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Student Persistence of Urban Minority Two-Year College Students

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Richard Hahn

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Student Persistence of Urban Minority Two-Year College Students

by

Richard Ari Hahn

MSW, Hunter College, 1991

BS, Hebrew University, 1981

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

College student persistence has been the focus of much research for over 40 years, but there has been little progress in increasing the rate of student persistence. Many scholars have focused on specific student populations in particular institutional types. While the fastest growing institutional type has been the 2-year for-profit college serving primarily underserved communities, the experience of persistence among students of this population has not been studied. Accordingly, this study was conducted to explore, through a social cognitive lens, the persistence experiences of students from minority urban communities attending 2-year for-profit colleges. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the data from interviews with 4 students from various schools around the country. Four common themes were found: social support, independence, growth, and conflict. All the students cited family as relevant but also as a source of conflict. All the students also expressed the importance of faculty for academic success, engagement, and fun. Participants did not mention any engagement or concern around financial policies, and social integration outside the classroom was valued more than the in-classroom experience. The results of this study will be shared to enhance understanding of persistence in 2-year schools. Insights from this study can help administrators, advisors, and instructors design and implement programs to be more closely aligned with the needs of this important student population.

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Dedication

To my father, Eliezer Zisel Shmuel, OBM, a.k.a Jerome S. Hahn, who passed away on October 25, 2003 corresponding to the Hebrew date of 29th of Tishrei 5764. It was his dream was to see this happen. Finishing it is honoring his dream.

To my Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneerson, ZT”L, who left this world on the 3rd of Tammuz 5754 corresponding to the Gregorian date of June 12th, 1994. His life, teachings, guidance, and philosophy taught me how to dedicate my life to the service of others and making this world a better place.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to many people who have suffered through my many years of working on this accomplishment. A majority of people will not be acknowledged simply because I cannot remember all of them, so if there will be somebody who I should mention and is not mentioned, I beg forgiveness. However, there are a few people that were absolutely essential for the success of this project. First and foremost is my dear wife of 45 years, Esther, who gave of herself and suffered from my difficulties and difficultness and frustrations that come with a project of this magnitude. I could easily write a dissertation of greater scope detailing her experience of being the spouse of a doctoral student.

My mother, Devorah Fuller, has been a constant and unbelievable support. In fact, she proofread the dissertation a few times. Thank G-d, she is not one to lay on Jewish mother guilt trips because with close to two decades working on it and hearing about it, she certainly had ample opportunities. She deserves to have one son with a PhD and may G-d bless her with many healthy years to “shep nachas.”

I also need to thank my children and their families who also sacrificed for this project including Reuven and his wife Bruriah, their children Zecharia and Sara Rosa; Chanie and her husband Mendy and their children Yisroel, Rena, Yechezkel, Menucha, and Shumlie; Yisroel and his wife Chaya Sara and their children Rachel Leah, Eliezer, Mendel, Chana, Rena, and Michla; our daughter Rivky and her husband Isser and their children Shmulie, Dovid, Menucha, and Yehudis; and our son Shneur, and Naomi and

her son Benny. This journey has been a part of my life almost as long as grandchildren have been part of my life.

A special word of gratitude must be expressed for my chair, Dr. Susan Marcus. I had the unfortunate opportunity to have more than one chair persons and I can honestly say that she has done an exceptional job and without her guidance this could have taken even longer that it actually did.

I also want to thank the participants of the study as well as the students and professionals with whom I worked at the now defunct TCI college in NYC. Many were inspirational and others were supportive.

And I thank G-d from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to complete this and the strength and fortitude that has been absolutely essential.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

College student persistence has been a problem focused on in research for over 40 years, but there has been little progress in increasing the rate of student persistence. This is an issue because in the United States there is a trend in income inequality (Keister, 2014). Although there is a range of causes and consequences of this disparity (Grusky & MacLean, 2016), educational achievement is necessary for countering this trend. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) has reported that the median weekly earnings of a high school graduate are $495 whereas a person with a bachelors' degree earns $1,137. The long-term trend in postsecondary enrollment has been growing for the last three decades, across all ethnicities and genders (Ingels, Glennie, & Lauff, 2012), but less than 30% of working-class children graduate college (Hurst, 2012).

Retention of students in postsecondary education is a challenge in all sectors of postsecondary education with only about 60% of students who begin school continuing to graduation (Habley, Bloom & Robbins, 2012). However, in 2-year for-profits schools with open enrollment the percent of new students who can be expected to graduate is just above 27% (ACT, 2014). The for-profit sector of postsecondary education is growing (Center for Analysis of Postsecondary & Employment, 2013) and is expected to remain strong despite an increasing amount of regulation restricting growth. This growth might be because the stated goals of the for-profit sector are different from the nonprofit and public sector. The nonprofit and public sectors typically strive to advance learning and promote scholarship, whereas the for-profit sector strives to help working adults attain practical careers (Hassler, 2006). Furthermore, for-profit colleges are rewarded for their

advantages, including an emphasis on the individual students and a focus on job centered education (Schilling, 2013). There is evidence that the student attainment and student satisfaction levels are comparable to public and nonprofit institutions (Liu & Belfield, 2014). There are media reports that, in New York City, graduation rates for Black and Hispanic minorities are better in the for-profit sector than in the public sector (Bellin, 2015). This may be influenced by the removal of remedial service in the City University of New York, which adversely affected the minority populations (Parker & Richardson, 2005).

Different populations may have different reasons for persistence or leaving college (Wood, 2012), but this study involved an exploration of persistence among students of urban 2-year for-profit technical colleges. This study contributes to the literature by adding a new perspective on student persistence and the experiences of students in urban for-profit 2-year technical schools. This knowledge can assist researchers and administrators in understanding this population as well as help instructors connect and support their students. Chapter 1 contains an overview of the background for this study including how this study enhances present knowledge and the theoretical basis for the study. This chapter also contains a description of the research problem, definitions of terms, and guidelines for this qualitative, phenomenological study.

Background

Research on college student persistence has a long history and covers many different disciplines and perspectives. The most prevalent is the sociological perspective primarily based on the work of Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993). He developed a

longitudinal model that included environmental and social explanations for student departure from college. His basic premise was that the greater the social or academic integration a student experiences, the greater the likelihood that the student will remain in school (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Psychological perspectives were added with the work of Bean (e.g., Bean, 1981; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Bean & Eaton, 2000, 2001) and Astin (1984, 1999). These researchers focused on concepts such as self-efficacy, handling stress, locus of control, and student involvement.

Early work on student persistence was focused on "traditional" students (middle class, White, male, recent high school graduates) attending 4-year residential schools. By the 1990s it was recognized that the models need to be adapted for different types of institutions and different populations (Halprin, 1990; Benefield, 1991; Mason, 1998; Nishimoto & Hagedorn, 2003; Chang, 2005). As the complexity of the field grew Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004), characterized the question of college student departure as an "ill structured problem," which meant that it defies a single solution and even a multiplicity of solutions may not solve the problem.

The research focused on the for-profit sector is still new (Iloh & Tierney, 2014). In fact, in a 2005 comprehensive volume on college student retention, the for-profit sector was not mentioned in the chapter on finances and retention (Schuh, 2005). Furthermore, most of the literature on persistence and retention focused on minorities included either minorities in primarily White institutions or primarily Black or other minority institutions. Additionally, most of the literature has focused on general relationships among factors and has not included the individual experience of what

staying in school means. With an increasing proportion of students enrolling in for-profit schools, especially minority students, it is imperative that understanding retention of these students in this setting is expanded.

I explored the persistence experience among an underserved community that has the potential to benefit society and lies on the cusp of success and financial failure. This is a population that has been denied the opportunity to fully contribute to society due to their disadvantaged socioeconomic status.

Problem Statement

Although there have been many studies on college student retention/persistence, the rate of attrition has not changed in the past few decades (Tinto, 2006). Additionally, the for-profit sector has been growing for the past two decades (Gilpin, Saunders, & Stoddard, 2015), but there has been a lack of research on this sector (Schilling, 2013). There is research on the demographics and persistence statistics of students in the for-profit sector, but little research has been conducted on how these students decide to remain in school or leave and the academic and personal circumstances surrounding that decision. Adding research on the subjective experience of persistence and the decision to remain in school enhances the current state of knowledge.

The subjective experience of persistence is just beginning to be explored in research, especially in different student populations. In a recent study on undergraduate psychology students in Britain, Xuereb (2014) found that academic difficulties were the most common reason for wanting to leave and family support was the most common reason for wanting to remain. Markle (2015) also noted that nontraditional university

students, especially women, express a will to succeed that overpowers the desire to leave school. There has also been some research on minority students in community colleges. For instance, Wood and Harris (2015) showed the importance of financial factors in persistence for Blacks and Latinos attending community colleges, and Smith (2015) listed family influence, financial issues, familiarity with college procedures, confidence and social integration as important for Latinos attending community colleges. Tuel (2014) expanded the target population and looked at nontraditional students while focusing on community colleges. He found that their experiences can be understood in terms of their relationship to their families and obligations to family, the quality of previous educational experiences they might have had, their relationships with faculty and staff, and motivation.

Although previous studies are indicative of possible processes that occur within the for-profit student population, there are no direct studies of persistence in this population. This is important because the for-profit schools attract a different demographic. These schools disproportionately attract minorities, especially Black women (Iloh & Toldson, 2013). Because this sector is both growing and attracting a different demographic, it is essential to understand if and how persistence and doubt about persistence are experienced.

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative study, I explored the persistence experience amongst urban minority students in 2-year for-profit technical colleges. A phenomenological approach was used, specifically interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers, &

Larkin, 2009). The primary phenomenon of interest was persistence. There are multiple definitions of persistence, which can apply to full-time students who are enrolled continuously in the same institution until graduation to any student who expects to graduate in about 2 to 4 years (Habley et al., 2012). Persistence is often conflated with the term *retention* (e.g., see Robbins et al., 2004). For a student-centered definition, Habley et al. (2012) defined persistence as continuing stubbornly despite challenges (p. 4.). Stubbornness in the face of opposition is clearly a student-centered, psychological perspective, and not an institution focused sociological perspective. This qualitative study was conducted to explore how this stubbornness manifests itself in the educational setting

Research Questions

The primary research question addressed by the study is: What is the experience of persistence in urban minority students in 2-year, for-profit educational institutions? The subquestions include:

Subquestion 1: How do students experience family support in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 2: How do students experience faculty support in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 3: How do students experience institutional policy in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 4: How do students experience the classroom environment in relation to persistence?

Conceptual Framework

Modern research on persistence/retention of college students began with Vincent Tinto's 1987 book, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, which over the years has gained paradigmatic status (Bensimon, 2007; Braxton et al., 2004). Based on sociological theories, Tinto's model was longitudinal and considered both intrinsic and external factors influencing persistence/retention behavior.

Tinto's (1987, 1993) work was based on the study of young students at 4-year residential universities, which led to criticism that it did not address the experiences of nontraditional and minority students (Bean & Metzner, 1985). In addition, because it was a model based in sociological theories, it did not address the psychological aspects of persistence (Astin, 1985). Despite its shortcomings, Tinto's model is longitudinal, covering the process from prior to attending college to graduation, as well as broad, including both institutional factors and environmental factors outside of the school that affect persistence or retention. Tinto's (1987, 1993) central premise is that a student is more likely to remain in school as he or she feels more integrated into either the academic culture of the institution or the social culture of the institution.

Research of the past 30 years has provided evidence that a student's ethnic/cultural background and its interaction with the culture of the institution are important factors influencing the likelihood of persistence. Whether the school is public or private, 2-year or 4-year, residential or commuter, or if it is a research university can impact persistence and retention. Because of the interactions between these factors, it is important to understand different contexts where students struggle with completing

higher education. With more people from underserved communities seeking their education in 2-year for-profit schools, the factors defining the convergence of this population in this setting needs to be explored.

To explore the experience of students from urban minority communities in 2-year for-profit institutions, it is important to explore what Tinto (1987, 1993) called student entry characteristics, which can include personal as well as cultural aspects that the student might bring with her. Tinto (1987, 1999) also proposed that institutional properties influence persistence rates. The idea that each type of institution has its characteristics that affect persistence decisions has been a significant premise in the retention literature.

There is evidence that underexplored factors might influence persistence decisions such as personal mobility, changing career paths, adjustment to adulthood (Wintre, Bowers, Gordner, & Lange, 2006), self-efficacy and locus of control (Luke, Redekop, & Burgin, 2015), and self-worth and ethnic identity (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2015). With few studies focusing on the for-profit sector, it is essential to explore how these students experience the struggle to decide whether to remain in school. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the experience of struggling to remain in school to make sense of the decision-making process, which made it appropriate to employ IPA as a research methodology (Smith et al., 2009). Students were recruited from various schools throughout the country. Participants were recruited in their first and second semesters and interviewed using semistructured interviews to gain rich data about

the life factors and school factors that influence their experience of staying or leaving school.

Definitions

There is disagreement on some of the definitions of terms in this field (Habley, Bloom & Robbins, 2012). Hagedorn (2005) argued that researchers are not likely to agree on how to measure retention due to difficulties with the definition. For example, both *persistence* and *retention* are used to denote the behavior of a student remaining in school (Hagedorn, 2005; Reason, 2009). However, the term most commonly used for staying in school is persistence. Persistence is the amount of time a student remains in school despite obstacles, whereas retention refers to the organizational phenomenon of keeping students in school (Reason, 2009; see also Rovai, 2003).

The following definitions, adapted from Berger and Lyon (2005) except where noted, are presented to clarify key concepts as used throughout this document.

Attrition: A student-centered term that refers to students who fail to re-enroll at an institution in consecutive semesters. This definition does not consider the reason for not reenrolling.

Dropout: A student whose initial educational goal was to complete a degree but who did not complete it.

Persistence: A student-centered term that refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion. This definition allows for the inclusion of transfer students.

Mortality: Refers to the failure of students to remain in college until graduation.

Retention: An institutional measurement that refers to the school's success at keeping a student at the institution, most often expressed as a percentage of returning students (Habley et al., 2012).

Stopout: refers to a student who temporarily withdraws from an institution or system.

Nontraditional students: Students who are older than 24, or do not live in a campus residence (i.e., are commuters), or are part-time students, or some combination of these three factors (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489).

Withdrawal: Refers to the departure of a student from a college or university campus. For-profit schools, because they need to remain profitable, often focus on retention and withdrawal. A student that persists in studies but transfers to a different school represents a loss of income for a for-profit school. However, persistence has the most long-term impact on the lives of the students.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all students intend to finish school when they begin their first semester. Although some students go to school to learn skills in a few courses, these students are less likely to attend 2-year for-profit institutions (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). However, it is difficult to fully understand people's intentions for going to school before changing their minds. Methodological assumptions also included the following:

1. There is an underlying phenomenological experience that is useful to investigate. There was also the presumption that students' experiences can be understood from a contextually based, subjectively constructed perspective.

2. The participants would be able to and willing to share their life experience honestly and with sufficient detail such that a qualitative investigation could be conducted.

Scope and Delimitations

In addition to examining basic questions regarding the background and institutional influences on social and academic integration, I explored effects of social and academic integration. This included subjective psychological factors such as the effects of school diversity and discrimination (a corollary of social integration) or the effect of lower quality secondary education (a corollary of academic integration). These are important because they are claimed to be among the advantages of for-profit postsecondary institutions (Berg, 2005; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Additionally, the focus in this study was on students from urban minority populations, who tend to enroll in 2-year for-profit colleges. This has also been the fastest growing segment of the undergraduate student population.

The open enrollment policies for many for-profit schools allow many students to begin college who would not have that opportunity otherwise. With open enrollment in the for-profit sector, for-profit schools have a higher percentage of older, minority, and single-parent students (Center for Analysis of Postsecondary, Education & Employment, 2013). Although it is not clear that an open enrollment policy affects retention or persistence rates (Laurent, 2012), it is important to begin to explore those demographics that open enrollment produces. Open enrollment also brings in White middle-class

students, but because the for-profit growth does not focus on this population, I did not look at persistence of these students.

Limitations

Although qualitative studies are not designed to be generalizable or transferable like quantitative studies, transferability is still applicable (Larkin, 2014). Transferability can be attained by implementing two principles: the principle of proximal similarity and the principle of explanation (Patton, 2002). The principle of proximal similarity allows the conclusions to be tentatively applied to similar subjects in similar settings. This needs to be coupled with the principle of explanation. Rich, detailed data is conducive to the extraction of both objective and nonobjective data that together form explanations of psychological processes that can transcend the particular situation (Giorgi, 1995).

IPA, being an interpretive method, was developed with measures to address researcher bias. In this study, bracketing and researcher peer review were employed to minimize such bias, as detailed in Chapter 3. Member checking (Shenton, 2004) or verifying the researcher's interpretations of the participants' contributions, was used to enhance credibility. Because bias might be caused by cultural differences, iterative questioning leading to a thick description of the phenomenon was employed (see Shenton, 2004). In addition, the study was available for independent audit, including the original proposal, interview schedules, audio tapes and transcripts of the interviews, tables of themes draft reports and the final report (see Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Significance

This study adds to the general knowledge concerning persistence and illuminates the process in a growing demographic of the postsecondary student population. This can assist administrators in designing interventions that can assist these students in achieving their educational goals. As the economy changes and a college education becomes more essential, the for-profit sector can respond faster than the traditional colleges and universities (Tierney, & Hentschke, 2007) whereas public colleges are unable to meet the demand (Parker & Richardson, 2005). Instructors in these for-profit colleges can benefit from a more intimate level of the potential struggles of their students. Advisors can be better equipped to help these students through having a more complete picture of the factors that influence the persistence process. With more knowledge to assist and encourage these students to succeed, more students can gain better employment. As a result, the economy can be strengthened by adding better-educated citizens to the working economy.

