themes and subthemes by highlighting repetitive phrases, words, and key ideas (see Appendices C, E and F). These themes were compared across the four participants identified as low EFC at both state colleges and state universities. More specifically, these themes are representative of the responses from the majority of the participants in this group. To support the identified themes, quotes from the interviews and Skype focus group follow:

*Precollege Experiences and Characteristics and Student Engagement*

The four participants were asked to describe their lived experiences both before college and within their first academic year. The participants were grouped into two separate groups: first-generation college student and non-first generation college students. Apart from similar prior college experiences, all of the participants struggled with math in high school and were enrolled in support math their first term in college. Three of the four participants sought after-school tutorial assistance and SAT preparation to improve their understanding of the subject in high school and utilized student support services to improve their math deficiency.

As the participants described their lived experiences within the first academic year of enrollment and their precollege experiences and characteristics, two themes emerged:

- The Lows and the High

- Reinforcements

The first theme: The Lows and the Highs derived from the Low EFC participants' precollege and college academic performances. Three participants graduated from high school with a B average and one participant graduated with a C average. Currently, the participants' average GPA is 2.3 or 78%. Despite the participants' low socioeconomic status, they had a high level of academic engagement academic performance. They expressed some level of difficulty their first semester and how they made improvements to become more involved in their academic success. Quotes taken from the three interviews and Skype focus group were analyzed and extracted to contextualize this theme to connect similar precollege and college skill-level in the course in which they were identified as deficient. The participants' experiences utilizing services like tutorial or the Writing Center were identified as means for influencing their academic success as each of the participants acknowledged their poor performance in math. Therefore, precollege experiences, characteristics, and behaviors impacted students' lived experiences during their first academic year.

The second theme: Reinforcements derived from the participants' recognition that their on-campus, academic support came from academic advisors and professors. Three of the participants described their relationship with their advisor as one that was continuous and effective. Three of the participants' advisors were female. One of the

participant's advisor was male, and he "did not like him."  Moreover, the participants'

interactions with their professors were described as a means for intervention and

prevention of academic failure and for reinforcements for academic growth and success.

Keywords were extracted and contextualized to gain an understanding of the roles of

academic advisors and how engaged professors influence student success. Themes,

presented in Table 2, describe the lived experiences and precollege characteristics of low

EFC participants within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities.

Table 2

*Lived Experiences and Precollege Characteristics of Low EFC Participants within Their First Academic Year at State Colleges and State Universities*

| Theme | Quotes |
|---|---|
| The Lows and the High | **"**I kind of struggled in my math. It was just too much for me." (Ronnie) |
| | "I think I passed those classes just because I stayed after school. I still struggled my first semester in college in math." (Ronnie) |
| | "I had a hard time with essays and like the writing part. I was disinterested." (Hawk) |
| | "I really didn't like English mostly. I didn't have the time to read and look for the answers." (Larry) |
| | "I just didn't like to read." (Ralph) |
| | "I have always been good at math, but I wouldn't do well on the test." (Larry) |
| | "It has always been about math for some reason." (Ronnie) |
| | "I went to after-school tutorial in high school for math." (Hawk) |

"Like when it comes to writing yea… because that's not my strong I go to the Writing Center often." (Ralph)

"I am saying in that area so it did intimidate me a lot." (Hawk)

"The tutors on campus help me out a lot." (Ralph)

"I had to enroll in math learning support to be accepted in college." (Larry)

Reinforcements

**"**I mean my advisor is the most helpful person on campus." (Ralph)

"My advisor is my go-to person." (Larry)

"My advisor is like my mom." (Larry)

"My chemistry lab teacher is very helpful. I met with her after class a couple of times." (Hawk)

"I know there are services on campus here to help me when I need." (Ronnie)

I will ask them about homework assignments. It makes a difference with your grade." (Hawk)

"I think the school is preparing me." (Hawk)

"I had to take that support class and I think it helped me once I started to let me help." (Larry)

"I started to talk with my teachers about how I was going to do better. So, they put me on some type of contract." (Ronnie)

"I have slacked and how my grades were

affected by not staying after class or going to my teachers' office hours to get extra help or just talk with them about what is going on with me." (Ralph)

"High school if I needed help the teachers would be there" (Ronnie)

"My support teacher would give me a practice quiz in his office. Inside of class I say they are very helpful as far as when I need to ask a question or when I need help, they would come over and help me." (Ronnie)

According to the four participants, they have always struggled with math and, therefore, required a learning support math course. They were proactive in seeking assistance for improving their skill level in the subject by attending after-school tutorial and SAT preparatory sessions provided by their high school. These sessions were not mandatory. Moreover, the participants described how the availability of and interactions with their professors impacted their ability to be academically successful. Furthermore, all of the participants suggested being admitted provisionally was an "opportunity" to attend college and reach their goals. One participant stated, "I was so excited when I was accepted in this school even though I had to take a support class." Another participant stated, "Because no else in my family went to college, I had to do what I had to do.

*Research Questions 2 and 3: Themes from Interviews and Skype Focus Groups*

The second and third research questions for this study focused on the common perceptions and understanding of social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy and their impact on first-time, full-time provisionally

accepted, Black males' academic success. When asked if they were involved inside and outside of the classroom with the faculty or their peers, the responses varied. Though the participants acknowledged the benefits of being engaged and involved in on-campus social network systems, they admitted they were not actively involved in on-campus organizations and groups. They were, however, engaged with their professors inside or outside of the classroom. They were assigned a mentor or peer mentor.

*Social Network and Student Engagement*

All of the participants have utilized student support services on campus. The Writing Center and tutorial were the most common services utilized. The participants utilized tutorial services primarily for math and science and the Writing Center for their English Composition courses. Much like their precollege experiences, they were not required to seek academic support as an intervention or a preventive mean. According to one of the participants, "I go to tutorial because I cannot understand the teacher, and my classmates don't either."

The participants were not involved in on-campus organizations and learning communities. Some participants stated they were unaware of the organizations on campus while others stated they were not interested in the organizations offered at their institution. The participants were asked to "identify what the institution should implement on campus to spark your engagement," and define student engagement and involvement. Four themes emerged from the participants' responses regarding their lack of on-campus involvement and engagement: Elective Dissonance (preferred cognitive dissonance), Communication, A Desire to Engage, and Engaged with a purpose. Theme one: Elective Dissonance derived from participants' decision to "not talk in class," "attitudes causing

80

failures," and "wanting to do nothing." Theme two: Communication is the result of

students' responses for why they are not engaged or involved in on-campus activities.

Common words were extracted to contextualize this theme including but not limited to

"not knowing what's going on," "what's out there to do," "I don't know," and living off

campus." Theme three: A Desire to Engage derived from the participants' responses for

why they have chosen not to be engaged including "disinterested," "ask me and I will tell

them what I like," and I wish there were more options here." Lastly, theme four: Self-

advocacy derived from the participants' perception of what it means to be engaged and

involved in and out of the classroom. Common words were extracted to contextualize this

theme including but not limited to: "pushing me to do more," "working with others," and

"opportunity for success" The themes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Social Network Systems and Student Engagement*

| Theme | Quotes |
|---|---|
| Elective Dissonance | "I mean in class I am mostly listening to them." (Hawk) |
| | "I really don't talk with them [teachers] like that because what we do in class, I kind of got. I mean it wasn't no interactions really." (Larry) |
| | "When I was in my feeling about being in learning support, my attitude caused me to fail my classes in the beginning of the semester. The way I thought in the beginning, my grades showed it." (Ronnie) |
| | "What hurt me was probably being lazy…and not wanting to do nothing." |

(Ralph)

| | |
|---|---|
| Communications | "I am not involved because I live off campus. I don't know what is going on campus until it's too late." (Ralph) |
| | "I wish they would use more than my email." (Larry) |
| | "I wish I could get text messages about campus events and clubs because I don't always check my email." (Hawk) |
| | "I don't know if I am failing my class until my advisor calls because my teacher do not return assignments always." (Ronnie) |
| | "I don't stay on campus. A lot of stuff is not communicated with commuter students." (Hawk) |
| | "Ugh…I am not involved with any on-campus organizations. I am not sure what is out there." (Ralph) |
| A Desire to Engage | "I want to be involved with a group on campus, but there is nothing that's interesting." (Hawk) |
| | "I wish there were more groups for men like a group that shows us how to cook for our girlfriend." (Ronnie) |
| Self-advocacy | "I believe if you are involved with others and in organizations and stuff like that, it kind of forces you to be engaged with others." (Hawk) |
| | "As I grow more as a student, I am starting to get more involved because a lot of my friends on campus are getting into different things. I guess it cost to be involved and engaged because others students are looking up to you to do the |

same, and it pushes you like it's pushing me to do more and to do better." (Larry)

"Step outside of their normal box and get engaged in their academics. I feel like you would be more focused if you are engaged. Because if you are engaged, that means you care and you are willing to make a difference in your academic." (Ralph)

"I think I would feel good about being involved and engaged. It would just made me feel better about myself, so I would do better in my class, especially if I was doing something to give back to the community or helping others." (Ronnie)

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The themes derived from the participants' acknowledgement of their preferred dissonance and lack of involvement and engagement in on-campus social network systems is the outcome of their psychosocial development. Though the participants have not become involved on-campus and have limited engagement in the classroom, the participants were able to define student engagement and describe its benefits. The participants described student engagement and involvement as "being involved with others," "being active in different organizations…communicating with teachers," willing to participate," and "made me feel better about myself." The participants' understanding of the benefits of being engaged and involved contradicts their willingness and efforts.

*Persistence and Academic Success*

The participants' definition of success varied. Four out of the four participants did not include the word "academics" in their initial definition of success. A sub-question to "What is your definition of success" was asked along with "describe how self-efficacy impacted your ability to be academically successful." Secondly, the participants were asked to "Discuss how your overall experiences, being a provisionally accepted, Black male impacted your decision to strive towards success?"

Theme one: Wholeness derived from the three participants who stated it was an "opportunity" they would not have had elsewhere. Initially, one participant stated he "felt labeled and wanted to rid myself of that stigma." Theme two: Ownership of Success derived from students' belief that they are also responsible for their academic success. Participants' responses included "I am responsible," "ownership," and "my responsibility." Lastly, theme three: Focused derived from the participants' understanding of their self-efficacy and their perceived ability to be academically successful despite prior academic challenges. Participants' described success as "I know it's possible, but unsure at times," "it's pretty much a mind thing;" "I have to put it into my mind…failure is not an option." Table 4 includes themes related to the participants' responses regarding persistence and academic success.

Table 4

*Persistence and Academic Success*

| Themes | Quotes |
| --- | --- |
| Wholeness | "Being accepted provisionally, it's like it pushes me more every day. So having this experience makes you want to get up go to class and learn… can't say it is the worst thing." (Hawk) |
| | "I didn't see it as a hick up. I felt like apparently God felt like this is what I was supposed to be doing. If I didn't have my learning support class, it could have been something else." (Larry) |
| | "I feel like it pushed me."(Ralph) |
| Ownership of Success | "I take 100% ownership of me succeeding in my support class and college courses." (Ralph) |
| | "I believe I am the number one person responsible for me passing and doing good here. This school has all of the resources for me to do well. But I am the one who has to use those resources." (Larry) |
| Focused | "I know it's a process. I may not measure up to other people's success. I can I say I feel good about my progress and I can say you know I will be based on my understanding I can be academically successful." (Larry) |
| | "Because if I feel like I know I need to get a task done, I am going to do it. I have put into my mind failure is not an option, but passing despite how I start. I think skills are like muscles. You have to exercise them so they can become stronger." (Ralph) |

Chapter V

RESULTS OF HIGH EFC PARTICIPANTS

Four High EFC students participated in one face-to-face interview, Skype interviews, 90-minute follow-up phone interviews, and a Skype focus group (see Appendix E). To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Participants were all first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black males with EFC scores of 4312, 2315, 1812, and 2268. Each student was identified as a provisional admit. These students did not meet the minimum standardized test score requirements for admissions at their institution. Two attended state colleges and two attended state universities within the USG. Each of them have earned at least 15 credits hours. All participants in this group were traditional students. The oldest participant was 20 years old.

