

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES' PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATING IN AN ASYNCHRONOUS
CREDIT RECOVERY PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Analysis of African American Female High School Graduates' Perceptions of Participating in an Asynchronous Credit Recovery Program

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Dr. Vivian Ikpa

Asynchronous online credit recovery programs have been implemented in public schools across the United States for a variety of reasons. In this case, African American female students who are deficient in course credits towards high school graduation have taken advantage of this relatively new e-programming mechanism as a means to capture course credits that were lost during the course of a student's high school career. Female enrollees in the asynchronous credit recovery program are lacking in course credits due to course failure for reasons such as truancy, excessive absences, maternity, incarceration, employment, health associated and domestic related demands outside of school. Beyond the aforementioned, the school climate in terms of organization, discipline, safety, and supportive relationships plays a significant role towards student success or failure. Because African American females are positioned at the bottom of the ethno-gender stratum, concentration on African American females is vital to ensuring academic success in addition to their well being.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate and ultimately understand the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of a group of African American female graduates while enrolled in an asynchronous credit recovery program. The study was guided by the following research questions: How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect non-traditional African American female's perceptions of education? How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect the lives of non-traditional African American

female student participants? What are the factors that contribute to the success of the non-traditional African American female student participants?

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, intense site immersion and observation, and thorough review of school district and student records. At the culmination of the data collection process, data analysis was conducted using the constant comparison method. Results from the data analysis revealed a reinvigorated perception of education as well as a reversal of lowered expectations, behaviors, standards, and attitudes while enrolled in the asynchronous credit recovery program. Enrollment in the asynchronous credit recovery program assuredly fostered academic success and strengthened the independent nature and identity formation of the African American female participants.

Several of the implications for practice are: strengthening adult/student relationships; culturally relevant professional development exercises; consideration of a female centered curriculum; address the at-risk student population as early as elementary school; and continuing research on the effectiveness of asynchronous credit recovery programs.

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of Raymond C. Thorn

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Any given school day in the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a kaleidoscope of urban minority school-aged youth are walking the street in various transitional states. Some children are huddled at the bus stop awaiting the arrival of the school bus while others are walking to school in small groups. However, many teenage males are congregating on street corners, females are sitting on porches, and both frequenting the neighborhood store for high calorie foods and drinks. For many, they are in the midst of transitioning from frequent absenteeism to truancy. You can witness this as one drives through any of the rapidly dilapidating neighborhoods. The number of students seen in the neighborhoods while school is in session does not take into account the hundreds more who inhabit their residences without leaving for hours and perhaps days at a time. These children, of varying ages, are not in school during school hours. Beyond being a compulsory policy, why are so many children absent from school, leaving school, and not graduating? What myriad factors are contributing to this dilemma? What policies and programmatic initiatives can reverse this skyrocketing trend (Rumberger, 2008; Steinberg, 2004)?

As a secondary public school student through the late 1970's and 1980's, my understanding was and remains that academic achievement is an active engagement that is accomplished through ongoing physical presence at an educational institution. Attendance enforcement in urban school districts has been a long-standing problem that affects school budgets, local law enforcement, and the judicial system. Research has a divergent view of this quandary. The existing

complexities in urban communities and institutions coupled with a negative economic malady further contribute to the malaise associated with the graduation and dropout rates of inner city minority students (Orfield, 2004; Vartanian, 1999).

On the school front, things are not palatable either. Urban school districts are limited in their capacity to reach the thousands of students who are at risk for dropping-out. Safety concerns, the lack of participant cohesion, high student-teacher ratios, dilapidated facilities, and performance pressures only inspire students to consider leaving school. Furthermore, programs earmarked for internal student support have inadequate funding and are vulnerable to elimination. Thus, these internal support programs do not receive the support necessary to assist a large number of students in overcoming the varying obstacles affecting their academic success, social and vocational development, mobility, and retention of those most at-risk for dropping out (Adelman, 2000; Gerwitz, 2009; Harris, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the motivations by which a sample of non-traditional African American females graduate high school by non-traditional methods. Through this study, a data rich interpretation will be developed via an historical context surrounding non-traditional African American females. Understanding that there is great disparity between the number of studies conducted specific to the academic achievement of African American females as compared to African American males, the need to research and study the lives of African American female students is of great importance.

This qualitative study will further utilize a life history methodology to provide insight as to the circumstances, processes, degrees of resiliency, and behaviors of a group of non-traditional African American female high school students as they fulfill their personal obligation to complete school and receive a high school diploma by non-traditional means.

Although it has been reported that dropout rates for all students have declined in the last thirty years, it is no secret to educators and researchers that minority students remain most at risk for dropping out of school (Brichler, 2001; Lofstrum, 2007) prior to graduating. With this being stated, policy, in the form of programs and legislative initiatives, has been promoted to stem the number of high school dropouts nationwide and encourage students to return to school to complete their education.

For example, The Promise Academy Charter School, which exists under a sponsorship agreement with the Cleveland (Ohio) Metropolitan School District, established a fully operational credit recovery school in a renovated local bank. The program opened in late August of 2008 and has the capacity to engage 750 students in an asynchronous online curriculum delivery model through a software licensing agreement with Pearson Publishing.

For this study, a similar online asynchronous curriculum delivery model will be considered as the programmatic intervention. The specific model was established to reduce dropout rates, help students meet graduation deadlines, and promote dropout returns to school. The growth of the program since its inception (2005) speaks to the growing number of non-traditional students whose enrollment in a traditional education program did not necessarily serve their academic needs. In 2008, the asynchronous program associated with this study enrolled one hundred and

twenty-three secondary students and graduated forty-three. In 2009, there was a fifty percent increase in enrollment (188) and a one-hundred percent increase in the number of graduates (88). There is an anticipated fifty percent increase in enrollment and another fifty percent increase in the number of graduates for the 2009 – 2010 school year. Although asynchronous curriculum delivery models have been implemented in various forms and for numerous reasons, this study will focus on non-traditional African American females and the effect that enrollment in an asynchronous curriculum delivery model has on participating student behaviors and perceptions as the potential to graduate is realized.

This study will shed light on phenomena specific to a group of African American females as they reach the point of high school graduation. The road many African American females travel is laden with obstacles, disappointments, failures, successes, and achievements. The purpose of this study is to establish an understanding of the processes by which these African American females found success through a non-traditional means. It is within their cognitive processes and responses to inquiry that a better understanding of the resilience of African American females is utilized for future studies and policy considerations.

Research Questions

The following questions are offered for investigation:

- How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect non-traditional African American female's perceptions of education?
- How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect the lives of non-traditional African American female student participants?
- What are the factors that contribute to the success of the non-traditional African American female student participants?

Definitions

Non-traditional students do not attend school on a full-time basis and are generally older than their grade level peers. Contributing characteristics can include: low academic achievement, high absenteeism rates, teen parent, and low socioeconomic status. These students were identified as “at-risk” during their year(s) attending an urban public school.

An African American female is a female of African descent who was born in the United States. For the purpose of this study, the African American female student would have been born to two African American parents.

Urban is defined geographically as an area designated as a city. Urban areas are the most densely populated areas of a region or state.

Asynchronous is defined as an event or series of events that do not occur simultaneously.

Asynchronous is most often associated with technology and the lack of a fixed time variable for completion of the technology based task.

A disruptive innovation is defined as an alteration to process and delivery that initially impacts a small population but increases its service population through ongoing refinement and integration.

A Credit Recovery Program is a disruptive innovation initiative that attempts to provide an alternative to the traditional classroom setting by affording a student the opportunity to recover academic course credits that were lost due to absence or course failure.

Individual risk factors are student-centered characteristics such as educational performance, attitude and behavior that have some connection to the process of dropping out.

Institutional risk factors are influential characteristics that exist within schools, households, and communities.

Delimitations of this study

The boundaries of the study exist around the non-traditional African American female subject as the primary focus of the study. Relative to location, the utilization of participants from a third class urban city is not to be drawn on as a means to generalize the situations of other non-traditional African American students in urban areas with significantly larger populations in geographical locales unlike the mid-Atlantic region. The geographical locale being a third class urban city in the state of Pennsylvania limits the potential for a broad association to other urban

cities as well as suburban and rural populations comprised of differing and quite distinctive characteristics, demographics, and established geographical area.

Non-traditional African American females have been chosen as the primary subjects because there is a lack of relevant research being conducted. There is limited capacity to rely on research applicable to this study because few longitudinal and ethnographic studies have been conducted specific to the African American female student population as well as the type of credit recovery program utilized for this study.

The study sample includes only African American females living within the City of Harrisburg's neighborhoods most concentrated by African American residents; communities comprised of multiple generations of African American families with dwindling economic resources, high crime rates, drug trafficking, high unemployment rates, and devaluing property values. The degree to which the responses and data are applicable beyond this study relative to race, class, and gender are questions for further examination.

Limitations of this study

The quality of the research is contingent upon the research skills of the researcher. A limitation of this study lies in that I serve as the sole research instrument. However, triangulating the data by analyzing multiple sources of data significantly reduces the potential for bias and compromise. Additionally, to strengthen the reliability and credibility of the research, I conducted member checks with the subject participants. This is to ensure the information initially put forward was, in fact, accurate, authentic, and true. Copies of the original interview transcripts were forwarded to the subject participants for their review. Additionally, through the

member check process, the subjects were provided the opportunity to address any statements that could be misinterpreted by the researcher and reduces the potential for error.

Second, the number of individuals/subjects used for this study is few, so the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population beyond the specific geographic locale of the subjects. The subjects are isolated within the study and are not brought forth for comparison with any other subgroup based upon race, gender, or class. Additionally, the programmatic initiative used as a strategy to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates will not be compared or contrasted against any other technology based program of the same name and should not be generalized beyond intent.

Third, quantitative research is easier explained than qualitative research. Therefore, I must fully describe the necessity to investigate such phenomena in order to make clear the significance of such a contribution. Finally, qualitative research requires many hours of analysis, observation, interview and transcription. Such time consuming processes require organization and a rigorous commitment to the research.

Significance of the Study

This study will focus, primarily, on the dilemmas and concerns around the academic success of the non-traditional African American female. Additionally, the study will provide information related to the integration and use of an asynchronous curriculum model as the tool of instruction. As stated, available research specific to the academic performance and the associated socially disruptive sources, affecting African American females is scarce at best.

Through this study, a descriptive analysis of the historical context, behaviors, self-concepts, and outcomes of a previously determined set of African American females is offered as an exploratory body of research specific to African American females and their relationships to academic achievement. It is necessary to investigate the phenomena through active research strategies because literature is insufficient to support the research framework. Thomas and Stevenson (March, 2009) and Davis (2003) state that race, gender, and class are often ignored when conducting educational research. For that reason, it is important to consider these categorizations as well as the connection and interplay of race, gender, and class within this study through the consideration of the theory of intersectionality alongside the methodology outlined for this study.

This study is significant in that it will add to a larger body of research exclusive to the African American female student and the causes of the social and academic issues resulting in a detachment from a traditional public school setting. Further relevance of this study will occur through the transparency of student responses towards a developed understanding of the reasons for a return to school by the student subjects. Significance will be realized through the perceptions of African American female assimilation, self-efficacy, and resilience while enrolled in an asynchronous curriculum delivery model.

Summary

To summarize, this study is relevant as it relates to the body of knowledge specific to the academic achievement of non-traditional African American female students. The established parameters of the study will ensure fully descriptive data are secured through the research. I

intend, through this study, to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning African American females. Because available literature is scarce, I intend to inspire further research on the academic achievement of the non-traditional African American female student as our social order and innovative educational strategies evolve.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is the review of relevant literature and research related to America's drop-out crisis and the relationship of such specific to an African American female population when we review pertinent documents that allow for the consideration and convergence of emerging themes. Additionally, the impact of a technologically disruptive innovation as an intervention to decrease the dropout numbers as well as the impact of such programs on a non-traditional student population is reviewed.

The literature selected for this study may be applicable to the study in terms of historical contexts, dropout rates, the process and causes of dropping-out, the connection of disruptive innovation theory to a non-traditional learning environment, and the subsequent impact of technology on a non-traditional African American female population. Further, the perceptions of the non-traditional learning environments and the possible connection to gender identity, race, and class may be appropriate when investigating the prevailing adaptation to a changing social dynamic and educational network within a specific segment of the African American female community.

This chapter will have three specific sections intended to solidify the belief that greater awareness to the present dropout quandary and its effect on the African American female is of great importance to urban communities and schools. The first section of this chapter will review trends and methods used to calculate dropout rates in addition to dropout statistics for the United States, the state of Pennsylvania, and the City of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. A review of

responses as to the reasons a student drops out of school will be the final viewpoint of this section.

In the second section, findings on the development of identity for African American students from a theoretical and cultural standpoint will be reviewed. This is important in that the research can provide a descriptive and developmental perspective on the value of academic achievement and the African American student. Although separated by gender, generalized interpretations drawn from studies on the African American community may be applicable to the subjects of this study. The research findings can provide a snapshot of larger historically cultural issues that are dissimilar to that of the majority population. In the final section, a dropout intervention is reviewed to expand upon the background, policies, and practices of an asynchronous credit recovery program. This is important relative to the impact of such a program as it relates to the non-traditional student population-especially students residing in an urban school district.

Gaps in the dropout research exist due to an absence of a standardized means by which to measure dropout rates nationwide as well as geographic and subgroup representation. Because the formulas used by school districts, state education agencies, and researchers vary, research has been conducted under the guise of different formulas. Also, due to the No Child Left Behind Act, school district reports and associated achievement studies rely on graduation rates rather than dropout rates. Additional gaps in the research exist because of relatively limited literature associated with the non-traditional African American female. Although a litany of resources exist relative to the African American student population, the sources tend to rely on research limited to African American males. Numerous searches resulted in generalized interpretations of African Americans as a subgroup amongst other racial subgroups as well as rarely delineating

gender. Research gaps also exist relative to the application of an online curriculum program. Because programming is relatively new within the realms of America's public schools, research is scant.

According to a report published by the North American Council for Online Learning (Watson, 2008), more than one million American high school students drop out of school every year and more than fifty percent of African American public high school students fail to graduate within the traditional four year time frame. Moreover, the number of students who do not graduate within four years is so staggering that under No Child Left Behind a number of states have considered and applied, through the US Department of Education, to use extended year rates without penalty to the law's accountability terms (Gerwitz, 2009).

Frequent absenteeism from school assuredly increases the amount of time students must officially enroll in school while acting as a gateway to dropping out of school. Marino (2008) identified three prevailing instances of nonappearance: Absenteeism, truancy, and school refusal. Marino defines absenteeism as a period-of-time away from school legally approved by the parent while truancy is absenteeism without parental approval. Too often, the assumed lack of adult supervision for potentially truant students leads to delinquency and anti-social behaviors.

Psychological research (Reid, 1999) indicates that truant students and unrelenting absenteeism yield a population that has "lower academic self-concepts, lower general levels of self-esteem, greater patterns of alienation from school over certain issues, higher levels of neuroticism and higher levels of antisocial behavior". Lastly, school refusal is an "inappropriate fear of leaving home" and/or an "inappropriate fear of going to school". The fear of leaving home can manifest

itself through clingy behaviors used as a coping mechanism for adolescents who have a historically cultural dependence on the family for safety and support. This parallels the fear of going to school which can eventually elicit separation anxiety and an overwhelming feeling of loss coupled with a fear of being alone (AACAP, 2008; Eisen, et al, 2006). These behaviors, if not addressed, can promote social and educational problems throughout a student's life. These problems are assuredly factors that further ensure academic failure. Unfortunately, there is not enough emphasis on studies relative to the possible link between truancy and psychological criteria such as anxiety (Brandibas, et al., 2004).

Absenteeism generally occurs at the elementary level when students have limited control and decision making capacity relative to their movement through the community. Truancy develops from absenteeism, often evolves into anti-social behaviors, and are assigned to secondary students who are deemed responsible enough to care for their transport to and from school as well as their own supervision through the peak hours outside of school.