Summary

Although research on college student persistence has been extensive over the past few decades, the rate of retention has not significantly changed. Even though urban minority students in 2-year for-profit institutions is the fastest growing sector of the postsecondary student body, student persistence for this population has not received much attention. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the process of the decision to remain in school or leave school in this group of students.

Chapter 2 will include a review of the literature on student retention. It will include three major theories and then a review the literature concerning various institutional types plus research on students of various minority statuses. It will conclude with a review of the literature concerning retention in for-profit schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The experience of persistence in minority students attending for-profit secondary educational institutions in urban settings has not been well examined, despite the growth and scrutiny of this sector by federal regulators (Berg, 2005; Edens, 2012; Lynch, Engle, & Cruz, 2010; Schilling, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of the educational experience of this underserved population to better understand the challenges of staying in school and the opportunities for retention and graduation.

Despite 45 years of academic research since the publication of Tinto's seminal work, retention of minority and underserved populations is still a significant problem (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013). There are a few important theories of student attrition that have been proposed, including Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993), Astin's (1984), and Bean's (Bean & Eaton, 2000, 2001; Bean & Metzner, 1985). After Tierney (1999) noted significant theoretical faults with Tinto's model, there has been much research on specific minority populations (Bridges, Cambridge, Kuh, & Leegwater, 2005; Bush & Bush, 2010; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Garrett-Spencer, 2011; Harris & Wood, 2013; Kim, 2014; Lent et al., 2005; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005; Wilson, 2013; Wood, 2014). In addition, there has been a considerable amount of research on the conditions affecting persistence in 2-year community colleges (Davidson & Wilson, 2013; Deil-Amen, 2011; Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano, 2011; Luke, Redekop, & Burgin, 2015; Mertes, 2013; Stuart, Rios-Aguilar, & Deil-Amen, 2014). This is important because students' experiences in 2-year colleges differ from the experience in 4-year institutions (Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto,

1993; Torres, 2006). The characteristics of minority populations and the effects of attending a 2-year institution have not been addressed in research (Torres, 2006), and most research on minority populations is focused on how those minorities integrate into primarily White institutions or historically Black colleges and universities. Therefore, this study was focused on the persistence experience in 2-year for-profit schools with a high degree of diversity serving minority urban underserved communities.

This chapter includes a review of relevant research focused on college student persistence and how this research contributes to the understanding of urban minority populations attending for-profit schools. First, a brief history of the retention/persistence literature is presented. Next, three major models/theories are presented that form a basis for understanding persistence. These models are Tinto's model of student departure, Astin's model of involvement, and Bean's model of student attrition. The integration of psychological theories is explained in the context of Bean's model, including the role of attitudes, coping behavioral theory, self-efficacy, and attribution theory. The chapter then reviews the literature as it pertains to minority students in various institutional settings including community colleges, technical schools, and for-profit schools. Finally, social cognitive theory (SCT) is presented as a conceptual framework for understanding the individuals' experience of the persistence phenomenon.

Literature Search Strategy

Research for this literature review included the following databases: Academic Search Complete, Credo Reference, Education Research Complete, ERIC, JSTOR, Primary Search, ProQuest, ProQuest Dissertations, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and

SocINDEX with Full Text. Databases were from Walden University, New York Public Library, Drew University, and Fairleigh Dickenson University. As a starting point for each search, I used the keywords *Tinto* and *college* to locate key articles. From there, I used snowballing and followed links to articles that cited the key articles. I also created alerts where available and on Google Scholar using the keywords *Tinto*, *two-year college* and *for-profit schools, retention, persistence, attrition, drop out, stop out,* and *transfer students*.

The Evolution of Research on Academic Retention and Persistence

The study of academic retention has a long history reaching back to the 1930s (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) when it was called "student mortality" (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, p. 5). It was not until the 1970s that researchers began to look at cross studies to observe trends and patterns. For example, Spady (1970) reviewed the dropout literature and developed an initial model to integrate the literature into a multivariate model. He used Durkheim's (1951) sociological model of social integration as a theoretical model for academic attrition. In this initial model, social integration was the primary factor influencing dropout, although academic achievement was a significant factor influencing social integration. When testing his model, Spady found that although there was some indication that social integration was important, it not only differed between men and women, but for men (83% of his sample) academic success was more important and was gained only through relinquishing some measure of social activities. Considering this apparent contradiction, Tinto (1973) developed his model equally integrating social and academic integration.

Tinto's Model of Student Departure

Tinto (1973) published a comprehensive theoretical framework based on Spady's (1970) work. This work and his subsequent revision in 1993 became paradigmatic in the field of college student retention, attrition, and persistence (Bensimon, 2007; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Braxton & Lien, 2000; Metz, 2004). This model of student persistence and attrition has been cited in more than 700 studies since 1993 (Bensimon, 2007). Tinto's (1973, 1993) model was based on Durkheim's (1951) sociological theory of anomie, attributing the causes of attrition primarily to institutional factors (Tinto, 1987). He delineated five contributing factors to difficulties in social and academic integration and hence attrition rates:

1. *Academic difficulties* include students who leave school because they do not meet the institution's academic standards. They can leave either voluntarily or involuntarily.
2. *Adjustment* issues typically occur within the first few weeks of school and are for most students are transitory.
3. *Incongruent goals* increase the likelihood of attrition when students' goals are different, greater or less than the intuitional goals.
4. *Uncertainty* will affect attrition when the natural level of uncertain goals is not resolved in a timely fashion.
5. *Commitments* refer to the strength of the students' commitment to the goal of completing the course of study.

These factors precipitate student attrition if they result in either in incongruence or isolation. Incongruence refers to when a student is actively involved in either the academic or the social life of the institution, but level or type of involvement does not facilitate integration. Isolation refers to a lack of interaction with other members of the institution (Tinto, 1987).

The premise of Tinto's (1993) model was that students stay in school when they are academically or socially integrated into the college experience, and his model specified both internal and external factors. Equally significant is the conceptualization of the retention/persistence process as beginning before engagement with the academic institution and chronologically flowing through various stages until the departure decision. Tinto's model is illustrated in Figure 1.

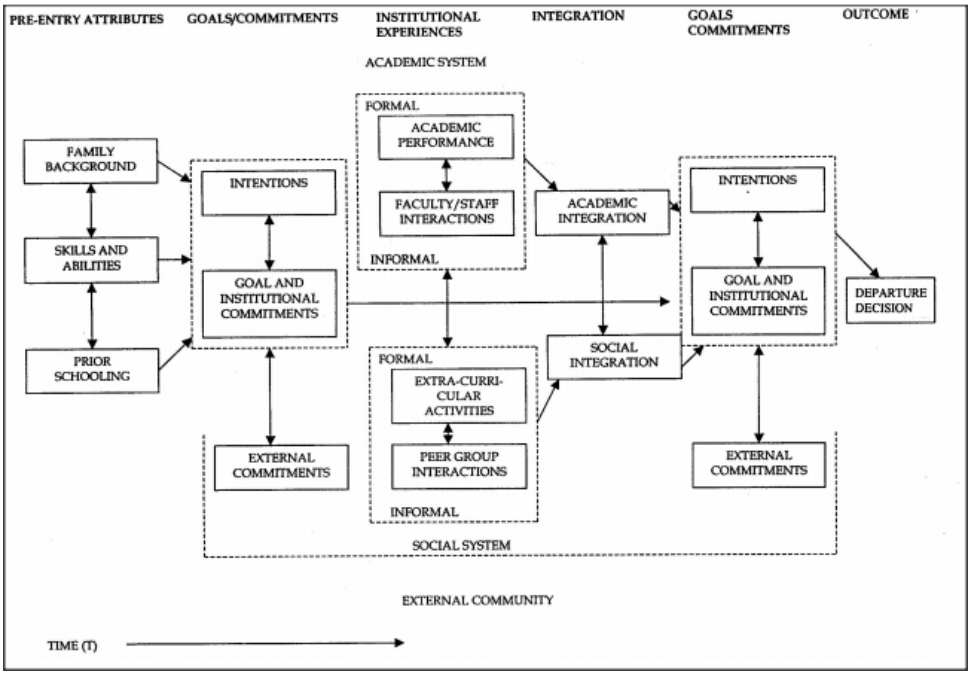

Figure 1. Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure.

The model describes a student's decision to depart from college as dependent on the student's commitment to complete a degree and is modified by the institutional goals and commitments. Tinto (1993) acknowledged that there might be external commitments (such as economic or family pressures) that can independently determine the decision to quit school. However, it is the academic and social integration that most directly affect students' decisions to stay in school. Although successful integration into either the academic or the social life of a college does not guarantee that students will remain in school, a lack of integration both academically and socially increases the likelihood that students prematurely leave (Bean, 1981; Henry & Smith, 1994).

Preentry Attributes

The primary stage of the progression through academic systems is the preentry attributes that the student brings with him or her when enrolling in college (Tinto, 1993). This includes family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling, though Tinto did not discuss the qualities of these preentry attributes that may affect attrition or persistence. However, Braxton et al. (2004) noted that there is evidence to support preentry attributes' influence on initial institutional commitment, though there has not been enough evidence to support the proposition that preentry characteristics influence social or academic integration.

Studies have shown mixed results regarding preentry attributes and their influence on college persistence. For example, Hicks (2014) looked at the contribution of high school class rank and college entrance exam scores as compared to entry-level psychosocial skills in resultant persistence for over 4,000 students, finding that both

factors were significant, but class rank and college entrance exam scores explained a more significant portion of the variance. In other words, although all of these preentry attributes were important, academic skills were more important than social skills. On the other hand, Bergman, Gross, Berry, and Shuck (2014) looked at 437 adult students in a bachelor of science program, measuring nine preentry attributes as well as eight academic and campus attributes. The preentry attributes included gender, age, ethnicity, parental education, educational goals, marital status, number of children, income and motivation. They found that for this population the preentry attributes were not significant contributors to the persistence rate when compared to factors connected to the campus environment.

Additionally, there is research with more focused preentry attributes. For instance, Soria and Linder (2014) looked at grade point average (GPA) and retention rates in children of divorced parents. They used a sample from a large, mostly White, public research university. They found that children of divorce generally earn a lower GPA and have higher drop-out rates. Smith (2015) used Tinto's model in a qualitative study of Latino community college students, evaluating the effects of a program designed to address possible short-comings of specific preentry characteristics: college readiness, socioeconomic status issues, and differences in culture. By addressing these factors, the six students in the sample all remained in school and reported a subjective ease of integration (Smith, 2015).

Institutional Factors: Academic and Social

Tinto identified two semiindependent systems, the academic and the social, each with formal and informal aspects. The academic system has been operationally defined as academic performance, and the social factors are defined as the interactions between students, faculty, and staff. The social system can be evaluated in terms of formal or school-sponsored extracurricular activities and informal peer group interactions (Braxton et al., 2004).

Validation of the Model

Braxton et al. (2004) analyzed Tinto's model and deduced 13 testable propositions:

1. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.
2. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
3. Student entry characteristics directly affect the student's likelihood of persistence in college.
4. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of academic integration.
5. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration.
6. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of social integration.
7. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of academic integration.

8. The greater the degree of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
9. The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
10. The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of institutional commitment.
11. The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from the college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation.
12. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.
13. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college. (pp. 9-10)

Braxton et al. noted that propositions 8 and 9 were critical for validation of the model. They also found that of the 13 testable propositions, only five received strong empirical backing: 1, 9, 10, 11, and 13. Moreover, when analyzed according to institutional type, even that level of empirical evidence is not upheld. In commuter institutions, only two propositions were upheld: 1 and 10. Thus, students enter college with certain characteristics, which influence their initial commitment to the college that influences their subsequent commitment to the college. In 2-year colleges, only one of Tinto's propositions were empirically supported, and that was that the students' entry characteristics directly affect the likelihood of persistence. There was no empirical evidence to support Tinto's model when applied to racial or ethnic minorities (Braxton et

al., 2004). This prompted a newer revision of the model based on 2-year and commuter colleges, but not incorporating racial or ethnic differences (Braxton, et.al., 2013).

Another evaluation of Tinto's model was done by Pan (2010), who conducted a meta-analysis of 122 studies that represented 98,207 participants. Though sometimes persistence was defined as intent to persist, other times it was persistence based on reenrollment, a path analysis of the model based on the complete dataset yielded a root mean square of approximation of .16, indicating a need for model revision. When looking at only 4-year institutions the model yielded better results, and Pan concluded that both academic and social integration contributed to goal commitment which, contributed to actual persistence, with the impact of social integration greater than the impact of academic integration. Furthermore, he found that Tinto's model fits better with 4-year institutions than 2-year institutions and that the constructs of academic and social integration may be qualitatively different in the two types of institutions (Pan, 2010).

Problems with the Model

Although the majority of the studies that use Tinto's model seek to validate the constructs or test hypotheses that flow from the model, concerns have been identified regarding the structure of the theory (Baird, 2000; Braxton et al., 2004; Braxton & Lien, 2000; Falcone, 2011; Johnson, 2000; Metz, 2002; Reason, 2009) as well as the generalizability to various nontraditional populations (Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin, and Bracken, 2000).

After noting the lack of progress in solving the persistence issue through application of theory, Braxton et al. (2004) contended that student departure is an ill-

structured problem. Being ill-structured implies that although solutions are not forthcoming, progress can be made only when multiple theoretical perspectives are employed. Baird (2000) focused on the needs to incorporate psychological nomenclature and perspectives to place a greater emphasis on the individual students' perception of the social environment afforded by the institution. Falcone (2011) went further and incorporated into her model a concept of validation built on self-perception in relation to the college environs. Johnson (2000) attempted to expand the structure of the theory by incorporating discourse analysis into the research of the process of persistence.

Another major contemporary concern is that Tinto's (1987) original study was based on what has come to be known as "traditional students" at four-year residential universities populated mostly by White students. One commonly accepted definition from the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) defined traditional students as those who earn a high school diploma, enroll directly into a four-year college, and are financially dependent on his or her parents. Nontraditional students naturally do not fit these criteria; the typical nontraditional student is above the age of 24, delays enrollment in higher education, and works at least part-time (Newbold, Mehta & Patricia, 2010). Other factors distinguishing many contemporary students from the definition of traditional are the lack of a high school diploma or being a single parent. When Tinto's original work original work was published traditional students make up a little more than 25% of the undergraduate population (Deil-Amen, 2012), while just less than 75% are considered nontraditional.

Additionally, in the years that Tinto conducted his original research, it was primarily White students who attended four-year residential colleges. This was consistent with the national data at that time. In the early 1970's over 80% of the college students were White and by 2008 that number was down to almost 62% (NCES, n.d.). This raises the question of whether Tinto's model is an appropriate approach for exploring the phenomena of retention and persistence in nontraditional populations. The context of this study is 2-year, for-profit technical colleges serving mostly urban students from minority communities. The students are nontraditional in that they are above the age of 24, are not supported by their parents, and have spent some years in the workforce prior to enrollment in college.

Astin's Model of Involvement

Astin (1984) proposed a theory similar to Tinto's work, hypothesizing that the success or failure of college students is a function of involvement. Astin used the term involvement rather than motivation because he viewed this as more measurable since it can be linked to observable behaviors. This model was proposed as an attempt to integrate concepts from various schools of psychology from psychoanalysis to learning theory (Astin, 1999). In the years since this model was first proposed, the concept of "student involvement" has evolved to the concept of "student engagement" (Bensimon, 2007; Kuh, 2009; Trowler, 2010). While he does not directly refer to Tinto's theory, Astin's basic construct is parallel to Tinto's idea of integration. Kelly (2008) notes that the two theories are mutually supportive and that Astin's work can be viewed as a "helper theory" in that it operationalizes the concept of integration. In fact, in one recent model of

student engagement (Coates, 2007), the construct is bifurcated into social and academic realms reminiscent of Tinto's structure, and that Coates (2007) defines his two factors of engagement as academic and social engagement. In a review of the engagement literature, Trowler and Trowler (2010) asserted that the value of engagement is uncontested in recent years, although the definitions and parameters of engagement are still poorly defined (Trowler, 2010).

Poggendorf (2013) used Astin's model in her case study of three small faith-based institutions. In these colleges, there was a very small (about 5.00%) attrition rate from first to second-year students. She found that there was a strong sense of community amongst the students, faculty, and staff in the three colleges, and attrition was often attributed to "lack of fit."

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) looked at the effects of student engagement on both achievement and persistence as well as if there was a differential effect according to ethnic or racial background. It must be noted that their sample included schools that were either primarily White or specifically served a particular minority. They found that with greater engagement there is both greater academic achievement and greater persistence, but the effect was greater for students who had a weaker initial standing.

In a study of African-American students in a large urban commuter institution Thomas, Wolters, Horn, and Kennedy (2013) found that student involvement, was not predictive of persistence, but they attributed that to the idea that since they belonged to a

minority the engagement in activities reflected an identification with the ethnic group rather than the institution.

Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) used measurements of engagement to study its effect on academic performance. They administered a 70 item questionnaire to 1352 students to measure the extent that they engaged in academically beneficial activities and which type of activities. They found a complex relationship that was dependent on students' academic abilities and the type of institution. Students with less academic preparation benefited more from engagement activities than well-prepared students.

Another important consideration is that recent research suggests that the construct of involvement is more complex than Astin proposed. In learning communities, which is a typical program used to enhance student involvement, there is a differential effect on students. Pike, Kuh and McCormick (2011) conducted a study looked at 39,546 first-year students and 37,041 seniors to access engagement in university life as influenced by participation in learning communities. Applying six measures of student engagement, they found a positive but complex interaction, depending on factors such as student characteristics and institutional characteristics of the particulars of the learning community. As noted above, students with lower demonstrated capabilities reap the greatest benefits from increased engagement (Carini, et al., 2006). McClenney, Marti, and Adkins (2012) looked at the data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement from the years 2001-2007. Their goal was to validate the use of student engagement as a proxy measure for student achievement and persistence. Although this report does not include the results of the analysis, on the basis of two academic outcome

measures and three persistence measures, they found that engagement correlated with persistence in a broad range of community colleges and in a different sample of Hispanic students.

Bean's Models of Student Attrition

John Bean (1980) developed three models of student attrition. The earliest one was termed "An Industrial Model of Student Attrition" (Bean, 1981) and was the basis for the latter two models. His second model (Bean & Metzner, 1985) focused on the demographics of students whom he termed "nontraditional undergraduate students." He formulated the third model to examine psychological factors that contribute to student attrition (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Bean & Eaton, 2001). Bean and Metzner's (1985) model was intended to expand Tinto's (1975) work in order to incorporate nontraditional students, and they developed a limited definition of "nontraditional" – i.e., not White and not middle- or upper–class, not attending four-year residential college immediately after graduating from high school, and commuting to school (nonresident).

Bean and Metzner (1985) reviewed 70 empirical studies of 2-year colleges and four-year nonresidential schools to formulate their theoretical model. The basic structure that Bean and Metzner (1985) posited is that drop-out decisions are dependent on four sets of variables: defining and background variables, GPA (mostly dependent on various academic variables), environmental variables, and intention to leave. They delineated 24 factors in the following areas: background variables, academic variables, environmental variables, social integration variables, academic outcomes, and psychological outcomes. Included in the background variables are age, enrollment status, residence (commuter vs.

residential), educational goals, high school academic performance, ethnicity, gender, and parental education. Included in academic variables are study skills and study habits, academic advising, absenteeism, major certainty, and course availability. Included in environmental variables are finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer. Social integration was not further analyzed into factors but addressed as a single measurement in the studies they reviewed. GPA was used as a measurement of academic outcomes. Finally, four types of psychological outcomes were postulated to affect persistence: utility, satisfaction, goal commitment, and stress. Sixteen of the 70 studies measured social integration and found that Tinto's major premise was not supported for this population. For example, Bean and Mezner (1985) cite eleven studies that reported that older students either showed less social integration or were less interested in social integration. They posited that other environmental factors had compensatory interaction effects that mitigated the social support traditional students attained through social integration. These environmental factors have potency far beyond the social integration of Tinto's model. For example, while increased hours of outside employment is likely to increase the likelihood of leaving school, their review revealed that it was the older nontraditional student that is more likely to be employed more than 20 hours per week. This model posits that if the environmental support is lacking, students are likely to leave school. For example, a student who does not have adequate child care or is unable to adjust his or her work schedule to accommodate a school schedule might have no choice but to drop out or delay his or her academic career.

An important innovation of the Bean and Metzner (1985) model is the inclusion of psychological variables as constructs with specific effects on retention/persistence. They included in the model four psychological constructs: utility, satisfaction, goal commitment, and stress, all of which they postulated to have a direct influence on the intent to leave. Increased perceived utility, increased satisfaction and a greater commitment to goals are postulated to reduce the intent to leave, while increased stress is postulated to increase the intent to leave.

The Bean and Metzner model has most often been used in conjunction with other models to enhance the explanatory power. Jeffreys (1998) used Bean and Metzner's model to explore the factors contributing to the retention of first-year nursing students. In addition, she looked at if Bandura's (1986) concept of self-efficacy adds explanatory power to Bean and Metzner's framework. Using an assessment tool designed specifically for nursing students, and based on the Bean and Metzner framework, she found that self-perception of academically related factors contributed more to achievement than the nonacademic factors.

Examples of studies including the Bean and Metzner model include Sorey and Duggan's (2008) in which they compared traditional and nontraditional students at a two-year community college using the Bean and Metzner model. Comparing 350 traditional-age students with 350 nontraditional students at four different campuses, they found that social integration had a more significant impact on the persistence of the nontraditional students than the traditional students. Despite their low response rate in this study, it is important to note that these results are counter to the model's predictions. Ivankova and

Stick (2007) combined Tinto's model with Bean and Metzner's model to look at persistence in a graduate program. While they found support for Tinto's model in this mixed methods study, factors such as goal commitment and satisfaction, as postulated by the Bean and Metzner model, were not predictive of persistence. They note, however, that their study focused on graduate students and the model was built for undergraduates. Holder (2007) found data to support a counter-intuitive conclusion that when online learners have higher learner autonomy, they are less likely to persist. He turned to the Bean and Metzner model to explain that environmental deficiencies can overwhelm academic efficacy and cause a lower rate of persistence.

Psychological Theories of Academic Retention and Persistence

While most of the research since the 1970s focused on institutional factors (Bensimon, 2007; Braxton & Lien, 2000), there were a few attempts to integrate psychological constructs into the popular models. For example, Watkins (1996) modified the Tinto model adding measures of cultural integration in a population attending a historically black college. Similarly, Napoli and Wortman (1998), in a longitudinal study of 1,100 college freshmen, examined initial goal commitment, social support, conscientiousness, and self-esteem as additional factors while validating the Tintonian model. They found that these factors typified the students that tended to persist. Bray, Braxton, and Sullivan (1999) explored the effect of stress on social integration within the Tintonian model. In a longitudinal study at a selective four-year research institution, they found that positive interpretation and growth, as stress coping mechanisms, facilitate social integration and active coping and denial negatively impact social integration.

Bean and Eaton's Integrated Model of Psychological Processes

Bean and Eaton (2001) developed a model to explain how social integration and academic integration come about, based on well-developed psychological theories, including, attitude-behavior theory, coping behavioral theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory. Bean and Eaton (2001) used the hypotheses generated by these theories to propose that students need to develop certain attitudes, beliefs, and skills in order to successfully integrate and matriculate.

Bean and Eaton's (2001) model is a uniquely psychological model in that persistence is dependent on the individual perception of the ability to succeed, which influences the intent to persist and then persistence itself. While it takes into account factors such as institutional fit and social integration, it is how the feelings of integration contribute to a subjective self-assessment based on locus of control and self-efficacy. As seen in Figure 2, it retains the longitudinal structure. The entry characteristics include past behavior, personality, initial self-efficacy, initial attributions, normative beliefs, coping strategies, motivation to attend, and skills and abilities of factors that can be considered primary but still malleable and open to change throughout the process. The model further goes on to indicate how the institutional environment, through feedback mechanisms, affects the subjective psychological state of the student. Nonetheless, it is that integration that results from the resultant psychological state that will directly influence the intent to persist and thus the behavior of persistence.

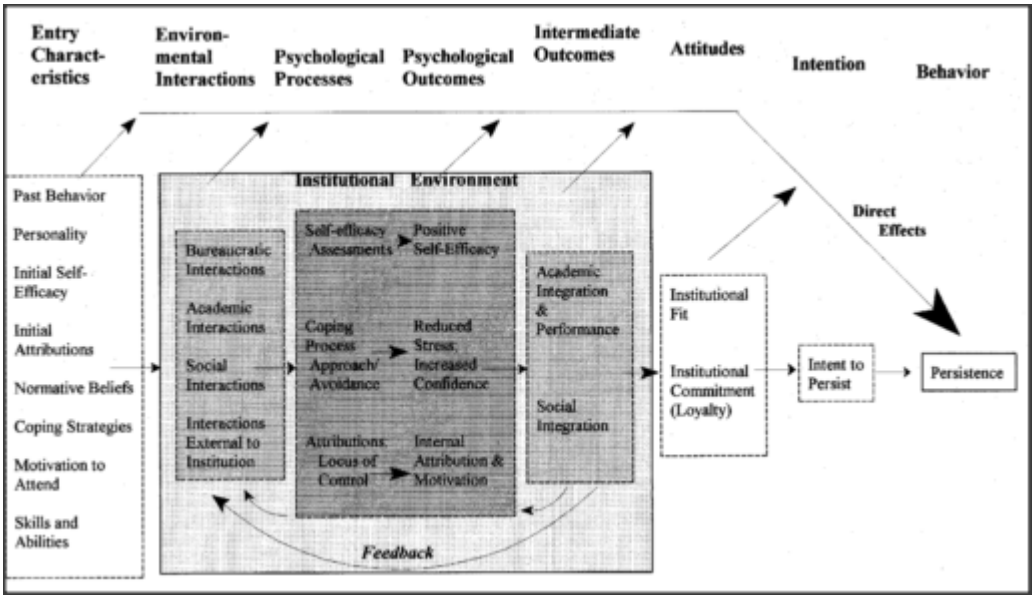

Figure 2. Bean and Eaton's (2001) psychological model of college student retention.

The Role of Attitudes

Ajzen and Cote (2008) describe the Ajzens' (1985) theory of planned behavior, noting that it is one of the most popular social-psychological models for predicting behavior. According to this model, a behavior is expressed when there is an intention to perform, and there is enough control on the part of the performer to overcome any obstacles. The intention is formed through an interaction of three factors: attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms and the performer's perceived behavioral control. In the case of college attendance an example of a subjective norm, or normative belief, might be: "my parents think I should stay in school." Bean (2000) posits that the beliefs lead to attitudes, which lead to intention, which lead to behavior.

Bean and Eaton (2001) applied this theory to the behavior of academic persistence, such that the behavior of remaining in school is a direct result of the

psychological intention to remain in school. That intention is predicated on the individual's attitude toward remaining in school or dropping out and is based on the individual's beliefs about the consequences of completing school or dropping out. The intention is based additionally on the individual's subjective norms, which are derived from the individual's interpretation of societal norms.

The role of attitudes in persistence has not been extensively studied as an independent variable. This might be due to Bean and Eaton's (2001) formulation placing attitudes as an intermediary factor; subjective norms and interpretation of societal norms affecting attitudes, and attitudes then affecting intentions which then influence behavior. In one study, Chang (2005) looked at how student attitudes affect the quality of student/instructor interactions across racial and ethnic groups. While the positive relationship between positive attitudes and the quality of the student/instructor interactions theoretically would improve persistence, this connection was not studied. The qualitative literature indicates the importance of attitudes. For example, Cook (2009) in a grounded theory study, found that underprepared community college students in a mid-sized college who had a negative attitude towards math found it challenging to complete requirements for full matriculation. Eastabrooks (2012) in a mixed methods study of 83 students at a private, religious four-year institution, found that attitudes influenced intent to graduate. She also found that strong academic self-efficacy was linked to persistence in that population.

Coping Behavioral Theory

Coping behavioral theory proposes that through an assessment of a given environment and adaptation to that environment, one adjusts to new situations. Adjustment is a process by which individuals fit into a new situation (French, Rodgers, & Cobb, 1974). Bean and Eaton (2001) discussed this theory in terms of the behaviors initiated to facilitate "institutional fit" and reduce stress. They propose that students choose their school according to the fit and attempt to reduce stress (Eaton & Bean, 1995). Bean and Eaton (2001) defined stress as the emotional and physiological response to perceived threats from the environment. These might be situations of role stress or role conflict engendered by the responsibilities of being a student. When a student efficiently copes with stress, he or she is likely to have a positive attitude and be less likely to drop out of college. A study by Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry and Kelly (2008) illustrated this concept. In a web-based study of 1,339 college freshmen, they found a complex array of institutional characteristics interacted with demographic factors to influence how comfortable they were in their college of choice. For instance, first-generation students, more than other students, considered psychosocial and academic factors when choosing a school, but females, more than males rated psychosocial factors as personally relevant, regardless of generation, race, or ethnicity. On the other hand, African-American females considered academic quality personally important more than any other group. Cho, et al. (2008) asserted that these data are important not only for recruitment but also for retention.

Although Bean and Eaton (2001) used an approach/avoidance model of coping, the research on coping is far more complex and includes many other coping processes and mechanisms. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) noted a number of different styles of coping, including future-oriented proactive coping (in which a person might react to stress by viewing it as a challenge and opportunity for personal growth), a dual process model of coping (in which a person might react to loss by going through a process of redefining oneself), communal coping (by consciously seeking support from peers or other support groups), religious coping, and various means of coping through the use of positive emotion.

Adjustment according to coping styles has been studied in relation to stress and academic achievement. Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000) found that although stress levels correlated with lower grades when students coped with stress using problem-focused coping skills they were more likely to become motivated to solve their problems than when they used emotionally focused coping skills.

Self-Efficacy Theory

The third psychological theory that Bean and Eaton (2001) apply to this model of student retention is Bandura's (1986, 1999) model of self-efficacy, which is an essential part of Bandura's SCT. The definition of self-efficacy has remained stable throughout the decades and is based on the idea that "an efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 79). An increased sense of self-efficacy will result in greater effort and persistence in achieving goals as well as reducing anticipatory fears. It is important to note that Bean

and Eaton (2001) alluded to other aspects of SCT, such as modeling, when they noted that academically at-risk students are more likely to expend greater effort when they see others succeeding at their academic goals. A greater sense of academic self-efficacy has been shown many times to contribute to academic success and persistence (Eastabrooks, 2012; Gosnell, 2012; Lent et al., 2005; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). In fact, in one meta-analysis, Robbins et al. (2004) found that self-efficacy was the best predictor of academic persistence from a range of nine other broad constructs that closely parallel the Tintotian factors.

There have been several studies focusing on the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement and persistence, none of which address nontraditional students. Kahn and Nauta (2001) were among the first studies to look specifically at how self-efficacy influences student persistence. Although 27% of the sample consisted of ethnic minorities, they did not conduct any analysis based on ethnic or racial status. Le, Casillas, Robbins, and Langley (2005) constructed the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI) to measure psychosocial and academic skills and how these factors contribute to academic performance and retention. However, their sample did not include enough ethnic minorities to assess the effect of various ethnicities.

Similarly, Gore (2006) used the SRI to measure academic self-efficacy as a predictor of student persistence. In addition to a skewed sample, Gore (2006) noted that academic self-efficacy could have differential predictive power depending upon at what point in the academic career it was measured and what aspects of academic self-efficacy

was measured. Kim, Newton, Downey, and Benton (2010) developed the College Learning Effectiveness Inventory (CLEI), but it was also developed and validated on students from a large Midwestern public university with less than 3.5% of any particular minority group.

Attribution Theory

Bean and Eaton's (2001) incorporated Weiner's (1986) attribution theory to describe how students interpret their academic experience. They focused on a critical aspect of this theory: locus of control. In the context of student attrition/retention, a student with an external locus of control is one who attributes his or her success or failure to factors such as luck, poor teachers, institutional flaws, and so forth. A person with an internal locus of control attributes his or her success or failure to intelligence, effort, or other aspects that he or she can improve or ignore. It follows that a student with an external locus of control who is dissatisfied with the college experience will be more likely to drop out. On the other hand, a person with an internal locus of control will see the possibility or opportunity to improve the situation and persist in his or her studies. Although there has been some research on how the college experience affects a student's locus of control (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), how locus of control affects persistence behavior has not been extensively studied. There has been a great deal of research looking at how an internal locus of control helps academic performance (Demetriou, 2011). One early study (Strain, 1994) found locus of control to have a significant effect on persistence, but the measure of persistence was limited to staying in school for one semester. However, in a more recent study, Guarino and Hocevar (2005) found that

students with an internal locus of control are more likely to remain in college. It is important to note that the model is a mere schematic, and many of the details have yet to be studied empirically. However, since this model is comprehensive and psychologically based, it is a useful framework for exploring the subjective process of persistence.

Current Conceptualizations

Despite over forty years of research into student attrition and institutional retention, there has not been a significant breakthrough regarding lowering overall attrition or increasing overall persistence (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013; Tinto, 2006). Tinto (2006) bemoaned this lack of progress and called for foci on global institutional change, development of retention driven programs and increased efforts to engage low-income students. This lack of progress is particularly true for lower-income students and for ethnic minorities (Smith, 2015), as well as first-generation students (Lundy-Wagner, et al., 2014), with the lowest persistence rates amongst African-American males (Bush & Bush, 2010; Kim, 2014).

Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) explored the contention that Tinto's model was not applicable to the community college setting because social integration is not likely when students who tend to live off campus do not spend time at the school outside of study time. Although they found that in a community college setting both social and academic integrations are critical, the process is different. Instead of parallel processes of integration, they found that both forms of integration occur in unison. Student-to-student interactions tend to focus on academic activities and are significantly different in nature and variety from residential institutions (Maxwell, 2000; Reed, 2013). One reason for this

lack of progress is that almost all the research is on the "traditional" student even though the traditional student is now in the minority (Deil-Amen, 2012).