Table 5 provides an overview of the participants' age, classification, major, institution type and participation in student support services and involvement in clubs or organizations. The participants' profiles contain similar details including their classification and major. Additionally, the profiles include the participants 'institution type (state college or state university), precollege academic performance and behaviors, involvement in afterschool supplemental instruction or standardized testing preparation.

Table 5

| Participant | Age | Classification | Major | Part. Stu. Supp. | GPA | Inv. Organization | S.C. S.U. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hernandez | 20 | Sophomore | Engineering | Yes | 1.69 | Yes | S.C. |
| Quincy | 20 | Freshmen | Mass Com | Yes | 2.0 | No | S.U. |
| Eddie | 19 | Sophomore | Beh. Anal | Yes | 1.65 | Yes | S.C. |
| Dexter | 19 | Sophomore | Mar. Science | Yes | 2.43 | No | S.U. |

Note: S.C. = State College    S.U. = State University

Brief Profiles of High EFC Participants

*Hernandez.* This participant was a sophomore student majoring in Engineering at a state university. He was a B student in high school and was never suspended. He sought after-school tutorial for English because he had difficulty with writing, research and British literature during his last semester of high school. His response highlighted his preferred cognitive dissonance in writing, research, and especially British literature, "It was boring. I really didn't understand why we had to take class and learn that stuff." Moreover, Hernandez stated, "I really struggled with math my last 2 years of school. When I realized I didn't get, I stopped trying and settled for my grade." Over time with the encouragement of his mother and opportunities for extra credit, he began seeking additional assistance because he realized those courses were graduation requirements. He stated, "I did start working with a tutor after school. I feel it helped a bit, especially when it is the teacher who I am taking is leading the tutorial session. I would get extra credit for

going." Because he attended a private high school, his tuition covered after school programs and preparatory sessions such as test taking skills, SAT/ACT prep and professional tutors. Hernandez was the first of his family to major in Engineering. He reported, "I mean it is a humbling feeling …it pushes me because I am the first. It is my motivation in a way." His mother recently enrolled in college this semester. His father has a high school diploma. Because he was a first generation college student, his family was very supportive of him attending college.

Having played football "from peewee league all the way through high school" he was a bit discouraged his first semester when he was not chosen as a walk-on. He stated, "I wanted to play here at the school but when I tried to try out on for the walk-ons, I didn't get selected. It was a blow though." He was "expecting to do something here that I had always loved to do." Playing football in high school made him accountable for his academic progress. He stated, "Football pushed me…and in my opinion I think it kept me leveled…level headed and on top of things because I had to keep a certain GPA in high school." He had coaches who would ensure he was meeting the requirements. During his first semester in college, he struggled with staying focused on his academics. Hernandez confessed, "Because that was something I was used to for a long time, it was a sudden drop…I mean a sudden change when I got here. I feel like I was dropped in the ocean and told to swim."

Hernandez credited his advisor for encouraging him to seek tutorial services, "I would have done better if I had an academic coach. I mean my advisor help me with my classes, but I need that coach feel like high school. I know I am not a child, but sometimes I need that push." From his first semester, he acknowledged he has matured

mentally and academically, "I know that I am motivated. I know there are places I can go on campus for help. I just chose not to take part in it." Now, according to the participant, "I can't really depend on others to make sure I pass my classes and for me to be doing what I am supposed to be doing. It has to start with me."

It was in eighth grade when he began to think about going to college. His initial thoughts about college were "apprehensive" and "scary." Once enrolled, he stated, "Those thoughts changed because the professors are nice, the people are nice, and everybody here helping me." In class, he claimed the professors encourage students to ask questions. He stated, "If you raise your hand, they will help. So, I haven't had any issues with that up to now."

Outside of class, Hernandez felt comfortable with stopping by his professors' office to discuss assignments. He stated, "I can always go to my professors' office and sit with them and talk the assignment out. To be honest, I like sitting in there with them to talk about the things they have worked on." His interactions with his professors outside of class were more engaging than inside. He indicated that during his first semester, he would not have given any thought to engage with his professors until his second term. He stated, "Because I didn't know what to expect when I got here, I…expected the worst."

Hernandez believed the roles and responsibilities of his professors were "helping me understand what I need to know for my major and how to use that knowledge in my career." Hernandez stated his experiences with his professors have been positive, he stated those interactions have made him "feel more confident in my work. I feel prepared for whatever is expected of me." Hence, those experiences helped shape him as

a student. Moreover, important characteristics he looked for in his professors to ensure academic success included "helpful and understanding and open and welcoming." He also shared, "They should have experiences too to relate to their students."

Hernandez suggested advisors should also be knowledgeable of the required courses necessary for students' majors, available, and easy to talk to. Next, though he had not had much contact with his financial aid counselor, he mentioned a number of "people's classes get dropped here in the beginning of the semester." He argued they should be "patient because dealing with money and tuition is…can be hard for a lot of students" and proactive. Next, he suggested mentors should not be judgmental. They should welcome all differences and short comings and create lasting and "humbling" experiences. He has a mentor from home he keeps in contact with. He was also a peer mentor on campus. Lastly, tutors should be knowledgeable, patient and "know what they are talking about when I am there," and not "quick tempered." He explained these characteristics would help him achieve academic success.

His experiences both inside and outside of the classroom were described as "engaging." He stated student involvement and engagement "requires students to be active in the classroom and on camp and do more than just sit in their room all the time." He was involved in an on-campus organization. He assisted with New Student Orientation. These opportunities of engagement helped him network and meet others who have the same interests. He acknowledged there were benefits of being involved. He has learned time management necessary for his academic success. He frequented both the Writing Center and tutorial for assistance with his assignments.

Hernandez suggested, self-efficacy was "pretty much a mind thing." He admitted, "It does feel good when others recognize what you can do. It makes me feel better about myself because they also believe in me. It motivates me too." He referenced his performance during last year or so in high school and during his first semester in college as not having the ability to succeed because of his preferred cognitive dissonance. He stated, "It didn't really mean that I really couldn't do the work, I just did not like it point blank. So, I gave the bare minimum and you could see it in my grades. So, in terms of my beliefs about my abilities…yeah it's a mind thing totally. If I tell myself I can be academically successful, that means I have already told myself I am going to do what I need to do to get there." There were a few accomplishments within his first academic year: passing out of his learning support class, not being as homesick as his first semester and becoming more independent and not relying on his coaches.

According to Hernandez, in the beginning, being a provisionally accepted, Black male student "makes you feel some type of way. It makes you feel labeled." After his first term, he realized there was no uniqueness to being a provisionally, accepted student. It was his experience that "some people didn't take it serious. They tell you that you only have two chances to pass it or you will be suspended." Hernandez stated there was no uniqueness to being a provisionally accepted student nor faced any unique challenges during his first academic year. The participant mentioned a uniqueness in being a Black male student. It was his experience that "some of my professors in other classes were harder on the Black males in the class than anyone else though…I don't know. May be it was just me over thinking it." He did not take those moments as moments of distress or concern. He, instead, "appreciated it."

91

Hernandez believed his growth was seen in his ability to work with his professors and other students. He understood how important it was to ask questions about assignments and work with his professors. He recommended upcoming provisionally accepted students to "never challenge your professors and don't have an attitude; have respect for your professors in order to bridge the gap, it will pay off in the end." Based on his lived experiences he acknowledged the professors were there to help, "so give them a chance." He also suggested to students "your perceptions can destroy you. Whether those perceptions were of the school, teachers, or other students, "you may be missing out on a good class or teacher who can help you reach your goals. I believe your experience weigh more than your perceptions."

*Quincy.* This participant was a freshmen Mass Communication major at a state university. He was a C student in high school. He spent a lot of time out of school because he was suspended over 20 times for various reasons unstated. He sought after-school tutorial services for both math and writing. He considered English as his "worst subject." He also partook in SAT/ACT preparatory sessions in high school. To help improve his writing abilities, he accredited "going to different little workshops" after school.  He avoided taking the SAT because of the writing portion. Though his mother only earned a high school diploma, and his dad earned a Bachelor's degree. Quincy's mother was his biggest motivation to seek assistance to improve his grades. He first began to think about attending college in the ninth grade. His original thoughts about college included "freedom, party time, and a game," but college was the one and only option for him. He described though his institution was not his first choice, he knew he had to go somewhere. He stated, "Where I am from…like in my neighborhood, folks

who look like me really don't make it out." It was his family's support and "home life" that motivated him to graduate high school. He explained, guys like him "they get lost in this streets with drugs, alcohol and stuff like that. Guys there in my generation don't really make it out of high school."

Once admitted, Quincy saw it was "completely different from my original thoughts." College, according to the participant, was "If you don't go to class and stay on top everything, your grades will suffer." With a history of track and field and band, the participant mentioned managing those things in college would be difficult. He said, "Band and track or any sport requires a lot of time and equal dedication to the sport and most importantly your academics." So, he wanted to "know what it felt like to just be a student when I got to college and focus on my grades." He struggled, initially, with his transition during his first term, and his grades were affected. Assessing where he was academically to present day, he stated, "I am not where I want to be right now." To ensure his academic growth, he participated in "extra things like staying after class and talking with my professors…finding somebody who is really good in that class really help me."

His interactions with his professors have grown since semester one. He reported he has developed lasting relationships with most of his professors. He stated, "I am not a good writer. Then, I would hear from my professors…you actually a good writer." He appreciated when his professors would share their similar college experiences. He said it made him see them from a more humanistic point of view when his professors would say "You know you better than me when I was in school."

Quincy explained his interactions with professors impacted his ability to become academically successful because "it helps me be in tuned with class and the expectations of the teachers." Though his interactions with his professors were beneficial in his academic progress, he stated, "I mean I feel like I can do a little bit more." Quincy said it was not only the responsibility of the professor; "it was a shared responsibility." He stated, "I have my lazy moments especially if the opportunity to get help is right there. So, yeah. I can probably put in more effort at times."

Quincy believed teachers are responsible for "teaching me how to solve whatever we are doing, to equip me with the knowledge that I need, and to help me prepare for when I graduate." To help ensure his academic success, the participant stated professors must possess specific characteristics. He confirmed professors must "care about their student and it's not just a job to them." He stated, "You can tell if a teacher cares just by their tone." Advisors play a major part in his academic success. He affirmed advisors must show they care about their advisees and be knowledgeable of the course requirements of his major.

Moreover, financial aid counselors played a critical role in his academic success. Initially, he did not have the financial support of his family because of lack of finances. He had to find financial support on his own to help pay for school. After his first semester, his mother and others began to support his college endeavors with their new found understanding of the financial aid process. So, financial aid counselors must not be judgmental. Financial aid counselors should demonstrate openness, understanding, and patience. He stated he has yet to establish a personal connection with his financial

aid counselor like the one with his academic advisor.  With his experiences with

financial aid, he stated, "I was kind of able to avoid it. Financial aid can be frustrating."

Quincy prescribed mentors and tutors were also responsible for his academic

progress. He explained mentors provide encouragement and did not judge his past. They

should provide guidance much like a high school counselor. Lastly, tutors should be

"willing to help." Non-judgmental was another important characteristics he looked for in

a tutor because at times he may not know everything. Patience was important as well

during his tutorial session.

His experiences inside the classroom were two-fold. He was more engaged with

his instructors and "tunes everybody else out." When others were in need of help, he

helps them. He reported, "I only hang out with a few people on campus." He described

them as the "ones who trying to get A's like me." He concluded, "I have always like

working with other people on homework assignments and group projects and stuff in

high school.  I considered myself a people person at times."

Quincy was not a part of any organizations, but he considered his Bible group a

learning community. His faith and belief system played a major part of his academic

maturity and growing desire to become more engaged. He defined student engagement

and involvement as "participation…the more you are engaged with it, the more you

learn from your experiences."  He remembered a number of students transferred schools

because there were few opportunities of engagement on campus. Because he does not

want to transfer, the participant said he was doing more to get more involved with others

outside of the classroom.

Quincy concluded self-efficacy was not based on one's ability or skill set but his mental state. He stated, "Me being confident in myself and my work because I know I put in the work makes me feel that I know I am going to get a good grade on it. So, yeah confidence is a big part." He later discussed receiving a C or D in a course he gave his all in made him feel successful; therefore, his effort should be acknowledged. He proclaimed, "I have self-motivating ability that will help me. Nothing going to be too hard for me."