No matter the cause, academic failure can seriously malign an African American student's ambition towards graduation. The ongoing absence from school or class can result in academic failure, which is amongst the contributing factors for dropping-out (Mayer & Mitchell, et al., 1993; McCluskey, 2004). Reports (Ormrod, 2008; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Schargel, 2007) have suggested that potential drop-outs can exhibit characteristics and risk behaviors as early as elementary school. Elementary school aged children who demonstrate low attendance rates are at risk for academic failure for a variety of reasons. These students do not have the opportunity to grow cognitively, socially, and academically due to increased time away from the structured learning environment. The earlier in life a student exhibits such repetitive behaviors, the higher

the likelihood for a student to be developmentally and academically behind their peers throughout their educational career. Thus, the drop out process can be set in motion by a variety of risk factors as early as elementary school (Alexander, 2001; Rumberger, October, 2008). Students entering high school are often several years older than their grade level peers due to prior retention and periods of high absenteeism. Age appropriateness along with course failure, retention, and developmental deficiencies are factors that contribute to dropping out (Rumberger, October, 2008).

Status Variables and Alterable Variables

Relative to this study, Lehr (2007) identifies two explicit tracks by which drop-outs are associated: status variables and alterable variables. As an extension to Bloom (1980), status variables are comprised of standard factors that are unchangeable or a challenge to change due to complex dynamics. Alterable variables consist of characteristics that are prone to flux and can experience a transformation with the application of appropriately aligned interventions. Status variables and Alterable variables consist of a number of contributing factors:

Drop-out Status Variables and Alterable Variables

STATUS VARIABLES	ALTERABLE VARIABLES
Race/Ethnicity	Behaviors
Gender	Student Grades
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	Absenteeism

Parental Employment	School Policy
Family Structure	School Climate
School Size and Type	Retention
Age	Support Services
Region	Attitudes
Ability/Disability	

(Lehr, 2007; Rumberger, 1995)

Although influential, no factor in isolation can be assigned to dropouts without considering the presence and impact of other contributory factors as well as the impact from the other variable. Indicating all potential contributory factors further assists in the identification of those most at-risk for dropping-out. In other words, an exhaustive investigation into multiple contributory factors reduces the possibility of under identification errors when identifying potential dropouts. With this, the combination of complex predictors is limitless as they play significant roles in the drop-out crisis.

Interventions to reverse dropout numbers have been instituted using both status and alterable variables as criteria. Recognizing what can be changed and what cannot be changed are important when designing intervention strategies and programs for at-risk students who have the propensity to drop-out of school. Although informative and influential in decision-making, status variables are comprised of factors that extend beyond the scope of school district interventions.

Research (Christenson, 2004, page 36; Lehr, 2007) indicates that schools are best suited to address the alterable variables due to their “utility” and capacity to change. Nevertheless, the convergence of status variables and alterable variables toward comprehensive policy development that positively affects the outcomes of student achievement is a topic for further investigation.

Dropout Factories

In 2007, Johns Hopkins University researcher, Robert Balfanz, published a controversial report for the Associated Press that identified 1,700 schools nationwide that they consider dropout factories (Zuckerbrod, 2007). The study of 13,562 high schools nationwide found that almost 2,000 schools failed to graduate sixty percent or more of their students in a traditional four-year time span. Balfanz (2006) states that schools labeled as such have “weak promoting power”. Conducted using a three-year average for the school years 2004, 2005, and 2006, the study was restricted to regular and vocational education high schools that have an enrollment of at least 100 secondary students who began high school in ninth grade.

Characteristically, many of these school districts are in urban areas having high population and poverty rates, high unemployment rates, and a high percentage of minority and second language students. Although the school district utilized for this study is labeled a drop-out factory in the Johns Hopkins study, the majority of the schools exist within America’s largest cities in states such as Texas, North Carolina, California, Michigan, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. Three connecting southern states carried the largest percentage of drop-out factories: Georgia (38.7%), South Carolina (51.89%), and Florida (51.1%). From the inside, many of the urban schools lack

physical resources including access to technology, current materials, and physically sound structures. In addition, these schools have a high rate of teacher turnover as well as an unacceptable number of teachers who are assigned to teach courses that they are unqualified to teach (Jacob, 2007; Lankford, 2002; Peske, 2006; Tillman, 2008). These factors limit school districts in their capacity to function and nurture the positive relationships necessary to support the academic and social growth for America's most at-risk student population.

Within the national attention brought to the study, opposition to the Johns Hopkins' study presented itself in the form of school district reports, newspaper articles and editorials, and national media coverage (Blair, 2007). Amidst the articles, statements, and reports, arguments against the study were entrenched in the use of the words *drop-out factory* to define these struggling schools as well as the methodology used for the study (Blasik, 2007; Hamamoto, 2007; Haywood, 2007; Neiderbach, 2008). School districts have argued that student transfers, incarceration, grade retention, expulsion, and death account for a significant number of those who are considered drop-outs (Heintz, 2007). To the contrary, the transfer and incarceration notion has been dubbed a political shell game perpetrated by school districts to hide the large number of actual drop-outs (Dillon, 2008; Hayes, 2009) while elevating the number of graduates (Grayson, 2009).

In addition to a statement published through the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University (<http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/images/AP.html>), Robert Balfanz responded to the criticisms from his detractors in a 2007 report by the Alliance for Excellent Education:

We acknowledge that some people may view the term 'Dropout Factory' as a harsh and unfair term. We use it to describe a harsh and unfair situation, under-resourced and over-challenged high schools which educate primarily low-income and minority students and year after year are unable to graduate the majority or near majority of students who enter the school. We recognize that these schools are filled with hard-working and dedicated teachers and administrators and resilient students. Our goal is to shine a spotlight on what has been called a 'Silent Epidemic,' the low graduation rates of the nation's low-income and minority students, and to demonstrate that the dropout crisis is concentrated in a relatively small sub-set of schools. This potentially makes solutions more possible as resources and supports can be targeted to where they are most needed (para. 10).

Still, without a standard equation by which to accurately gauge graduation rates and drop-out rates, the true numbers and effective responses and solutions to this dilemma will continue to evade education departments, policy makers, and school districts as well as potentially compromise the authenticity of research studies.

Dropout Rates

Calculating National Dropout Rates

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, graduation rate calculations, as the flip side of dropout rates, do not adequately communicate the gravity of the dropout numbers across the United States. Emphasis on graduation rates without formal consideration for dropout rates skews the true effectiveness of our nation's public schools. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) states the disparity between graduation rate formulas and those created by independent research yields an eleven percent difference between federal, state, and independent reports. This disparity brings to question the number of students overlooked in data collection methodology and reporting relative to the true graduation and dropout numbers (Greene, 2002).

National dropout rates vary under two principal reporting sources and one longitudinal study: The Current Population Survey (CPS), the Common Core of Data (CCD) survey, and the Cohort or Longitudinal Studies Program (Laird, 2006; Lehr, 2004). The Current Population Survey is performed through the US Department of the Census and the National Center for Education Statistics. The US Department of Education, state education agencies, and local education agencies perform the Common Core of Data survey (Hamby, 1989). Because methods vary, there is no standardized means by which to calculate national dropout rates (Orfield, 2004; Swanson, 2003). Conflicting sources may provide deceiving reports that do not necessarily communicate the gravity of the dilemma due to an inability to gauge the rates of subgroups (Heckman, 2008).

National and state reporting utilize four different rate scales to identify dropouts and graduates: Event dropout rate, status dropout rate, status completion rate, and the averaged freshman graduation rate (Laird, 2006). The event dropout rate approximates the percentage of public and private high school students who exited school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the following school year. Status dropout rates are more general in that specific age ranges are used to identify the percentage of students who are not currently enrolled in school and have yet to secure a diploma or approved certification acknowledging the completion of high school. Status completion rates use the same formula as status dropout rates except for identifying the percentage of students in a specific age range who have secured a high school diploma or approved certification. Lastly, the averaged freshman graduation rate identifies the rate by which students entered high school in 9th grade and graduate within a traditional four year time- period. To ensure the average freshman graduate rate parallels Adequate Yearly Progress

through No Child Left Behind, GED recipients and non-regular diplomas are not considered in reporting.

Without a consistent measuring tool as an indicator of true drop-out rates, school districts, state agencies, and those charged with ensuring accountability find themselves immersed in a quagmire of inaccuracy and discrepant resource allocation. The need to address this dilemma and institute an agreed upon method is far overdue. Policy considerations and lobbying for a standardized equation must occur in order to gain a better understanding of this predicament and address the deficiencies.

National Dropout Rates

Despite the methodology used to calculate drop-out rates, there has been a significant decrease in drop out rates for all subgroups over the last thirty years (Laird, 2006). This may be due to the increased demand for high school diplomas and college degrees as the growing economy of the time incentivized the securing of a diploma or degree as a means to ensure financial security. Still, non-Hispanic White students remain less likely to drop-out than African American or Hispanic students (Child Trends Data Bank, 2009; Greene, 2001; Laird, 2006). This national trend is consistent with state and local reporting. Sub group national dropout rates have become more complicated to aggregate stemming from the inclusion of “more than one race” as a possible response to racial identification query.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics’ report on the dropout rates in the United States in 2003 (Laird, 2006), the four regions of the United States (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) have reported four different [status] drop-out rates. The northeast had the

lowest percentage of dropouts with 8.4 percent. The Midwest and West were near double digits with 9.0 and 9.6 percent respectively. The South eclipsed all regions with a staggering 11.4 percent.

Since 1972, the percentage of dropouts reported to have the most significant decline were African American and Hispanic students. Fortunately, this reduction, over three decades, has narrowed the gap between African American students and white students. Although all groups experienced stagnant periods, increases, and significant declines, there is no further indication within the study of the historic, cultural, economic, or school related factors affecting the rates. Relative to African American and white students, both groups have been able to reduce their respective dropout rates by almost fifty percent.

Event dropout rates collected over the same thirty-year period indicate that low-income student dropout rates are much higher than middle and high-income families. Like status dropout rates, the percentage has decreased for all groups but low-income families experienced frequent periods of flux during the 1980's while trending downwards through the 1990's.

State Dropout Rates

Pennsylvania Department of Education data for the period 1994 – 2004 indicate a steady reduction in dropout rates. The highest rate reported was in 1994 at 2.7 and the lowest in 2004 at 1.9. Although the Pennsylvania Department of Education stated the rates from the 2003 – 2004 school year were the lowest spanning a ten-year period-of- time, African American and Hispanic students had significantly higher rates at 4.0 and 5.2 respectively. Incidentally, African

American male drop out numbers exceeded African American female dropout numbers by twenty percent.

Further review of Pennsylvania Department of Education data reports suggest that despite the grade level of the student when leaving school, there are sizeable increases in dropout numbers between the ages of sixteen and seventeen during the 2003 – 2004 school year. The numbers for sixteen-year old students dropping out totals 942 as compared with 7,101 for seventeen-year old students in Pennsylvania. Despite the age of consent being seventeen, the nearly eight hundred percent increase is an indication of the critical importance in addressing this dilemma through prevention initiatives established as early as elementary school.

Local Dropout Rates

The school district directly associated with this study has experienced a dropout rate that is higher than both federal and state averages. In 1987, the district recorded a dropout rate of 5.2 percent. According to Mills (September 8, 2008), this was twice as high as the Pennsylvania state average. The years 1988 – 1992 saw the district dropout rate climb annually to a staggering 8.0 percent. By 2000, the district witnessed an 8.4 percent dropout rate. This rate was the third highest in the state of Pennsylvania behind Reading and Philadelphia.

In 2000, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed the Education Empowerment Act (2000-16). The act and the associated amendment to the Public School Code of 1949 allowed for the governance of the school district to change from a traditional elected board to the discretion of the Mayor of the City of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The Mayor appointed a five-person control board to replace the legislative arm of the school district (Wong, 2007). It has been publicly

stated that since the mayoral takeover, the district has realized a reduction in dropout rates from 8.0 percent reported in 2001 to 4.8 percent in 2008. Although the dropout rate has witnessed a reduction since 2001, this urban and primarily African American populated school district has existing rates that more than double the state average. The dropout rate for African Americans in Pennsylvania [as well as the Harrisburg School District] remains twice the state average. When compared to available dropout reports (Laird, 2006), there is no evidence of success in closing the gap that exists between African American students, predominantly African American school districts, and the larger state population.

The Dropout Epidemic

As the United States becomes less homogenized, there are myriad reasons why students drop-out of school. The many risk factors that contribute to dropping out create a multi-layered and very complex contextual structure. This is why schools and communities cannot view the issue of dropouts as an isolated phenomenon. The set of challenges confronting America's students requires interventions and preventative measures to combat the risks factors associated with dropping out.

School based dropout prevention programs address the academic and school centered causes of at-risk behavior. Although identification and intervention strategies have been marginally successful relative to student retention, these interventions are rarely effective when promoting academic recovery and when acting as an intervention to contributing external factors (Britt, 2006) and alterable variables outside of the school. Externalities such as family have great impact on the success of a student. Studies indicate that a family's culture and past relationships

with educational institutions are highly influential and can place a student at risk for dropping out (Hale, 1998).

Pennsylvania's Department of Education Secretary, Dr. Gerald Zahorchak (October 29, 2007), stated "boredom and a lack of challenges" as contributory factors in a student's decision to drop out of school in Pennsylvania. In addition to the collection of whole group and sub group data, the Pennsylvania Department of Education attempts to collect relevant data to study the reasons for dropping-out. The Pennsylvania Department of Education catalogues the results within a data matrix. The matrix lists six reasons for dropping out (Academic problem, Behavioral problem, Disliked school, Pregnancy/Child care, Wanted to work, and Runaway or expelled) within four program categories (College preparatory, Vocational, Exceptional, and General). The three most frequent responses in all program categories were *disliked school* (41%), *wanted to work* (21%), and *academic problem* (20%). As is customary with quantitative studies, the survey did not delineate why students disliked school. The Silent Epidemic (2007) stated that forty-seven percent of dropouts emanated from a lack of interest in school and the associated learning environment (Paulson, March 3, 2006). Unfortunately, reporting has flaws because dropouts do not necessarily comply with a school district's exiting process therefore creating a dilemma and inaccuracies in data collection and reporting. Data based upon the documented responses provided by students who have conducted official exit interviews with the associated school district do not represent the vast numbers of undocumented dropouts.

The MAEC (Mid Atlantic Equity Center) recognizes that there is a significant correlation between students who drop out and gender, race/ethnicity, and poverty. Balfanz (2007) states that numbers, geographical areas, and sub group identification [data] collection are necessary in

developing a better understanding of this phenomenon. In addition to the aforementioned, Britt (2006) advocates for longitudinal studies as a means to delve into the processes and perceptions of students beyond the quantitative data collected for local, state, and federal reporting.

The Texas Miracle and No Child Left Behind

Linda McSpadden McNeil's 2008 study of 271,000 students from urban districts in Texas indicated that the accountability associated with No Child Left Behind has had a significant impact on the number of dropouts nationwide. Although the 'Texas Miracle' of achievement in the late 1990's served as the impetus for No Child Left Behind at the federal level, research conducted over the last decade paints a different picture than that which was originally heralded as a great reform model for all to emulate. McNeil states that the pressure on schools to perform at a certain level has affected how schools are managed and how students are taught and serviced. In essence, McNeil acknowledged that student value is based upon their being an "asset" or "liability" to the school's success. Further, No Child Left Behind's increasingly stringent accountability measures only precipitate principals and administrators to group students by subgroups—identifying low performers, increasing disciplinary action for minor infractions, and beginning the process of moving a student out of school. Thus, a policy initiative purportedly implemented to bring more equity to education has actually increased the susceptibility of minority subgroups to further adverse institutional practices and policy. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) stresses the need for the implementation of a standard measure of graduation and dropout rate as well as a need for more responsibility on the part of school districts to eradicate the large number of push outs.

Push Out

The term ‘push out’ is drawn on to describe the means by which school districts utilize institutionalized practices to move the less desirable student population towards the exit door. Lehr (2007) states that negative incidences within school leave students with feelings of isolation and discontent. This pushing out can occur through repeated disciplinary action, standardized teaching methods, teacher attitudes, limited support, and even the pressure of high stakes testing (Oleck, 2008). A study of the African American and Latino populations in the Denver (CO) Public Schools indicates that minority and low-income students are “taught down to”. Using the excuse of stressors outside the school as a reason to lessen the amount of rigorous schoolwork, school districts ensure African American students enter each school year at an institutional disadvantage (Padres Unidos, 2006).

Investigation into the dropout dilemma in Denver found that district numbers reported a seventy-seven percent graduation rate for African American students. However, further investigation based upon freshman graduation rates found that in 2002 – 2003, there was a thirty-eight percent graduation rate when the traditional four-year scale is applied. In this era of mandated reporting and cash for success under No Child Left Behind, school districts determine their success based upon the number of students graduating in a given year. Nonetheless, these numbers do not contribute to the accuracy of dropout rates (Peterson, 2005). These inflated graduation numbers relay to the unassuming public that all is well and that schools are making significant strides and graduating great numbers of students. However, these graduation numbers do not reflect the disproportionate number of students who have unofficially dropped out, been pushed out of the system, are incarcerated, or have failed to graduate in a traditional four-year time span.