Current Integration of Psychological factors in the Retention Literature

Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson, and Le (2006) conducted a study looking at the contribution of various psychological factors to student outcomes, including retention and GPA. They looked at differences between 2-year and four-year institutions. They found that academic motivation, especially motivation that was connected to a particular course of study, predicted success in that field, but social activity had no relationship with GPA. Their results seemed to support the idea that social integration, which they called Social Connection, was predictive of retention in four-year institutions, but not in 2-year institutions. They did not address the issues of socioeconomic status, gender or ethnicity.

Continuing low persistence rates indicate that attrition remains a major problem that needs attention (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008). One possible reason is that there is a need for more focus on individual psychological factors. Moreover, Allen et al. (2008) noted that even when we know that specific programs increase the likelihood of their participants' persistence, such as first-year seminars and academic advising, lack of understanding how individual characteristics interact with program characteristics, prevent us from improving efficiency.

In fact, in recent years there has been papers that suggest a "back to the drawing board" approach where they attempt to redefine basic parameters (Lobo, 2012) or call for new research paradigms (Falcone, 2011; Forsman, Linder, Moll, Fraser, & Andersson, 2014; Kerby, 2015; Markle, 2015; Stuart et al., 2014). Some of these researchers

reexamined the sociological basis of retention literature (Kerby, 2015; Markle, 2015; Stuart et al., 2014). Others emphasized psychological constructs. Falcone (2011), developed a potential framework based on validation theory (Rendón, 2002) and Vickery (2012) used a grounded theory study to apply the classic psychological theory of force field analysis to the retention of nontraditional students. At the other end of the spectrum, Forsman et al. (2014) called for the application of complexity theory, an outgrowth and combination of systems and chaos theories.

Research on Persistence in Nontraditional and Minority Students

As previous noted, all the early research on retention and persistence (before Bean & Metzner, 1985) focused on the "traditional" student. Even though the traditional student is now in the minority (Deil-Amen, 2012), there is still a dearth of research dedicated to understanding the persistence process of these students (Wood, & Harris III, 2015; Smith, 2015; Markle, 2015). Research on the persistence of nontraditional students has mostly focused on the persistence of minorities/underserved populations at primarily White institutions. Knaggs (2012) looked at students of lower socioeconomic status at a mid-west four-year private college. She performed a grounded theory study and merged three sociological theories to build a new model for this population. She found that two significant factors contribute to persistence decisions, including integration into the role of a college student and adapting the role of an independent adult. The former factor was conceptualized as parallel to Tinto's two lines of integration, social and academic. The latter factor, adapting to the role of an independent adult, is based on a range of sociological concepts that can be subsumed under the idea of cultural capital. She

concluded that while specific stressors and motivational factors differed for each of her subjects, persistence was dependent on the ability to balance stressors with motivation while fitting in time to fulfill various adult responsibilities.

Garrett-Spencer (2011) based her qualitative study of African American men in a primarily White institution on Tinto's model. Using a case study methodology, she interviewed 16 African American male students at a primarily White college in order to access the factors contributing to persistence. She found little support for a Tintonian social integration factor in this population and suggested that a sense of self-efficacy, religious beliefs and the valence of family connection were critical factors in these participants' persistence. Brackett (2011) conducted a grounded theory study interviewing 12 students enrolled in a program designed to enhance persistence. She wanted to know what factors contributed to the enhanced persistence and concluded that affording the students with enhanced social capital increased the likelihood of persistence. When viewed through the Tintonian lens, she concluded that increased cultural capital translates into better social integration, but academic integration was not an essential factor for these students. Lin (2011) compared non-White and White students at a large public four-year research institution in the mid-west. With a sample of 530 students, 309 White and 221 non-White, she conducted a quantitative study using 12 different scales to assess student experiences. She found in that setting that cultural congruence, which is similar to acquired cultural capital, was a major factor for minority students but not for White students. For White students, persistence was stronger for students who felt a cultural affinity to the college culture from the outset, while the racial

and ethnic minority students increased their likelihood of persistence with a greater sense of self-efficacy. Wei, Ku, and Liao (2011) studied three different groups of minority students at a primarily White university and noted that at primarily White universities various minorities perceived the stress of being a member of a minority group as separate from other forms of stress and contributes to retention outcomes. In other words, although all students may experience stress, there is a unique form of stress that originates in being a member of a minority community, such as having to work harder to prove oneself. Several researchers (Torres & Hernandez, 2009; Villaseñor, Reyes, & Muñoz, 2013) looked at Latina/o students at both primarily White institutions and institutions that primarily served the Latina/o population and noted that mentoring could be a critical factor for student success. Not surprisingly, in historically Black colleges and universities the lack of diversity can be seen as a factor enhancing persistence (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010).

Community Colleges and 2-year Institutions

Community colleges differ from 4-year institutions in that they are primarily open-enrollment institutions. These differences also manifest as differences in student academic preparation, as well as various psychosocial factors including older students, a higher percentage of working students, but with a wide range of prior academic preparation (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). Braxton and Lien (2000) questioned the relative importance of academic versus social integration in community colleges and commuter institutions as compared to 4-year residential institutions. Based on the idea that students in two-year commuter colleges do not have the time for in-

school social activities, there is substantial evidence that academic integration seems more important than social integration (Braxton & Lee, 2005; Deil-Amen, 2011). Furthermore, Michalowski (2010) noted that a variety of off-campus factors could critically influence the decision to continue in college, as against dropping out or stopping out. None-the-less, there is also evidence that in community colleges both prongs of Tinto's model, academic and social integration can be critical (Jefferson, 2010; Karp et al., 2010) even though they may have dynamics that differ from the four-year institutions.

Minority Students in Community Colleges

There are some studies that focus on the experience of minority student in community colleges. Wood and colleagues (Wood, 2012, 2014; Wood & Harris III, 2015; Wood, Newman, & Harris III, 2015; Wood & Turner, 2010; Wood & Williams, 2013) have focused on this population in community colleges. Wood looked at various sets of extensive data and statistically analyzed factors such as financial concerns (Wood & Harris III, 2015), grade point average and other academic difficulties (Wood, 2014), institutional characteristics and geographic locations (Vasques, Urias & Wood, 2014) to determine the ability of those factors to predict persistence rates in the minority populations. His findings indicated that there are many similar reasons for attrition/persistence between minority students of different ethnicities (Black and Hispanic). While this was particularly true for academic factors, extra-curricular factors such as family obligations and financial questions had more significant impact for minority males in 2-year community colleges. Ortiz (2009) looked at the factors

contributing to the persistence of Hispanic students at one particular community college and found that structural factors in the institution that were perceived as supporting the minority student as well as individual support by faculty and staff were important in the overall success of the Hispanic students. While this finding was specific to one school, it aligns with Barnett's (2006, 2011) conclusions that validation from staff and faculty can be critical for minorities in community college. This gives support to Falcone's (2011) suggested model.

Technical Schools

Hirschy et al. (2011) formulated a model specifically for technical track students at community colleges. They built on Tinto (1993), Bean (Bean, 1981; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hirschy et al., 2011), Braxton and Hirschy (2005) and Reason (2009) and constructed a model that added career integration and student educational intentions to Tinto's academic and social integration.

For-Profit Schools

With all this research described above, there is almost no work done on the for-profit sector. This is surprising considering that there is evidence that in for-profit college Blacks have a higher chance of graduating than White students (Gramling, 2013). However, it is critical to understand why a student would choose to enroll in a for-profit school, which is typically more expensive than the schools in the public sector. There is one study that addresses this issue. Chung (2012) noted that while there is a preponderance of minority students at these schools, it is probably a factor of location since many of the for-profits school are located in the urban periphery. While this is

important, it seems that students from lower SES and students who had a high rate of absenteeism in high school are common enrollees in the for-profits sector schools.

Gramling (2013) found that some of the factors that correlated with success at for-profit colleges were similar to those in the public sectors, such as grade point average and family support, part-time enrollment seemed to enhance the chances of completing a degree. I found only one other study that looked at the factors that contributed to persistence at a for-profit college (Fernandez, 2011). It should be noted that Fernandez (2011) studied a large campus of a regionally accredited national school with students that had educational goals that ranged from associate's degrees to doctoral degrees. In this study, persistence factors were similar to four-year public institutions. Although there is much research on attrition and persistence, there is are no studies looking at the persistence or attrition factors at 2-year for-profit schools serving the urban community.

Conceptual Framework

Social Cognitive Theory

SCT (Bandura, 1986) serves as the conceptual framework for this study. As can be seen from the review of the literature thus far, virtually all the studies have been based on organizational/institutional models, concepts, ideas, and constructs, although there has been some attempt to integrate some of the concepts from SCT. In order to understand the psychological dynamics, it is essential to view them in a framework which is broad enough to capture as many aspects of human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and integrate them into that theoretical framework. SCT is such a broad-based theory based on a matrix of concepts. In this attempt to explore the experience of persistence it is

useful to employ three major components of SCT: reciprocal determinism, personal agency, and vicarious processes.

Reciprocal determinism. In SCT, Bandura (1978, 1986) outlines three major categories of behavioral determinants. These include the environment, personal and cognitive factors and behavior. He also calls this triadic reciprocity. What is important to emphasize is that in SCT the term determinism does not imply "determined by" but rather that these categories of factors work together, in a fluid, interactive, manner (Bandura, 1986). For example, SCT would posit that the behavior of enlisting in and attending a school will be affected by thoughts about persistence and will affect the attitude and perception of persistence. Furthermore, since cognitions can be defined as symbolic representations, the individual's understanding of the relevant symbolism will contribute and influence that individual's activities, goals and other future occurrences (Bandura, 2001).

Personal agency. Bandura proposed an emergent interactive view of personal agency (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Within the system of triadic reciprocal determinism, people will perceive environmental situations and possibilities for behavior, assess them according to the personal and cognitive factors available, plan and execute behaviors and reassess using the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards afforded. The concept of personal agency was of particular importance for this study in order to keep open the possibility of discovering the significance of planning, intentions, and the subjective feeling of changing one's mind. The SCT construct of personal agency can be further split into

intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura & Locke, 2003).

Intentionality. Bandura defines intention as "the determination to perform certain activities or to bring about a certain future state of affairs" (Bandura, 1986 p.467). As a psychological concept, intentionality is also central to phenomenology (Husserl, 1931 p. 73-80). Intentionality is the underpinning for purposeful behavior (Bandura, 1997). Intentionality has an effect on motivation as well as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). One important environmental factor influencing intentionality is the goal and its properties. A goal can be specific or general, a great challenge or lesser challenge, proximal or distant. Succeeding in school can be viewed as a general, distal goal as against finishing the semester or a particular course might be a more specific proximal goal. These factors, according to SCT, will affect the determination to achieve these particular goals.

Forethought. SCT views people as future-oriented in that behavior occurs in order to reach a goal or fulfill some purpose. This power of forethought is possible because of the unique human ability for symbolic conceptualization (Bandura, 1986). It is the ability to imagine positive outcomes that motivate present actions. On the other hand, cognitive projections of negative outcomes are essential for avoiding unwanted and disastrous occurrences. Furthermore, social cues can become associated with particular behaviors. As a result, people will either seek or avoid situations due to their subjective predictive value (Bandura, 1986).

Self-reactiveness. Self-reactiveness refers to the tendency of a person to modify his or her behavior via self-monitoring, and corrective changes in perception or behavior

according to personal standards (Bandura, 1986, 2001). The standards might be socially engendered and include personal and social moral standards (Bandura, 2001).

Self-reflectiveness. Self-evaluation is not limited to action and behavior. Humans have the unique ability of metacognition. Self-reflectiveness refers to that human capacity of thinking about one's internal, mental or psychological state and judge one's capacities and directions, and then adjust them accordingly (Bandura 1986, 2001). Intimately connected to self-efficacy beliefs, self-reflection allows a person to change attitudes and behaviors while taking into account internal and external, social and environmental factors that impinge on the individual.

Vicarious processes. Early behavioral theories postulated that direct reward or punishment was necessary for an organism to learn or modify behavior (Schwartz, 1978). One of Bandura's earliest objections to behavioral theory focused on the human ability to learn new behaviors without direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1965). This is more than just a mere imitative process. Bandura (2005) claims that it is the concept that is incorporated in the learner which allows for further development and creativity.

The two important concepts are included in the construct of vicarious processes: modeling and observational learning (Schunk, 2012).

Modeling. Although a model can be any observable sequence in which an observer can extract an understanding of the consequences and change accordingly (Bandura, 1962), efficient models are relevant and credible to the observers (Bandura, 1962, 1986). Schunk (2012) enumerates two functions of modeling: response facilitation and inhibition and disinhibition.

Response facilitation. Response facilitation is not a learning process rather it increases or decreases that likelihood of a particular behavior because the observer sees that the model's behavior engenders a change for the model (Schunk, 2012). When one student observes another student walking out of a school-sponsored activity with a free lunch the observer student is more likely to attend the activity.

Inhibition and disinhibition. Observing a model react to an environmental stimulus can affect the observer in either a positive or negative manner (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2012). If a student is removed from a classroom after making a disturbance, that student is a model, and the observers will be inhibited from making disturbances in the future. If, on the other hand, the disturbing student gets extra attention, the observers might be disinhibited and try to gain attention through making disturbances in the future.

Observational learning. Modeling can be seen as the "teacher" side of the vicarious process while observational learning can be seen as the "learner" side of vicarious process. Observational learning is structured into four sub-processes: attentional processes, retention processes, production processes, and motivational processes.

Attentional processes. There are a number of factors that will increase the likelihood that the observer will pay attention to a model. Some of these factors are inherent in the activity, while others are dependent on the characteristics of the observer. If a strategy for accomplishing a task is being modeled and the strategy has a high functional value it will more likely merit attention.

Retention processes. In order for behavioral change to take place, the observer needs to remember what was observed. SCT posits that retention is achieved through

extraction of meaning and transforming the message into a symbolic or representational system. This transformation is essential for the information to be integrated into existing cognitive schemata (Bandura, 1986). The details of these processes have been explicated more by cognitive information processing theorists than social cognitive researchers (Schenk, 2012).

Production processes. This stage is where the "learner" constructs a cognitive model of the observed model's behavior. In other words, the actual behavior is organized, or produced, in the mind prior to the execution of the behavior (Bandura, 1986). This production is achieved by matching the plan of execution to the concepts retained in the symbolic or representational systems.

Motivational processes. Bandura (1986) noted that people can have an efficient cognitive model of new behavior but might not ever execute that behavior unless there is a sufficient reason. This is the function of the motivational process. It is important to note that the motivating factors can come from three different sources: direct, vicarious, and self-produced.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as one's confidence to apply learned behavior to achieve goals and other outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). As mentioned previously, a greater sense of academic self-efficacy has been shown many times to contribute to academic success and persistence (Eastabrooks, 2012; Gosnell, 2012; Lent et al., 2005; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). In fact, in one meta-analysis, Robbins et al. (2004) found that self-efficacy was the best predictor of academic

persistence. However, those researchers did not place self-efficacy within the general framework of SCT.

Although the theory of self-efficacy was initially formulated as an addition to SCT (Bandura, 1977), it became an integral part of SCT (Bandura, 1986) as well as a robust theory unto itself (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been most often studied as an independent variable impinging on persistence even without considering other aspects of SCT (Brackett, 2011; Eastabrooks, 2012; Gosnell, 2012; Kim, Newton, Downey, & Benton, 2010; Luke, Redekop, & Burgin, 2015; Wood, Newman, & Harris III, 2015). Less often it has been presented within the framework of SCT (van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Efficacy beliefs are central to the sense of personal agency (Bandura, 2001) even while they are subject to the vicissitudes of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2001).

Dimensions of self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) enumerated three dimensions that can be used for measuring efficacy: level, generality, and strength. The level of a self-efficacy judgment refers to the difficulty for which a person feels efficacious. A person can feel capable of executing an easy task, a difficult task, or any level in between. The generality of a self-efficacy judgment refers to the range of tasks for which a person feels efficacious. A person might feel capable of executing arithmetic problems but not for math in general. Alternatively, a person might feel very efficacious in all areas of math but not for other academic disciplines. The strength of a self-efficacy judgment refers to the ease at which it is disconfirmed by experience. Some people remain resolute in their

beliefs concerning their capabilities despite numerous failures, while others lose their confidence at the slightest provocation.

Self-efficacy within the SCT framework. Since reciprocal determinism is a central concept in SCT, self-efficacy is affected by, and affects, environmental, personal and cognitive factors. Indeed, Bandura (1986) enumerates of two dozen factors that can either generate self-efficacy or are modified by self-efficacy. These include mastery experiences, observational experiences, interpersonal relationships, and physiological and psychological states. Furthermore, self-efficacy developmentally changes throughout life (Bandura, 1986) This implies that self-efficacy needs to be viewed as a dynamic construct. The majority of research studying the relationship of self-efficacy with student retention/persistence measures self-efficacy at a single point in time without considering its dynamic nature. Van Dinther et al. (2011) reviewed over 500 studies that studied self-efficacy in education and found only 39 that described factors influencing self-efficacy in higher education in a way that was compatible with Bandura's theories. These studies included survey studies and intervention studies, both with and without control groups. They found indications of a wide variety of influences on self-efficacy, but those interventions that were built on SCT principles were most effective in increases student self-efficacy. It is important to note that none of the studies cited in van Dinther et al. (2011) related to student retention or persistence.