Quincy stated, "There is no uniqueness to being provisionally accepted," and he had not faced any unique challenges.  He acknowledged, "At first I didn't understand it. Like I thought I have to take all support. I thought that was for, excuse my language, stupid people, you know what I'm saying. But I mean that wasn't it at all, people I met in the class, just like me, I don't think anybody was stupid in there." He reported his learning support courses provided "extra little help." Because he was registered for only 14 hours and was required to enroll in two support classes, he is now behind in his college credits because he only earned eight hours. He was considering summer school.

The participant viewed his admission status as "a mindset I had to grow out of." Once he realized it was just a "stepping stone to get closer" to his goals, he was okay with it. He takes "100% ownership" for his success in his learning support course and subsequent college level courses. Furthermore, he described his accomplishments as "not being suspended" and "passing all of my classes." Though he did not get all A's, he stated, "I don't think a GPA will define you." He recommended to future provisionally accepted, Black male students "Live through it first. There was no experience like

experience." Being involved on campus was critical because "the more you are involved on campus, the more you will begin to see who you really are."

*Eddie.* This participant was a sophomore Behavior Analysis major at a state college. He was a C student in high school and was never suspended. He participated in after-school tutorials sponsored by his high school for math and reading. He partook in SAT/ACT preparatory sessions. Reflecting on who he was in high school and the student he has become, the participant believed he has matured personally and academically when he stated, "In high school, I was different than who I am now. In college, I am more organized." While in high school, he felt a bit anxious with the amount of work given especially in his English course. He stated, "It is actually teachers put so much on us in high school, and I felt like my teachers just dropped it on us. So much work." Because of the amount of work given, he believed he was prepared for what was expected of him in college. He stated, "You know now thinking back, I really thank my high school English teacher."

Both of his parents were recently enrolled in college. Eddie's parents delayed attending college because they joined the military immediately after graduating from high school. His mother was his biggest motivator for his academic success and goals. He began thinking about attending college when he was in middle school in Alaska. He has traveled the world because of his parents' military background. Before attending college, he thought it would be "a lot of hard work." Considering to attend either an Historical Black College and University (HBCU) or Predominantly White Institution (PWI) was not a difficult choice for him. He stated, "I mean I believe I have experienced different things than some of the students I met here. I been to a private school, charter

school, and a predominately Black…you know mixed school." Once enrolled, those thoughts were confirmed. He stated "yes, college is hard work, but I have to learn how to manage it." He described his home life as one that was "strict," and now he does not have to "report to anyone the time I return to my dorm after late night parties." He also noted, "Those late night parties catch up with you and affect your grades."

To this point, Eddie's college experience was one that was described as smooth because "one thing that is important to me is my family. The environment here reminds me of home; it is what keeps me here honestly." His student experiences inside and outside of the classroom were "very frustrating" initially. Prior to midterm of his first semester, the participant stated, he "was trying to find a way to adjust from who I was as a high school student. At first I didn't want to ask questions because I was worried how is she going to react or how is he going to react." After thinking about how his family members described the school prior to his enrollment, he began to feel more comfortable talking with his teachers inside and outside of the classroom. Conversely, Eddie described himself as a person who was not a "very outgoing person, but "now anybody who is anybody who knows me know I ask a lot of questions."

Eddie acknowledged the interactions he had with his professors were important. He claimed in-class and out of class interactions with your professors were "key factors for your education. The teachers should never deny you of that." He accredited his academic progress to his understanding that students "should be using their resources to the best of their abilities." He would appreciate a little bit more time with his professors out of class. The participant experienced times where his professors were not in their office during their posted office hours. He preferred face-to-face and hands-on

engagement opportunities with his professors even though some professors are good with emails.

Eddie's perceived characteristics of essential individuals on campus along with his experiences helped his academic progress. He stated, "I feel more comfortable with professors who are very patient with students and motivating. I mean a student may not do well on a test, but that does not mean they are not a good student." Advisors should also demonstrate patience, trustworthiness, and knowledge of the requirements for the major. Eddie described the student-advisor relationship as "50/50." Next, student support services like tutorial are critical as well. He stated, "I am now trying to find ways to balance it all." He described his experience with student support services as "opportunities to work with someone close to my age like in the Writing Center or tutorial." So, tutors should be consistent, patient, and helpful. He described one experience as "she was tough in a way that made me better. I appreciated her for that."

Financial aid counselors should also be open, patient, knowledgeable, service oriented and proactive. Reflecting on his experiences with financial aid, he stated, "They can be kind of rude. I feel like they should be proactive to resolve some of the issues up front while explaining to students this stuff not at the end of the term. It's like when we talk to them it's after the problem." Lastly, though he had a mentor, he was not been assigned a mentor on campus during his first semester. This person was someone he met when he first enrolled on campus. This person played football with him. He suggested mentors should have realistic expectations of their mentees, relatable, and only have a small number of mentees. He concluded mentors should help students become more engaged in campus life.

Eddie explained he learned more when he was engaged; therefore, he was "more motivated to do well." He referenced his Physics study group. In this group, he found himself amazed at their ability to solve problems. Each group member would have had difficulty solving the problem individually. He stated, "I really like working together to achieve something great." He proclaimed it is important to be engaged and involved with professors. Moreover, while engaged, he feels like "it pushes" him to do more, therefore, he felt he would be "held to a higher standard." The outcome of his engagement and involvement with clubs and organizations was time management and becoming "a well-rounded student."

He explained being involved helped ensure academic success. He realized a number of on-campus clubs and organizations like Student Government Association require a certain GPA. According to the participant, "just managing what you have to do when you are involved forces you to adopt time management skills." His level of engagement and involvement took a drastic change. He stated, "I owe everything to my freshman year. It is like jumping off of the deep end and not knowing what to expect at the bottom."

Eddie described himself as "diligent and hardworking." He said, "I do my best to get my work done. I work well with other students, and I feel like I am the best student I can be." So, "self-efficacy is holding yourself to a higher standard and being a go-getter." He believed his achievements should not be measured by others because he has "what it takes to go get it even if no one recognizes what I have done or achieved." He suggested achievement and self-efficacy are the end results of "you doing your absolute best to complete a task…you have done enough." He said "I am going to work hard and

push forward. I believe I am capable to complete all that is required of me in terms of each course, graduation requirements and everything else."

When he was admitted, provisionally, he "saw it as an opportunity and took it." He stated his mom told him "If it was something that was worth your career, go for it. So, I took full responsibility for passing my learning support class and other courses." He professed "being provisionally accepted as you call it is just how the school accepted me. That's it. It was just a class I had to take for math. I was pretty good at everything else."

He did not experience any unique challenges as a provisionally accepted student. However, he expressed concerns of "general…regular stereotypes of being Black in college." He explained, "I believe I have risen above those stereotypes by presenting myself in a respectful manner and articulating myself with my classmates and teachers." Eddie wanted to paint a different portrait of not only himself, but of other Black male students. He stated, "I don't sag… I don't owe the world anything or have shown them that would confirm how they perceive a Black male student." He professed, "We want to achieve great things." He acknowledged he felt accomplished because he is now a good manager of his time, getting more involved, and making good grades. He wanted other provisionally accepted Black male students to get involved on campus and network and "maximize every opportunity they get."

*Dexter*. This participant was a sophomore majoring in Marine Science at a state university. He was a C student in high school and was suspended four times for various reasons. He sought after school tutorial assistance for math.  To prepare for the SAT/ACT exam, he purchased a book that provided different study tips and examples,

but did not participate in the after-school preparatory sessions. It was his precollege experiences that helped him transition because those experiences "build the hardship and struggle, but it's all worth it for everything I do." He described his efforts in middle and high school were never assessed especially in math. He stated, "I would copy down everything, and I will go back and look but I still don't understand sometimes I just don't understand."

Dexter's first thoughts about attending college started in the fifth grade. His mother graduated from college, and he was not sure of his father's highest level of education because he is deceased. The participant's family and friends were very supportive of him attending college. Moreover, his mother is his biggest support. Because of her desire to succeed, he said, "I feel like now I have to handle myself better. She did a good job raising me coming up in high school."

He stated, "Man, I had no idea how tough college was going to be." After he was admitted, college was "tough." He stated "college is worth all of the hard work, and it makes you have to grow up." Thus far, he confirmed he has had only one bad experience with a professor. He could recall the exact date the incident happened. From that moment, he professed the professor made it very difficult for him in the course. On the other hand, he reported interacting with his professors is "key." According to the participant, he had two teachers who made his classes "interesting, fun, and engaging." He said interacting with his professors was a simple process, "just go to their office and just say hey because they are going to remember your face and that is important." He further discussed his interaction with his professors helped him gain more opportunities,

"that is the point of college interacting with people networking in getting to know other people."

So far, Dexter has had the opportunity to meet some very interesting people and learn about them and where they are from. He stated, "I am a people person." The participant also compared different areas on campus like the café and the student center to places in his home town. He expressed, "Those places on campus helped me transition when I was a freshman." He was not involved with any on-campus organizations. He stated he was "focused on academics for now."

He described student involvement and engagement as opportunities to meet other people outside of his norm. He described his experience working with a foreign exchange student from Beijing. Because his family is originally from Nigeria, he expressed, "I feel it is important to involve yourself in diversity. It played a role in helping you grow because you are seeing something new, something different. They can change your life your outlook on life." Moreover, he acknowledged "there is always stuff going" on on-campus, and "it's going to lead to other things."

Dexter concluded individuals on campus should exhibit certain characteristics to impact students' academic success. He believed professors should be positive, engaging and knowledgeable. He stated his academic advisor "should always have energy," "open" and "is welcoming." He suggested those characteristics were important because he liked to feel that "I can talk to you about everything not only my classes." Next, the participant has not been assigned a mentor. He stated, "I've been looking for one too." Moreover, according to the participant, mentors should be like "Big Brother, Big Sister."

Mentors should be someone he could relate to and someone to "look up to." They should also have "an entrepreneurial mindset and family oriented" like his cousin and father.

The participant shared his bad experiences with financial aid. He recommended, "When things have to be paid for, they need to be paid for before my stuff gets dropped…seriously." Because of poor communication with financial aid, the participant proclaimed he had to miss several days from class to resolve payment issues. Dexter suggested financial aid counselors should be proactive and knowledgeable about their process, improve customer service, and consistency. He stated, "When I go up to the financial aid, I feel like a number. It feels like I am at Pizza Hut."

Dexter explained tutors should be interesting, knowledgeable, and engaging to help improve his level of understanding. He expressed he frequented the Writing Center and tutorial services on campus to help him understand his assignments. Teachers, according to Dexter, "give extra credit when you go get helped in the Writing Center." He stated, "I like that fact that the same people I see around campus are the same ones in the tutor lab helping you out."

Based on his understanding of self-efficacy, he defined self-efficacy as "your belief in yourself to do good in something." Moreover, he detailed how he felt about himself impacts his ability to be academically successful. He said, "It is a mind-set. If you tell me to get that done, my mind-set… it never tells me I cannot do this if something is that hard. I will find someone to help me do it."

He described himself as having a high level of self-efficacy. He believed there was no uniqueness to being provisionally accepted. In fact, he stated, "I am the gold… because no matter what I do, I am not going to fail." He acknowledged being accepted

provisionally was just an opportunity to be enrolled into college. Despite his admission status, he was able to participate in on-campus service events, meet a diverse population of students, pass his support and other courses his first term. He recommended to other provisionally accepted students to not become distracted by how you were admitted, be careful of your perception of the school and others, get involved and "Try it and experience what this college has to offer."

Research Question 1: Themes from Interviews and Skype Focus Groups with High EFC Participants.

Research Question 1 was established to gain an understanding of participants' lived experiences within their first academic year and how their precollege experiences and characteristics impact their ability to succeed. The interviews and focus groups transcripts were transcribed and analyzed to categorize topics, themes and subthemes by highlighting repetitive phrases, words, and key ideas (see Appendices C, E and F). These themes were compared across the four participants identified as high EFC at both state colleges and state universities. More specifically, these themes are representative of the responses from the majority of the participants in this group. To support the identified themes, quotes from the interviews and Skype focus group follow.