Thousands of public school students experience a push out. To the school district, these students are not representative of the dropout crisis. School districts tend to rely on graduation rates based upon the number of students graduating in a given school year rather than address the number of students who started ninth grade and subsequently graduated in the traditional four-year cycle. For example, the National Education Association's lobbying agenda reported that in 2001, New York City schools graduated 34,000 students while discharging 55,000 high school students. Although reports indicate that most students were transferring or moving, it is easy to bury thousands of push-outs into the transfer category. Therefore, true indicators of the dilemma are not available or veiled behind a shroud of secrecy and inaccurate reporting.

African American Females

The Feminization of Poverty

The National Women's Law Center's report, *When Girls Don't Graduate, We All Fail: A Call to Improve High School Graduation Rates* (2007) discusses the short and long term implications for females when high school graduation does not occur. Women who do not complete high school have limited opportunities to secure employment and receive wages that allow for financial security (Barton, 2005; Britt, 2006). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Governor's Alliance, and America's Promise Alliance indicate that dropouts are likely to be stricken by poverty, unemployed, have poor health, receive public assistance, and are often single parents with children who have an even higher potential to drop out of school. To stress this point further, a report prepared by Fogg (2007) for the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry indicates that during the year 1979, dropouts earned seventy-five percent of what high

school graduates earned and forty-one percent of those with a bachelor's degree. By 2006, that number had plummeted to under sixty-six percent when measured against high school graduates and thirty three percent when measured against those who had obtained a bachelor's degree.

Statistics compiled by city-data.com (2009) reports that 47.9 percent of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania residents who did not graduate from high school live in poverty as compared to a 17.5 percent poverty rate for high school graduates. Furthermore, female residents are more likely than males to be in poverty during peak working years (Jones-DeWeever, 2009). According to a report published by the Pennsylvania State Data Center (2006), females earn 74.5% of what their male counterparts earn in similar occupations. Moreover, the cost of childcare and the financial burdens on a female head and single-parent household places females at an economic disadvantage. Therefore, from statistical research, it can be implied that African American females have the most to gain by securing a high school diploma as we witness the feminization of poverty (Hilfiker, 2002).

Identity and Achievement

Historically, African American females have been relegated through various exclusionary social practices that exist as a part of the fabric of the United States (Lewis, 2006). The media's promotion of negative imagery through the denigration and portrayal of African American females as poorly educated mothers to illegitimate children affects the development of positive identity traits in African American female adolescents. Further, through the annals of interpretive commentary, African American females are overlooked for their contribution, self-determination, and ability to establish a sustainable balance through their efforts. Furthermore, a

study of African American females (Jones-DeWeever, 2009, page 16) indicates that their view of femininity “includes both hard work and perseverance; self-reliance and tenacity; care giving work and wage-earning work; along with egalitarian notions of sexual equality”. With minority race and gender status coexisting, the many exclusionary societal roadblocks that impede development, opportunity, and access to resources for African American females places their identity concerns and perceptions of their lives at the forefront for possible observation. Additionally, African American females are confronted with discrimination from an array of sources and directions. Discrimination in resources, education, and employment are primary discussion points when addressing the topic of exclusion. Exclusion, in this capacity, limits the academic success of African American females and can lead to low attendance that creates a cycle of low performance and interest, and eventually coerces a student to drop out of school (Lewis, 2006).

Literature is limited when addressing the academic success of African American females. Even more so is the insufficient literature around the growing number of non-traditional African American females residing in urban school districts. The consideration of the theory of intersectionality and Black Feminist Thought, as potentially evidenced within this study, may be applicable as a supposition to assist in the identification of the institutional and individual causes for the social and academic success of African American female students when race, gender, and class is taken into consideration. As I attempt to establish a relationship between rising social and academic dilemmas in terms of “cascading and stability effects” (Shapiro, 2008) the ability of the African American female to adjust to institutionally influenced phenomena should be considered.

Published in 1901, Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery* (1901) provides a historically descriptive account of the Black experience through the dynamic life of a historically prominent male figure born into slavery. As an autobiography, the writing allows for the examination of the growth of the African American during the transition from slavery to freedom. However, text on the African American experience by an African American female was provided as early as 1830 through the writings and speeches of Maria W. Stewart and later through the published essay of Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice From the South* (1892). Cooper's writings chastise the efforts of a White society and especially African American men in their attempts to address the issues of race through a single focus on the pursuits of males. She argues the point of America moving into the realms of a true democratic society with race and gender at the forefront of the progressive efforts.

To this point, inspired by the adolescent identity development studies conducted by Ruth and Gene Horowitz in the 1930's, Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1939, 1940, 1947, 1950) carried out several significantly innovative studies on racial identity. From 1939 through 1950, the Clarks published six studies with results that were impactful on the outcome of the *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision of 1954. This case, ironically, featured two African American female siblings at the center. Although groundbreaking with the "doll study" as a gauge of racial identity development and preference, the studies relied upon male subjects to argue the need to establish an integrated society and school system. Literature focusing on racial identity has grown in popularity as America has increasingly recognized diverse populations across the vast landscape. Nonetheless, the intersectionality of race, gender, and class has been male focused while discounting the importance of the African American female. Moreover,

Psychology textbooks have historically excluded ethnic females from their writings on female development (Santos De Barona, 1992) and the various tracks by which ethnic minority females must navigate.

Again, the voice of the African American female has been silenced and her experiences ignored. For years, the popularity of the Feminist Movement muffled the issue of race. This Progressive Era movement consisted of primarily white, heterosexual, Christian wives of the white middle and upper class. Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005), as a reform movement and as a resistance to racial exclusion, emerged from the original Feminist Movement to advance a cause more specific to the legacy associated with the African American female population in terms of addressing not only gender, but race (Morris, 2007). The intersectionality of race and gender was able to exist under the broader female centered agenda of the earlier Feminist Movement. This inspired women to seek deeper meaning in their existence and prompted a level of consciousness that evoked an inner networking towards social justice for all women.

As a consequence of historical displacement and disparagement, African American females are likely to be “assertive, confident, independent, and strong” (Jones-DeWeever, 2009, page 16) as an inherent mechanism of survival (Cohen, 1996). Too often, outspoken females are perceived as being boisterous and raucous (Fordham, 1993). Understanding that these traits are often associated with masculinity, African American females must often assume roles of responsibility historically associated with their male counterpart.

For the many residing in urban areas often wrought by homelessness, desperation, violent crime, and limited resources, African American females must use what are perceived as aggressive behaviors as a tool for survival. Unfortunately, this seemingly defensive as aggressive behavior crosses over from community to school often to the consternation of school administrators, teachers, and support staff who often interpret student behaviors as an indication of home life rather than as cultural difference (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000). The unfortunate result can be gender and/or race bias often culminating in a struggle that can be perceived as disrespect to authority rather than constructive inquiry or response (Morris, 2007). Lewis and Lockheed's (2006) study of social exclusion found that students are often on the receiving end of discriminatory practices by teachers. They state, "[w]hether discrimination is conscious and overt or subconscious and subtle, its impact is significant" (pg. 25). Preconceived and stereotyped ideas of African American students negatively affect the relationship between student and teacher as well as teacher expectations of students (Lewis, 2006; Thomas, 2009) whether behavior or ability. Teachers can exacerbate bias in the classroom and the larger school environment. Stereotypes surely abound as a convenient coping mechanism for some. These lowered expectations can create a devalued sense of worth and connectedness for students within the school system (Cohen, 1996; Jones-DeWeever, 2009).

James Marcia's Identity Status Theory (1966) offers an extension to the works of Erik Erikson's identity development by focusing on the concepts of crisis, exploration, and commitment. Within the fabric of the concepts are Marcia's four developmental states: (1) diffuse; (2) commitment; (3) moratorium; and (4) achieved. These states are independent components. Although development is generally processed and described in stages, Marcia's Identity Status

Theory does not intend to provide a sequence. The theory recognizes states of being that are influenced by different situations and circumstances (Schwartz, 2002). This theory may hold relevance in this study in that it attempts to acknowledge the process over the event. Phinney (1990) enhanced Marcia's theory by stressing ethnic identity exploration and development that begins during adolescence. Today, Phinney continues to explore the development of identity and the relationship to self-esteem in adolescent minorities within diverse cultural settings.

The term double jeopardy has been assigned to African American females by creating two distinct and separate veins; one being race, and one being gender (Greenman, 2006; Kim, 2008; Robinson, 2001; Sanders, April, 1989). The Theory of Intersectionality (Knudsen, 2006; Morris, 2007; Nash, 2008) intertwines this stratum in an attempt to address race, class, and gender in the conceptualization of an African American female population. Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990) as a juxtaposition to Critical Feminist Theory (Marshall, 2005) speaks to overwhelmingly oppressive patterns "by placing Black girls at the center of its analysis" (Jones-DeWeever, 2009, pg. 14) while advancing a clear theoretical comprehension of the intersectionality of race, gender, and class as aspects of a historically imposed system. To this point, Evans-Winters' book, *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms* (2005), places the African American female at the center while amalgamating several schools of thought including Black feminism. Through this study, revealing a broader image of the African American female can significantly extend the range by which African American females are positioned within society.

Esteem and Achievement

A review of studies and reports on the correlation between self-esteem and academic success yielded a positive correlation in a study (Thomas-Brantley, 1988) of 150 Midwestern public school students of varying performance levels. In addition, a positive correlation was evidenced when race and gender were considered. Ultimately, there was no difference when comparing races or gender when subgroups were considered. In another study, however, there was an inability to establish a substantial relationship (Bower, 1991) when race and gender were taken into account. The survey of 2,400 girls and 600 boys commissioned by the AAUW (American Association of University Women) reported that African American females maintain high self-esteem despite the occurrence of lower academic success. Jamie Victoria Ward (Saltzman, 1994) states that African American female students maintain a genuine sense of self-esteem by refusing to acknowledge the areas where there may be a lack of proficiency or adequacy (Cohen, 1996). Additionally, African American students who do not achieve academically often view their academic failure as irreversible due to inability (McInerney, 2002). The acceptance of inability in this capacity did not negatively impact the African American student's self-esteem in these studies. However, the acceptance of inability can be considered when addressing motivations relative to academic success, pursuits, and outcomes.

Like the AAUW's commissioned report, Harper and Tuckman's (2006) study on racial identity reported a devaluation of realms where African Americans have not customarily been successful. The study of 289 African American high school students from a Midwestern urban school district found that racial identification fluctuates while developing between the ninth and twelfth grade. The results also indicate that a relationship exists between cultural immersion and

academic success noting an ongoing deficit when ethno centered [African American] domestic lifestyles and academic strategies are not present in the home. Jones-DeWeever's 2009 study entitled *Black Girls in New York City* concluded that African American girls with a strong sense of racial identity had solid personal and family relationships, sense of self-worth, and exhibited higher academic performance.

Often, academically successful African American students who resist negative peer influences are perceived as *acting white* (Hilfiker, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Some students experienced situations of isolation from their peers when efforts to succeed academically were considered out of place or unattractive by a larger peer group. Conversely and unfortunately, many students growing through such a vulnerable and influential life period tended to place peer acceptance over the pursuit of academic excellence and were particularly willing to accept the values placed on them by a peer group. It can be considered that the devaluing of academic excellence stems from self-concepts born of negative conditioning brought forth through stereotypes and historically unfair practices (Fisher, 2005; Ogbu, 1991) or as resistance to majority norms (Hilfiker, 2002). This resistance to the educational construct of the majority mainstream fosters social exclusion and challenges a majority value system. This refusal to accept various societal norms such as educational pursuits places these students at a great disadvantage that contributes to lower educational interest, participation, and achievement (Lewis, 2006). The study recognizes that this period manifests itself during the early high school years when conflicts, dependencies, insecurities, and development are in the most severe period of flux and identity reconsideration. Notwithstanding, African American females are seen as being more appropriated to school completion than the African American male counterpart

(Saunders, 2004). The adult roles and situations of teenage African American females can contribute to higher rates of school completion for African American females when compared to African American males.

Berliner's (2008) study was conducted on a cohort group of 3,856 ninth grade students in a California school district. The focus on the reenrollment of high school students and the resiliency associated with such lends itself to the investigation on the characteristics and experiences of those who dropout and eventually return or overcome academic obstacles. For Berliner's study, the rate of reenrollment was highest for ninth grade dropouts followed by African Americans and females.

Support Begets Success

In general terms, there is no doubt that self-concepts and identity awareness are impactful on the academic achievement of America's public school students. The degree to which these self-concepts affect student achievement and resilience cannot be assuredly quantified. Evans-Winters' (2005) ethnographic study of a group of African American female students residing in an urban school district over the course of three years identified support systems available through community, school, mentorships, and federal and state funded programmatic initiatives. Jones-DeWeever's (2009) study of 128 African American females in New York City is an insightful study that investigates their perceptions and attitudes as they navigate the urban terrain of New York City. Many of the responses within focus groups and through surveys gives way to further understanding of this vulnerable population of girls. Survey responses identified the people in their lives that have had the most impact. The most influential people in the lives of the

female study participants have been mothers at forty-eight percent followed by female authority figures who play a significant role within the family structure. Unfortunately, fathers were at eight percent and teachers at three percent. The study did not identify the reasons for such a low percentage for fathers and teachers. The study concluded that simultaneous access to support systems such as mentorship programs, faith-based initiatives, community groups, and service providers aids in the resilience of Black [African American] female students. However, further investigation into the processes and stages of identity development for African American females remains valuable towards understanding the contributory relationships impactful on African American female values and attitudes towards academic achievement.

Asynchronous Models: Credit Recovery & Disruptive Innovation

It is safe to say that academic success rests among the intended outcomes of African American students (Lewis & Kim, 2008). Still, students lacking course credits have few opportunities to accumulate credits in a time-period that will allow for full academic recovery and timely participation in graduation exercises. Initiatives such as credit recovery programs allow the non-traditional student to realize graduation rather than turn to exiting the realms of academia by dropping out. Although not specific to race and gender, student motivation in e-learning/online programs has been studied (Blanchard & Frasson, 2004; Henry & Stone, 1999) to assess the value of motivational practices in e-learning networks to ensure success and reduce the anxieties of academic pursuits.

Because asynchronous curriculum delivery models or ALN (Asynchronous Learning Network) (Mayadas, 1997) vary in scope and purpose, it is important to frame the particular method of

delivery being investigated for this study. The credit recovery program for this study was established to reduce the drop-out rates of at-risk students and provide an alternative means towards graduation for the non-traditional student in the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Similar in structure to the program dynamics referenced by Trotter (May 21, 2008), the credit recovery program within this study is a self paced, online curriculum delivery model that provides the non-traditional student participant the opportunity to accumulate credits at a pace that is better suited to the student learner. Studies on the use of online credit recovery programs report that this type of technological innovation helps currently enrolled students retrieve credits towards graduation and encourage dropouts to return to school (Watson & Gemini, 2008).

An early objective of asynchronous curriculum delivery models was to enhance the learning of advanced placement students through an independent study component. This independent study component is asynchronous because the assignments and assessments are not bound by time and space as occurs with traditionally synchronous models. As technological advancements emerged, asynchronous models became primarily associated with computer based media or online applications and software. This independent approach to learning has become increasingly viable and accessible for all students through distance learning initiatives such as video conferencing, Blackboard™, web casts, pod casts, blogs, Wikis™, Twitter™ and privatized online learning programs such as NovaNet™ and Plato™. These innovations allow students the freedom to access and respond to the information within a flexible timeframe and without the necessity for face-to-face synchronous experiences. Petroski (2008) states that there are existing colleges whose students never attend a course on a physical campus.

Disruptive innovation is a theory founded by Harvard Business School professor, Clayton Christensen. Disruptive innovation challenges the framework associated with sustainable innovations. Sustainable innovations are internal improvements to an already existing system. Sustainable innovations can be referred to as periodic upgrades to systems. Although considered innovative, change is slow and results reap only marginal improvements. A disruptive innovation, on the other hand, is an advancement that significantly alters the sustained delivery method or product. This disruption eventually results into what can be interpreted as a natural evolution of a delivery method or product that ultimately displaces the formerly sustained method.

An interview transcription (Burkhardt & Duncan, 2008) notes Clayton Christensen as stating,

Online learning, a disruptive innovation, is starting to take root in many areas in the United States—both in and outside of the public schools.