Social Cognitive Theory and Student Persistence

SCT was first applied to academic achievement in a seminal paper by Bandura and Barbaranelli (1996) in which they found a complex set of interrelated factors

impacting on self-efficacy of children which, in turn, was able to explain a significant variance of the academic achievement in that population. This is significant because it was the only study that looked at a wide range of factors including socioeconomic status, parental academic efficacy and aspirations, pro-social behavior, depression, peer influences, moral disengagement, and academic, social and self-regulatory efficacy of the child. However, they looked only at early adolescent children.

There a few studies that look at some factors that affect self-efficacy. Based on the Bandura, et al. (1996) model Spruill, Hirt, and Yun (2014) extracted the factors that specifically related to efficacy of parents, peers, and self and added the factor of race to test influence on self-efficacy and academic success in male college students. Their results were equivocal, but indicative of the complexity of the questions. Singley, Lent, and Sheu (2010) studied the relationship between five factors from SCT, including self-efficacy, goal progress, social support, academic satisfaction, and well-being. They measured the participants at the beginning and end of the semester, thereby yielding a longitudinal assessment. They found that goal progress and self-efficacy had reciprocal effects, as per Bandura's (1986) theory. On the other hand, social support did not seem to affect self-efficacy. While the authors claim general support for Bandura's theories, they did not address persistence directly. In a case study of 16 African-American men at a primarily White institution, Garrett-Spencer (2011) found self-efficacy to be important for persistence, but she did not examine self-efficacy in the context of SCT.

Vickery (2012), in a grounded theory study, looked more closely at persistence in nontraditional students at a large for-profit school of higher education. She found three

central themes to favor persistence: social support, personal organization and an interplay of self-efficacy and motivation which she called “know thyself.” The theme of “know thyself” was directly tied to SCT, social support can be found in SCT, but personal organization was a newly found theme.

In an important study, Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007) used SCT to explore the how self-efficacy affected academic outcomes across various generational factors and how does self-efficacy change over the course of a semester. They found that nonfirst generation students had higher academic self-efficacy, but there was not a unique contribution of higher self-efficacy to GPA. Additionally, they found that high initial self-efficacy predicted academic success and adjustment to college life. They conclude that a high sense of self-efficacy can increase the likelihood of persistence and suggest that counselors apply the four sources of self-efficacy (vicarious experiences, emotional arousal, verbal persuasion, and performance) to boost students’ self-efficacy and help maintain persistence.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter serves to review relevant models of college student retention/persistence, review the contexts in which relevant research has taken place, and present a conceptual framework for the phenomenological study. To follow is a brief summation of the models, the breadth of research, and SCT as a conceptual framework.

Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) theory of student departure is a sociological theory that has become paradigmatic in this field of research (Braxton & Lien, 2000). This is a

longitudinal model that enumerates factors and influences from before enrolment in an institution of higher education till departure, be it graduation or earlier. This theory is based on the classic sociological theory of Durkheim (1951) and posits that students leave school due to a lack of social or academic integration. Tinto's model was based on research that focused on "traditional" students, meaning White students in 4-year residential institutions who began college immediately after high school. Although Tinto (1993) made some changes to reflect the experience of nontraditional students, such a minorities and community college students, the experience of those populations remained an open question in the research community.

Astin's Theory of Involvement

Astin (1984) attempted to simplify theoretical frameworks by focusing on student involvement. In this way, the focus was turned from the institution to the student. In other words, research could then be focused more on individual factors that contribute to how much a student involves him or herself in the academic community rather than what institutional factors promote student integration.

John Bean's Theories

John Bean's work (Bean, 1981; Bean and Eaton, 2000, 2001; Bean and Metzner, 1985) was the first major to challenge the applicability of the Tinto model for nontraditional populations. Bean and Metzner (1985) found that Tinto's major premise that retention was dependent on social and academic integration is not necessarily applicable to the nontraditional populations. For instance, older, part-time and commuter students did not feel a need for social integration on-campus. They posited that drop-out

decisions could be predicted according to specific defining background variables, GPA, environmental variables and student intention to leave.

A second factor that Bean and Metzner (1985) added to the discussion was the specific inclusion of psychological constructs in their model. This was later expanded to integrate aspects of four psychological theories into the prevailing sociological models (Bean and Eaton, 2000, 2001). These psychological theories included attitude-behavior theory, coping behavioral theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory. While the inclusion of psychological concepts shifted the discussion to include those constructs, the paradigms and models were still sociological.

Review of Current Research

Despite the fact that research on the retention/persistence of nontraditional and minority students has burgeoned in the last three decades, many segments of the college student population have not been studied. Most of the research has focused on either minority students in primarily White institutions and historically Black colleges and universities or students in community colleges. While most of the research is based on models such as Tinto's, Astin's and Bean's, the research indicates that different populations might have different dynamics depending on the social, racial, and ethnic characteristics of the students and in conjunction with the institutional characteristics, such as four-year vs. 2-year, residential vs. commuter, and nonprofit vs. for-profit schools. In particular, there is a lack of research on minority students attending 2-year for-profit schools.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's SCT was presented as a conceptual framework for this study (Bandura, 1986, 1977, 1997, 2001, 2005; Bandura and Barbaranelli, 1996; Bandura and Locke, 2003). The basic tenets of the theory were delineated including reciprocal determinism, personal agency, vicarious processes, and self-efficacy. Personal agency was described in terms of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Vicarious process was divided into the processes of modeling and observational learning. Self-efficacy has been applied to the field of student retention/persistence as an independent variable in many studies.

SCT was described in detail since this study used IPA. IPA requires the researcher to be immersed in the conceptual framework so that the researcher will be able to reveal in the data psychological value (Giorgi, 2012).

In sum, in this chapter the range of research on college student persistence has been presented, including three major theorists, Tinto, Astin and Bean. The current state of the research has also been presented covering various student populations and different institutional types. Finally, relevant aspects of social cognitive theory were reviewed and described in order to use these concepts in the development of the research questions, interview guide, and initial data analysis plan. In the next chapter, interpretive phenomenological analysis will be presented along with the specific methods proposed for conducting this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Despite 40 years of research on retention of college students, little is known about the struggles experienced by students when deciding whether to remain in college at for-profit, urban, 2-year technical colleges serving minority populations. Using IPA, I explored the experiences of these students. SCT was used as the theoretical framework to identify concepts for exploration, analysis, and interpretation. This methodological chapter begins with a review of the background and basics of IPA. The IPA method is then detailed, including selection of participants, data gathering through interviews, and analysis of the data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical issues that were encountered during the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The primary research question addressed by the study was: What is the experience of persistence in urban minority students in 2-year, for-profit educational institutions? The subquestions included:

Subquestion 1: How do students experience family support in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 2: How do students experience faculty support in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 3: How do students experience the classroom environment in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 4: How do students experience institutional policy in relation to persistence?

Research Approach

IPA was chosen as the research approach, as it is designed to explore the subjective experience of participants as they live through a phenomenon. IPA is built around three epistemological concepts: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. Phenomenology and hermeneutics have been characterized as separate traditions in the field of qualitative research (Patton, 2000), but IPA includes them as a united methodology.

Phenomenology is the philosophical concept that the subjective experience is embedded in the knowledge of individuals and is worthy of study. This subjective experience can provide psychologists with the data to understand how individuals understand and react to any phenomenon. However, one challenge is to isolate that subjective experience from the individual's normative and cultural assumptions. Another challenge in using phenomenology for research is that researcher bias is unavoidable (Chan, Yuen-ling, & Wai-tong, 2013; Fischer, 2009; Wertz, 2005). But IPA is designed to address this problem through a process of bracketing. Smith et al. (2009) describe Husserl's concept of bracketing as setting aside commonly accepted concepts and perceptions of the world to process the experience of a phenomenon from a description of a phenomenon. Additionally, the researcher's assumptions will taint the first reading of any data, so techniques are developed to identify assumptions and biases (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Bracketing is usually emphasized before the interview process, but the researcher needs to be vigilant about biases throughout the entire research process (Smith et al., 2009). Bracketing techniques include being interviewed by a colleague to reveal

biases, journaling during the process, and reflective thinking. In relation to hermeneutics, bracketing is the attempt to isolate the phenomenon from the interpreter's preconceptions, whereas hermeneutics suggests that it is not only impossible, but that the interactions of preconceptions on phenomena are reciprocal (Smith et al., 2009). IPA resolves this issue by delegating the bracketing process to a third party where possible.

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. Although it originated in biblical interpretation, it began to be integrated into psychological work in the mid-1970s (Homans, 1975). An innovation of hermeneutics was developed by Heidegger (1953/2010), who proposed that the encounter with a phenomenon can (and maybe should) restructure preconceptions accordingly. In other words, what is brought to any situation will influence the interactions and perceptions of that situation. Similarly, that environmental situation will interact with and influence conceptualizations and perceptions on the part of the person involved. The implication is that the interpreter's awareness of his or her own preexisting conceptions, experiences, and beliefs will assist in the interpretive process. Smith et al. (2009) noted another critical influence of hermeneutics on interpretive phenomenology: circular interpretation. This implies that the meaning of a word can only be determined by its context in a sentence, whereas the meaning of the sentence can only be determined by the meanings of its words. Furthermore, this reciprocity is valid at all levels of interpretation. The implication for IPA is that all interpretations needs to be iterative and not linear.

An important aspect of IPA concerning hermeneutics is that IPA involves a double hermeneutic. This means that the final product is an interpretation of an

interpretation. The person who experiences the phenomenon interprets it for the researcher, and the researcher interprets that interpretation. Here, the implication is that the researcher is bracketing, in some sense, the participants' interpretation of the experience. This forces the researcher to check his or her interpretations with the participant. This was important for the current research. Regardless of efforts to remove the researcher from dual roles by engaging participants from institutions not affiliated with the researcher, there will always remain a power gap between the researcher and the participants, which was true in this study because the participants were from underserved communities and I am not. Using the constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Fassinger, 2005; Ponterotto, 2010), the difference of power or status becomes visible and can then be more easily addressed. In this paradigm, the interactions between the researcher and the participants are interactive and are focused on uncovering the deeper meaning of the experiences. Although the constructivist position may be embedded in a social context (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006), this requires maintaining a realization that interpretation is likely influenced by the inequality of human interactions (Ponterotto, 2010).

Finally, ideography is the focus on instances rather than the population's level of statistically valid characteristics. One ideographical method is eidetic reduction (Wertz, 2005). Using neither inductive nor deductive processes, its purpose is to determine the meaning, structure, and organization of the studied phenomenon. It positions the individual as an agent of action and explores the subjective essential essence of that agency (Wertz, 2005). As Smith et al. (2009) noted, this is not the same as focusing on the individual. Instead, it is an in-depth, complex process of the discovery of the

relationships of the individual with the environment, both external and internal. Wertz (1983) describes in detail how slow, intentional focus on the reports of an individual's experiences of various phenomena uncovers psychological relationships that might be missed when using a nomothetic approach.

Although Husserl's concepts were developed in the framework of philosophy in the first half of the 20th century, they are gaining support from fields such as neuroscience and social science. Husserl's philosophical methods allow introspective analysis to extract the conceptual from the details of the experienced phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). To move this method into the scientific realm, the researcher needs to take the linguistic report of the participant and extract the conceptual meanings underpinning that report, thus interpreting the report using a psychological framework (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) suggest that researchers should avoid selecting a theoretical perspective prior to the study, which can contaminate the data with constricted worldviews, and choosing one theoretical lens that can preclude interpretations that might be obvious from another theoretical viewpoint. I addressed this issue by using a conceptual framework that is inclusive of both psychological and environmental constructs—SCT.

Role of the Researcher

When I started this research, I was an instructor at a for-profit technical college that served mostly minority urban population. I not only taught but advised and mentored many students during the previous 7 years. As a licensed clinical social worker, I have also worked with the urban minority communities for about 20 years. Over the past two

decades, I have not only become familiar with the struggles of people in the underserved communities, but I have worked to advance their lives. As a clinician, I have dealt with many issues that handicap the disadvantaged, from personal trauma to societal prejudice. Although such issues are only occasionally dealt with in the academic setting, I am aware that nonobvious issues can influence student success. To reduce the possible conflict of interest, only participants from other institutions and not from my place of employment were included. Nonetheless, there was a risk of an apparent power differential on two accounts. I am not a member of the target population and as an instructor and researcher, I can be viewed as a person of authority and power. The tools for managing these differentials are the same techniques and perspectives used in clinical interviewing. However, research requires an additional level of transparency and validity. This was addressed by being interviewed by a doctoral level colleague familiar with the population and qualitative research to reveal researcher biases.

Methodology

Participant Selection and Recruitment Procedures

The population for this study was urban minority students attending 2-year, for-profit technical schools. This defined basic selection criteria, including over the age of 24, not financially dependent on parents, delayed enrollment (not immediately after high school), minority status, and living in the city. The sample was selected from first- and second-semester students. Student participants were recruited through a snowballing technique. Former students and colleagues were contacted and requested to help locate potential participants. Those participants contacted me via e-mail. There were

interactions with the participants on three occasions. There was an initial screening interview via telephone or e-mail in which eligibility for participation was determined, procedures were explained, and consents were obtained. A second, in-depth interview was conducted during the semester in which the data for analysis was gathered. After analysis, a summary of the themes and conclusions was shared with each participant to verify my interpretation (see Smith et al., 2009).

Sample Size and Justification

Qualitative research requires a small sample size to facilitate in-depth analysis (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). In phenomenological studies, it is difficult to determine the final number of participants; however, a reasonable range needs to be determined prior to commencing (Robinson, 2013). Because an in-depth analysis requires a small number of participants, many experts suggest having between three and six (Smith et al., 2009; Robinson, 2013). If there is more heterogeneity in the sample than expected, that number might need to be increased by as much as 50%. However, due to several factors, including the closing and potential closing of many schools that served the target population, this study included four participants.

Saturation

Sample size needs to be determined with the goal of achieving saturation of the data. Saturation means that additional data does not increase the thematic thread that can be taken from that data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). According to Smith (2011), saturation can be achieved when each theme extracted from the data has more than eight examples illustrating the theme from at least three participants. In an exploratory study,

where the goal is to uncover factors, constructs, perceptions, or experiences, and the process entails clinically-based history taking, comparisons of data across participants, intuitive judgments, and references to the conceptual framework, a small sample is sufficient (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006) but may not achieve saturation of all constructs. Saturation was not sufficiently achieved in this study.

In this type of exploratory study, I was looking for alternative insights that would need to be further studied and possibly integrated into existing models and theories. If in a well-constructed IPA study, no alternative insights are revealed, the conclusion might be that the traditional models are valid for this group. Such a contribution would be valuable and significant. Despite the inability to claim saturation, reasonable insights were achieved.

Data Collection Interview

The second contact was a semistructured interview with a goal of exploring the experience of deciding whether to remain in college. With the third contact, the analysis and conceptualization drawn from the second interview were shared with the participant to edit, confirm, and validate those conclusions. Once each of the participants was identified, there was a follow-up phone or e-mail. We agreed on a time for a phone interview. This in-depth semistructured telephone interview lasted about 60 minutes. The phone interview was audiotaped and transcribed via NoNotes service.

Self-selection bias was an issue that had to be addressed in data collection (Robinson, 2013; Rönkä, Sevõn, Malinen, & Salonen, 2012). Students who have left school or those who are considering leaving school might not want to participate in a

study. To address this issue, a gift card for a local eatery was be given to participants as a token of appreciation.

Data Collection Tool

Smith, et al. (2009) recommended an in-depth interview format structured around broad, open-ended questions. They suggested between six to ten open-ended questions. Building on the extant literature an interview structure was developed. Follow up questions and prompts focused on the participants' feelings and thoughts that occurred with the process of struggling with remaining in school and the persistence decision.

Content Validity

Questions were developed out of the theory and research identified in Chapter 2. As discussed in Chapter 2, research on student persistence has demonstrated that factors of demographics (Fernandez, 2011; Gramling, 2013; Hagedorn, 1999; Lin, 2011; Reed, 2013), satisfaction (Barnett, 2006; Vickery, 2012), and academic and social integration (Eastebrooks, 2012; Jeffereson, 2010; Karp et al., 2010; Mertes, 2013; Ortiz, 2009; Poschea, Allan, Robbins and Phelps, 2000) have predicted student persistence with some success. Further, the theoretical frameworks of Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), Astin (1984) and Bean and Metzner (1985) have identified these factors as relevant concepts in their models. Additionally, self-efficacy, agency and other aspects of SCT have been shown to influence persistence (Wood, Newman and Harris, 2015; Vickery, 2012; Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols, 2007). Finally, as this study is phenomenological; the researcher also included questions concerning the personal experience and meaning of the phenomena in

question. Based on the aforementioned research, I developed a set of questions and probes:

1. What got you interested in coming to this school?
    a. Probe: Was there something, in particular, that got you interested?
    b. What did that (event, person, etc.) mean to you?
    c. Probe: Was there another event or experience that encouraged you to attend this school?
    d. How was your family or friends involved with your decision?
2. So, how is it going since you've started attending classes? What comes to mind now that you are a student?
    a. Probe: What do you enjoy most? [stories of particular examples]
    b. Probe: What is the most challenging part for you [specific examples]
    c. Probe: How has your experience in classes influenced your feelings about completing your studies?
        i. Have there been interactions with faculty or staff that have been helpful or challenging?
3. While you have been in school, how has your life changed?
    a. Probe: Can you give me a specific example of how your life changed?
    b. Probe: What does this change mean to you?
4. How else has your life changed?
    a. Probe: Can you give me a specific example of how your life changed?
    b. Probe: What does this change mean to you?