*Precollege Experiences and Characteristics and Student Engagement*

Four high EFC participants were asked to describe their lived experiences both before college and within their first academic year. Apart from similar precollege experiences, all of the participants struggled with math in high school and were enrolled in support math their first semester in college. One participant was enrolled in both math and English support classes. All but one of the participants sought after-school tutorial

assistance and SAT preparation to improve their understanding of the subject in high school and utilize student support services to improve their math deficiency. As the participants described their lived experiences within the first academic year of enrollment and their precollege experiences and characteristics, two themes emerged:

- The Highs and the Lows

- Academic Support

Three of the participants graduated from high school with a C average. One participant graduated with a B average. The participants have supportive family and initiated after-school assistance to improve their math skills.

The first theme: The Highs and the Lows derived from the High EFC participants' low precollege and college academic performances. Currently, the participants' average GPA is 1.9 or 74% slightly less than the Low EFC participants despite their socio economic status. Each participant described some level of difficulty with their courses or transition into college during their first semester and how they have now become more engaged in their academic progress. Quotes taken from the three interviews and Skype focus group were analyzed and were extracted to contextualize this theme to connect similar precollege and college skill-level in the course in which they were identified as deficient. The participants' described experiences employing on campus academic services like tutorial assistance or the Writing Center were identified as resources for impacting their academic success. Hence, precollege experiences, participants 'characteristics, and behaviors influence students' lived experiences during their first academic year.

The second theme: Academic Support derived from the participants' perception of on-campus support services, relationships with their professors and academic advisors. All of the participants defined their relationship with their advisor as one that is enduring and trustworthy. Similar to low EFC students, the participants, described their advisors as mother figures and wanted to make them proud. According to the participants, their engagement with their professors was described as opportunities for the professors to get to know them as individuals. One participant stated, "My teachers helped me with my test anxiety. He [professor] could not see why I wasn't passing my test." The participants explained interacting with their professors was a chance to improve their deficiencies. Keywords were extracted and contextualized to gain an understanding of the roles of academic advisors and how engaged professors influence student success. Themes, presented in Table 6, describe the lived experiences and precollege characteristics of high EFC participants within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities.

Table 6

*Lived Experiences and Precollege Characteristics of Low EFC Participants within Their First Academic Year at State Colleges and State Universities*

| Theme | Quotes |
|---|---|
| The Highs and the Low | "I had to take a math support class here. But I really struggled with math my last two years of school. I did start working with a tutor after school. The Writing Center makes me feel confident in my writing." (Hernandez) |
| | "English was my worst subject in high school. I didn't want to take the SAT at all because of the writing part. "I got help after school for math in high school." (Quincy) |

"In high school, I wasn't that different than who I am now. I was a little more disheveled in high school. I struggled with it my last two years of high school." (Eddie)

"I graduated with a C average in high school. In math class, I will sit there and not know what's going on and I would copy down everything and I will go back and look but I still don't understand sometimes I just don't understand. My current GPA is 1.69." (Dexter)

| | |
|---|---|
| Academic Support | "My advisor is the greatest thing to happen to me in life." (Dexter) |

"My advisors calls me when about appointments and my grades all the time." (Eddie)

"My advisor…I want to say she is like a mom to me." (Quincy)

"The professors here are helpful. If you raise your hand, they will help. When I am in their office I can kind of talk to them some of the things I struggle with as a student, and they talk with me about figuring things out." (Hernandez)

"Because of me being in their office, they know me out of class. I believe you can't get everything you need and need to know by just sitting in the class two or three times a week... …without that I am just another student in their class." (Quincy)

"My interactions makes me feel good about myself. When I go to their offices and even in classes…you know talking with them they make me feel good about myself when we talk about what I need to do pass the class and all." (Dexter)

All of the high EFC participants said they struggled with math both in high school and college. Four out of four high EFC participants were proactive in seeking assistance for improving their skill level in the subject by attending after-school tutorial and SAT preparatory sessions provided by their high school. These sessions were not mandatory. They have full support from their family. Each detailed being admitted provisionally was an "opportunity" to attend college and reach their goals. The precollege experiences of high EFC participants were the same as those who were low EFC. Both groups had total support from their family as they pursue their degrees.

Research Questions 2 and 3: Themes from Interviews and Skype Focus Groups

The second and third research questions for this study focused on the common perceptions and understanding of social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy and their impact on first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males' academic success. When the participants were asked if they were involved inside and outside of the classroom with faculty or peers, the responses varied. Conclusively, high EFC participants are more involved in on-campus organizations. They have not, however, been assigned mentors or peer mentors.

*Social Network and Student Engagement*

Each of the participants utilized the on-campus student support services. The participants stated they frequented the Writing Center and tutorial assistance. These participants sought tutorial services for their math and science courses and the Writing Center for their English Composition courses. Similar to the low EFC participants, high EFC participants were not obligated to pursue academic support in high school and

college.  One participant stated, "The people in tutorial cool because they are like my age. I used to go when I was in high school…I mean nobody made me go. It was like my teachers in there helping us out…not the same." Another participant said, "I had to do what I had to do stay here. So, I guess that meant me going to tutoring to get my grades up." These participants also lacked engagement in on-campus clubs and organizations. High EFC participants, much like low EFC participants, explained they either lacked knowledge or interest in what was available to them at their institution. The participants were asked to "identify what the institution should implement on campus to spark your engagement," and define student engagement and involvement. Three themes emerged from their responses: Disengaged, Exploration, and Success Plan.

Theme one: Disengaged derived from participants' responses for why they have chosen not to be engaged including "disinterested," "it's boring here most of the time," "I'm not that into what we have here." Theme two: Exploration derived from participants' desire to become engaged or involved in on-campus activities. Theme three: Success Plan derived from the participants' perception of how academic success is a benefit of engagement. Common words were extracted to contextualize these themes. These themes are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Social Network Systems and Student Engagement*

| Theme | Quotes |
| --- | --- |
| Disengaged | "When I find out what is going on on-campus, it be too late." (Eddie) |
| | "Can I give them my phone number instead of them emailing. I have never been good at checking my email." (Dexter) |
| | "Can you explain to me what learning communities are?" (Eddie) |
| | I think there are some major clubs on campus…there is a Collegiate 100 club on campus. Dang, I can't think of that many more." (Hernandez) |
| | "I keep missing out on stuff on campus, so me and my friends started a Bible group." (Hernandez) |
| Exploration | "I would say man it's… it's like they can think of making this school a little more fun for students cause I hear it all the time. Students say" Ugh, it should be this going on, or that going on. Well that's kind of like up to us with we can let them know, we can like go to the head." (Quincy) |
| | "I mean I can get involved, but I'm not interested in what is here right now." (Eddie) |
| | "I am part of a club, but we haven't done anything in a long time. I can't tell you the last time we met." (Dexter) |
| | "I was looking for something like I was involved with in high school." (Quincy) |

Success Plan

"I wish there were more groups for men like a group that shows us how to cook for our girlfriend." (Dexter)

"Student engagement and student involvement requires students to be active in the classroom and on camp. Being involved and engaged will help them network and meet others who may have the same interests." (Hernandez)

"When you are engaged…you are more motivated to do well. I feel like it is important to be engaged with your teachers and your fellow classmates. It pushes you more and you are held to a higher standings." (Eddie)

"It will lead to a better you. It is important to be involved with your peers because they can teach you about life." (Dexter)

"I believe if you are involved with others and in organizations and stuff like that, it kind of forces you to be engaged with others." (Hernandez)

"As I grow more as a student, I am starting to get more involved because a lot of my friends on campus are getting into different things. I guess it cost to be involved and engaged because others students are looking up to you to do the same, and it pushes you like it's pushing me to do more and to do better." (Quincy)

"Step outside of their normal box and get engaged in their academics. I feel like you would be more focused if you are engaged. Because if you are engaged, that means you care and you are willing to make a difference in your academic." (Eddie)

"I think I would feel good about being

112

involved and engaged. It would just made me feel better about myself, so I would do better in my class, especially if I was doing something to give back to the community or helping others." (Dexter)

*Persistence and Academic Success*

The participants' definition of success was diverse. Similar to the low EFC participants, all high EFC participants did not include academics in their initial definition of success. A sub-question to "What is your definition of success" was asked. The participants were asked to describe how their self-efficacy impacts their ability to be academically successful. The participants were also asked to "Discuss how your overall experiences, being provisionally accepted, impacts your decision to strive towards success?" Collectively, all four participants described being admitted provisionally was an opportunity for them to attend school. Four themes were found from the participants' responses related to their persistence and academic success: Access to Success, Absolute Truth, Nurtured, and Intrinsic Motivation.

Theme one: Access to Success derived from the participants' declaration that being admitted provisionally was an "opportunity" or gateway to attend college. Theme two: Absolute truth derived from the participants' affirmation that they are also responsible for their academic success. Participants' responses included "I have to put in work too," I am responsible," and "it's my responsibility." Nurtured is the third theme. This theme derived from the participants' responses about the varied support they received from their family. This support was either financial, motivational or both. According to the participants, family support was significant to their academic success.

Lastly, theme four: Intrinsic Motivation derived from the participants' perception of their self-efficacy and their ability to be academically successful. Participants' perceived their ability to be academically successful as internally driven, "it's all up to me and the end of the day;" if I just put my mind to it," and "it's whatever I want to do basically." Table 8 includes themes related to the participants' responses regarding persistence and academic success.

Table 8

*Persistence and Academic Success*

| Themes | Quotes |
| --- | --- |
| Access to Success | "There is no uniqueness about being provisionally accepted at this school. If you got to take a support class…you got to take that support class." (Hernandez) |
| | "God gave me another opportunity to do something great in my life. If I didn't have my learning support class, it could have been something else. I mean I don't think there is one student on this campus that feels like everything was perfect." (Quincy) |
| | "There are a lot of stipulations that put us down as a culture and as a generation. Some times in our own race, our struggles are not recognized. I believe I have risen above those stereotypes by presenting myself in a respectful manner and articulating myself with my classmates and teachers." (Eddie) |
| | "Well, you take those opportunities like this and make something grand." (Dexter) |
| Absolute Truth | "I believe students have to put the time in too. We can't hold teachers fully |

| | |
|---|---|
| | responsible for everything and even when we fail." (Hernandez) |
| | "My first semester was bit of a struggle. I didn't do so well in two of my courses. I got two D's. I got credit for them and didn't have to retake them. It was my fault. I couldn't blame the teacher for me slipping and not doing what I needed to do." (Quincy) |
| | "Who's responsible for me succeeding? I mean it's 90/10. I am 90% responsible for making sure I am successful. My teachers are just here to give what I need." (Eddie) |
| External Motivation | "I come from nothing. I am from the Southside of Atlanta. My family is counting on me to do this." (Quincy) |
| | "My mother and brother have a big impact on my success." (Eddie) |
| | "If self-efficacy is my beliefs in my ability that I can do something or task…and the task is academic success…well I would say it just pretty much a mind thing." (Hernandez) |
| Intrinsic Motivation | "I would say I can do whatever I can put my mind to and what people say about you doesn't make you. "If you tell yourself or myself I don't care how I am going to do on this…yes, it may be hard…you thinking about failure will make you fail, but if you tell yourself the opposite, you will succeed." (Quincy) |
| | "I believe in myself. Me wanting to be the first engineer in my family trumps what I may not understand." (Hernandez) |
| | "My perception is there is no other way because I have do what is required even if I |

don't want to. So, it is pretty mind over matter after you have exhausted all of your options." (Eddie)

"If you tell me to get that done, my mind-set… it never tells me I cannot do this if something is that hard. I will find someone to help me do it." (Dexter)

Chapter VI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results of the interview and Skype focus groups with eight participants: four low EFC and four high EFC participants were used to provide insight into the lived experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted, Black male students as it related to their academic success. After coding the interviews and Skype focus groups and identifying topics, themes, and sub-themes for both groups, coding analysis was used to analyze the overall themes that were consistent across the two groups.

*Research Question 1*

Two overarching themes emerged from the data for the first research question: What are the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities in Georgia. These themes were Now and Then: The Learning Curve: Skill and Experience and Intervention and Prevention.

*Now and Then: The Learning Curve: Skill and Experience.* One of the most significant findings in the data was students were actively engaged in their academic success presently and precollege. Because all the participants struggled with mathematics, precollege, there was a deficiency in their skill level in mathematics in college. According to the participants, because they wanted to build on this skill set, they took every opportunity to seek assistance in this discipline by seeking and attending after-school tutorial programs in high school and tutorial programs in college. Both low EFC and high EFC students partook in after-school tutorial assistance. This study's findings

support existing literature that reported pre-college characteristics and experiences, socioeconomic status, self-efficacy, student engagement, and social network systems are important to the academic success of Black male students (Harper, 2012; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; Governing, 2016; Superville, 2015; Wood & Williams, 2013).