Home schooling is a big area where online learning is taking off, but so too are areas of non-consumption within public schools like AP courses, credit recovery, and alternative education. As they take root in these places, they will begin to improve, and as budget cuts eat at the existing offerings in public schools, online courses will take on more and more of the load as more affordable options for districts that offer an escape from the barriers of time of the school day and more one-on-one and customized learning. (para. 39)

In the feature article *How Do We Transform Our Schools?*, Christensen and Horn (2008) support the customization of learning for the individual student by using computers to deliver a self-paced instructional model that offers alternatives to the expanding non-traditional population. The number of student enrollments in online programs has grown significantly over a period of seven years. In 2000, there were approximately forty five thousand students participating in

some form of online curriculum delivery model. As of 2007, the numbers had grown by more than twenty times (Lagace, 2008).

Credit recovery programs were established within urban public schools to support at-risk students in the accumulation of credits that were forfeit because of academic failure or during unstable periods resulting in lengthy absences from school. Further, these programs provided an avenue for the non-consumer, or in this case, the non-traditional student. If administered ethically, a credit recovery program can provide an alternative to the traditional school setting while simultaneously reducing drop-out numbers [of the non-traditional student consumer] and increasing legitimate whole graduation numbers for the home school district.

On one hand, school district officials have supported credit recovery programs as a means to assist an at-risk student population in the academic reestablishment of themselves through online credit accumulation. On the other hand, potentially limitless implementation of such initiatives can be obstructed because “established organizations are trapped in the industry’s architecture” (Trotter, May 5, 2008) and use technology as a tool of efficiency rather than as a transformative tool. Program detractors question the validity of such online programs because, until recently, there were no evaluations on the quality and rigor of online credit recovery programs (Trotter, July 2, 2008).

A disruptive innovation initially offers an alternative option to a previously established method of delivery. These innovations were not initially embraced by the masses due to a small population being recognized as a consumer. In the larger, established delivery system, the population being served by the disruptive innovation is considered non-consumers. This non-

consumer is labeled as at-risk or non-traditional when compared to the traditional high school student. As the disruptive innovation becomes increasingly efficient and the number of non-consumers grows, potential exists for the disruptive innovation to transform the organization (Christensen & Horn, 2008). Initially, these online programs were structured to provide a substitution for advanced placement courses when a course or series of courses were unavailable in the traditional high school setting. However, to the credit of the disruptive innovation theory, *Keeping Pace With K-12 Online Learning* (2006) states that more students are accessing the credit recovery program than the number of students enrolled in advanced placement courses. This is, in part, due to the increased enrollment opportunities through “for-profit online schools, state-run virtual schools, non-profit groups, and homegrown district efforts.” (Davis, March 26, 2009, pg. 8)

Reports on public school systems state that the nation’s public schools are “trapped within existing architecture” (Wilson, 2008, para. 2) as they are experiencing a period of turbulence due to increasing demands for course availability and customized education plans against constrained budgets. Advocates of online learning feel the current economic trend and the effect on school district budgets makes online learning an appealing consideration (Ash, March 18, 2009). Specifically, a quarter of America’s public schools cannot satisfy demands for advanced placement courses due to the deficient pool of certified instructors and the inability for school districts to offer these courses to the smaller population of non-consumers because of budgetary constraints. Additionally, the roughly fifty percent of students who have fallen behind in course credits are limited in their opportunities to reclaim credits due to course failure or time away from school (Horn, 2008). The current economic trends should cause America’s public schools

to reconsider the application of such technological innovations to a rapidly increasing service population at an affordable cost.

As the demand grows for alternatives to the traditional classroom setting, companies like Apex Learning, Pearson, and Plato Learning, Inc. have advanced the implementation of technology based course work for the advanced learner as well as the student in need of remediation and instructional interventions. The flexibility of such programming is embraced by an ever growing population that is within an ever changing social and domestic dynamic. These programs hold particular value to school districts by retaining students on enrollment rosters as well as increasing graduating rates and reducing overall dropout numbers.

Identity theory and disruptive innovation theory may lend purpose to this study while promoting further research on the topic of African American female perceptions towards graduation during their enrollment in an asynchronous curriculum delivery model. Disruptive innovation, through the application of an asynchronous curriculum delivery model, provides a considerable argument for the establishment of such curricula in the nation's public schools. Disruptive innovation may cause initial turbulence to an established organization. However, studies advocate for further investigation of such computer based programming as an enhancement to the educational process of the non-consumer. Related to this study, the non-consumer is the non-traditional African American female subject.

Identity theory and the associated causes of motivation, as referenced in the literature, is appropriate to draw on the behaviors and attitudes of a group of non-traditional African American females selected for this study. The intention of the literature review is to provide

additional references by which to interpret the findings when conducting interviews pertinent to this study. Identity status theory and any connection to academic achievement and behaviors in African Americans will be considered to support prior research on the African American community and, specifically, non-traditional African American females.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Because research on academic achievement has generally been quantitative, insight on the historical context, behaviors, and social attitudes of the subjects will provide a qualitative knowledge base to support both quantitative and qualitative studies on African American student achievement. Through this research, a significant contribution to the knowledge base on African American achievement can be provided. Although there is ample research from an ethno gender perspective and African American male perspective, there is insufficient documentation on the achievement of African American females, and specific to this study, the non-traditional African American female student.

Because the purpose of this study is to better understand the internal and external causes of the disruption to academic programming and the subsequent completion of school for non-traditional African American female students in a third class urban city, it is necessary to research the predominant causes using a qualitative approach. Unlike studies that analyze quantifiable measures such as retention, drop-out rates, program completion rates, graduation rates, and pass/fail ratios, this study will investigate the historical context, motivations, behaviors, and perceptions of the subjects as they navigate a non-traditional path to graduation through qualitative research.

Role of the Researcher

The primary research instrument created the interview questionnaire protocol as well as conducted, transcribed, and coded the respondent interviews and researched archived documents. Additionally, the research instrument was immersed in the site observation process. Prior to the study being conducted, the researcher resided in the City of Harrisburg as a former elected municipal employee as well as an instructional and administrative employee of the Harrisburg School District. Prior supervision of the study participants and personal investment in the academic achievement and success of all students warrants acknowledgement of such status within the study. This is important to note due to the researcher's professional relationship to the study participants and associated district personnel.

An explicit role within my tenure as central office administrator, site administrator, and program director was the evaluation of budgets, operations, professional personnel, and student outcomes. Past opportunities to create, observe, and evaluate internal school programs assisted the researcher during the site immersion and interview periods. While observing the behaviors and occurrences within the program, the gathering of descriptive data based upon the processes and contexts took place.

As the research instrument, it is necessary to ensure bias is limited. There is the possibility of bias due to former elected status within the municipality as well as former supervisory status within the Harrisburg School District. At the time of the study, however, the researcher did not serve in the capacity of employee for either the City of Harrisburg or the Harrisburg School District. Further, prior background knowledge and familiarity of the student participants could be

recognized as bias within the study. For example, bias could be realized within student responses to direct inquiry during the interview process as well as prior knowledge of the learning environment. The role as the research instrument within the asynchronous program had the potential to affect the study due to the physical presence of the researcher. These limitations must be acknowledged and will be indicated as necessary.

Internal Validity Threats

Because this study occurred over a specific period-of- time, maturation of the student as it relates to longitudinal studies did not affect the validity of the study. Single group threats in terms of selection were limited because there is no control group and the study is not quantitative in nature. The subject participants were selected based upon a set of established criteria. Validity threats were significantly reduced by triangulating data collected from the participating student population. This will provide additional data for comparison as patterns and trends are revealed.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, former students were engaged towards a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena at hand. The researcher made use of responses from a specific group whose association to the study was bound through enrollment and active participation.

The students, as a subgroup, were categorized by gender with the female population acting as the primary focus of the study. There is one group identifying the status of the female: Graduate (G). Female graduates (G) will have officially graduated prior to the current school year of the study. More specifically, a Graduate will have completed the necessary coursework, obtained the minimum number of credits allowed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and have

received a high school diploma through traditional channels for the previous school year.

Graduation, in this case, is defined by the successful attainment of twenty-four course credits as outlined through the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Harrisburg School District.

No student subject will be receiving any special education services at the time of the study.

The female group consisted of five African American females formerly enrolled in an asynchronous curriculum delivery model. The five African American females are identified as five female graduates who are (G) at least eighteen years of age, and began their freshman/ninth grade year enrolled in the Harrisburg School District. Additionally, the graduates selected for this study were not enrolled in another school district or juvenile placement at any time during their high school career. Graduate participants transferred to the asynchronous credit recovery program directly from a Harrisburg School District secondary site or their identified last school district enrollment, prior to dropping-out, were in the Harrisburg School District. The criteria set forth will assuredly reduce the number of eligible subject participants. Once the criteria was established and used to refine the pool of eligible subject participants, five female participants were randomly selected for the study.

All student respondents were labeled, initially, as non-traditional or at-risk based upon their age when enrolled in the asynchronous curriculum delivery model associated with this study. At-risk students, as defined for this study, are identified as high school aged students, aged fourteen through seventeen who have exhibited characteristics associated with students who demonstrate behavioral trends paralleling those who have not completed high school in a traditional fashion and/or within the traditional timeframe of four years. Low or inconsistent attendance, disruptive behavior resulting in documented disciplinary action, and failure in multiple courses are

examples of the many characteristics associated with the term at risk. Non-traditional students are age eighteen to twenty one and had not completed high school. These students, in most cases, were identified as at-risk at some point during their initial enrollment in high school.

Purposeful sampling allows for the selection of female subjects based upon particular settings, persons, or activities (Maxwell, 2005, pg. 88). Further, purposeful sampling ensures that the sample group is representative of the larger population. Stratified purposeful sampling (Patton, 2001, pg. 240) will be used in the selective decision making process when choosing female subjects. Additionally, purposeful sampling allowed for the establishment and potential support of comparisons between the African American female perceptions towards graduation. Further, subject participants were randomly selected from the refined eligibility pool. Because the population sample is small, the researcher must take care that the study does not veer towards a gender comparison from a perspective unrelated to this research. However, the data obtained can lend itself to further discussion on the significance of gender roles historic to the African American community.

Triangulation of Data

The various data collection sources presented a heavily descriptive account of processes, behaviors, and historically relevant events. Data triangulation provided rich exhaustive data as well as identified discrepancies within the larger study. The triangulation of data collection sources and methods invariably increased the validity of the study.

Research Questions	Interview	Observation	Archived Data School Records
How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect non-traditional African American female's perceptions of education?	Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the non-traditional African American female graduates. The graduates were audio taped and member checks were conducted to ensure accuracy.	On site observations of the asynchronous credit recovery program occurred to validate the responses from graduate interviews as it pertains to behaviors and attitudes while attending the asynchronous credit recovery program.	Access to the non-traditional African American female's cumulative folder and electronic records validated interview responses through a thorough review of the graduate's school file.
How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect the lives of non-traditional African American female student participants?	Face-to-face interviews were conducted, as much as is reasonably possible, at the residence of the non-traditional African American female graduate.	Off site observations occurred to validate the responses from graduate interviews as it pertains to participant's lives outside of the educational environment.	Access to the non-traditional African American female's cumulative folder validated interview responses through a thorough review of the graduate's school file.
What are the factors that contribute to the success of the non-traditional African American female student participants?	Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the non-traditional African American female graduates. The graduates were audio taped and member checks were conducted to ensure accuracy.	On-site observation will occur to identify positive behaviors, attitudes, relationships, and interactions of non-traditional African American female graduates while enrolled in the asynchronous credit recovery program.	Access to the non-traditional African American female graduate's school records provided additional data to compare alongside interview responses as well as provide additional insight as to historically documented data on student success and/or failure. Access to the asynchronous credit

			recovery program files provided additional insight as to the mission, structure, and outcome of the credit recovery program since its inception.
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Data Collection

Relative to this study, data was collected utilizing site immersion observation, semi-structured interviews, student records, and archived data/documents from previous years of program operation. Primary data was collected from human subject response to inquiry through a semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured interview was used to collect data from the student subjects relative to their perceptions and attitudes towards traditional education methods and the asynchronous credit recovery model in terms of student technology use, program effectiveness, and facilitator to student relationships. The interview process yielded data from five African American female students. Interviews were recorded through a digital audio recording device and audio transcription was documented with the assistance of audio transcription software. Unfortunately, the audio transcription software did not work effectively, so the researcher was responsible for transcribing the interviews directly from the audio playback. Additionally, data were collected through intensive immersion in the learning environment employing direct observation strategies. Audio data is securely stored on a compact disc, Apple® 3G, and anonymous mp3 files identified by color (Green, Black, Blue, Red, and Yellow) and identifier number (G1 – G5).

Intense observation through extensive involvement in the process allowed for a richly descriptive interpretation of the phenomena at hand. Student interactions and behavioral attitudes were observed through the site observations. Student perceptions of the program may become increasingly authentic as researcher presence within the program site became more frequent. Descriptive participant response was further enhanced through a previously established rapport between the researcher and the participant. Additionally, the interviews were conducted, as possible and with the least intrusion, at the residences of the female participants. Conducting the interviews in this manner afforded an opportunity to carry out site observations with a refined focus on the participants' neighborhood and home environment. Unlike research conducted solely on students while in the school environment, a glimpse of participants' lives outside of school provides additional insight. Efforts to employ lengthy participant observations reduced bias and allow for further development and investigation of emerging themes that may not have been recognized with limited and short-term involvement.

Archived data and any associated documents provided a longitudinal snapshot of the program and any historically pertinent data and unidentified trends that advanced the transparency of the study. Archived data are memos, printed emails, meeting notes, and any program documents that provide information of the history, structure, implementation, personnel training, partnerships, and status of the asynchronous credit recovery program.

School records consist of the specific student cumulative folder that is created when a student enters the school district. The cumulative folder includes: birth records, health and immunization records, guardianship, report cards, discipline records, standardized testing results, evaluative documents, and an elementary portfolio of student work. Beyond personal contact

information, the electronic student file includes: race/ethnicity, special education status, school entry/withdraw, electronic discipline records, academic transcript, absences, and free and/or reduced lunch status.

The use of member checks further ensured true and internally valid data had been collected through the interview process. Additionally, The possibility of providing distorted data was significantly reduced through the feedback sessions. For example, urban minority school aged students often make use of colloquialisms and traditionally urban slang to communicate their perceptions of events and behaviors. With this, the possibility existed to provide distorted data due to an inability to interpret the data effectively during the analysis stage. Therefore, feedback sessions with the respondents were conducted to strengthen the analysis and to ensure the interpretation of transcribed data was being perceived as it was originally intended.

Approximately fourteen days after the formal interviews were conducted, contact with the participants was initiated for the purpose of providing copy of the individual transcript assigned to the participant. A verbal request was made that each take the time to review the questions and responses as transcribed from the recorded interview. Within the larger request, each participant was asked to verify all responses were transcribed accurately as well as provide any additional commentary that may have been overlooked during the initial interview process. A period of seventy-two hours between receiving the transcripts and the follow-up contact from the researcher allowed ample time for participant consideration.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis occurred through an ongoing systematic review and coding of collected data through a cross-case analysis of the interviews and direct observations. As an aspect of constant comparison analysis, the primary data was initially organized to a manageable form by separating each interview transcript into thematic sections. Within the divided interview transcriptions, the data was separated then organized into coded text categories. The purpose of this is to identify predominant and consistent micro themes and patterns within the larger macro theme. Emergent patterns strengthen the internal validity of the study. Using Dye's Kaleidoscope metaphor (Dye, 2000), cross case analysis and category refinement occurred throughout the data analysis period to identify an overarching theme.

A thorough review of direct observation notes elicited processes and functions of the asynchronous credit recovery program as well as behaviors of students from program entry to engagement. Student relationships with peers and instructional personnel was also heartily observed to further understand the effect of human contact on academic achievement and commitment. Notes taken of prevailing and consistent behaviors were placed alongside the predominant individual interview transcript responses for additional review and to establish trustworthiness through further triangulation of data.

An independent review of student records revealed several commonalities between individual participants. Student record reviews of academic history, attendance, discipline, and general information provided rich data allowing for the establishment of a longitudinal snap shot of student progress from elementary through high school.

Methods of Verification

Rigor is demonstrated through the evidence of validity. Validity is strengthened through verification procedures that ensure the relationships established through the research methods are strategically aligned to the research question. In addition, the representative sample must ensure appropriate selection to provide abundant data to support the study. A conscientious review of unadulterated data, ongoing comparison analysis, and a conscious interpretation of analyzed data supported with purposefully positioned accountability measures strengthened the validity of the study.