5. What comes to mind when you think about completing your degree and graduating?
    a. Probe for specific examples
6. What else comes to mind with you think about completing?
    a. Do you discuss this with friends or family?
7. What is your strongest asset or support for staying in school?
    a. Probe for details
    b. What else do you feel is support for staying in school?
8. What is your greatest obstacle?
    a. Probe for details
    b. What else do you feel is an obstacle to staying in school?
9. Was there someone in your life whom you experienced as a "force" – either positive or negative – in staying in school?
    a. Can you describe that person? And describe an example of their influence on your going to school?
    b. Has any of the school's policies made it easier or harder for you?
10. How did/does attending school affect your view of yourself?
11. Can you think of anything else that influences your experience of school?

At the end of the interview the participants were thanked and, they were asked for an email address so they can receive a gift card by email. They were informed that a follow-up contact would be initiated in a few weeks so they could review my

interpretation and suggest corrections as they see fit. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions are considered the raw data for the study.

Member Checking

After transcription, I summarized each interview and emailed the participants with a request to review the summary and verify that it accurately represents the intent of their responses. The participants were requested to send feedback via email.

Analysis of Data

IPA has a relatively strict structure that allows for interpretive flexibility and creative interpretation. This research followed the guidelines as put forth by Smith, et al. (2009). The steps involved in IPA analysis are as follows:

1. Reading and rereading, to immerse the researcher in the data and get an intimate feeling for the participant's perspective and worldview.
2. Initial noting, taking the text is perused for apparent intents and emotional processes exhibited by the participant and evidenced in the data. Three levels of researcher commentary are detailed by Smith et al. (2009): descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments.
3. Developing emergent themes that can be clustered as related or distant, while retaining the close connection to the participants' experience of the phenomenon.
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes. This includes abstracting themes to reveal super-ordinate themes and subsuming themes to reveal

lower-order connections can assist in developing an understanding of the context and function of the individual themes.

5. Repeating the above process for each participant, and then comparing across participants to reveal possible common themes or extractions.
6. Once all the interviews have been individually interpreted, a cross-subject analysis should be performed using the same basic techniques as the analysis of the individual interviews.

In addition to the above guidelines, for the IPA analysis, Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) suggestion to keep a psychological frame of reference will be adapted through the use of the particular conceptual framework of SCT. This means that during the exploration, interpretation, and analysis of the data the I remained open to identifying processes relating to reciprocal determinism, personal agency, and vicarious processes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2013), trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility can be viewed as synonymous, and they all fall under the general category of validity strategies. Since in IPA the information is from individuals, triangulation is not applicable. "Member checking" (Creswell, 2013) is used to establish validity. The purpose of the member checking procedure is for the participants to discuss, edit, and validate the summary of the interviews. Further trustworthiness is enhanced by review of the researcher bias, as detailed above. An audit trail of researcher reflections, analysis process decisions, and interview notes was used to corroborate interpretations and detect bias.

Smith, et al. (2009) discussed four broad principles that, together, constitute criteria for validity in qualitative research in general and IPA in particular. They are sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance.

Sensitivity to context is necessary from the very first contact with both the institution and the participants, but it becomes apparent in the analysis, review, and write up. Rich, detailed descriptions (thickness) was the goal. Contextual questioning in the interview protocol achieved this.

Close attentiveness achieves commitment to the participants during the in-depth interviews. It was enhanced by my personal history and commitment to the target population. Rigor refers to the completeness of the method and demonstrated efforts at thoroughness. To this end I emphasized idiographic engagement, meaning that the data and the analysis were rich in details and particulars that lead to in-depth interpretations that were validated by the participants by asking the participants to review the summary and interpretations of their interviews as well as the researcher's conclusions. They were given a chance to suggest emendations which would be incorporated into the final report.

Transparency and coherence refer to the quality of the write-up. Enough details are included that the research can be duplicated.

Ethical Issues and Procedures

When considering ethical practice, it is essential to consider the role of the researcher/practitioner. In IPA, the researcher's role is defined as an observer/participant, rooted in its double-hermeneutic process (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The

participant interprets his or her experience, and the researcher interprets that interpretation. The results of an IPA study are an interpretation that originates from the data from the person who shares the experience, analyzed by the researcher and then modified and edited in a joint effort of the researcher and participant. Since the goal is to present the experience from the participant's perspective, the process must be iterative. The researcher's role is to identify the broader concepts and constructs in the narrative, while the participant explores the details of the experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Since the psychological definitions and constructs are not available to the participant, the participant's role is to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the participant's experience.

In order to avoid conflict of interest and questions of dual roles, participants for this study were not recruited from the school where I was employed, but rather various schools throughout the country.

Qualitative interviews have the potential for evoking unexpected ethical issues (Aliwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Palmer, Fam, Smith, & Kilham, 2014). Some of these issues may originate in conflicts between beneficence and the potential of compromised research integrity (Palmer, Smith, & Kilham, 2014) or issues derived from an integral power differential between the researcher and the researched (Fisher, 2012). Although by their very definition unexpected issues cannot be planned for, the following discussion describes possible issues that were considered.

One issue that was considered is that students would see participation as beneficial for their schooling and withdrawal from the study as detrimental. This is one

reason why the study was not conducted at the school where I taught. During the initial contact, the potential participants were assessed to see if they meet the research criteria. The research was explained to them, and they were asked to sign the informed consent form. Three participants signed and mailed back a hard copy of the consent, and one participant agreed to the consent before the onset of the interview. It is recognized that the informed consent is the starting point for ethical concerns. In qualitative research, ethics is based on the ongoing respect for the participants and the implementation of the worldview that the participants are true full-fledged partners in the research. This enhances the possibility that their participation gives them a voice (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This is particularly important when studying the underserved populations. Each participant was informed of the progress of the research and how his or her particular participation can enhance the field and benefit society.

Another question that was asked is if the research intervention would unduly influence the decision-making process of the participants. Since the purpose of this study is to explore the process of whether or not to remain in school, it was expected to provoke some insight for the participants. However, this is generally seen as a nonspecific benefit and is noted in the informed consent form.

As Fisher (2012) noted, underserved and economically disadvantaged populations are often viewed, by researchers as well as by themselves, as vulnerable and disempowered. She suggests that the researcher's stance should be one of giving a voice to the researched population. As Smith, et al. (2009) point out, this issue is addressed in IPA through participant validation, which was the goal of the third interview. However,

this was not considered sufficient. As Aliwihare-Samaranayake (2012) points out, constant awareness of this differential can reveal other situations that need to be considered and negotiated. She notes that the setting where interviews take place needs to be perceived as power neutral, so for a participant that has recently left school, the interview would need to be off campus. The interviews were conducted via telephone which allowed the participants to be a location that was most comfortable for them, often in their home setting.

The study was designed to protect the participants' confidentiality. Not only were the names of the participants obscured, but due to the decreasing number of possible participatory schools, the names of the schools were also not identified.

Raw data was recorded on the researcher's hardware and kept in password protected files until after publication of the study when it will be destroyed. Printed forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office.

Participants were informed that if they experience distress as a result of participation, the interview would be halted, and a debriefing session will be initiated. This did not occur. All necessary means were taken to ensure their safety and physical and psychological well-being.

Summary

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was conducted to explore the persistence experience of urban minority students of 2-year for-profit colleges. IPA was the methodology used in this study because of its propensity to uncover new aspects of the experience studied. Four major sub-questions were examined:

1. How do students experience family support in relation to persistence?
2. How do students experience faculty support in relation to persistence?
3. How do students experience the classroom environment in relation to persistence?
4. How do students experience institutional policy in relation to persistence?

An overview of IPA was presented, and details of the method were outlined. Four students were selected through a snowballing technique and participated in semistructured interviews. Finally, issues of validity, trustworthiness and ethical questions were addressed.

In chapter four the results of the analysis of the data will be presented.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research was to explore the persistence experience in urban minority students in a 2-year for-profit technical college. To explore the subjective experience of the subjects, IPA was used to develop the data collection tools, conduct the data collection, and guide the analysis (see Smith et al., 2009). The research question was as follows: What is the experience of persistence in urban minority students in 2-year, for-profit educational institutions? The subquestions included:

Subquestion 1: How do students experience family support in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 2: How do students experience faculty support in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 3: How do students experience institutional policy in relation to persistence?

Subquestion 4: How do students experience the classroom environment in relation to persistence?

The chapter is organized into the following sections: Setting, Demographics, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Evidence of Trustworthiness, Results by Research Question, and a Summary of the Data.

Setting

I initially proposed to gather data from one school located in Manhattan, New York, and to conduct the interviews at the 2-year for-profit technical college or an appropriate location near the school. However, that school closed as did many other for-

profit schools in the interim. As a result, the participants were recruited from various schools in different parts of the country, and all interviews were conducted via telephone. The interviews of two participants, DA and TW, were from a home office that precluded the possibilities of disturbance or interruption. The interviews with MC and MV were conducted from a hotel room. Three of the participants were in settings that were free of interruptions, and one (DA) was at home with many family members in the background. Each interview was recorded via NoNotes technology with the consent of the participants.

Demographics

From the time of acceptance of the proposal until the data collection, a significant number of 2-year for-profit technical schools had closed including a school that had agreed to cooperate by allowing me to recruit students at the school. I modified the recruitment procedure with approval from the IRB and used a snowballing technique to recruit participants. Former students of the researcher as well as colleagues and other acquaintances were contacted to refer students who might be interested in participating in this study. Nine potential participants requested to participate, and four agreed, completed the consent form, and participated in the interview.

Participant 1 (TW) was a 40-year-old African-American female attending a technical school in Sacramento, California. This participant experienced a traumatic automobile accident during the time that she was a student in her program. She had extensive training experiences before being in school this time and was working for a national security firm for many years. She was married with two children, and her

husband was also a professional. Participant 2 (MC) was a 31-year-old African-American female attending a 2-year nursing program in New Jersey. She had previous unsuccessful attempts at pursuing a nursing degree. She was married. She has one small child, and her wife has four children. They live in a home that they own. Her prior attempts at attaining a degree were before she was "settled down." The woman she is married to has an independent cleaning business. Participant 3 (MV) was a 25-year-old Hispanic male studying motorcycle repair in Phoenix, Arizona. He had attempted to live independently prior to deciding to go to school. He had several jobs since finishing high school and currently works for his father in construction. This is his first attempt to pursue a secondary degree of any type. Participant 4 (DA) was a 24-year-old African-American female attending a 2-year human services program in New York City. She had a semester of community college prior to this and was unsuccessful in her courses. She spent a few months living independently while working in restaurants before deciding to return to school and to return to living with her family. All the participants were either financially independent or had been financially independent in the past.

Data Collection

Because the initial recruitment and data collection site was no longer available, the recruitment strategy was modified and snowballing was used to recruit students. Former students as well as colleagues and other acquaintances were contacted to refer students who might be interested in participating in this study. Over the course of 4 months, nine potential participants requested to participate. Three potential participants were disqualified because they attended a community college or a not-for-profit school.

One potential participant was disqualified because she was under 24 years old and still living at her parents' house. Another potential participant was disqualified because he was attending a 4-year program. Additionally, three students were referred to participate but never contacted me.

Interviews were conducted between December 19, 2017, and February 25, 2018. All the participants were interviewed over the phone and interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes to 68 minutes. TW was interviewed for 68 minutes, MC was interviewed for 40 minutes, MV was interviewed for 41 minutes, and DA was interviewed for 68 minutes. The average length of the interviews was 53.75 minutes. Prior to each interview, I obtained consent using the consent form. Three participants signed and e-mailed the consent form back, and one reviewed it over the phone before the interview. During the interview, I took notes of thoughts and interpretations I had during the interview. All interviews were recorded through NoNotes call recording and transcribed through NoNotes transcription service. Transcriptions were edited for accuracy while listening to the audio recordings. From the notes taken during the interview and the transcriptions, summaries of the interviews were compiled and sent to all participants for the voluntary review. They were urged to inform me of any inaccuracies or misinterpretations as well as to add any information they wished to share. None of the participants returned any comments although Participant 1 acknowledged receipt of the summary.

Data Analysis

Notes were taken during each interview. The audio recording of each interview was listened to three times prior to using the audio to correct the transcript. Each

transcript was then checked and corrected while listening to the audio of the interview a fourth time. Additional notes of my subjective impressions were taken during the coding process. These notes were reviewed and compared to the possibilities of bias as indicated by the results of the peer interview conducted prior to data collection.

Coding Process

In Chapter 3, it was proposed that the analysis of data follow a structure that allows for interpretive flexibility. That structure includes immersion of the researcher in the data, initial noting of apparent intents and emotional process, development of emergent themes, looking for connections, repeating this process for each participant, and then comparing across participants. Each interview was listened to at least three times after the initial editing of the transcripts and prior to coding. In total each interview was listened to for a total of six times. This was done to increase the immersion process. The transcripts were coded manually using an Excel spreadsheet. Each interview was coded according to the research questions and significant prompts. The first 10 columns were defined by the original research questions and prompts, and three additional columns were added after the initial analysis. These included a column for data that pertains to social integration, data that pertains to academic integration, and a column for any additional data that did not fit into other categories. The additional columns were generated from the theoretical and generally accepted constructs of social and academic integration central to Tinto's classic analysis. Relevant quotes from the transcripts were coded into the appropriate columns. Emergent themes were then specified for each participant and supported by connections and noted in a final column. Finally, an

additional row was amended to the spreadsheet to compare each research question across participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This section describes how I ensured trustworthiness and credibility of the study using the specific elements appropriate for IPA. I review the procedures employed to ensure ethical conduct and treatment of the participants and their rights.

Credibility

It was proposed that I would contact subject matter experts in the field to have them review the interview guide for coverage of the subject matter. I reached out to three experts, but I did not get any responses. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using the NoNotes service. This allowed me to stay as close to the original content as possible. Each interview was listened to three or four times before correcting the transcriptions to support an immersive process. Last, credibility is enhanced by sensitivity to context (Smith et al., 2009). This was achieved by verbatim quotes from the raw data.

Bracketing

For bracketing to decrease the likelihood that my biases would contaminate the data, I was interviewed by a colleague to uncover biases, took notes during the process, and engaged in reflective thinking. I was interviewed by Andres Rosado, PhD, a sociologist who has been teaching this population for many years. He noted that there might be an affinity for students who are perceived to have overcome social barriers and advanced themselves. He further warned me that I might tend to see social barriers before

verifying them. Notes concerning perceived emotional or evocative messages were written down during the interview process and notes that focused on reflective thinking were recorded during the analysis.

Member Checking

All four participants received summaries of the interview with an invitation to review and report any changes or additions that would improve the dependability of the data. One, MC returned a short comment,

> My wife is very supportive, but she doesn't have time. She is running her own business, and she don't get off much. So I have to get done all of the things that I did before. But I don't let it get to the kids. She wants me to finish and get a better job.

MV replied that he had no comments.

Transferability

Findings and data in qualitative research can be deemed transferable when the reader can perceive the data as similar in context to a second context of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although true transferability has been questioned because qualitative research is context specific (Shenton, 2004), Korstjens and Moser (2017) suggested increasing transferability by including contextual and background information, thereby thickening the description of the data. Because the number of 2-year for-profit technical schools had decreased during this study, the amount of context had to be limited to preserve confidentiality. However, thickening the data achieved through iterative

questioning. For instance, for each participant there were multiple questions concerning the experience of the family while in school.

Dependability

All the interviews were transcribed by the NoNotes service and then corrected by me. Interview summaries were sent to the participants for verification. The data were stored on a secure external hard drive in my office to minimize the risk of external contamination. All processes were reported in detail to allow for replication of the study.

Confirmability

For confirmability, an audit trail was provided. This included audio of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews, summaries that were sent to the participants, notes taken during the interviews, and annotations on the transcripts. Participants were identified by initials, and other identifying details were changed to protect confidentiality. One unified interview guide was used for all the participants. Flexibility allowed for deeper probing and a better understanding of each person's circumstance. Coding was done manually using an Excel spreadsheet. Verbatim quotes were incorporated into the coding sheets next to codes and themes to confirm the alignment between text and the codes and themes.

Results

Summary of Themes

Common themes were identified across participants for each research question and prompts. Four themes emerged from the data. These are presented in Table 1, with the associated categories and concepts that represent different aspects of each theme.

Table 1

Themes with Associated Concepts

	Themes			
	Social Support	Independence	Growth	Conflict
Concepts	Strengthening	Self-determination	Advancement	Balance of school with home or work
	Endorsing/approval	Self-reliance	Maturing	Conflicting obligations
	Reinforcing/Encouragement	Purposefulness	Self-reflection /evaluation	Hassle
	Assisting	Passion	Broadening of horizons	Friction
	Enjoyment			

Social support. This theme represents the experience of perceiving others as inspiring, supporting or promoting the success of the student participant. The concept "strengthening" emerged as relevant for several of the participants. Strengthening refers to an encouragement that is not necessarily directly connected to the school experience. For example, TW indicated that her children were giving her strength by giving an extra measure of unanticipated care. Concerning her daughter, she said, "she's been bringing me tea, trying to cook for me, which is sweet. Made me feel really good, and it's really sweet, and my son actually bought me a Starbucks . . . I was in awe."