The participants began to consider college at an early age. The most consistent response to "When did you first begin to think about college" was between sixth and eighth grade. Because of the influence and support from their parents and middle school teachers, and early exposure of what college could offer, both groups considered college early. Preparation for SAT and ACT started as early as the ninth grade for both groups of students. After comparing the data between low EFC and high EFC, the data were also compared between state college participants and state university participants to identify similarities and differences between the two groups.

Each EFC group's precollege behaviors and characteristics were found to be consistent. Low EFC participants were found to have higher GPAs in high school and college despite their enrollment in a state college or state university than High EFC participants. Low EFC participants perceived their academic success in high school and college was due to their participation in after-school tutorials, on-campus tutorial, and working closely with their teachers and professors. High EFC participants described their participation in after-school support services and on-campus support services as limited or not at all.

Participants were asked if they sought after school assistance in high school and what on-campus resources they utilized for assistance with their writing and math. One

participant stated, "I go to tutorial for help because I have always needed help. It wasn't something I had to train myself to do." Another participant stated, "Because I knew I had to do better than high school, I knew something different had to be done." Much like after-school tutorial sessions sponsored by the high schools, the on-campus tutorial and academic services were also free, readily available, and sponsored by the institutions. Tutors were best described as individuals who are knowledgeable, interesting, and fun. One participant stated, "It's easier to understand my math assignments in the tutor hub because the student helping also took the professor I was taking at the time."

All participants shared their interactions with their professors both inside and outside of the classrooms. These interactions were described as much needed encounters that were encouraged by the professors. One participant stated, "Interacting with your professors is important." Another participant said, "The professors here are helpful. I like sitting with them and talking with them in their office more so [than] in class though." These sentiments were described by both low EFC and high EFC participants.

Despite the participants' EFC status or institution type, advisors have a significant role in student success. The participants spoke highly of their academic advisors. Their responses were often accompanied by a smile or grin. Each of the participants, according to the responses from the interviews and Skype focus groups, have a continuous and helpful relationship with their academic advisors. One participant compared the assistance he received from his academic advisor to that of the assistance from his "high school guidance counselor" as he stated, "My advisor reminds me so much of my guidance counselor. She is always checking on me if she doesn't hear from me in a while."

The advisor-student relationship can also be compared to a mother-son relationship. One participants stated, "My advisor is like a mother to me. Whenever I pitch an idea to her or let her know I need help with a class or something, she never lets me down." There was only one participant who had a male advisor, and their relationship ended at the end of his first term. The participant did not care to express why. In the meantime, holistically, the support of their academic advisors mimics the support of their family. The participants' family supported them 100% as they pursue their college dreams. Most of the participants grew up in single parent households with mothers who attended or recently enrolled in college. Three participants had mothers who did not either attempt or graduate college. So, the "mother figure" the participants are drawn to are their female academic advisors. Only one participant stated his father graduated from college.

Though the socio-economic status of the two groups were diverse, their precollege academic engagement and characteristics and lived experiences during their first academic year were so similar differences were nearly missed. A repeated review of the data was necessary to find that both groups: low EFC students and high EFC students were equipped with the skills for academic success. What worked for them to succeed (participants had varying definitions of success) in high school has transposed itself into their habit for pursuing success at the college level despite skill level deficiency, behavior issues, socioeconomics or parental level of education. Moreover, despite their institution type, the students found support in their academic advisors and social support services on campus.

*Intervention and Prevention.* All the participants described their admissions process as a smooth transition. One participant noted, "I had stopped considering college until I went to a Black College Expo with a friend, and I met the admission recruiter from the school. We talked for a while. Before I left, he helped me with FAFSA and my admission application." Another participant stated, "Adjusting to college wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I had to learn that I can't just call. Face-to-face communication works best." Despite their provisional admit, precollege experiences, and college level deficiencies, the participants were able to transition and integrate themselves to both two-year state colleges and four-year state universities.

Six of the eight participants, four from state colleges and two from state universities, despite being identified as high EFC or low EFC, were Pell recipients. These participants represented 75% of the participants in this study. One participant described his transition from student-athlete to student after losing his scholarship. He explained, he lost his scholarship immediately after quitting the team. He later described having to "balance work and school to pay for school expenses and to help his mother pay bills." Another participant was a dependent of two military parents: one active duty and one retired. When asked if he received VA (Veteran's Affairs) benefits, he stated "I didn't know there was an office on campus that helps with that." He stated, "I didn't want to be a burden to my family, so I work to help them out."

Despite SES status, six of the eights participants (all Low EFC and two High EFC) expressed their concerns about their financial aid counselors when they were asked to "describe important characteristics you look for in a financial aid counselor?" One participant stated, "They need to be on top of it. If they need to fire and hire new

staff, then they need to do that." Another participant suggested, "I feel like they should be better…umm…proactive to resolve some of the issues up front while explaining to students this stuff not at the end of the term when they add balances to people's account. It's never a fun experience." Not all the participants' experiences were bad. One participant reported, "If you complete FAFSA on time, there will be no problem." Another participant stated, "If there is something wrong with my account, I can go to my financial aid counselor, and they show me how to find other means for paying for school." Six of the eight participants suggested they have or know someone who has encountered an issue with financial aid. The participants were asked "have you encountered a bad experience with financial aid?" One student said, "A lot of people's classes get dropped here in the beginning." There was a concern with financial aid because students collectively felt they were not seen as students but as a number. One participant stated, "no matter who you talk to in financial aid, they either rushing, rushing you or have an attitude for some strange reason. No matter how patient I try to be." Another participant said "no one explained to me telling me the difference in my financial aid options. I think one day talking to my advisor she explained to me the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized loans. This was way after I took them both out."

Low EFC participants graduated from high school with a B average. They did not have any precollege behavioral issues. Contrary, participants with high EFC scores were found to have precollege behavior problems and slightly lower GPA. Combined, two participants were suspended 25 times in middle and high school. One participant stated, "I was suspended 20 times in high school." When asked "what were the reasons for your

suspension," one participant stated, "I was trying to be like my friends." Another participant stated, "I was doing what I saw others do in my neighborhood. I took home to school with me." Participants with low EFC scores did not have a history of high school or middle school suspensions. High EFC participants were found to have spent more time out of class in middle and high school due to their high in-school and out-of-school suspension rate compared to Low EFC participants.

One High EFC participant stated, "I have grown since high school. I monitor who I include in my circle now." Another participant stated, "I can't do what I did in high school. School is a more serious than high school." Their precollege college experiences and characteristics have not defined who they have become as a college student. The participant with the highest suspension rate was a New Student Orientation leader and has not been in trouble or expelled. According to the data, provisionally accepted, Black male students are involved and engaged with their professors in and out of the class, seek academic support for intervention and prevention to improve their deficiencies.

Four overarching themes emerged in response to the second research question, what are the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students that influence their academic success at state colleges and state universities and do social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males' academic success? Those themes included a Provisional Opportunity, Partnerships, Academic Success, and Mind Over Matter as it relates to their persistence and academic success.

*A "Provisional" Opportunity.* When considering the impact of the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students, seven

out of the eight participants expressed being accepted on a provisional basis was an "opportunity." Participants from both the low EFC and high EFC groups expressed taking a learning support course was essentially a way in. The participants acknowledged their academic deficiency from high school and during their first semester as "a struggle or weakness." Moreover, these students expressed there was no uniqueness to being a provisionally accepted student. One participant stated, "If I didn't have my learning support class, it could have been something else. I mean I don't think there is one student on this campus that feels like everything was perfect." These students do not perceive their admission status as unique, but instead as an opportunity.

Most of the participants believed being admitted provisionally was an "opportunity." One participant stated, "Though I was given a chance to go to college, I felt labeled. Yes, I struggled in math before, I felt like the class was a waste of time because we didn't do anything in the class. I didn't gain anything from it." He further stated, "I got more help from my roommate than my teacher." In the end, apart from feeling "labeled," this participant concluded, "I still had this chance, so I had to do something with it. Because someone else could have been accepted in my place." Though there was initial resistance during the early part of this student's first semester, he later described his admission as an "opportunity."

This "opportunity" to be accepted was also described as motivational for some participants. Additionally, their response to "Describe your overall experience being accepted provisionally, and how it impacted your success included, "It's like it pushed me more every day." Another participant stated, "It was a drive. Being provisionally accepted wasn't going to determine who I am today." The participants' admission type

124

was described as not having a negative connotation; seven out of eight participants found being provisionally admitted motivational.

Not all of the factors that impacted success were positive. One low EFC participant stated, "My laziness causes me not to do well in my classes. But, over the past semester or so, I have learn how to manage my procrastination." Another participant stated, "Because I didn't live on campus my first semester, I didn't have access to everything I need to succeed. I had to ride to campus with a friend. The school ran out of housing, so I had to rent an apartment. So, I struggled initially, but my mom pushes me every day."

Three participants found there is a uniqueness to being a Black male student apart from being provisionally accepted. One student stated, "I think being a Black male altogether is kind of rough though. I feel like some people have different expectations of you as a Black male." Another participant said,

There are a lot of stipulations that put us down as a culture and as a generation. Some times in our own race, our struggles are not recognized. For me being in college, many do not realize what I am here for is a daunting task. I feel like the odds have already stacked against us…us being here sets us apart. We are more than a statistic and what you see on T.V in terms of violence. One thing that motivates me is being everything the world says I cannot. So, because this school accepted provisional students, I have the opportunity today achieve great things. Maybe this makes me unique.

Lastly, another participant mentioned his professors were aware of the expectations of the world for Black males, so "they try to show us the right ways to handle certain situations and just be smart about what you do."

*Partnerships.* The participants consistently believed the professors were not solely responsible for their academic success. The pathway to academic success was a partnership. One participant stated, professors are "responsible for helping me understand what I need to know for my major." Another students stated, "I believe students have to put the time in too. We can't hold teachers fully responsible for everything even when we fail." Three participants were former student-athletes. Athletics plays a unique role in student success. For those provisionally accepted students who were student-athletes, partnerships and collaboration with their coaches are significant. One participant stated, "Football would not be a distraction from my academics; instead, football keeps me focused." Another participant struggled to transition his first semester because he did not make the football team as expected. College was a different experience because he had played football since a young child. Furthermore, he said, "Football pushed me and kept me leveled-headed and on top of things because I had to keep a certain GPA in high school. My coaches were always checking my grades and stuff to make sure we were doing what we supposed to do. So, we were always trying to do right in the class and stuff because we didn't want to be benched for a game." Having a hard time adjusting without the structure of sports, the participant had to adopt an athletic way of thinking. Without the support and partnership of his coach, the participant stated he felt like "I was dropped in the ocean and told to swim." Last, another participant played basketball his freshmen year and was able to maintain a B average. He credited his academic success to

the stability sports provided because of its requirements and the coach's expectation. He stated, "I was required to spend like 8-10 hours in study hall. So, I had more time to be a student and athlete than someone who now had to work."

Though most of the participants' perceived being accepted provisionally an "opportunity to succeed" or a step closer to achieving their dreams, most of the participants also reported the support of their family impacted their ability to succeed. When asked, "What are the factors that impact your ability to succeed," six of the eight participants from both groups stated "family." One participant stated, "A lot of people, including my mom and dad, look up to me. I don't want to let them down." Another participant stated, "My sister only completed one year of college, so each year I complete here, my family and sister are cheering me on."

*Academic Success.* When the participants were asked, "What is your definition of success," all of the participants did not include academics in their definition. One low EFC participant defined success as "doing your best at the highest level in life and sometimes exceeding your best." One high EFC participant recited a quote "Success is wanting something as bad as you want to breathe." Another participant stated, "Success is having a lot of money. Making money and providing for my family."