Morse (2002, page 9) states, “In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study”. Beyond the use of member checks, using a triangulation matrix to establish a relationship between the research questions and the methodology, the analytic goals of the research study remained rational and purposeful. Appropriateness of the sample optimally represented through the study participants lends itself to the relationship established between the participants, the research questions, and the phenomenon that further toughens verification. Lastly, an active analysis of the data from a broad as well as narrow stance, ongoing evaluation of the research process, and constant consideration of concepts strengthens the development of theory and reinforces verification.

Ethical Issues

As this study requires adult female participants, it was mandatory that an examination of the critically ethical issues related to studies that encroach on the rights of female subjects is

conducted. Protection of female subjects is tantamount to the success of the study. By ensuring there is no presence of a methodology that compromises their safety or infringes upon their rights, freedom, and status, a legitimate study could be conducted within the scope of the age range, racial identification, educational status, and gender specific criteria set forth for the study.

Once the participant pool was established through a cross sectional analysis of the eight student graduate profiles, random contact with six of the eight potential participants was initiated and research objectives verbally presented. This action was necessary to provide the participants the necessary information relative to the study, methodology, and expectations. Through this process, participants were afforded the opportunity to express any concerns with the primary researcher or others associated with authorized knowledge of the research study. At the completion of this process, five non-traditional African American female graduates agreed to participate while one declined participation.

Prior to the research being conducted several tasks were completed relative to obtaining permission to conduct the necessary research. Study participants provided written consent and willingness to participate and be audio recorded. These assurances were acquired through the presentation of several consent forms as a mandate of the research study. Written consent to access student and program records was secured through the Office of the Harrisburg School District Superintendent. This consent was necessary due to the potentially sensitive and confidential nature of student records. To further safeguard confidentiality, student names were replaced with a color code during the initial stages of data collection, pseudonym for participant description, and numerical identification for the presentation of analyzed research data.

To maintain an ethical platform, it was necessary to forward signed consent forms and copy of the dissertation proposal to the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Temple University proposal defense team who conducted a review of the study proposal. Through this, the IRB and a Temple University review team acknowledged all ethical issues were addressed and remedied prior to the study being conducted.

CHAPTER 4 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a life description of the female student graduate (G1-G5) who participated in this study. As stated in Chapter 3, replacement of the participant names with pseudonym will personalize the participants without compromising their right to confidentiality.

When searching for information about the tragic state of African American boys thousands of studies can be drawn from a variety of educational databases and sources. However, there is a noticeable shortage of relevant studies concerning the plight of African American girls. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate the achievement gap between African American students and their white counterparts continues to grow as urban schools and communities fall prey to an economic crisis and ever increasing poverty gap. Analogous to Evans-Winters' (2010) referencing of prioritization in urban public schools as a "plane going down and deciding who gets the oxygen mask", a paradigm shift from African American males to African American females is best suited to resuscitate urban schools gasping for the last bit of air.

Participant Descriptions

This study utilizes five non-traditional African American female graduates who realized high school graduation through the district's asynchronous credit recovery program. Periods of intense program observation, a scrupulous review of student records, and participation in the semi-structured interview process provided great data for this study. However, it is important to provide background data through a rich description of the study participants.

The African American female graduates selected for and agreeing to participate in this study are residents of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. These female graduates attended a Harrisburg School District secondary school throughout their high school career. School records identify the female graduates who participated in this study as Black/African American. The five female graduates who participated were at least eighteen years of age when this study was conducted (n=5; mean age, 18.4 years). None of the participants received special education services at the time of this study. Prior to this study, the participants were identified as at-risk for dropping-out due to lengthy periods of absenteeism, excessive absences, and credit deficiencies. Eventually, the participants were labeled as *non-traditional* due to their return to school in an effort to graduate and receive a high school diploma. Coincidentally, all participants were raised in single-parent households with the mother acting as the primary guardian.

Although descriptions of the non-traditional African American female participants are general within contexts such as relationships and program effects, each participant has their own individual story. This chapter intends to qualify their story through a historical perspective.

G1: Amber Chambers

Raised in the Uptown neighborhood of Harrisburg, Amber Chambers spent her childhood moving between the households of her separated parents. Failure of the relationship of her parents did not dramatically affect the young girl in terms of diminishing emotional stability and feelings of abandonment so often attributed to children in such households. Unlike many parental separations that can negatively affect the self-esteem and social development of young

children, the separation of Amber's parents was an amicable departure that did not disturb the trust and love between family members.

The neighborhood has a dense population of single-parent households head by unwed mothers and multiple generations living under one roof. To Amber, her life was no different from the lives of her friends and peers. Most of the households were head by single mothers due to rapidly increasing male incarceration rates for non-violent drug offenses and the skyrocketing trend of non-married, single mother head households that began to proliferate in the 1980's. Single mother households, once a phenomenon, became a lifestyle and an accepted reality in this urban and vastly minority populated community. Amber did, however, consider herself fortunate in that her father lived only three blocks from the house she shared with her mother and younger brother who was just a year and a half her junior. Amber's residence, filled with afro-centric table figurines and walls adorned with culturally African tapestries spurred a strong familial bond and security within a Black identity. Although no longer together, both her mother and father provided love and support as well as an emphasis on academic achievement and the importance of caring for family. Amber's mother wanted the best for her oldest child and worked long hours to provide a financially stable environment for her children. Amber reciprocated this love through a commitment to her family that never waned even as she grew more independent with age.

Amber has tomboyish qualities born from burgeoning relationships with neighborhood boys from elementary school and a rapidly growing and influential social trend towards a penitentiary culture. Dressed in gender-neutral clothing, Amber could easily be mistaken for an adolescent male with her corn rowed hairstyle, gawky thin frame, bitten to the quick fingernails, baggy

jeans, and brightly colored expensive tennis shoes. Amber was comfortable playing the role of the sexually ambiguous little sister to the neighborhood boys who protected her and separated their relationships with Amber from the many teenaged girls in the neighborhood who were intent on developing romantic partnerships rather than close supportive friendships. With this, Amber did not receive the labels of misogynistic terminology so frequently used within the culture of urban hip-hop adolescence.

Gregarious and comical, Amber would spend her free time immersed in the dominant culture of her neighborhood. The culture, over time, grew into violent gang activity, rampant drug trafficking, and a disregard for authority as young middle school boys began gravitating towards and subsequently depicting a life witnessed on the streets, television, and popular music.

Although romanticizing the ever-expanding youth culture swept up in a soundtrack of violent and testosterone charged lyrical content of hip-hop music, Amber's immersion into the *gangsta* life never caught root due to the ongoing interventions by her mother and father.

A very bright student through elementary school, Amber entered ninth grade as an inaugural student in the local school district's science and technology high school earmarked for the upper ten percent of high school achievers. Amber had a long and trying year attempting to navigate the terrain of a school encompassing stringent rules and expectations, rigorous engagement, and a commitment to excellence. She missed the day-to-day frivolity of elementary school and her close friends who were now attending the general high school twenty-six blocks from her school and fifty-one blocks from the neighborhood and school where she found so much comfort and security through eighth grade. As she moved through her ninth grade year, G1's grades took a serious nose-dive prompted by a growing lack of interest and increasingly frequent daily

absences. Her classmates at the science and technology school were not like her friends. They relished in their dress code, proper behaviors, and the pedestal of academic achievement. To her, these academic peers were not representative of the neighborhood's mantra of *keeping it real*. It did not take long for Amber's absences to extend from intermittent class skipping to full days to full weeks at a time. Amber's lack of attachment to the school program, her peers, and her studies caused the year to end with the dismal securing of one credit within a possible eight-credit schedule.

As Amber enjoyed her summer and prepared for her sophomore year, she received notification that she would no longer attend the prestigious science and technology school and would begin her sophomore year at the regular education high school within the school district. Caught in the swirl of adolescent nostalgia, Amber was ecstatic for the opportunity to, once again, spend her school days with her neighborhood friends. Entering tenth grade credit deficient and immersed in a school population exceeding 1,500 students, Amber was unprepared for the impact of such heightened levels of social interaction. This environment was different than elementary school and had nothing in common with the science and technology school from ninth grade where attendance policies were strictly enforced, class to class transitions were held firm within the allotted three minute time-frame, and academic achievement was a ubiquitous theme. Within the walls of a more liberal and flexible school environment, it did not take long for Amber to develop a propensity for mischievous behavior while at school. The inconsistent practice of building leadership, weak policy enforcement, and possessing an affable personality further provided an opportunity for her to move in and throughout the school building at her leisure.

The school environment is set within its own extremely critical urban community and social status holds great importance for the many students who meticulously prepare themselves for school each day. Influenced by the social element that existed in the hallways, Amber's quick-witted humor and friendships with the popular Uptown boys increased her visibility and popularity within the school. Hallway social gatherings, the camaraderie amongst old friends, and the increasingly negative behaviors occurring within her peer group drew Amber further away from her commitment to school.

As another school year closed, many of Amber's male friends from the neighborhood turned to selling drugs for quick financial gain as well as establish themselves as the next generation of young up and coming drug dealers. Drawn to the culturally abysmal but very popular realms of the drug culture, Amber experimented with marijuana and allowed her neighborhood friends to purchase high-end clothing and accessories for her. Amber's commitment to the 'hood credo further drew her away from the little black girl next door with the exaggerated smile. She was slowly becoming the epitome of that which her parents had worked so hard to avoid. Although Amber was never directly involved with illegal narcotics sales, she nonetheless was guilty by association as rumors and innuendo followed her to school from the neighborhood.

Amber's friendships and associations did nothing to further her advancement through high school. As she consistently underperformed in school while simultaneously staging performances for the neighborhood boys and any students in the hallway willing to stop and listen, Amber became increasingly distant from her academic responsibilities. School was a veritable playground to freedom as failing grades became a result of her growing class absences and undisciplined behavior. Outfitted in flashy urban clothes and adorned with an enlarged gold

Jesus piece pendant dangling from a gold necklace, Amber morphed into an urban caricature of sorts. Amber became the antithesis of all that she and her family encompassed. She was supposed to graduate with the class of 2008 but remained nine credits short of eligibility. Amber was travelling down a road laden with unnecessary obstacles and struggles. Very soon, the realities of her associations and posturing would extend beyond her academic failure and come crashing down on her as the summer of 2008 opened with heightened levels of neighborhood violence and a string of subsequent arrests.

Amber was never a tough girl in the sense of having endured the struggles of a life of poverty and shattered dreams. She just happened to reside in an old family neighborhood bordered on the south by a rougher hewn population of street toughs. The neighborhood boys who she played with under the streetlights on summer nights less than a decade ago, graduated to juvenile placement facilities, county prison, or a celebration of life at the closed casket funeral held at the local church. Amber, left abandoned by the reality of youth culture gone awry took time to reflect. Here she was, a relatively intelligent girl with beautiful brown skin, a large toothy grin, better than average vocabulary and communication skills, and empathetic good heart, left to pick up the pieces of a teenage life spent giving herself away to a lowly street culture that invariably ends in dramatic fashion less historic than tragic.

Unsure of her direction while still shaken from the events of the previous summer, Amber did not return to school in an attempt to salvage her academic standing. Sitting in a despondent state inside her family home, school had started a month ago. Amber's mother sharply refined her communication with her offspring demanding that she continue on the road of success that her mother and father had originally laid for her. It had been years since the utilization of this road

and she felt skeptical, hesitant, and fearful. However, the alternate routes chosen over the last four years did not bear the fruits of success and Amber was therefore limited in this capacity. On the cusp of her nineteenth birthday, Amber realized that by traditional means, she would graduate high school just shy of her twenty-first birthday. Desperate and unsure of what to do, Amber's mother urged her to investigate alternative paths to graduation.

It was at this point Amber had to reach inside and resurrect the motivation of yesteryear. She had to apply herself in such a way as to allow for full recovery, not only academically, but also socially and emotionally.

G2: Monica Brown

Shuttled between foster homes throughout her young life, ten-year old Monica Brown found permanent placement with a foster care family in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Monica moved into the family friendly neighborhood located in Harrisburg's Allison Hill section with her younger foster brother. Although unrelated by blood, the two young children had spent time in the foster care system together. Streets of single-family households coupled with one of the local district's high performing neighborhood elementary schools allowed Monica to transition with relative ease. Monica entered the neighborhood elementary school as a fifth grade student. Within two years of her placement in Harrisburg, however, Monica's foster parents legally separated but maintained an amicable relationship with the young children acting as the motivating factor towards maintaining a healthy post-relationship life.

The inconsistency often experienced in the lives of foster children caused Monica to develop a resilient character that settled and protected Monica in the most turbulent of times. As had

become standard practice, Monica was responsible for the care and transport of her younger foster brother. Cultivating maternal characteristics at such a young age lead to a heightened level of maturity. Monica was able to rise and tend to domestic duties prior to leaving the family residence for school. While maintaining strong grades in elementary school, Monica raised and cared for her foster brother as if she had given birth to him. Responsibilities included preparing him for kindergarten, making breakfast, walking him to the neighborhood kindergarten program, and preparing the evening's meal. Still, Monica rarely missed a day of school and reflected positively on her adolescent life. So often she was inclined to deal with the dilemmas of growing up in an impoverished urban community by herself with very little guidance and support. Her mother's absence was not due to a lack of caring, but as a need to fulfill financial obligations and stave-off debt. Monica's mother worked incessantly through Monica's time in elementary and middle school. However, the inability to spend quality family time together nurtured isolationist and positively independent qualities in Monica. Because of this, Monica found it hard to make strong friendships. In many ways, Monica was emotionally mature beyond her neighborhood peers.

Although pleasant and forthcoming, Monica continued to maintain distance from her peers as she moved through her early high school years. Over time, Monica had become a disciplined student whose focus on success paralleled quite nicely with the school district's Naval Junior ROTC program. The high school's female Principal aggressively pursued and ultimately persuaded Monica to enroll in the district's NJROTC program. The high school Principal was so impressed with Monica's commitment and sense of honor that she often used Monica as an example of excellence and promoted her endeavors whenever possible. The high school Principal's budding

relationship with Monica brought further confidence to Monica whether being academic or related to the school's military program. Monica had found a mentor in her building administrator and the relationship between Monica and the Principal resembled a multi-faceted connection often moving between mother and daughter, friend, confidante, and spiritual kinship. This newfound adult to child liaison could not have occurred at a more appropriate time.

Moving into eleventh grade, the neighborhood school had since closed and like many neighborhoods formerly populated by aging residents, the turnover resulted in a drug culture developing on the streets of the neighborhood. To compound the growing complexities of her teenage life, Monica's foster mother fell ill to a debilitating disease and the family left the neighborhood to relocate to a subsidized housing complex in Harrisburg. The housing complex was located at the primary gateway to the city of Harrisburg from the interstate highway. Although bordering the business district of bright lights, hotels, restaurants, and commercial buildings, the housing complex was sandwiched between a four-lane thoroughfare to the west and a rail yard that served as a drop-off and storage facility for the rail system to the east. The rail yard was in contrast to the maple tree lined streets of the old neighborhood. The often loud and illuminated rail yard site was the source of ongoing rumblings as steel met steel through the night while train cars passed through downtown Harrisburg on the way to Lancaster and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

As money woes became more and more of a daily occurrence at Monica's residence, she took on a full-time job at a local fast food restaurant after school securing as many hours as she could. As if Monica's childhood responsibilities were not cumbersome enough, she now found herself taking care of her younger brother and ailing mother as well as attending school, participating in

NJROTC, and now working lengthy evening hours to bring money home to fill financial gaps created through her mother's inability to work. Through it all, though, Monica could look to her mentor and site administrator for support during her most trying times.

While maintaining such a strict schedule, Monica took the time to indulge a relationship with a young boy who attended school with her. Their relationship was the first that she had seriously considered and opted to move forward. The relationship served Monica well in that it afforded her the opportunity to escape the reality of the dilemmas confronting her. Monica's commitment to high performance had assisted her in maintaining a grade point average around 3.0, which gave her a decent class ranking and kept her on track to graduate with her class. Although Monica's schedule had cost her in terms of high grades during her junior year, she was maintaining passing grades in all subjects. However, indulgence in her relatively new relationship resulted in her becoming pregnant with her first child at the end of the third marking period of the school year. Adjustments were made to best accommodate the situation but Monica's pregnancy and effects from juvenile diabetes had compromised her health in such a way as to drastically increase the frequency of absences from school. Within time, Monica's grades had fallen below the minimum grade to pass. She ended the school year with two credits of a possible seven. Within three months, Monica's life had diminished from a heralded student and potential Navy candidate to a pregnant teen five credits behind.