"Approval" refers to a more direct communication concerning the school experience. It is expressed as consent or agreeing to the "project" of being in school. All the participants reported that there were people who approved of their being in school. MV noted that his cousin expressed approval in when he stated, "I'm really proud of you.

You should really pursue it and dedicate yourself to it." However, the other end of the approval spectrum would be disapproval. Moreover, MV stated about his father, "but at the same time I was helping him with construction, and he was kind of using me there too."

"Encouragement/Reinforcing" refers to the positive reaction of others or intrinsic to an event and is specific school-related behaviors. While it can be assumed that there are reinforcers active if these people are still in school, here, I was looking for the experience of being reinforced. DA was reinforced by getting good grades, and she expressed it when she said,

> I thought it was more social and more confident because as I saw my grades, I was like, I saw my grades going up. And then even though they go up and down sometimes, I saw that they'll make it easier for any student. I feel like the school was really honestly (besides the bad experience) I actually feel like the school is a good school and fact I am looking forward for the next semester and stuff I feel like the school is something that I was actually really involved.

"Assisting" refers to acts where someone else helps with some school-related task or to end someone or something hindering the accomplishment or end the experience of frustration. DA was very impressed with the amount of assistance she received from her teachers, especially one particular teacher. She said, "when I had questions he would kind of like help me make shortcuts on how to do such and such work."

"Enjoyment" refers to expressions of pleasure that was not necessarily about progress toward a particular goal. It could be an expression of pleasure that derives from

the advancement of the goal, such as when MV stated, “I found it very good to learn about the mechanical.” On the other hand, enjoyment also refers to pleasure that can be just plain fun, such as MC describing her teachers as “just very fun.”

Independence. This theme represents the experience of the need or desire to get things done alone. The concept of “self-determination,” refers to the experience of making decisions regardless of other people’s opinion. This includes whether or not other people expressed an opinion. TW discussed this dimension throughout the interview and it was a major concept in her experience. When asked if anybody else was involved in her decision she replied,

> No. just myself. I do watch, I have to admit, I watch a lot of ID channel, and I think that between that and the news and just keeping myself updated just makes me want to be able to be part of trying to help and protect people.

“Self-reliance” was also a concept that was common to all the participants. This refers to the concept that they could do it via their own efforts. When discussing support from family or friends, MC replied, “No, it’s just me.” Later on, she stated, “I have to study for six hours a night and still make a C or a B on a test and I’m grateful for that.”

“Purposefulness” was seen as determination and resolve to achieve the goal when viewed from the participants self-evaluations. This was also common amongst all the participants, although the faltering of this concept was of primary interest. When talking about her attitude towards school policy, TC stated, “as long as it don’t kill me, I’m good.” On the other hand, when applied to the experience of other people, such as staff, faculty, purposefulness refers to the focus on the professional task that needs to be

accomplished. DA praised one of her teachers saying, "…she knows what she is talking about. She knows what she is teaching in the class….I think she is a great teacher."

The concept of "passion" was evident in the self-descriptions of two of the participants, TW and MV. This concept implies that there is an emotional factor that drives the persistence. MV stated this explicitly when he said, "Yes, it's really of interest to me to finish. It's a real passion of mine." On the other hand, "passion" was also a term applied to instructors, as when DA characterized one of her teachers as, "Passionate about her experience working with people…I wouldn't say anything bad about her."

Growth. This theme represents the experience of "becoming" or moving from one stage of professional or emotional development. The concept of "advancement," or professional growth, emerged as relevant for all the participants, although to varying degrees. MC was very emphatic when she said, "I just want to get my education and get my license and work."

The concept of "maturing" refers to the sense of personal growth or the concept of dealing with greater responsibilities. This emerged in the interviews with DA and MV. MV was excited when he said, "I was a little immature when I started, but now...More mature, more dedicated, more efficient, more ambitious I would say."

A third concept that emerged within the theme of growth is "self-reflecting or self-evaluation." With the convergence of her obligations for school and the difficulties stemming from her accident, TW was in a critical time for self-evaluation. She stated, "You assess things by yourself. Hearing from her, hearing from my kids and I'm like I need to rest to relax. It was scary for me too."

"Broadening of horizons" is another concept within the theme of growth. This factor was apparent in the interviews of three of the participants, TW, MV, and DA. For example, MV stated, "It's made me a little more ambitious. Now I know that I'm doing this, maybe in the future I could do more, that's myself out a little bit more."

Conflict. This theme represents the struggle that the participants experienced either interpersonally, intrapersonally, or between roles or responsibility. It emerged as relevant for all the participants. The concept of balancing school with home or work was especially salient. This refers to conflict when it is not experienced as a conflict but more like a "fact of life," in other words, expected role conflict. It was not experienced as a need to yield one role for the other. For example, when TW discussed her role as a mother, she talked about learning to play video games with him and teaching him how to cook.

> I've been teaching him how to cook. I've been gradually doing that, but I told him, you know what you want to grow up and I want you to be completely sufficient and do not depend on a woman doing stuff.

The concept of "conflicting obligations" refers to role conflict when it was subjectively experienced as conflictual. This was evidenced when there was a need to compromise some aspects of another social role to fulfill the role of a student. MC notes that she pushes off family obligations in order to continue to study,

> if I wasn't in school and I was in work, I'd be running and doing things but with school, my main thing is like, maybe, like if I had two gallons of milk in the fridge, I will wait until there is less than a pint in and then I'll go get some milk.

The concept of "hassle" refers to experiencing conflict in intrinsic difficulties but not experienced and overwhelming. School rules fell into this category for most of the participants, but also things like difficulty in getting to class on time. DA noted, "There's times where it's like snowing or it's raining, and the weather is really bad so they understand and there's also train issues, so they kind of do understand."

On the other hand, "friction" refers to experiencing difficulties that are either overwhelming or are perceived as potentially overwhelming. DA had an overwhelming conflict when she was involved in a physical fight with another student and felt like the dean was ineffectual in dealing with it.

Analysis of Results

The results of this study are first analyzed by research question and then analyzed for emergent psychological themes and experiences.

Research Question 1

The results of the thematic analysis aligned two themes to clarify the aspects of family support, encouragement, and conflict. Family support, as experienced by these participants was important but not critical. All the participants noted that their families were supportive but other factors such as independence and growth were more important. The family system also presented a challenge to successful persistence for most of the participants. There was evidence of conflict that needed to be negotiated.

Encouragement. Although all the participants reported that their families encouraged their efforts to succeed in school, each one had a remarkably different experience. In two instances, families were influential during the initial stages of the

school experience, while in the other two cases, family support developed after enrollment. Even while the participants were attending classes, there was a full range of support from the families from a feeling of dependence on the encouragement, to appreciating but considering it irrelevant, to deciding on the academic path independent from the encouragement.

For DA family encouragement was critical in her decision to return to school. Her mother pushed her to go to school, and her mother's best friends were critical.

> my mom wanted me, she was asking me about school. She is like, so what are going to do now? You are not studying, like what's your plan? Are you going to work?" and "My mom's best friend was like, this is a kind of second opportunity for you…She was also, like, kept asking questions and stuff.

There was an explicit acknowledgment of encouragement apparent in some of the interviews. One example was when MV says, "…he tells me that I need to do my own thing. Yes, he really helps me with pursuing what I really want to pursue…He told me to take off work to go do my … thing," in reference to his father. MV also reported that he was explicitly encouraged by his cousins. This is in the context of emphasizing that it is his own passion and decision.

MC acknowledged her family's support but did not elaborate on it during the interview. Significantly, in her reply to the summary she said that she felt supported despite the role conflict, "it is difficult to get everything done, but I must say that they do support me. My wife will tell me how important it is."

At the other extreme was TW. She was fulfilling a lifelong goal, and her determination was independent of her family. She did not need their encouragement to complete the work. However, she did need their encouragement to care for herself to stay healthy enough to do the work. She was learning the importance of leaning on her family, the ways of positive dependence. She describes it like this:

> My daughter said something that made me want to cry. And my son. They said, 'it's good to see you sit down mom and relax, we're glad you're okay,' and they gave me a kiss on the cheek…I know they're watching me, but I never expected them to say that…Everything I'm doing, I'm doing for my family.

Conflict. Conflict with family was experienced mostly as conflicting obligations which often made it difficult to fulfill all their obligations. All the participants experienced a conflict between home obligations and school obligations, but the reactions were quite varied. They varied from seeing the conflict as challenges to overcome (TW), to benign and bearable (MC), to difficult and challenges to struggle with (MV and MC).

As TW tried to balance the burdens of school, family, and work, she would make attempts to get more done by pushing herself to the limits. In her words,

> My work is graveyard shift…so on my breaks I'm not only eating, I'm on my phone studying and stuff like that…I just try to take every little moment of the mommy time I have, and sometimes you really have to do stuff for you, but I focus so much on studying.

While MC noted that the conflicting obligations of home and school are her most substantial challenge. She described her situation, "So, I have to make time for those

things, that's most challenging of it all". She also insisted that it is not stressful when she said, "I don't want to say stressful, because it is not – it's not overwhelmingly stressful."

More friction between the roles was evident in the interviews with the other two participants. DA complained about having to live at home. When asked about how parts of her life made things difficult she replied,

> I had to go back home, and sometimes it's kinda hard to do homework when I'm home because with my brother and sister-in-law and the girls and my mom…it's always like the little girls will come into my room, and it's hard to pay attention when I'm home.

MV had a much more complex experience of this conflict. Deeply embedded in obligations to his extended family, he acknowledged the friction and viewed it as a normal life hassle that needs to be taken in stride. He tells the following story: "One day I had to my grandma's house to buy groceries and pick up some things from her house. I ended up staying there, cleaning up and watching television. I guess because she gets lonely."

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, How do students experience faculty support in relation to persistence? Most of these students found the faculty very important in their academic journeys. It seems that interactions with instructors is one of the most important factors that these students experienced. Social support was the dominant theme that emerged in the analysis, but the concept of purposefulness was also prominent. Within the theme of social support, assistance and enjoyment emerged. The concept of assistance expressed

itself in the descriptions of the faculty being always available to assist the participants. This was important for all four participants. They noted that it was encouraging that their teachers knew the material and were very knowledgeable. On the other hand, for two of the participants, the opportunity to enjoy their interactions with the instructors seemed critical. It was not necessarily the instruction that they enjoyed, but the person of the instructor, even while not in the classroom.

Assisting. Instructors made themselves available to help the students during class and afterward. It was appreciated as a way of helping to do the work as well as a way of checking in if the student was to be late for class. The availability was seen as a means of getting their tasks done. MC noted that her math instructor would be available to answer questions, but she preferred to tackle difficult subjects at home with a video. "I mean, I can stay, like he'll go over it but, like, I'm more learning when I go home and do them myself. But for the most part, it helps me to understand." MV was explicit in his description of this experience. "Times, they notice I'm a little bit weak and like if I do have questions, they'll help me out. Sometimes I visit them during office hours, and they help me out. But they are always there to help you."

Purposefulness. The concept of purposefulness, when applied to faculty, is synonymous with professionalism, seen as focused on getting the task done. Although this would seem to be one of the most critical factors in a student's experience, not all the participants expounded on this. It was not found in TW's or MC's interviews. In contrast, MV found a role model in one of his teachers, describing him as both kind and stern. "He is more like the rough and tough, but he is very great proper and very office-oriented like

business-oriented type guy. I like how he is a role model in my life." DA described this concept referring to an instructor that gave her a hard time and failed her. None-the-less, she praised the teacher as knowledgeable and passionate. She would not blame the teacher.

> I thought it might be different with a different teacher. It might be a little more easier because don't get me wrong, the teacher, she was very smart, and she is very intelligent, and she knows what she is talking about. She knows what she is teaching in the class…. Honestly, but the classes are hard for me in general.

So, while she was not able to stay at her previous school when classes were too hard, it seems that her respect for the teacher that was failing her contributed to her remaining in school.

Enjoyment. Three of the participants expressed some level of enjoying the interactions with the instructors, but on entirely different levels. MV was fond of his instructors and viewed them more as mentors. Nonetheless, he says that they are "really nice" and "really friendly." MC expressed it explicitly. "I do love –I love interactions with the teachers…for the most part they—they're just very fun. And they're really pleasant." However, DA was very excited about, at least one of her instructors. She called him "one of the greatest teachers that I've known." She described him as,

> really funny. He doesn't talk down to students. He'll ask students…he has a great personality…I would go visit this teach in his classes or when he is on break. I would, by mistake, we would walk by, and I'll see him, and I'll start talking to him because he likes Star Wars and he is like, I guess that's one thing about the

> teacher that is great is that he can have a lot in common with the students themselves. He likes the things that the students like and when it comes to conversations there's something always to talk about.

This is particularly significant because she talks about her previous school where, "the teachers really didn't care and don't really commit to the students."

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked: How do students experience institutional policy in relation to persistence? Participants in this study had a wide range of experiences with various aspects of institutional policy. The results of the thematic analysis revealed a theme of growth in connection to the students' interactions with school policy or their reactions to the policies. Additionally, the concept of assistance was prominent. School policy either enhanced their experience or was seen as a surmountable hassle on the road to completion and independence. Associated themes were assistance, self-determination, and self-reliance. There were significant times when school policy felt critical. Also staff intervention and assistance was critical. On the other hand, there were times when school policy was perceived as an obstacle. In the latter case, overcoming the obstacle was something that just had to be done.

Assistance. Two of the participants mentioned that they needed to interact with the school in ways that the school afforded them the necessary assistance. When the students took advantage of the policies of assistance for them, the help could have very well been crucial. TW and DA both talked about times when the school helped them through difficult times via school policies. TW talked about how the school counselor

advised her to take a break after her accident, and she would arrange it with her instructors that TW would not be penalized.

> My counselor…it was very sweet of her…She said you need to take a break. We can talk to your teachers. Whatever you need to turn in if you have it ready I will turn it into them. Take a break.

DA expressed gratitude when talking about the assistance given to her when scheduling classes because she wanted to avoid a certain teacher. “They always let you pick out your schedule, and they will tell you what time do you want to start and the show you like hey here’s your schedule.” so “I was really quite excited about it and I was trying to like not take the same teacher again.”

Self-determination and self-reliance. When school policy presented the participants with hurdles, the salient theme was self-determination and self-reliance. MC’s attitude says it clearly,

> If it is going to kill me, then I’ll say something. But other than that, I just (pause) I just want to get my education, and get my license, and work. As long as it don’t kill me, I’m good.

DA had a problem because even though the school had a “no violence” policy and another student attacked her, that other student was suspended for three days, which included the weekend. At that point, she considered leaving school, but

> Even when I had the fight, and I wanted to give up school,…to go to another school would leave me nowhere…I guess that’s what made me kind of just getting up every day in the morning and just keep going.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 asked, how do students experience the classroom environment in relation to persistence? The participants related the classroom environment to the concept of social integration. TW and DA discussed how they brought the connections from the class to outside settings. TW was very active in her study group and was even throwing a party for those students, but that was all outside of the classroom. Similarly, DA had a much greater focus on her friends from other classes and the club she initiated and ran. MC and MV downplayed any interactions they had in class. "I don't like to deal with stuff like that because I feel it's a social hour" (MC). "I wouldn't say I interact much with people….Maybe if I had more friends, I'd be able to study better." (MV)

Summary and Transition

Chapter 4 described the results of the data collection process. Procedures to enhance trustworthiness and credibility were explained. The process of analysis of the raw data was presented. Finally, themes and concepts were derived from the interviews and supported. The following themes were identified: Encouragement, Independent, Growth, and Conflict. Concepts that relate to each of the themes were identified. Under the theme of encouragement, the following concepts emerged: strengthening, endorsing/approval, reinforcing and assisting. Under the theme of independence, the following concepts emerged: self-determination, self-reliance, purposefulness, and passion. Under the theme of growth, the following concepts emerged: advancement, maturing, self-reflection/evaluation, and broadening of horizons. Under the theme of

conflict, the following concepts emerged: balance of school with home or work, conflicting obligations, hassle, and friction. For each one of the four research questions data was presented to illustrate how these themes and concepts were used to answer the questions and describe the experience of the participants.

Chapter 5 will compare and contrast the results of this study with the literature and will interpret and analyze the findings through the lenses of the persistence literature and SCT. Limitations of the study will be discussed as well as recommendations for further study. Implications of the results and data will be discussed, considering recent socio-economic-political changes.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this IPA study was to explore the persistence experience of urban minority students attending 2-year for-profit technical colleges. This study was designed to fill a gap in the literature in understanding the persistence experience of this population. Using IPA, four students from different schools across the United States were asked about the experience of persistence and the meaning of family, culture, and institutional factors that influenced their ability to complete college. Four common themes were found: social support, independence, growth, and conflict. Social support was indicated by the experience of perceiving others as inspiring, supporting or promoting the success of the participant. Independence was indicated by the experience of a need or desire to get things done alone. Growth was a theme that described the experience of becoming or moving from one stage of professional or emotional development to another. Conflict was experienced as any struggle either interpersonally, intrapersonally or between roles and responsibilities.