Because the participants did not include academics in their initial description of success, I asked each participant "What is your definition of academic success." Institutions have developed a culture that defined academic success by a letter grade because six of the participants' responses included phrases like "getting all A's," "having straight A's," "having the highest grade in the classroom." I began to wonder if receiving an A in a course represented academic success. One student defined his academic success

as "being the first to graduate in my family." Next, the participants were asked "What are the characteristics you look for in your professor, advisor, tutor, mentor, and financial aid counselor that may impact your academic success?" The responses to this question varied. One participant stated, "One important characteristic I look for in a professor is someone who is willing to help." One main characteristic for advisors was "knowledgeable of the major requirements" according to six participants. Tutors should be knowledgeable of the subject in which they are tutoring and "interesting and fun." Mentors should be "relatable" and "humble" and "non-judgmental." Lastly, financial aid counselors should have "patience," knowledge of the processes," and "not have an attitude."

*Mind over Matter.* Self-efficacy was defined as the perception of one's ability to complete a given task. The participants were asked how their self-efficacy impacted their ability to be academically successful. Overall, the participants concluded their academic success was not solely based on their ability to pass an assignment or receive high points on a quiz. The participants' perception of their ability to become academically successful, despite academic challenges, exemplifies its meaning. One student stated, "No matter how I was admitted in school, I can be successful. Yes, my weakest subject is math, but if I get a D on an assignment doesn't mean I'm not going to be successful." Another participant stated, "The way I thought in the beginning, my grades showed it. Then I made a difference by doing more… (pauses) because I thought differently too." Another participant said, "My perception is there is no other way because I have do what is required even if I don't want to. So, it is pretty mind over matter after you have exhausted all of your options." One participant's perception of self-efficacy was utilizing available

on-campus resources. He stated, "I think it's all about trusting yourself and knowing what you can  and cannot do and where to go and who to call on when you can't."

*Research Question 3*

Two overarching themes emerged in response to the third research question, how do social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males' academic success. Those themes include Elect to Disconnect and Climate Change.

*Elect to Disconnect.* The ease of their transition from high school to college was viewed as two-fold for both groups: preferred cognitive dissonance and lack of knowledge. The reasons for their lack of engagement and involvement and academic success especially in the classroom was due to their preferred, cognitive dissonance. One participant said he only wanted to come to his school because of football. Because he was not selected, he wanted to transfer at the end of the semester. Another participant stated, "I was in my feelings about being in learning support, my attitude caused me to fail in the beginning of the semester." When asked about his interactions with other students and his professors, one participant stated, "I mean it wasn't no interactions really. I really don't talk with them like that because what we do in class, I kind of got. So, for me it wasn't really a need for me to go to them like that out of class." After reflecting on the importance of interacting with their professors, one participant concluded "it is important to have engaging interactions with your professors because I feel like it's key to a successful student." Another participant said, "The way I thought in the beginning, my grades showed." The third participant acknowledged, "I think they really appreciate you

trying to help yourself. I began to ask a lot of questions, sitting in the front of the class, and going to them during their office hours."

When considering the level of student engagement at both state colleges and state universities among students who were low EFC and high EFC, the responses of the participants showed they were not involved in on-campus activities, organizations, or clubs. This also included learning communities. When asked, "Are you involved in learning communities," I had to restate the question by providing examples of learning communities for each participant. One participant stated, "No, I am not part of any learning communities on campus." Another participant said, "I didn't know we had those on campus." Two participants from the state college described their "Bible group" as a learning community. One stated "I didn't have anything to do with my time, so I got a few of my friends together and we have Bible study in each other's room twice a week."

Only two of the participants were involved, at some point, in an on-campus club or organization. One low EFC student at a state university stated, "Well, last year I was a New Student Orientation Leader. I didn't participate this year because I didn't have the time to dedicate to it. Besides, I lost interest in it." One high EFC participant at a state university stated, "Today, I had an interview with a Mass Communication group that hypes up the crowd during football and basketball games. I didn't know it existed until somebody came up to me and asked me to join."

Lack of interest in the organizations or knowledge they exist seemed to be common amongst the uninvolved participants. When asked "What type of programs or clubs would you like to see on campus that would pique your interest," one participant stated "I would like to be a part of a group that shows men how to dress professionally."

Another participant stated, "I would like to meet other students like me and with the same major, so we can form study groups. Because some of my classes are hard."

The common belief among all participants in this study was there is a need for implementing different organizations and clubs on campus. A number of students said they were unaware of campus activities, programs, or other opportunities for engagement with other students and faculty. A number of participants stated they do not engage with their faculty in or outside of class. One participant stated, "I can't understand some of my teachers. If I go to their offices, I still probably won't understand them. There are language barriers I can't get past." Another participant stated, "I have been here nearly 2 years, and I have only had two teachers who were engaging and made the class fun." According to most of the participants in this study, faculty is only seen inside of the classroom. Very few students were engaged with their professors outside of the classroom. When asked, "Do you see your teachers around campus," four participants said, "No."

Only two of the eight participants lived off campus at some point. They, as much as the participants who have always been resident students, mentioned the communication on campus is not effective. One students proclaimed, "I wish they would use more than my school email. I don't check it every day." During the Skype session, the other three participants agreed. Another participant suggested, the school needs to use our personal emails as well as send us text alerts or reminders of what is going on. Lastly, one participant suggested, "If they would send us a simple survey of what we want to see on campus, I would tell them the truth. Because what students were interested in years ago may not be the same today."

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the cross case analysis of findings of the three interviews and Skype focus groups of both low EFC and high EFC participants attending state colleges and state universities. Data from the interviews and Skype focus groups were used to answer three research questions. Overarching themes were developed by merging the key ideas from each of the two groups in response to the research questions. The results of this study point to the need for assessing the goals and objectives of support courses and assessing the on-campus clubs and organization to appeal to the students' interests. Students want to engage with their faculty both inside and outside of classes and the improvement of communication will help keep students abreast of what is going on on-campus. There was a common assumption that faculty were seen in class and their offices and do not interact with students outside of the classroom. Participants expressed they would like to see their teachers outside of the classroom and to get to know them. Additionally, the participants suggested they would be more involved if there were or if they were aware of clubs, organizations, and activities that piqued their interests. In Chapter 7, the results and implications of this study for administrators will be discussed, and recommendation for future first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students.

Chapter VII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

State colleges and state universities are responsible for the most significant increase in graduation rates over the past 10 years because of their accessibility nationwide (Doyle, 2010). State institutions offer admission and learning opportunities for students who otherwise would not be eligible for admission to select USG 4-year institutions such as Research and Comprehensive Universities.  In Harper's (2012) qualitative report, he discussed the many factors influencing the academic success, retention, and graduation of Black males. He categorized these factors in three areas: precollege socialization readiness, college achievement, and post college success. According to Harper (2012), college achievement was influenced by classroom experiences, engagement outside of the classroom, and supplemental educational experiences. Post-college success included enrollment in graduate school and career readiness.

Understanding the lived experiences of this unique yet growing population of students who will ultimately transition into the general population of students warrants close scrutiny through the lens of qualitative research. In this case, the research provided useful information for improving the social, instructional, and educational environment of provisionally accepted students. Capturing the unique, personal experiences of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students, within the context of these institutions, during their first academic year, provided fundamental data for the

development of more inclusive strategies for assisting and retaining provisionally accepted Black male students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate first-time, full-time Black male provisionally accepted students and to achieve a clear understanding of their lived experiences to enhance campus-wide social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy to improve opportunities for academic success. In doing so, the insights gained from this phenomenological study will help faculty, staff, and stakeholders understand more clearly how provisionally accepted Black male students' lived experiences influence their self-efficacy, sense of autonomy, and collegiate experience and initiate early intervention opportunities for these students to become more engaged in their academic journey. The research questions addressed students' perspectives of challenges and significant issues faced during the first academic year as well as factors contributing to the success of those students participating in this study.

## Discussion

Data was collected from the interviews and Skype focus groups with eight first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students. Four participants were identified as low EFC and the other four were high EFC. Interviews and focus groups were used to answer the first research question: What are the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students within their first academic year at state colleges and state universities in Georgia? To successfully understand the scope of this question, it is critical to understand the precollege experiences and characteristics of first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male

students at both state colleges and state universities. Most of the low and high EFC participants compared their level of involvement in academic success to their current involvement with tutors and other support services on campus. Making a connection with success represents the participants,' low and high EFC, understanding that if they are actively engaged and involved in their academic success, similar to what worked for them in the past, they will reach academic success despite their skill level in certain disciplines.

*Making a Connection with Success.* The participants in this study were age 20 or younger. On average, these participants have only been out of high school 3 years. Three of the participants from the low EFC group graduated with a B average. One graduated with a C average. Despite their EFC score, these participants were not found to have spent a significant amount of time out of class for suspension. Their parents were and still are actively involved in their academics. These participants also utilized after-school tutorial services without it being mandated by their teachers. Much like their high school experiences, these participants struggled significantly in math. One participant stated "I had to retake college algebra one summer in high school."

The participants with high EFC scores had slightly lower grades in high school. Of the four, three graduated with a C average and one graduated with a B average. Each of participants expressed their frustration with math. Each of the participants sought after-school assistance to improve their deficiency level in mathematics. One participant stated, "Math is something I have never been good at." The participants credited their parents for the push and the support services on campus like the Writing Center and tutorial for helping them bridge the skill gap for mathematics and writing.

Each of the eight participants passed their remedial course their first attempt during their first semester. Only 37% of the student population at state colleges and 18% of the student population at state universities require remediation (USG, 2016). Of that population, 7% graduate from state colleges within 3 years and 25% graduate from the state universities in 6 years. When asked "are you on track to graduate on time," each of the participants responded "yes." The findings from this study reflect Jenson's (2011) assertion that there are several factors that impact student success including assertiveness, academic commitment, and social and familial support.

In this study, it was determined precollege experiences and characteristics impacted students lived experiences during their first academic year. The results of this study support Pascarella's (1985) argument there are many factors that influence student persistence and academic success, student retention, engagement, motivation, and ultimately their lived-experiences. The results of this study found the participants shared similar academic success and preparation and student disposition among the two groups. Most students had B averages and sought academic support.

Additionally, the findings from this study support Jenson's (2011) assertion that students' ability to integrate and immerse themselves in a new environment is based on the students' individual past experiences. These experiences include their academic performance in high school, characteristics, social skills, and study habits. According to the literature, Black male students often struggle with social integration and maintaining study habits (Jenson, 2011). The findings in this study contradicts that trend because each of the participants asserted they were actively engaged in their academic success. It is

imperative to introduce the dynamics influencing the academic success of Black males and develop strategies for assisting and retaining provisionally accepted students.

Each of the participants stated they were not assigned mentors by their institutions. Four of the eight participants have mentors who were from their neighborhood or someone from school. The findings from this study show there is a need for peer or faculty/staff mentorship on campus because these participants initiated their mentor relationship. When asked, "Would you like to have a mentor on campus?" one participant stated, "I wanted one so I asked my advisor to be my mentor. She agreed, but she is helping me to find a male mentor also." Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004) concluded mentoring programs increase students' confidence, thereby diminishing the likelihood of cognitive dissonance. Moreover, there are three ways to counter cognitive dissonance: changing the disposition of the individual or group, familiarize oneself with a variety of resources, and eliminate or diminish the level of importance of unrelated ideas (McLeod, 2008). It is essential for this group of students to make a connection with an on-campus mentor. Mentors provide students with a tangible resource for both academic and emotional support necessary for their academic success.

On-campus support from academic advisors was a critical factor influencing academic success for this group of students. This type of support reflects their family support. One student asserted "My advisor is the go-to person to help me with everything. When I was struggling in my remedial math course, she helped me find a tutor and feel better about myself" Another participant stated, "My advisor is like my mom. She supports me without judging me." This study affirms, by identifying and understanding the benefits for improving students' self-efficacy as opportunities to encourage, engage,

and promote academic excellence, academic advisors help students promote a positive

affirmation of self-assurance and a need to perform academically (Bandura, 1994).

*At-risk for Success.* The literature concluded Black male students, enrolled in

college, face multiple factors influencing their ability to persist (Cooper, 2010, Harper,

2012; Davis, 1995; Wood & Wood, 2013). Students who were identified as low EFC

were found to have a higher academic performance than those who were identified as

high EFC. This study found that these students had what Zimmerman (2000) described as

increased motivation and increased autonomy for learning. Their increased motivation

did not begin once they were admitted; their drive for success preceded their enrollment.

This habit has assumed a significant role for improving their academic motivation.