Monica entered the summer two months pregnant and working full-time at the same fast food restaurant that served as an air conditioner for bored youth exhausted from the heat and low-end residents in search of a reduced -price menu item. Monica's life was not supposed to take this turn. Where did she go wrong? What did she do to deserve this? Was she forever bound to the

employment and minimum wage brought through a career in fast food service? Would she graduate to public housing as a single parent like her foster mother? As Monica spent the summer attempting to save money in preparation for the birth of her child in late fall, she was determined to recover from the events of the last year. She was resilient. She could overcome this. She refused to become a statistic.

As Monica entered school in the fall, she was now five months pregnant and still five credits behind. Her foster mother's health had not improved and the family became increasingly dependent on Monica's wages for survival. Little was Monica aware that during the next eight weeks, a series of significant and unpredictable events would unfold and further disrupt her world.

No more than six weeks into the new school year, a tragic event shook the school district. Monica's mentor and source of stability suddenly died. The unexpected passing of her Principal devastated Monica and left her, once again, lingering alone with very little support except her own. As the fall months turned cold, violence began to escalate at school as a cascading effect stemming from the emerging dilemmas emanating from the absence of strong and experienced female leadership. Concerned for the welfare of her unborn child as violent fights broke-out daily and the frequency of weapons possession increased, Monica discontinued going to school. Monica felt the schools were unsafe and unable to provide a quality education amidst the daily chaos. Shortly after leaving school, Monica prematurely gave birth to her son. As her son remained in the hospital for a time after birth, Monica set forth on a period of realignment and self-actualization. With a limited window of time, Monica renewed her focus and established the goal of returning to school and walk across the stage with the current year's class.

G3: Shante' Hudson

Shante' Hudson was born the first and only child to Renee Hudson. Shante' was raised adjacent to the largest public park in the city of Harrisburg. She spent the better part of her childhood playing in the park that served as her back yard and bordered a cluster of local minority owned small businesses. Upon completion of a full day of playing in the park, Shante' would pay a visit to the neighborhood ice cream stand that was located two doors from her residence. Although long lines extended to her front porch on many evenings, Shante' had neighborhood privilege and received preference at the ice cream stand. Her carefree childhood, filled with endless summer days in the park and nights on the front porch of her mother's two-story house, left Shante' intoxicated by life's offerings as she drowned in the bliss of urban living.

Shante' was a pretty child who was unassumingly shy but served as the protected jewel of the neighborhood. Shante's mother was involved, supportive, and provided Shante' with the material trappings of childhood often unavailable to the other neighborhood children. Shante's mother spoiled her, and, through such, she never developed a sense of independence, discipline, or fortitude. Her mother rarely provided direction to Shante' so she was inclined to traipse through life with little motivation. This was of small consequence to Shante' because she was an above average student who attained high grades through elementary school with very little effort. Like the other participants of this study, Shante' attended a neighborhood school just three short blocks from her residence. As she made the daily trek to school, she was one of the few students that had enough money in their pocket to purchase snacks and a soda. At times, she even had enough money to give to her friends so that they fully could participate in the glory of the morning's sugary shopping excursion.

As Shante' entered the local high school, which was a mere seven block walking distance from her residence, her mother made sure Shante' would be dressed in the most popular clothes and be provided with the most updated electronic media devices. To Shante', school was more fashion show than a bastion of educational excellence. By the time Shante' entered tenth grade, she was unconcerned with school beyond its social offerings. Almost from the outset, Shante' took to skipping classes and lingering in the hallways with the older students ignoring the insistent redirection from the classroom teacher and security staff. Within time, Shante' found herself bored by midday and began leaving school after lunch to spend the afternoon with her neighborhood friends whose vacant residences they would inhabit. Often, the truant students would take refuge in the minority owned stores en route to her family's residence. Comfortable within her neighborhood, Shante' was so content at wasting away her days that she began missing whole days of school. To the dismay of Shante's mother, she was unable to reestablish her daughter's commitment to school and feared that she may not complete high school.

As the behaviors continued, Shante' accumulated just 4.75 academic credits of the possible 14.0 credits through her tenth and eleventh grade years. Entering what should have been her senior year, Shante's laissez-faire attitude about academics did not waver until a confrontation with a guidance counselor culminated with the information that she would not graduate with her class. Suddenly, the realization of three years of time that could not be erased or undone by her blatant disregard for achievement, Shante' was almost two academic years behind. If she was to fulfill the obligation to herself and her mother, she had to secure a way to move through school towards graduation in June.

G4: Patrice Everson

By the time Patrice Everson entered high school as a ninth grade student, she had attended six district elementary schools within the local school district. None of these placements was due to a transient family but occurred because of Patrice's defiant behaviors and outbursts in the classroom. Documented as early as kindergarten, Patrice was stubborn and did not engage her teachers in a way considered appropriate by most standards. Disruptive tantrums would lead to removal from class then would lead to suspension and time away from school. Patrice would return to school unaffected by the discipline and continue with the same conduct once returning to class. Numerous meetings held with her mother who could do little to quell her growing daughter's increasingly volatile behavior towards her teachers. Although not a physically violent child, Patrice attacked her teachers and fellow students with unrestrained verbal aggression.

These behaviors continued through elementary school into high school. As was consistent throughout, Patrice would begin the school year with passing grades and a willingness to learn. However, within time, restlessness and boredom set in, causing Patrice to become increasingly disruptive, inattentive, and confrontational. For too many years, promotion to the next grade occurred because of her strong start to the school year. Patrice would limp from grade level to grade level, all the while accumulating disciplinary write-ups, phone calls to her home from administration, and ultimately, threats of relocation to another school site.

While there was no follow-up by administration, Patrice took the frequent conferences lightly and was under the assumption the empty threats from administration were just that. She was unimpressed by the interventions set forth by teachers and administration. The more adults

attempted to support and move closer to Patrice, the more she resisted their overtures.

Eventually, G4 attended school infrequently. In her time away from school, Patrice would spend countless hours sleeping the days away while her peers were in school. Once the neighborhood energy rose with the sounds of screeching brakes coming from the undercarriage of school buses, Patrice would exit her house and actively engage the neighborhood students returning from school.

Patrice's daily schedule made her that much more languid in the pursuit of a high school diploma. She was losing interest by the day and moved ever closer to the point of no return. Another month had passed when Patrice found that she was several months pregnant with her first child. Like a child re-born, Patrice's behaviors rapidly changed as the reality of motherhood became increasingly apparent. Patrice was now in a position where her personal wants were of diminishing importance. However, she had spent far too much time away from school to recover the credits from her junior year. Her child's birth in late spring of her junior year caused a fundamental shift with Patrice as her newborn son became the sole priority in her life. Patrice was fully aware that her capacity was limited without a high school diploma.

Within the first twelve weeks of the school year, Patrice had been present on ten occasions and absent forty-nine. Her absences, this time, were due to an inability to persuade family members to care for her child while she was in school. Her mother and older sister were unable to provide the necessary support that Patrice so urgently needed. If she was to return to school to claim lost credits, she needed to work to pay for a daycare provider. To Patrice, money is of grave necessity if she were to move forward. A short time later, Patrice secured a job at a fast food kiosk not far from her home. The manager allowed her to work from late morning into the early evening.

Although the hourly pay was the minimum allowed by law, it provided her with an opportunity to establish a regular cash flow mechanism to afford the expense of daycare for her child as well as seriously consider a return to school.

G5: Cheryl Sims

Like many students in the local school district, Cheryl Sims attended multiple elementary schools prior to entering the district's high school. Cheryl, along with her mother and younger brother lived in the government-subsidized neighborhood that abuts the elementary school she attended. This school, well known for its community outreach and parent involvement is less than one hundred feet from the residences of the school's attendees. Beyond a well-attended afterschool programming, the housing project housed the local outlet of a larger national initiative that serves underprivileged children. Support systems were readily available to Cheryl and through such allowed her to grow at her own pace within the realms of a familiar, comfortable, and peculiarly secure environment. Cheryl attended both the school and community programs and developed easy friendships simply because the densely populated neighborhood dictated such.

Like island natives working together to survive under the duress of limited resources, the housing project exists as an extension to the city with it's own individualized culture that maintains a hearty pride more so for its history and resilience than the ongoing state of economic misery. In the context of urban legends, the housing project is a stereotypical amalgamation of all things dysfunctional and beautiful about urban living. To many, the neighborhood is a gift and a curse. Beyond producing Negro League baseball players and multi-millionaire professional

athletes, the neighborhood has a rich history of raising some of the most significantly influential Black professionals in the city. On the other hand, the neighborhood is notoriously well-known for its share of loosely constructed criminal organizations, intense drug trafficking, and periods of escalating violence.

It was during time spent in this neighborhood and elementary school that Cheryl experienced the most consistent period of her young life. After third grade, Cheryl's family moved across town to a neighborhood that was unfamiliar to her. To compound the effects of removal from a comfort zone, Cheryl's life became more chaotic as her family moved and transferred to a different elementary school each year for the next five years. The nomadic behaviors of Cheryl's family did nothing to contribute to her securing trusting friendships and networks as was established when she lived in government housing.

Finally settling in a rented two-story single-family row home prior to entering ninth grade, Cheryl embraced the relatively consistent nature and stability of the neighborhood as well as its proximity to the local high school she would be attending. Although Cheryl accumulated a respectable 13.25 academic credits over her freshman and sophomore year, she struggled in her English and Mathematics courses. Moving into her eleventh grade year, Cheryl's struggle became resoundingly clear as she failed English, Math, as well as four other classes. During the school year, Cheryl had taken on additional domestic duties as well as part time employment that kept her away from home late into the evening. With this, Cheryl's attendance suffered under new building policies concerning late arrivals to school. The policy did not allow students to enter school after a certain hour without a parental or medical excuse. At first, the front office turned Cheryl away, marked her absent for the day, and she would return home. After accruing a

number of absences through an inability to enter school without a written excuse, Cheryl got the inclination to stay at home and not attempt to arrive to school on time or with a written excuse. Without a tutoring component in place, Cheryl enrolled in the district's summer school program to recover core credits lost during the previous school year. Unfortunately, Cheryl's performance and attendance in summer school was similar to the school year as she did not complete the summer program because of excessive absences.

Eventually, Cheryl would recover from the previous year's dilemma and return to school for what should have been her senior year. Cheryl's efforts to pass every class and increase her daily attendance brought great rewards in that she successfully completed and passed every course on her schedule. However, with the failures from her junior year, Cheryl remained four credits shy of the required number for graduation eligibility and ultimately had to consider returning for her fifth year of high school if she wanted to graduate. Cheryl wanted to complete high school but had an opportunity for extended hours at work, which was in direct conflict with the amount of time Cheryl would have to commit in order to graduate the following school year if she were to return to the traditional school environment.

Whether pulled-out, pushed-out, purposely absent, or enduring the rigors of adult responsibilities, each participant experienced a period of instability causing a deficiency in the number of academic credits towards graduation. These non-traditional African American female participants cannot be generalized beyond the criteria set forth to conduct this study. To recall, these individual participants traveled a unique path that eventually converged through participation in an asynchronous credit recovery program.

CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data for this qualitative study. I initially describe the sample selection and data analysis process that was employed. Additionally, to assist readers in establishing an understanding of the asynchronous curriculum delivery model associated with this study, a description of the non-traditional education model in terms of program curriculum, structure, environment, personnel, and observed behaviors and interactions is presented. Within this, an analysis of the interview data occurs as well as detailed commentary from the respondents related to the categories associated with the data stemming from the concepts of internal and external factors. I also present a brief analysis of the student participants through high school using school district records and notes taken during the initial interview. This section includes feedback responses to inquiry during a brief second round of interviews. Finally, I present the emergent themes and their relationship to the study and the associated research questions. The entire process explores the struggles, conflicts, responsibilities, successes, and perceptions through the responses emanating from a group of non-traditional African American females as they moved towards graduation from high school while enrolled in an asynchronous credit recovery program.

Sample Selection Process

Eighty-eight (88) students graduated through the asynchronous credit recovery program associated with this study. Of the eighty-eight (88) graduates, forty-nine (49) were female

students. There was a set of criteria in place in order to refine the subject eligibility pool to a number that was applicable to this study. The criteria for the selection of subjects are based upon race, gender, age, graduation status, special education status, and school enrollment.

As stated, there were forty-nine female graduates from the asynchronous credit recovery program. Of the forty-nine female graduates, eight had received special education services and six did not begin their freshman/ninth grade year in the Harrisburg School District. Twelve students exited the Harrisburg School District by juvenile detention facility placement or transferring to another school district. The remaining twenty-three graduates were reduced to eight eligible subject participants due to three students listed as Asian, two as Caucasian/White non-Hispanic, four as Hispanic, and four of bi-racial origins. Lastly, two students were not eighteen when they graduated. At this point, I randomly selected five students from the pool of eight eligible graduates to contact for participation in the study. Of the five initial contacts, four graduates agreed to participate and one was not interested in participating in the study. I was able to contact one of the three remaining graduates from the eligibility pool who agreed to participate bringing the total to five subject participants for the study.

Emergent themes

Through the data analysis phase of the study, the various codes based upon similarity and sorted categories formulated three predominant themes: Internal motivation; Teacher encouragement and support effect; and programming effect. The emergence of these themes is based upon the relationships and connections to the asynchronous program as well as the effect of both on independent student achievement and their perceptions of educational programming.

Connections to the program and the support from the supervising staff of the asynchronous program resonated through the subject responses as a relevant factor in the achievement and behavioral changes of the subjects.

The theme of internal motivation emerged from data collected and through an exhaustive investigative review of the interviews conducted with a group of non-traditional African American female high school graduates.

As an emergent theme, internal motivation generated from the identification of patterns originating from subject responses to inquiry. Internal motivation as a contributing factor in the pursuit of positive behavioral or task-related endeavors focuses on self-concepts that are developed, enhanced, and refined through a series of events where trial and error, without penalty, are exercised towards personal satisfaction without threatening the personal freedoms of the individual. Success through ever evolving positive self-concepts, in this case, encourages increased involvement, attendance, persistence, competence, and commitment to task. The effects of internal motivation are more salient to non-traditional African American females, who are often misunderstood, isolated, and whose self-reliance does not parallel a population comprised of dissimilar cultural backgrounds.

The presence of internal motivation is tantamount to the success of African American females in a society that does not readily provide ample support to offset the historical and institutional plight of African American females. Therefore, the reliance on self as a motivator is essential to the academic and societal success of African American females. This study reveals the positive effects of internal motivation and persistence on the academic success and in the personal lives

of the non-traditional African American female. Through the academic progress while enrolled in a credit recovery program, the non-traditional African American female's motivational propensity towards change and achievement is evident.

As I kept going with it I just got more confident that I was going to graduate. (G1)

Even though you may have made mistakes during the school year or didn't come to school or everything else, you can still get on the right track...and fix the mistakes you made instead of being like everyone else saying I'm just not going back to school. (G2)

There's many ways to work around having a baby, going to school, and achieving your goals. (G2)

It just fell back on me, so I had to do what I had to do. So I did it. (G3)

I think it was about getting to school (credit recovery) everyday because I wanted to finish. That was definitely a motivation right there. (G3)

...the people at credit recovery or whatever were focused. (G3)

I always knew I was going to graduate. (G4)

For my son, I had to. (G4)

Summary

Internal motivation is more easily recognized and acknowledged within an asynchronous credit recovery program due to the self-directed and independent nature of the program. Because each student participant is engaged within their own specific coursework, they are the only person by which their success or failure is gauged. Therefore, the independence of the asynchronous credit recovery program places the student participant in the center position. When student success, motivation, and effort is ostensibly measured against the peer group, students have the potential to pull away from direct interaction due to a heightened level of discomfort within the learning environment. These passive behaviors can ultimately result in increased absences and

disengagement from the learning environment altogether. The unfortunate result in too many instances is a student prematurely dropping out of school before realizing graduation. The asynchronous credit recovery program structure can enhance student self esteem and confidence in their pursuits because progress and success are not measured against their peer group or with any degree of subjectivity. With this, a sense of personal ownership heightens motivation, confidence, engagement, and ultimately, student achievement.