There were four subquestions used to examine dimensions of the persistence experience. The first question related to how the students experienced family support. All the students cited family as relevant but also as a source of conflict. Participants reported that family members provided verbal support and helped with household chores, but family responsibilities often conflicted with their academic efforts. Thus, the family was recognized and described as critical to their academic goals. The second research question explored the role of faculty support in relation to persistence. All the students expressed the importance of faculty for academic success. Some participants even

expressed engagement with faculty at an interpersonal level, describing their experience of their instructors engaging and fun. The third research question explored the experience of institutional policy. Participants did not mention any engagement or concern around financial policies, and their responses involved individual needs. This ranged from disregard to satisfaction and appreciation for the services and guidelines the school policies provided. The fourth subquestion related to how the students experience the classroom environment in relation to persistence. The classroom experience was not a significant experience for these students, and they related this question to social integration that occurred outside the classroom. Examples of this included informal regular peer get-togethers in Starbucks (TW) or impromptu but regular gatherings of peers for burgers or pizza to process incidents that happened at school (DA). These experiences were meaningful and influential for these students.

Interpretation of the Findings

Until recently, the emphasis in the persistence literature has been on institutional factors rather than intrinsic student factors. Most of the previous research has indicated that academic integration and social integration are crucial for understanding persistence (e.g., if students felt connected to the institution or student body then they were more likely to succeed). These studies are based on Tinto's earlier (1993) model, on Astin's (1994) and Bean and colleagues' work (Bean, 1981; Bean & Eaton, 2000, 2001; Bean & Metzner, 1985), and others (Alicea, Suarez-Orozco, Singh, Darbes, and Abrica, 2016; Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano, 2011). For instance, Camacho (2015) used Tinto's framework to study Latino college students and found that students' struggles with

academic and social integration were primarily influenced by societal and environmental issues that can influence the likelihood of persistence. Additionally, Mertes (2013) looked at Tinto's construct of social integration in a community college environment and concluded that faculty concern for students' development was the determining factor contributing to social climate. Ramos-Sachez and Nichols (2007) also explored how academic self-efficacy interacts with generational status and GPA, concluding that some other internal resource contributed to a difference in GPA across generations.

In contrast to previous research in the field, Tinto (2017) recently called for a focus on the individual students' perspectives. He proposed a model based on individual student motivation that is influenced by self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and perception of the curriculum. Although he outlined implications for institutional change, he emphasized a focus on the inner psychology of the students. In the present study, self-efficacy was an influential factor in the students' struggle to persist. Additionally, a sense of belonging was crucial, which included belonging in any social community rather than just a college community, to supporting academic goals. For example, MV felt a sense of belonging to his family, MC with her larger social circles, and TW with many communities, including family, work and school-based peers.

Social Support

As described in Chapter 2, some of the persistence literature included the role of social integration in how students remained in school. For example, Karp et al. (2010), using Tinto's (1993) framework, found that social and academic integration is essential for community college students' persistence, but there is a unique process for students of

urban community colleges. In the current study, findings indicated that for urban students of 2-year for-profit technical schools, social support was a major theme but not necessarily experienced as integration into the school social or academic structure. These students experienced social support as the experience of others as inspiring, supporting, or promoting academic success. The concepts associated with this theme included strengthening, approval, encouragement, assisting and enjoyment. Although each student felt supported by his or her family, each student had a unique experience and found support from various sources (e.g., teachers, friends, colleagues, and peers in addition to the family support). In addition, I found that fun and enjoyment was a factor that strengthened their experience in school. This is similar to Bean and Metzner's (1985) claim that satisfaction correlates with a tendency to persist in college. It could be from interactions with teachers, interactions with other students, or other peers, or even interactions with the academic material. Through the lens of SCT, the importance of enhancing the motivational process through positive environmental reinforcements is emphasized.

Independence

The participants in this study expressed various concepts connected to the theme of independence. This was indicated by the participants' desire to get things done on their own. Tuel's (2014) theme of motivation is similar to this theme of independence, especially concerning purposefulness and self-reliance. The current study also involved a similar population, as Tuel focused on minority community college students. However, the participants in this study also expressed a passion for their academic success that was

not dependent on environmental factors but could be connected to personal organization found in Vickery's (2012) study.

Growth

The theme of growth is common in qualitative studies of other college populations. For example, Tuel (2014) included it as a part of motivation for his participants. The participants of this study discussed things that were parallel to the quotes and themes in Tuel's study, referencing professional growth. Additionally, Knaggs (2010) found that low socioeconomic status students who participated in a college preparatory program talked about personal growth in terms of school attendance and becoming adults. Though this study included older students, personal growth is still a serious factor; even the older students related the feeling of becoming more mature and self-reflective.

Conflict

The theme of conflict represents the struggle that the participants experienced with factors that made keeping up with school more difficult. This is a theme that appears in almost all the qualitative studies of the persistence of nontraditional students (Fernandez, 2011). For instance, Fernandez (2011) found a general conflict between demands of school and demands of life and Cruez (2017) found that although having a job is motivating, time management around work responsibilities is the greatest difficulty. In this study, the participants noted various levels of conflict with family, friends, work and time management. Balancing time and effort to try to fulfill both school and family or work was the primary struggle for all the participants. However, there were

differences in the way the conflict was dealt with, ranging from determination to acceptance of the conflict as "just what happens."

Fun

One finding that was not obvious from the literature was the importance of fun. Two of the participants noted that the instructors were fun and one implied that learning was a fun activity. This description of the experience is difficult to find in the literature. However, Knaggs (2012) noted that one of the participants in her grounded theory study felt that it was easier to stay in school because it was a fun place to be. Marshall (2008) also noted that one of his participants had greater difficulty persisting because she was having fun in peer settings that were not supportive of her academic goals.

Through the Lens of Social Cognitive Theory

Because the problem of student persistence has been characterized as an "ill structured problem" defying a single solution (Braxton et al., 2004), it has been suggested that searching for general trends is insufficient for revealing the influences on students that help them remain in school. Tinto (2017) addressed this concern by suggesting researchers place a greater emphasis on the individual student experience. In this study, each participant had a unique path for dealing with the challenges of being in school. Although this data may lead to general patterns, as Bensimon (2007) said, it is often the unique aspects of the person's story that makes for success or failure. SCT was identified in this research as a framework that can accommodate these challenges.

SCT is an agentic theory, meaning that an individual will plan and execute behaviors using an assessment of the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards afforded. In other

words, the intention to complete achieve a goal will be maintained by the view of future rewards and the perceived ability to withstand the challenges needed to achieve that goal (Bandura, 1986). As when DA had to contend with overcoming a conflict to remain in school, the proximal goal was weighed against the distal goal of graduation. Falcone (2011) suggested that without understanding the contribution of personal agency, it would be difficult to understand the persistence efforts of students marginalized by social class background.

As an agentic theory, SCT claims that the individual perceives him or herself to be a decisive determinant of outcomes. One aspect of personal agency is intentionality, or personal determination to attain a goal. All the participants emphasized personal agency and expressed the idea that through their efforts they could persevere. While personal agency is an important component of self-efficacy, it is more than the sense of an internal locus of control. It implies inhibitive and proactive personal causality within the strictures of environmental pressure and control (Bandura, 2001). When MC acknowledged that there might be restrictive rules from the school, but as long as "they won't kill her" she can deal with them, she was exhibiting a strong sense of personal agency. TW consistently expressed her natural ability to be the determiner of her destiny, but, in fact, she was learning that there might be circumstances beyond her control since her automobile accident forced her to cut back on her academic activities. Even though her basic sense of her ability to achieve specific goals (self-efficacy) had not changed, there was a shift in her perception of locus of control. It was her agentic management of events that were beyond her control that shaped her academic trajectory. In other words, there

was a highly individualized interaction between her self-reflected abilities and tendencies, her high level of intention and forethought pushing her to achieve, and her decisions to cut back on academic activities to ultimately achieve her goals.

SCT discusses not only personal agency but also posits other modes of human agency including proxy and collective agency. Specifically, people can have a sense of control via influencing or being part of larger social structures. TW felt this to be an integral part of her struggle to succeed. She saw her education as a component of her ambition to be part of the protector part of society, and to join the FBI or the CIA.

Personal agency was less apparent in the experience of DA and MV. Although they both acknowledged that they had to put in a great deal of personal effort, they talked more about the importance of external events, such as family or social support, factors that are not in their control. On the other hand, as MV saw his grades improve, he took more control over his destiny and began to plan for an entrepreneurial life trajectory. This might imply more of an external locus of control, but by applying the principle of triadic reciprocity, we can explain how the behavior of success in school influenced his thinking about the importance of the social and cultural influences allowing him to redefine his goals and aspirations. Therefore, other mitigating factors supported their struggle to succeed in school.

SCT states that success in any endeavor is dependent on multiple factors, but key among them are the individuals' sense of self-efficacy for the particular task which is dependent on personal effort and the perception of a particular locus of control. Self-efficacy and locus of control are two fundamental concepts in SCT that can impact on

persistence (Guarino and Hocevar, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Enhanced self-efficacy means that when a person believes in his or her capability to achieve a specific goal, then he or she will be more likely to succeed. Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) found that self-efficacy was an important predictor of GPA but also conclude that it was not sufficient to predict persistence. They recommended the need to identify additional factors. Self-efficacy refers to the person's personal judgment of his or her own capability to achieve a designated goal (Bandura, 1977). Bean and Eaton (2001) proposed that high self-efficacy focused on particular situations and events will contribute to the overall connection to the institution and student persistence. Locus of control refers to a person's belief that reinforcement is a result of one's own efforts or permanent characteristics or a result of luck, fate or other external factors with the former termed internal locus of control and the latter as external locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Bandura (1977) emphasized that the two concepts are independent and warns against the idea that an internal locus of control can lead to a higher sense of efficacy and power and asserted they are independent constructs. In contrast, Bean and Eaton (2001) cited studies that indicated a strong positive correlation between the two. In this study the interaction between self-efficacy and locus of control was complex and individualized.

TW believed in her capability to achieve each one of her goals. She also attributed her successes to own efforts. She expressed a heightened sense of efficacy that was not as apparent in the other participants. There was both a strong sense of efficacy over a broad range of goals. MV began his journey because "I had no options" and felt he could have gone the route of his cousins that were not going to school. None-the-less, MV expressed

a growing sense of ability to succeed by noting that as he began to experience better grades, he gained more confidence. He talked about a "new mentality" and became infused with an inner "passion." When DA expressed her frustration, ("damn, I worked so hard went to tutoring every day, and I didn't pass the class....I'm really bad at taking tests."), she was expressing both a low sense of efficacy and an internal locus of control. On the other hand, she attributed much of her success on having the right teachers. The other three participants expressed the idea that they relied on themselves to achieve their goals, reflecting an internal locus of control. This complexity is found in the literature. Cavazos et al. (2010) found amongst Latina/o students an internal locus of control but contrasted with Luke, Redekop and Burgin's (2015) finding amongst community college students that they expect something outside of themselves to determine their success.

Limitations

As mentioned in chapter one, qualitative studies can gain transferability by the principle of proximity. When this research was initiated the literature indicated that this sector of higher education was experiencing an expansion and there would be a larger similar population in similar institution over the course of time. In fact, 2-year for-profit schools have closed down, and the population with these specific characteristics has shrunk. Additionally, the small number of participants limits the transferability of the findings.

The principle of explanation is dependent on data saturation, which could not be examined in this study due to my inability to interview additional cases. Thus, it cannot be said with certainty that the themes and concepts are fully developed. However, it is

possible that the conclusion that individualistic positive factors are essential factors for persistence and success in the academic setting would merit greater validation with a larger participant sample.

IPA is dependent on the ability of the researcher to delve into the depths of the participant experience on two levels. The two levels are, first while conducting the interviews, and second during the interpretation process. To verify my understanding of the interviews, member checking was requested, but only one participant responded with limited comments. Secondary interpretation of the interviews was conducted through an iterative process, but since this is my first IPA research and I have extensive clinical experience. Therefore, my interpretation began from a clinical perspective and moved towards a research perspective across iterations.

Additionally, interviews were conducted via telephone and thus it was impossible to assess the effect of a perceived power differential or perceived race or gender differential. This could have some influence on the course of an interview and the data gathered.

Recommendations

The literature review led to a conclusion that different factors influence students' persistence in different populations in differing institutional settings. Additionally, it was shown that the population that tended to attend urban 2-year for-profit schools was particularly underrepresented in the literature. Contrary to expectations, this population has dwindled instead of grown.

Tinto (2017) has recently called for a greater emphasis on research focusing on internal, psychological factors that promote persistence in college students. In particular, he notes self-efficacy and a sense of belonging to be factors that need further exploration. This study suggests that internal individual psychological factors may have more influence on student success and students' struggles to persist in technical colleges. Whereas Tinto (2017) suggested that a "sense of belonging" implies the sense of belonging to the social structures of the school or campus, this study found that belonging or integration can be a subjective feeling that can be satisfied elsewhere. Factors of social integration may be rooted in a subjective feeling of integration that can have its source in any supportive source, be it peers, instructors, family, or external social circles. The variety of supportive social integration needs to be further studied. It would be interesting and informative to explore the extent and effect of social integration across various realms including family, peers, professional or technical colleagues, classmates, and other social structures and when such categories of support are advantageous or detrimental for student persistence.

Self-efficacy is known to be a crucial factor for success and persistence. There have been a plethora of studies looking at the effects of specific interventions on academic self-efficacy. For example, Van Dinther et al. (2011) reviewed 39 empirical studies, and all but one of them looked at institutional factors that influence self-efficacy. The internal, subjective, ideographic perspective is lacking. This study has found that self-efficacy can have its sources in unique areas. Case studies or grounded theory

research can uncover the process of development of self-efficacy in successful persistence.

Psychological factors that impact on individual success need to be further research. Nomothetic studies may not be able to uncover the importance of individual psychological factors that can help or hinder a student's struggle (Lamana Finn, 2017) and qualitative, ideographic research is still essential for understanding how both successful and unsuccessful students navigate that journey.

This study found that there can be a fun factor that keeps students engaged. Other studies have noted this, but there are no studies that focused on this factor. This needs to be examined and determined what are the parameters of this type of positivity that can help students stay connected to school. Further, the fun factor may be particularly different across institutional type. It would seem intuitive that fun would have a different experience for an online technical school student than for a four-year residential college student that is known to be a "party school." Although this assumption should be examined, it could be critical to understand more of the fun factor as expressed in this study, where the teachers and classes were reported to be fun. There is a body of research on the use of humor in education (Banas et al. 2011; Wanzer et al. 2010). Exploring the influence of humor on student persistence is an area ripe for research.

Another point is that the finding that 2-year for-profit technical colleges have been closing in contrast to the indications in the literature when this study was initiated. It would be important to learn how this social-political-economic development effects the urban minority student populations that those school primarily serviced.

Implications

Although this study was initiated before the paradigm shift that Tinto (2017) called for, this study adds impetus to that change. Moreover, where Tinto (2017) called for institutional and curricula change, this study shows that motivation and other factors that impact persistence can be highly personal. School administrators need to be cognizant of the need to individualize their programs and build in flexibility that can contribute to increased self-efficacy and motivation.

This study indicated that the struggle to succeed in college is highly personal and idiosyncratic. Many nomothetical and correlative studies conclude that various programs or behaviors cause student success. For instance, Hwang (2015) states, "frequent meetings with the advisor increased the odds of completion, while talking with the faculty or participating in study groups were not significantly associated with completion" (p.162).

The concepts of social and academic integration, although they remain essential for some students in some institutional types, may not be the most appropriate for urban minority students in 2-year programs. Administrators and instructors need to be open to supporting the individual's support systems. Students who do not seem to be involved in school life may be getting their support from other sources. This awareness can help the instructors and administration in their interactions and their support of the students who do not appear to be involved in school activities. There should be an awareness and a mechanism for connecting with each student to ascertain what he or she needs to succeed.

Importantly, there is a noteworthy implication from the idea that even for adult learners school should be fun. Not only in the sense that there are activities that are designed to be entertaining, which has been the norm, but also academically and within the interpersonal space between instructors and students. College administrators need to encourage and allow opportunities for instructors to forge appropriate social contact with students that will foster an environment of enjoyment. This is particularly important while schools are growing through corporate acquisition and all schools are saving money by hiring more adjunct instructors. Adjuncts are typically paid for the hours they spend in face to face instruction which often does not allow them to spend time cultivating appropriate social connections with the students. Although there is a valid argument that undergraduate instructors rarely choose that profession for its lucrativeness, emphasizing enjoyable faculty-student interactions can have a positive impact on student success and hence school success. Developing compensation systems for these employees of the colleges would enhance the persistence of the students.

Conclusions

Although the specific population and school type combination that this study focused on is declining and not expanding as expected, it was found that the experience of succeeding in a 2-year for-profit technical school is both idiosyncratic and depends on individual perceptions of social integration, enjoyment, and achievement. After over 45 years of student retention and persistence research that has not significantly improved student success (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013; Tinto, 2006) this study adds to the shift in research direction spearheaded by Tinto (2017) to place more of a focus on individual

intra-psychological factors. Hopefully, such an emphasis will eventually find some structure for Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon's (2004) ill structured problem.

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