The common thread between students who were identified as low EFC and high

EFC attending a state college or state university are automatically viewed as at-risk.

Despite the participants' differences in school enrollment and EFC score, this study

found each of the participants' efficacy beliefs impacted their emotional reactions and

individualized efforts and time spent preparing for academic success, the length of time

the participants persevered during difficulties, and their resiliency (academic, social, or

environmental) (Pajares, 1996). Each of the participants asserted their high school

provided "free after-school tutorial." One participant stated, "I was surprised to see my

principal teaching my after-school math session."

The participants 'sense of self-efficacy was influenced by what Dewey (1938)

called their continuous and interactive learning experiences. Their continuity in terms of

lived, real world experiences and believed knowledge is the outcome of their enhanced

prior learning experiences. Hence, one participant stated, "I have never been good in

math. That was my only weakest subject. When my sister went to college for less than a year and came home, it was my motivation to do what I had to do to be better." On average, the participants began to think about college in middle school. They were actively engaged in preparing for the SAT and ACT. One participant stated, "I bought my own SAT prep book and did the practice examples from it over and over." Another participant stated, "I was involved in the TRIO program and every Saturday we practice test taking skills."

The participants' precollege experiences and characteristics paralleled Hibbs (2012) self-efficacy strategies that influence Black male students, their mastery experiences, and, most importantly, their overall academic achievement. The average GPA for low EFC participants was 2.28. The highest GPA for this group was 2.6. The average GPA for high EFC participants was 1.95. The highest GPA for this group was 2.43. There was a variance in majors to be considered. The majors ranged from Engineering to Marine Science.

*Research Question 2*

Two major themes emerged from the data in response to the second question: What are the common perceptions of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students that influence their academic success at state colleges and state universities with the USG? Those themes included a "provisional" opportunity and family matters.

*A "Provisional" Opportunity.* When considering the participants' perception of their experiences being provisionally accepted, the majority of the participants expressed it was just an "opportunity." One participant stated, "It was a smooth transition. I can't say I had a problem with it. I was confident." Another participant exclaimed, "When I

first got accepted, the first thing I thought was…this will be the next four years of my life. I was excited no matter how I got accepted." "Provisional acceptance is just a mindset," one participant exclaimed. "It is a how bad do you want this type of thing. Sort of it's an opportunity take it."

The study adds to Cooper's (2010) assertion that community colleges provide growing academic opportunities for millions of students. For the purposes of this study, state universities also provide the same opportunities. Both the state colleges and state universities have policies in place that support open admissions for students with college deficiencies. In this case, these participants had math deficiencies. According to a majority of the participants, the three most common support services they frequented were the Writing Center, tutorial services for math, and academic advisement.

The findings of the study represent one of Cooper's (2010) social support systems that are offered at both state colleges and state universities. Cooper asserted community colleges help students requiring remediation improve their academic success. He found those social support systems included academic guidance and advising, student success courses, and learning communities (Cooper, 2010). None of the participants were familiar with the term "learning communities." Once I provided examples of learning communities, one participant stated, "The student tutors really help me out. When I still don't get it, they don't get frustrated. They tried teaching me another way." Another student stated, "There are some students in the Writing Center that help me out." "There aren't any groups on campus that focus on one subject or so," one participant exclaimed. Another asserted, "I wish I can get together with others in my dorm."

The participants, while enrolled in their remediation courses, were also enrolled in a co-requisite course. For example, each of the participants required math remediation. They were also enrolled in the college math course as well. One participant stated, I didn't see the point of the math support class. I learned more in college algebra than my support class."

*Family Matters.* Each of the participants asserted his family motivated him to succeed. Family played a major role in student success. One participant stated, "I come from nothing. I am reminded of where I come from. My family, especially my mother, supports me here in school." Another participant stated, I want to graduate so, I can take care of my mother." The findings of the study support Harper's (2012) qualitative report. Harper contended family support, an element of precollege socialization, is one of the many factors that influences academic success, retention, and graduation of Black males.

Two of the participants were identified as first generation including one participant whose parents enrolled spring 2017 into college. Bradbury and Mather (2009) asserted 45% of incoming students were first-generation. Participants were also asked "What are the factors that impact your ability to succeed?" One participant stated, "Having my family to support me each step of the way means a lot to me." Another participant expressed, "I don't want to let my mom and family down." The findings of this study supports McCarron and Inkelas (2006) assertion that one of the greatest predictors of academic success and inspiration in college is family support.

Despite the differences in parental level of education of the participants, their family support is the same in terms of encouragement and motivation. The support differs in terms of participants who were not identified as non-first-generation because of their

parental knowledge of financial aid, the admissions process, and available support systems on campus. One non-first generation college student stated, "Man, I know not to call financial aid for anything. My oldest sister could never get anything done over the phone." Another participant exclaimed, "Listen, my mom and I both are not good in math. She had to get help from a tutor on camp." So, the findings of this study supports Bryan and Simmons' (2009) assertion that family relationships and experiences are significant in promoting social development and academic success.

*Research Question 3*

Three overarching themes developed in response to the third research question: How do social network systems, student engagement, cognitive dissonance and self-efficacy affect first-time, full-time provisionally accepted, Black males' academic success? Those themes included a success story, preferred disengagement, and new systems for networking.

*A Success Story.* "Money," "wealth," and "doing better than my dad," were a few of the responses to "What is your definition of success." None of the participants included academic success or achievement in their response. I asked a sub-question, "What is your definition of academic success." One participant asserted, "Getting all A's in my classes." Another expressed, "I mean passing all of my classes with A's and B's. The responses from all of the participants despite EFC score, first-generation, state college or state university revolved around A's equal academic success.

The average GPA among both EFC groups is C. It surprised me to hear their collective definition of academic success. Yes, the participants were engaged in pursuing academic support. They were, however, holistically not engaged or involved in other

142

clubs or organizations on campus. Only two of the eight participants were involved or

engaged on campus. The results of the study supports Hibbs' (2012) assertion that Black

male students have higher GPA's when they assumed leadership roles and are actively

engaged in organization. One of the two active participants has a 2.69 GPA.

Though a measurement of academic performance is critical for ensuring students'

academic success, the definition of academic success, according to the participants,

contradicts Astin (1993), Ewell (1997), and Tinto's (1993) four principles of academic

and college success. Their ideas of academic and college success requires students to

become actively involved on campus, become socially interactive and collaborative, and

utilize campus resources (Astin, 1993; Ewell, 1997; and Tinto, 1993). Based on this

theory, the participants in this study are not academically successful.

*Preferred Disengagement.* Six out of eight participants proclaimed they were not

involved in on-campus clubs or organizations. One participant stated, "I am not involved

on campus because I am not interested in what is offered here." Another participant

stated, "I am just lazy. I got to see what is out there for me." Though this population is

unique, Parrish (2008) affirmed engaged students demonstrate a more optimistic

perspective about themselves and their abilities. The uninvolved or disengaged

participants felt no sense of connection to the institution. One participant exclaimed, "I

am not a people person. I am not trying to get to know anyone. If they don't talk to me, I

don't talk to them." Unengaged students, according to Katz et al. (2004), are not

academically successful and do not persist.

These participants did not have assigned faculty/staff mentors; therefore,

contradicting Davis's (1995) assertion that Black students enrolled in predominately

white campuses are also less likely to have role models and personal attachments with the faculty. None of the research sites were identified as PWI. One participant stated, "I can't understand the teacher in class. So, I don't go to his office because I won't understand him then." Another participant said, "I don't see my teachers around campus other than their office and in class."

Mentorship and opportunities for student engagement outside of the classroom according to Davis (1995), help students create and maintain social bonds and relationships necessary for integration into for the institution's social climate and culture. I asked the participants "Name or list any clubs or organization your institution provides." The common responses from the participants were Greek organization and Student Government Association (SGA). The participants' lack of knowledge may lend itself to the participants' false disinterest or preferred disengagement. How the institutions, in this study, demonstrate their ability to support their diverse student population influenced the students' overall outward views and actions.

*Improvement of Communications.* Institution support systems, according to Davis (1995), help students create and maintain social bonds and relationships necessary for integration necessary for the institution's social climate and culture. Both state colleges and state universities have resident and commuter students. The outbound online communication is the same for both groups. One participant who lived off campus asserted, "When I lived off campus, I missed out on everything." I was on campus whenever my roommate was on campus." Another participant said, "I wish they would use more than my student email. Most of the time I can't log in. I wish they would send

what's going on to my personal email." One participant suggested, "They should just send out a text and everything would be alright."

When I asked those two participants, "if you would participate in more on-campus with different activities and events if you were alerted early, both participants said, "Yes." The findings of the study show a need for what Brantley and Miller (2002) called principles of good communication. This principle includes an open channel of communication. According to Brantley and Miller, there are a number of barriers that hinder effective communication in the receivers' cultural background. All of the participants asserted they communicate mostly using their cell phones.

## Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the participants' degree of comfort and ease conveying personal experiences, perception and feelings during the interviews and Skype focus groups. This study was also limited because of my current role as an academic advisor for this population of students within the USG. The study involved four institutions within the USG: two state colleges and state universities. The findings are not generalizable to all state colleges and state universities. Additionally, the findings are not generalizable to all Low EFC participants or High EFC participants at each at state colleges and state universities within the USG or other states.

## Implications for Practice

The findings from this study indicate that socioeconomic status of students do not predict academic success at state colleges and state universities within the USG. Institutions should assess students' individual self-efficacy to build understandings of the internal, self-existing, self-perceived competence of provisionally accepted Black male

145

students. Creating increased opportunities for student engagement will allow provisionally accepted Black male students to participate in a smooth transition into their overall college experience, hence countering potential pre-college characteristics developed in K-12.

Administrators at both state colleges and state universities should encourage faculty to become more engaged with their students both inside and outside of the classroom and to establish lasting relationships, coaching and mentorship. Peer mentoring programs would help first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted Black male students transition successfully as well. The participants have mentors, but they are not campus faculty. One participant asked his advisor to be his mentor.

Attention to the delivery of communication to both on-campus and off-campus students should be evaluated. A second means of communications should be considered to include the student's personal email or text. Another recommendation includes seminars to show students how to link their personal and student emails and how to set-up their student emails on their cell phones. An assessment of students' interest is needed to evaluate the needs for clubs and organizations offered on both state colleges and state universities.

A number of participants failed to define, initially, their school's perception of academic success. They defined academic success as a letter grade. Institutions should clearly establish an institutional definition of academic success that specifically includes engagement and involvement on-campus. Assessing students' standardized test scores and more recently their English and math performance index (EPI/MPI) should be assessed as well for identifying academic and skill-level deficiency and potential for

academic success. Last but not least take on a customer service approach especially in financial aid is critical for effectively improving the rapport and relationships between the student and financial aid counselor.

<center>Recommendations for Future Research</center>

Given the increasing population of students requiring remediation at state colleges and state universities, administrators need to learn more about their common precollege experiences and characteristics and perceptions during their academic their first academic year. One recommendation is to study Pascarella's (1985) General Causal Model as it provided a formative understanding of how students' pre-college experiences affect their ability to transition, integrate, persist, and succeed academically in post-secondary education.

Secondly, there is a need for research that explores various assessments of student interests for implementing on-campus clubs and organizations. Student involvement and engagement is also a measurement of academic success, integration, and progress.

A third recommendation would be to replicate this study at the same four institutions in 3 to 4 years to determine if any modifications were made in terms of improving social network systems, means of communication to students, and levels of involvement or engagement in on-campus activities and organizations.

The last recommendation would be to reproduce this study in a different setting such as two other state colleges and state universities within the USG or in a different state to determine the impact of participants' precollege characteristics and experiences on academic success.

<center>147</center>

Conclusions

The findings of this study support the need for assessing institutional programs, clubs and organizations to attract the interest of a diverse student body. It would be fitting to consider all of the social support services discussed in this study for example: academic guidance and advising, student success courses, learning communities, informed financial aid and support, and social networks and their effect on students' academic success. One of the most prominent findings was participants wanted to engage and interact with their faculty both inside and outside of the classroom. It is imperative for administrators to require faculty implement activities and assignments that facilitate engagement between themselves and other students. Mentorship should also be considered a significant entity for student involvement and engagement with faculty and staff apart from their academic advisors.