The second theme to emerge, teacher encouragement and support effect, originated from subject responses concerning the relationships with the asynchronous program staff when compared to the relationships in a traditional learning environment. Studies have shown that positive teacher-student relationships encourage student achievement and satisfaction (Bergin, June, 2009; Baker, 1999; Decker, February, 2007). This is especially true with an urban at-risk population where secure attachment is contributory when addressing student satisfaction and the effects of a positive, non-threatening learning environment on student achievement (Baker, 1999). Many urban minority at-risk school age students do not possess the internal motivation to succeed. As a result, students rely on strong relationships with their teachers for leadership and guidance (Marchant, 1990) as early as elementary school. For that reason, supportive and concerned school environments that smooth the progress of student learning and connection contributes to the academic success of at-risk minority school age students (Towns, et al., 2001; Waxman, Huang, & Anderson, 1997).

Subject responses to the degree of encouragement and support received in the asynchronous credit recovery program as compared to the traditional high school setting revealed significant

differences with preferences leaning towards the asynchronous education model and the associated personnel:

Mr. _____ (credit recovery instructor), he was focused on teaching but it also seemed that he was more into getting to know the kids like personally and who they are and how they think and stuff like that so he can really be there and try to help them and know what they're talking about—understand them. Like there weren't too many teachers like that at the [traditional high school] if you ask me. (G1)

Like, [the credit recovery teachers] were really encouraging us to graduate. In credit recovery, they encourage you. It was more like they understood where you were coming from...they talked to you like an adult. (G2)

In credit recovery, they encourage you. Well, you need to do your PSSA's. You need to do this and you need to do that. And they go over stuff.

Well, our twelfth grade teachers [in credit recovery] were a whole lot different than what we were used to. When you needed him (credit recovery instructor), he took the time out to sit there and explain to you and help you out. He was just really there. (G2)

...they talked to you as though you were a twelfth grader and you're about to be in the real world. (G2)

No, I didn't have any relationship with the teachers at [the traditional high school]. (G3)

Summary

Urban minority populations and communities receive insufficient and inadequate support. Too often, these neighborhoods are not the primary focus of municipal government or state government efforts and lack a comprehensive strategic planning model to offset many of the deficiencies and issues crippling the community. This effect cascades from the neighborhoods into the school setting where lowered expectations, internally weak organizational structure, antiquated resources, and a lack of purposeful effort creates significantly miserable and ineffective conditions. Therefore, it is of the utmost necessity for educators charged with the responsibility of educating school age children to provide the necessary support, personalized

empathy, and encouragement in an attempt to counterbalance societal limitations and the debilitating effects of secondary status.

The third emerging theme of the study is the effect of the asynchronous program on student perceptions of personal and academic achievement as well as the impact on student perceptions of an alternative learning environment. The credit recovery program's assessments are objective and do not rely on subjective assessments, evaluations, and personal critiques to determine the value of the individual. Further, the self-paced platform of the credit recovery program reduced the day-to-day pressures of performance anxiety (Cavanaugh, 2009). The reduction of performance anxiety increases the capacity of the non-traditional African American female to advance proficiency in collecting, assembling, and processing information as well as promoting investigative abilities beyond that of academic pursuits. The development of such expands the range by which the non-traditional African American female establishes resolution skills and negotiates conceptual struggles (Coleman, 2005). To this end, the independent nature of the student to computer interface model places the non-traditional African American female in a position of constant self-actualization that promotes confidence, growth, and self-esteem while enhancing personal value and identity consideration towards clarification and commitment. Subject responses referenced their preference for an independent self-paced education model as a means to satisfy and complete their education outside of the realms of the time and space required within a traditional school environment:

And being as how I wanted to get a job to help get myself ready for college—if I would have continued to go to the [traditional high school], I would not have been able to do any of that. Everything I needed was right there. (G1)

Some kids can't learn with a teacher teaching them and talking to them the whole entire time. I'd rather read and do it myself. I'd rather do it myself than have somebody talk and talk and talk. (G2)

I can go ahead and get done with and be done. Why sit around and wait for everybody else to catch up? It allows you to go ahead and get done with it. You can pace yourself or you can go through it fast. But as long as you understand it, that's all that really matters. (G2)

[Teachers at the traditional high school] show you one way of doing things and just expect you to catch on or whatever. In credit recovery you can keep looking at it until you get it. (G3)

Once I started getting into the routine and everything, everyday, I got used to it. I liked it better than I did when I was in a setting with a bunch of my friends. (G3)

I was on my own pace...so it was easier for me to get through it. (G4)

I wasn't wasting time. (G4)

I don't want you setting schedules for me. (G4)

I had responsibilities I had to take care of, too. So, I couldn't be in school all day (G4)

I didn't have to worry about worksheets or anything moving slow. I just get in and get out. (G5)

Summary

A technology based asynchronous education model does not threaten the traditional schooling program within a traditional brick and mortar model. Nonetheless, the effects of such programming are undeniably beneficial to a segment of the population that has been confounded with dilemmas directly related to the school environment or external dynamics and complexities unrelated to the school environment. Subject response to inquiry discloses aspects, affects, and characteristics of the credit recovery program that are associated with time schedules, commitment, independence, and isolation from influence that is antithetical to a traditional school model. Further consideration on the applicability of credit recovery programs on non-traditional student populations beyond those that are credit deficient is necessary to ascertain the

various affects and positive behavioral influences such programming has on a non-traditional student population. It is possible that a wider audience can be served through participation in an on site technology based alternative non-traditional schooling environment.

As is recommended with qualitative studies, a cross case analysis was employed to strengthen the validity and reduce bias within this study. A cross case analysis was chosen over a traditional case analysis process because visibly consistent inquiry is evident within the interview protocol. Within the cross case analysis, I used the constant comparison method as a means to develop groups and place student responses according to the common questions brought forth during the interview process. The grouping procedure contributed to coding, the development of categories, and ultimately, the identification of emergent themes. Further, triangulation of themes, interview questions, and data sources strengthened the reliability and validity of research findings.

Themes	Interview Questions	Observation of Program and Residence	Archived Data School Records
Internal Motivation	√	√	√
Teacher Encouragement and Support Effect	√	√	
Program Effect	√	√	√

Initially, I downloaded the set of five interviews from a Sony® IC Recorder to a Dell® Inspiron 1521 laptop computer. Once the interviews were downloaded, I converted the audio to an mp3 format and extracted the interviews to an Apple® iPhone 3G. I did this to ensure audio interview data was format to the highest quality audio device for playback. Additionally, I wanted to secure several anonymous back up copies of the interviews in the event a technological malfunction occurred during the data analysis process.

Once I concluded the data transfer process, I listened to each interview three times. As I listened to each interview, I attempted to do three things: 1.) Familiarize myself with the entire interview 2.) Compare audio with notes taken during the initial interview process and 3.) List heading titles and identify any data overlooked during the first two listening sessions. After I completed the listening sessions and accumulated written notes and memos from the interviews, I transcribed the interviews. I chose to utilize the Dragon® Naturally Speaking® 10 Speech Recognition Software. However, this method did not fair well in terms of accurately transcribing the audio. This was due to the fractured speech patterns, loose grammar and word usage of the student subject interviewed for this study. Therefore, I abandoned the use of the software for a traditional method of transcription. Although a time consuming and arduous task, I intently listened to the interviews and transferred the audio into a written transcription. At this point, I listened to each interview again to make certain that the written transcriptions accurately matched the audio interviews.

Once I transcribed the audio interviews to written form, I color coded and numerically identified the respondents to secure confidentiality as well as reduce any bias on my part related to the

identification of the particular respondent. As stated, student identification occurs through color-coding and/or interview number: Green/G1; Black/G2; Blue/G3; Red/G4; and Yellow/G5.

As an aspect of the constant comparison method and grounded theory development, I relied on open coding to study, analyze content, compare and conceptualize responses towards the emergence of categories. Through this process, I was able to uncover meaningfully significant patterns amidst the array of data and allow the categories to evolve without any imposition on my part. The development of categorical properties occurred through an inductive analysis of transcribed data by grouping common responses to inquiry, identifying repetitive words, phrases, and co occurring data while studying supporting archival data and applicable field notes. Throughout, I referred to Dye's Kaleidoscope metaphor as a reminder of the necessity in separating the interviews into refined data bits to compare and consider the varied relationships emerging from the data.

Prior to separating the interview transcripts into smaller bits of data as referenced within Dye's Kaleidoscope metaphor, I reviewed the written transcripts three times in order to identify common words and phrases frequently used by the subjects through each independently conducted interview. These words and phrases are used to establish preliminary categories. Six references emerged from sixty percent or more of the student subjects:

- 1.) One hundred percent of respondents used the word progress
- 2.) Eighty percent of respondents used the word independence
- 3.) Sixty percent of respondents used the word pace

- 4.) Eighty percent of respondents referenced work/employment
- 5.) Eighty percent of respondents referenced family responsibilities
- 6.) Eighty percent of respondents referenced negative teacher/student relationships

This preliminary process of identifying relevant words, phrases, and references provided direction in the break down of the interview transcript into meaningful data bits. Data bits were created by using scissors to physically separate each transcript into individual responses for further identification of similar responses across the five interviews. Once the responses were separate from the entire transcript, I was left with a knot of responses that had no visible pattern or relationship to one another. Using the six references from my search of common words and references, I was able to begin compartmentalizing subject responses into groups by placing the data bits into stacks according to their commonality. Miscellaneous responses that had no initial connection to any other responses were placed in a separate pile for further review and consideration.

Separating the interview transcripts into data bits was a time consuming task. However, further examination of the data in this refined state afforded the opportunity to develop the preliminary concepts into categories. Once the data bits were placed into piles of common responses, each were labeled with a categorical title:

- 1.) Motivation
- 2.) Behavior modification/enhancement

- 3.) Personal responsibilities
- 4.) Encouragement/support
- 5.) Relationships
- 6.) Program structure
- 7.) Learning environment
- 8.) Time commitment

It was at this point that I reviewed each response within the category to extract co-occurring data. There were instances of co-occurring data relative to relationships, learning environment, behavior modification, and responsibilities. I found it necessary to copy these data bits and move them back and forth across categories until permanent categorical placement was established. Through this process, I was able to further refine and ultimately reduce the number of categories from eight to three with the remaining five categories labeled as sub-category data and placed under one of the three existing categories. The final categories established were motivation, support, and program structure.

I initiated a thorough review of the categories created from subject responses. Through further refinement, I identified two concepts amongst the categories. The two concepts that evolved from the categories were contributory internal and external factors. More specifically, motivation, perception, burgeoning self-concepts, and responsibilities are factors that are central to the study respondent's behavior and achievement. Conversely, encouragement, influences,

program structure, learning environment, and time commitment are external influences affecting student behavior and achievement.

As a commitment to the constant comparison method, a vigorous review of field notes from a period of immersion within the credit recovery program was conducted. Full respondent interviews were used as the primary data to compare with observed behaviors and practices within the credit recovery program. Further, there was a review of school district data to compare against subject interviews to ascertain consistent points to strengthen the analysis. Subject response to behaviors while enrolled in a traditional school environment has an association with subject credit accumulation or a lack thereof. Additionally, subject responses to the non-traditional learning environment presented a positive relationship with the behaviors and progress achieved while enrolled in the credit recovery program. This process revealed additional insight and provided confidence in the establishment of the aforementioned categories.

Once the contributing factors were categorically established and placed under internal and external concepts, I delved further into the categories towards a refined description and identification of each. Understanding that one group exists due to personal conviction and the other due to influence, I was able to classify the common thread that existed within the categories of each code. The common point when comparing both sets of categories is the presence of support and motivation and how one contributes to and affects the other in the development of identity, independence, and transition into adulthood for the non-traditional African American female as she approached graduation from high school. This was an important facet of the data analysis process as it assisted in furthering the identification of emergent themes.

Asynchronous Credit Recovery Program

Program Rationale

Achievement expectations associated with No Child Left Behind inspired creative non-traditional means by which school districts would address academic achievement, enrollment, attendance, graduation and dropout rates. The credit recovery program related with this study was established to provide students with an opportunity to independently accumulate earned credits in failed courses during their high school career. The credit recovery program serves a student population that is enrolled in any one of the three high schools of the school district. The first few years served a small population of students who were identified as credit deficient by one to three course credits.

The initial programmatic initiative provided this service in two of the three high school buildings. Students were able to attend this program afterschool for several hours. With this type of operation, the number of students being served was limited because of access and available space. As is consistent with national data, an excess of fifty percent of the senior class had yet to accumulate the necessary credits to be a legitimate senior. As an aspect of Adequate Yearly Progress reporting and compliance through No Child Left Behind, high school graduation and attendance rates were key discussions held by school district administrators. Due to the increasing number of students who were credit deficient entering their fourth year of high school, the program was expanded and moved to one centralized facility within one of the existing high schools. The sudden expansion of the program caused a brief period of flux because of the decision to centralize the program within the physical site of a previously established alternative

education program and vocational school. The coexistence of several educational programs under one roof made it necessary for the program to negotiate for expanded space within the physical site. Additional issues considered centered around staffing, technology upgrade and integration, software licensing, training, supervision, and admissions criteria. It was at this point the asynchronous credit recovery program began to take on the status of a recognizably operational and viable high school alternative.

Curriculum Delivery

The credit recovery program associated with this study utilizes an online educational delivery program provided by a software licensing agreement between the school district and Pearson Education, Incorporated. Pearson Education, Incorporated created and developed NovaNET® software to compete in the growing market of online curricula. The NovaNET® software allows for a one hundred percent computer based curriculum. The NovaNET® courseware is a standards-based comprehensive curriculum that allows for student interaction, periodic assessment, and real time Adequate Yearly Progress reporting under No Child Left Behind. The NovaNET® program is self-paced and allows for ample student progress as well as opportunities to conduct topical online research.

To accommodate the learning levels of students, NovaNET® includes the BASI (Basic Academic Skills Inventory) assessment, which measures a student's range of ability in reading,

language skills, and mathematics. The NovaNET® software then appropriates the curriculum delivery to the particular student's abilities. To further ensure student learning is taking place, NovaNET® provides an assessment upon completion of a particular subject module. A student must have seventy percent proficiency in the assessment in order to move to the next course module. However, if a student does not achieve such, the system reverts back and provides a review and tutoring component to increase student competency on the module assessment. Because NovaNET® has over 6,000 hours of self-paced coursework the student assessments are never replicated. Therefore, students can sit side by side during a course assessment and have distinct individualized course assessments.

Program Structure

Students enrolled in the credit recovery program are accepted by school referral, walk-in, or through the special education placement process. Student applications, referrals, and school records are reviewed to ensure the credit recovery program is an appropriate placement for the student. Once a student has been approved to attend the credit recovery program, an introductory meeting and case review are held with the student to outline the expectations of the credit recovery program. A site administrator communicates expectations to the student. Also in the presence of the site administrator is a parent, probation officer, advocate, or guidance counselor. The student is presented with a student handbook to review prior to their first day of official enrollment.

The credit recovery program associated with this study has two daily sessions: morning and afternoon. The morning program session begins promptly at 7:30am and ends at 11:30am. There

is a half hour interval between morning and afternoon program sessions to allow for staff breaks and preparation for the afternoon session. The second program session begins promptly at 12:00pm and ends at 4:00pm.

Through direct observation, I witnessed students enter the physical school site through the primary points of entry and egress. Students proceed towards the ground floor staircase and are required to check-in prior to ascending to the third floor for credit recovery programming. The check-in procedure is a security measure that ensures student safety. School district records indicate that there are students who have been previously adjudicated and are currently in the juvenile or adult justice system under probationary status. With this, student safety remains a priority in an attempt to eliminate the potential encroachment of school district policy.

Once the check-in process is completed, students are waived for entry into the daily program. Students ascend to the third floor of the aged school property. The third floor of the school site has three independent program administrative offices, two large adjoining classrooms for the credit recovery program, and a pair of gender specific lavatories.

Students enter the program classroom and are required to sign-in as another means by which attendance is gauged. Students proceed to an available computer and log on to the NovaNET® program through a student username and password. At this point, students could now continue with their specific online coursework from the previous session.

Learning Environment

The credit recovery program operates between two adjoining large-scale classrooms on the third floor of a historic school building built during the first quarter of the last century. Although historic in character, the building does not provide the necessary learning space for a progressive twenty-first century education. Because no modern heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system exists, the third floor of the building becomes extremely hot during the fall and spring seasons. This is not necessarily the optimal climate for technology-based programs. Often, during these seasons when the heat index rises, computer processing slows and students are unable to proceed with their online coursework. A decade ago, fiber optics cables were installed in the building to allow for online access and a centralized telephone network. However, the fiber optics connections have become quite outdated when compared to today's advances in technology integration and accessibility. Because a high-speed internet connection has not been established at this school site, online research and NovaNET® access can be time consuming.