Precollege experiences and characteristics influence students' behavior and tendencies during their first academic year. College level deficiencies can continue to be improved if programs like TRIO and after-school tutorials are offered. Students engaged in these programs are most likely to seek academic support during the first of year of college. State colleges and state universities that provide holistic social support programs for first-time, full-time, provisionally accepted students will continue to have increased retention, matriculation and graduation rates of this population and all students. Despite the literature that indicates state colleges provide more social support for the success of this population of students, the findings of this study indicate there is no difference between the social support services, engagement opportunities, and relationships between faculty and staff and students at state colleges and state universities. Socioeconomic

status and admission type were not academic success predictors. Despite low involvement and engagement with faculty, students desired to work and engage with their instructors outside of the classroom. Overall, there was a desire to become engaged with others in a number of organizations, if they existed. This was proven by the participants' precollege experiences and behaviors prior to enrolling in college. So, precollege behaviors and characteristics are transferrable similar to those who are traditional admits. In conclusion, there is no uniqueness to being provisionally accepted.

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Appendix A:

Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board Approval

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**
**for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

**PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT**

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**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 03437-2016          **INVESTIGATOR:** Nikki Jackson

**PROJECT TITLE:** *A Smooth Transition: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Lived Experiences of First-Time, Full-Time, Provisionally Accepted Black Males.*

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:**

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. You may begin your research study as soon as letters of permission have been received by VSU's IRB.

If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

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**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**

- Consent statement must be read aloud to participants before interview session begins.
- Research data collected during research study must be securely maintained (locked cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) for a minimum required three years.

Appendix B:

Email to Participants

Email to Participants
To: Participant (s)
Subject: Research Participation Invitation-A Smooth Transition: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Lived Experiences of First-Time, Full-Time, Provisionally Accepted, Black Male Students

Greetings,
My name is Nikki Jackson. I am currently a doctoral candidate at Valdosta State University. I am looking for participants for my research examining the lived experiences of first-time (never enrolled at another institution of higher learning), full-time (enrolled in 12 or more credit hours), provisionally accepted (required to take remedial English or math), Black male students. You are receiving this email because you meet all of the criteria needed to ensure the success of this research.

This study is about accessing and understanding your academic experience and journey and understand what it is like to be provisionally accepted. If you take part in this study, you will be invited to interview one-on-one with me on campus at location of your choice and a Skype, focus group. The interview and Skype session will be scheduled in advance in order to correlate with your class or work schedule. Moreover, both the interview and Skype, focus group will be audio taped and transcribed. For your participation, you will be compensated with a $10.00 food gift card. On the day of the interview, I will read over the consent to participate and record your response to participate at the start of both the interview and focus group. You will also receive a copy of the consent form via email prior two days prior to the interview.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Nikki Jackson at nnjackson@valdosta.edu.* This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or **irb@valdosta.edu**.

Appendix C:

VSU Consent to Participate

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You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled "A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Experiences of Provisionally Accepted Students at Open-Access Four Year Institutions." This research project is being conducted by *Nikki Jackson,* a *student* in *Education Leadership]* at Valdosta State University.  The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation.  You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it.  A basic explanation of the research is given below.  Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.  The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

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**Purpose of the Research:**  This study involves research.  The purpose of the study is to gain insight on the lived experiences of provisionally accepted students at Open-Access Four-Year Institutions and what it means to be provisionally accepted.

**Procedures:** *Your involvement in this research is greatly appreciated. We will meet for a face-to-face interview (date yet to be determined). The time allotted for the interview is one hour. There will be 8 to 10 open-ended questions asked to gain insight on your experiences. There are no alternatives to the experimental procedures in this study.  The only alternative is to choose not to participate at all. For the interview, you will be asked (at the appointed time) to meet in Whiting Hall, 234 or via Skype to conduct the interview at which time notes of your responses will be recorded using a note pad and tape recorder. Moreover, there will be no one else present during the interview to ensure confidentiality.*

 *Please note there are some details about the study that you are not being told in advance. When your participation is over, the study will be explained to you in full detail, and all of your questions will be answered.  At that time, you can decide whether or not you want your information to be used in the study.*

**Possible Risks or Discomfort:** *Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study.  However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks.*

By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

**Potential Benefits:** *Although you [may/will] not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of the lived experiences of first-time full-time students provisionally accepted in Open Access Four-Year Institutions.*

*Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing the attributes adding to or depreciating these experiences.*

**Costs and Compensation:** *A $10.00 Starbucks gift card will be given to participants for their participation at the end of the interview. There are no costs to you and there is no additional compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project.*

**Assurance of Confidentiality:**  Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law.  Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.  The information provided will be protected at all times. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity so there is no connection made between your input and

The study has a couple of risks. First, the anecdotes you tell may be recognizable by others. I will use pseudonyms for you and your school. All taped interviews and journal recordings will be locked in a file cabinet in my home office for your protection. Second, an inaccurate portrayal of situations or participants may cause harm. You will be provided a copy of the transcripts to validate accuracy. Any risk to you will be minimal as you are only disclosing personal information that you wish to disclose and you may withdraw from the study at any time and have your data destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:**  Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary.  If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study.  Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating  at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.  *Valdosta State University participants please note your decision not to participate does not affect your grades.*

 *During the interview, please note you may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If at any time you choose to withdraw from the study, your information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in research results.*

**Information Contacts:**  Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Nikki Jackson* at *478-973-8639* or *nnjackson@valdosta.edu*.  This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants.  The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants.  If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu.

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**Agreement to Participate:**  The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.   I agree to participate in this study.  By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older.  I have received a copy of this consent form.

*I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study:* _____ *Yes* _____ *No*
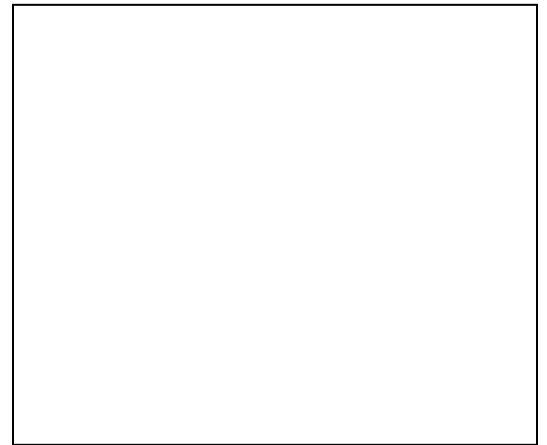
*Mailing Address: _____*

*e-mail Address: _____*


_____          **This research project has been approved by the**
Printed Name of Participant
                                              **Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board**


_____
Signature of Participant                    Date

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_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent       Date

Appendix D:

Interview Protocol

| | |
|---|---|
| Introductions<br><br>(15 minutes) | Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Nikki Jackson. I am a doctorate candidate at Valdosta State University. This interview will be tape recorder for review and analysis. I am interested in understanding the lived experiences of provisionally accepted, first-time, full-time, Black male students at state colleges and state universities. What I learn from today's discussion will create an awareness of your perceptions and experiences at the institution (my home institution) to help improve the institutions' services for students like yourself. Your responses will be confidential. I will not include your name or any other information that could identify you in any reports we write.<br><br>Do you have any questions before we begin? |
| Topic 1:<br><br>Pre-College Experiences and Characteristics<br><br><br>  20  Minutes | 1  Would you consider yourself an A, B, or C student based on your High School GPA?<br>2  Were you ever suspended? If so, how many times?<br>3  Were you enrolled in special education classes?<br>4  Did you receive tutorial for courses you struggled with?<br>5  Did you participate in SAT/ACT prep?<br>6  What is you parent(s)' highest level of education?<br>7  At what point, in your life, did you first begin to think about attending college?<br>8  Describe your thoughts about college before you enrolled? Have those thoughts changed or remained the same after you were admitted? How? Why?<br>9  How did your family and friends feel about you attending college? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Topic 2:<br>Social Network Systems<br>Student Engagement<br><br><br>20 Minutes | 1. Discuss your student experience both inside of the classroom and outside.<br>2. Describe your experience with admissions.<br>3. Describe your experience with financial aid.<br>4. Describe your experience with your academic advisor.<br>5. Describe your experience with the faculty.<br>6. Describe your experience with student support services.<br>7. Tell me about your relationship with other students.<br>8. What organizations are you apart of?<br>9. Are you involved in learning communities? |
| Topic 3:<br>Persistence and Academic Success<br><br><br>20 Minutes | 1. Have you been assigned a mentor or peer mentor? If so, was this a recommendation or your request?<br>2. What is your definition of success?<br>3. Discuss how your overall experiences, being accepted provisionally accepted, impact your decision to strive towards success?<br>4. How much ownership do you accept for your decision to succeed in passing your learning support course(s) and subsequent college level course(s)?<br>5. What are the factors that impact your ability to succeed?<br>6. What motivates you to succeed? |
| Final Thoughts and Closing<br>(15 minutes) | Those were all of the questions we wanted to ask. Thank you for your participation. Do you have any questions at this time? |

Appendix E:

Interview Question

The interview questions are as follow:

1. What is your classification (freshmen or sophomore)?

2. When was your first semester of enrollment?

3. At what point, in your life, did you first begin to think about attending college?

4. Describe your thoughts about college before you enrolled? Have those thoughts changed or remained the same after you were admitted? How? Why?

5. How did your family and friends feel about you attending college?

6.  Describe how you felt about being admitted on a provisional basis?

7. What remediation course(s) are you enrolled in?

8. Discuss your student experience both inside of the classroom and outside.

   a) Describe your experience with admissions.

   b) Describe your experience with financial aid.

   c) Describe your experience with your academic advisor.

   d) Describe your experience with the faculty.

   e) Describe your experience with student support services.

9. Tell me about your relationship with other students.

10. Tell me about any memberships or participation on or off campus groups or organizations?

11. Are you involved in learning communities?

12. Describe your precollege experiences?

   a) Describe your academic performance in high school.

   b) Were you ever suspended? If so, why and how many times?

   c) Were you enrolled in special education classes?

d) Did you receive assistance for courses you struggled with in high school?

e) Did you participate in SAT/ACT prep?

f) What is you parent(s)' highest level of education?

g) Are you HOPE and Pell eligible?

13. How supportive is the faculty and staff of your academic progress? How so?

a) What type of support was provided?

b) Were you assigned a mentor or peer mentor?

14. What is your definition of success?

a) Discuss how your overall experiences, being accepted provisionally accepted, impact your decision to strive towards success?

b) How much ownership do you accept for your decision to succeed in passing your learning support course(s) and subsequent college level course(s)?

c) What are the factors that impact your ability to succeed?

15 What motivates you to succeed?

15. Is there anything else you'd like to share that I have not asked?

The interview will conclude with "thank you for your participation. "I will ask students if they have a Skype account. If so, I will notate their Skype username for the focus group. If not, I will help the student set up a Skype account. The student will also receive potential dates for the focus group.

Appendix F:

Skype Protocol

- A day prior to the Skype focus group, I will Skype each student to make sure each student can access the session. Students will be given a time to log in. I will also confirm the time for the Skype session for the next day.

- Recorded, 90 minute focus group.

- Overview of focus group (remind students Skype session will be recorded using cell phone).

- Introductions (students will create and introduce themselves using pseudonyms). I will call and confirm students' pseudonyms prior to the focus group..

- Begin interview with warm up question.

Appendix G:

Focus Group Questions

The list of focus group questions will be revised based on new themes that emerge from the analysis of the interviews.

1. Describe how your enrollment at the institution made a difference in your understanding of college? (warm-up question)

2. Describe the support programs available to you? What do you like or dislike about each?

3. Discuss what you have done to contribute to your academic progress?

4. To your knowledge, what do other students, in your remediation course, say about the support services or lack thereof as it pertains to academic success?

5. Would you encourage other potential provisional accepted students to enroll in your institution? Why or why not?

6. If you could change anything about your experience at your institution, what would it be?

7. Describe any needed changes within the institution to better facilitate the experiences of provisional accepted students.

8. Describe a situation where you believe you may have been treated differently due to your academic status.

9. What additional information would you like add as it pertains to your experience as provisional accepted students?

- At the end of the Skype session, I will thank the students for their time and participation. I will also inform the students I will be sending a copy of the transcription of both the interview and focus groups to ensure the accuracy of their

responses and interpretive meaning. Within the correspondence and a one-on-one

phone call, interpretive meaning will be defined and discussed.