Classrooms

The adjoining classrooms house a number of desktop personal computers for access to the online credit recovery programming offered through the NovaNET® software. Classroom A has the larger number of computers when compared to Classroom B. Both classrooms serve as sources to an approved online curriculum as approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Classroom A

Classroom A serves as the primary space for online instruction and accessibility to an instructor and program facilitator. Classroom A also serves as the primary site for all student academic and attendance records.

Classroom A has twenty desktop personal computers for student use with the NovaNET ® software. There are four rows of student computers with seven, five, five, and three computers per row. The walls are laden with an array of inspirational words and phrases created by staff and students. There is also a wall length blackboard where pertinent information and announcements are written or posted. Additionally, a data printout of student progress is posted on the wall as a means to inspire student engagement.

Beyond the technological tools used for instruction, the interior of the classroom lacks the accoutrements of a modern day classroom. In other words, the classroom is not appealing upon first entering. However, the observed simplicity of the interior classroom impressed upon me that this method of education does not rely on striking visuals and costly resources to maintain interest and active participation. It is within this simplicity that I observed and noted a strong academic focus amongst the student population. Additionally, the focus on academics could be due to the lack of classroom transitions and periodic disruption experienced in a traditional high school setting. To this point, the mission of the program is straightforward and implied through the physical setting, the individualized means of instruction, and the lack of group related activities.

There are two adult supervisors within Classroom A to assist students when needed. The facilitator addresses student needs and ensures days move along smoothly and without incident. The program facilitator works at a crescent shaped desk located in the far corner of the classroom. The crescent shaped desk affords students the opportunity to meet with the facilitator to review progress within the program and review the academic prescription in a professional capacity. A special education teacher is assigned to the credit recovery program to support

special needs students through the computer based educational process. The special education teacher works out of Classroom A and conducts daily check-ins with the students to make sure all aspects of the student's individual education plan (IEP) is in compliance and the academic and behavioral progress is in accordance with the IEP.

Classroom B

Classroom B serves as the room for credit recovery spillovers from Classroom A. Classroom B is also utilized for online research, book research, and the critique of senior projects. In addition to the ten desktop personal computers used to accommodate students from Classroom A, there are fifteen traditional school desks set amongst four rows to allow students to read independently, conduct additional research, and examine the catalogue of published resources. There is one adult supervisor in this classroom whose responsibility was observed to be the provision of academic support and to conduct critiques of written documents produced by the student population. This teacher is charged with the responsibility of assigning eligible student workers to the district's job placement/co-op program.

Supplemental Support Services

Beyond credit review, academic placement, and scheduling, the credit recovery program utilizes the guidance counselor and several site based support personnel to assist students with transitions associated with social and behavioral growth, reintegration, child rearing, transportation, employment and higher education opportunities, as well as the various relationships, conflicts, and dilemmas that affect the student participant.

Because of the structure of the credit recovery program, students were afforded generous time to meet with support staff. Therefore, student meetings were not limited to a brief meet and discuss as occurs within a full school day where coursework and organizational obligations constrain the potential for immediate disclosure and counseling.

Behaviors and Interactions

Through lengthy immersion in the program, I was able to observe and note student behaviors, peer-to-peer interaction, and student to teacher interaction. It was important to observe the behavior of students while enrolled in the credit recovery program. Students were identified as at-risk due to the exhibition of negative behaviors prior to enrolling in the credit recovery program. At-risk behaviors included course failure and high absence rates. Therefore, it was necessary to observe behaviors to compare notes and school district documents related to student behaviors while enrolled in the larger traditional high school setting.

Observed Behaviors

I witnessed male students arriving alone or with one other male. Rarely did I see small or large groups of males entering the credit recovery program together. Female students often arrived in groups of more than two and generally sat among one another if seating arrangements allowed for such. Occasionally, a male and female couple would enter together. Males were more apt than females to sit at the first available seat and appeared to be unconcerned with the degree of peer to peer interaction. Once inside the program, students engaged in rudimentary conversations ranging from social networking to entertainment to occurrences in the local community. Through casual interactions, students who did not know one another in a traditional

high school setting were able to develop a work-related acquaintance based upon the common goal of graduating from high school: “You go over to credit recovery and you just meet people and you sit there and sometimes you talk to them and get to know them and ya’ll become real close friends.” (G5) Soon after initial greetings and dialogue were exhausted, students logged on to the NovaNET® program and continued with their coursework.

I observed a sense of calm within the credit recovery program that I had never observed in a traditional education setting. As observed, interfacing directly with the computer program lessened the frequency of negative behaviors often seen in a traditional classroom. Because of the asynchronous nature of the credit recovery program, each student appeared to work within the realms of their own existence thus disallowing externalities to influence their behavior in a negative manner. The development of an independence from influence was evident through observation and subject responses. Therefore, the limited degree of dialogue amongst peers reduced the potential for verbal conflict and program disruption. The lack of disruption allowed for an intense focus on the academic goals at hand: “I enrolled in the credit recovery program because I felt like it helped me focus more on me than anybody else...or getting sidetracked by everyone else and what they were trying to learn and all that” (G1); “It’s not loud. Like everybody is trying to do the same thing” (G2); “Not talking to everybody [and] got my work done faster. When I was in regular class, I was always talking and not doing my work” and “I got done faster. There wasn’t as many interruptions and stuff” (G4); and “It was quiet. Really quiet like library quiet” (G5). The program also encouraged independence on the part of the student population: “It really taught me to be more independent.”(G1): “My day was independent. The way you learned everything fell back on you. It taught me that I could be independent and if I

wanted something that I could get it if I put my mind to it”(G3); “When you’re on the computer, you’re working by yourself” (G4); and “...because I went and did my work and did what I had to do and get in and out” (G5).

Accordingly, because credit recovery is self-paced, there appeared to be no negative attitudes emanating from pressures often exercised on students in a traditional format. The absence of institutional pressures often bounded by time, promoted a calm, almost casual learning environment: “You didn’t have to worry about getting a certain amount of work done within the time period that you were in class” (G1); “I was able to go, get what I had to get done [completed] for the day” (G2); “Nobody wants to sit there and look at a paper all day in school. Nobody wants to sit there and do paperwork all day” (G3); “It didn’t consume my whole day. I still got the work done but it didn’t take up my whole day” (G4); and “...I knew that when I went to credit recovery it wasn’t going to be a long period of time—taking all day to do my work” (G5).

For the benefit of this study, I witnessed a greater commitment and confidence in students upon completion of a coursework assessment or module. Feelings of assuredness were expressed in their body language, facial expressions, and public statements. With this, the students remained upbeat and focused on the coursework before them. This type of gratification could have a positive effect on student attendance, participation, motivation, self esteem, and academic achievement: “As I kept going with it, I just got more confident that I was going to graduate” (G1); “...so once you know you’re getting done with modules this fast and the test this fast, then it makes you like, this is nothing. I can go ahead and get done” and “At credit recovery, they let you know from the beginning—from the time that you start through the time that you’re there

what you need to do to graduate” (G2); “But once I started going to credit recovery and I was finishing my stuff so fast, they were like you’re about to be done.” and “Because I was finishing. I was actually getting my work done” and “I came everyday” (G4); and “It was valuable to me because I got my credits fast and I was happy about that” (G5).

During periods of observation, I noted that female students attended at a higher frequency than male students. Female students also logged more seat time than male students. In other words, female participants would remain on site for longer periods of time than male students. Overall, female students progressed at a faster pace than their male counterparts. Direct observation did not provide insight into the daily rates of progression by either gender. However, female students were observed to be more actively engaged and on task, whereas male students were observed going on line and accessing music and sports websites not associated with the credit recovery program.

Female students were extremely attentive to the task at hand and rarely, if ever, digressed from the online coursework module. I observed the occasional cellular phone calls to friends, jobs, daycare, or home. Cellular phones were allowed in this learning environment because many student participants have adult responsibilities where it is necessary to be contacted without penalty or violation of policy.

Participant Background

I was given permission to access archived data specific to the non-traditional female participants associated with this study. The accessed documents were limited to the student’s general

information, cumulative folder, academic transcripts, discipline and attendance records while enrolled in the traditional high school and later in the credit recovery program.

Female students selected for this study are listed as African American according to school district records. All females were at least eighteen years of age at the time of this study. These non-traditional African American females were identified as at-risk at some point during their high school career. They were identified because of excessive absences, coursework failure, or failure to adapt to a traditional high school setting. Their at-risk behavior made them eligible to participate in a non-traditional educational program that would provide the opportunity to secure academic credits towards high school graduation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland reported that in 2007 sixty-five percent of African American households were head by a single parent. Further, the report states that in Pennsylvania the percentage reaches a staggering sixty-nine percent (National KIDS COUNT Program, 2009). This does not take into account the number of children residing within those households. Therefore, the number of African American children residing in a single parent household may exceed seventy percent.

Specific to this study, school records indicate that one hundred percent of the female study participants reside within a single parent household with the mother at the helm. Female head households are at a disadvantage if only by the absence of direct or supplemental sources of income and support that generally exists within a two-parent household. Although not investigated for this study, research indicates African American mothers maintain close influential relationships with their daughters (Doswell, 2005; Jones Thomas, 2007; Kerpelman,

2004). Through these strong relationships and open lines of communication, these daughters/study respondents provide additional and much needed support to the larger family dynamic. Incidentally, none of the non-traditional female participants was engaged in any school based extra curricular activities whether being clubs, organizations, or athletics. At the time of this study, one hundred percent of the respondents stated that they were either working or actively pursuing employment while still in high school. With this being said, eighty percent of the female respondents indicated that their contributions to a balanced household is a priority in their lives and enrollment in the credit recovery program provided them the freedom and time to attend to their varied situations:

I'm a very family-oriented person, so I was really focused on my family, for real; like trying to help us out so that we can live a little better life. (G1)

So once you get done with your credit recovery or your work at school, you could go home and focus on your responsibilities that you need to take care of. It gave me more time to get out and look for a job. (G1)

I would always come home from credit recovery and go job hunting. Like, me and my friends would look for jobs and see which school we wanted to enroll in—figure out where we wanted to be in life. (G1)

Because I had my son a little early—he was in the hospital. While he was in the hospital, I had enough time to go to school (credit recovery), finish-up what I had to do in school, and come back and handle my son. (G2)

I worked every night. (G2)

Yes, [credit recovery] fit in perfectly. And I take care of my mom because she's really sick. (G2)

And I needed to work, too. (G4)

The thing with my son was he went to daycare from eight to five. So, therefore, I had to find a way to do school and work between eight and five o'clock. (G4)

Because I had to take care of my son. I couldn't be in school for seven hours. He was in daycare—I had no one else to watch him. I needed to work while he was in daycare. (G4)

I would get up, come to credit recovery, finish my work, come to work, get off work, pick my son up, and come home. (G4)

Coming home, doing my chores, taking care of my two little brothers and going to work. (G5)

Because ever since I been going to credit recovery, it's been keeping me on my track as far as taking care of my little brothers and taking care of my home. (G5)

The quicker I got my work done, the quicker I could leave and you know, attend to my job, attend to my little brothers and home. (G5)

As is revealed within student responses, the non-traditional African American female students in this study find themselves in a position of responsibility that is not general to the traditional high school female student. From childcare dilemmas to earning a wage to caring for the home, many school age African American females must endure burdens associated with adulthood. Terry Moe (Personal electronic communication, February 17, 2009), Political Science Professor at Stanford University and online school advocate stated,

Urban African-American females are but one of the many groups of students who could be served in this way. In their case, they may come from deprived backgrounds, have serious educational deficits that may need to be overcome, have economic and family hardships to deal with in addition to school, and much more—so they will need coursework that is specialized to their learning needs and specialized as well to their schedules.

Therefore, the time intensive traditional method of graduating from high school is in direct conflict with the day-to-day situations these female students find themselves.

Academics

Utilizing school district transcript data, I created a table of annual credit accumulation through the subjects' high school career. The data provides relevant insight relative to the non-traditional African American female student's progress through high school. The table indicates that as the

non-traditional African American female population progressed through high school, the percentage of students on grade level fell each year.

All female students for this study entered ninth grade in the traditional high school setting. However, at the end of their freshman year, sixty percent were not eligible for a tenth grade assignment. Unfortunately, school district records indicate that despite their freshman credit deficiencies, they were granted tenth grade/sophomore status. As the respondents moved through their tenth grade year, only twenty percent were eligible for junior/third year status. Again, however, all students were promoted to the eleventh grade. By the time the subject's fourth year approached, one hundred percent of the respondents did not have the necessary credits to be a true senior when gauged against mandatory credit numbers. Moreover, sixty percent of the study participants had to enroll in school for an additional year.

Eighty percent of the non-traditional African American female population did not accrue the necessary credits for promotion to eleventh grade. Because of this, there is a need to investigate the ninth and tenth grade years of African American females to develop a deeper understanding of the events and influences that create such dilemmas. As stated, the freshman and sophomore years are the points where identity consideration is at its most recognizably severe point of flux and transformation whether emanating from gender or race. It is here that consideration of progressive and preventative policy initiatives are considered.

Credit Accumulation by School Year

Female Participants	Y1 Credits	Y2 Credits	Y3 Credits	Y4 Credits	Y5 Credits
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G1 Green	1.0	4.5	5.0	4.5	10.0
G2 Black	7.0	7.0	1.0	10.0	
G3 Blue	6.0	3.25	1.5	13.25	
G4 Red	0.0	7.0	3.0	2.0	12.0
G5 Yellow	7.5	5.75	2.75	6.0	2.0

Peer-to-Peer Interaction

Participant responses to inquiry concerning peer-to-peer interaction while enrolled in a credit recovery program yielded responses more about the traditional high school environment than the non-traditional credit recovery program.

During lengthy periods of observation, while both the morning and afternoon credit recovery programs were in session, I had the opportunity to observe peer-to-peer interaction. Student interaction was limited to general conversation in class or during a group break period. Female students did not interact frequently and immersed themselves, more often than not, in their coursework. The opportunity to be actively engaged in their academic progress appeared to supersede any need for full communicative engagement: “I didn’t really have too many friends at credit recovery. I was there for me and trying to get my work done” (G1); “As far as the social—it wasn’t really. It was a real quiet environment” (G3); “I didn’t really talk to too many people

that much” (G4); and “I could just walk into the class and not have to talk to anybody. I wouldn’t really have to converse with the people sitting next to me” (G5)

To the contrary, study participants responded adversely about the affects of the traditional high school environment on their attitudes, behaviors, and achievement:

But when I was at the high, it was just—regardless if you know the people or not, someone is always in your ear trying to get you involved—bring you into their drama. (G1)

Just seeing that at the high school, there was a lot of chaos and you couldn’t really focus too much ...and there was a lot of stuff going on. (G1)

Getting into other people’s drama. Being in the halls a lot. Just doing a lot of unnecessary stuff that I didn’t need to be doing. (G1)

There was a lot of violence. And them breaking up the fights and the teaching, we didn’t really have time in between the classes. (G2)

At credit recovery, you’re around new people and people that are trying to be on the same level that you’re trying to be on. (G2)

But you’re around so many different people that you’re not yourself. At credit recovery, you can be yourself and be around people that’s on your level. (G2)

It’s the environment. It’s the environment-the environment. I just think that the type of environment John Harris is it influenced everybody. (G3)

There’s only a handful of people who really come to school to do their work. Nine times out of ten, people are in the hallways or whatever. (G3)

Like if I’m at John Harris, you’re distracted by all the loud noises in the hallway. (G3)

Education just wasn’t on their mind. (G3)

I slacked off a lot. I slept a lot in class. I didn’t really do work. I walked the hallways; just whatever was going on at that time. (G3)

At John Harris it was more like whatever. (G3)

Back then, I didn’t want to come to school. I hardly ever came to school. (G4)

Well, when I was in school, I didn’t want to do my work. I was always talking and stuff. (G4)

Like, other females and other people, you know, having fights and all that. (G5)

The autonomy of the asynchronous credit recovery program isolated the participants from negative influences thus allowing uninterrupted learning to occur which encouraged a higher degree of concentration and focus on the academic task-at-hand.

Student to Teacher Interaction

During the interview process, students spoke freely on their impression of their relationship with the credit recovery instructors. Often, their responses reflected the educational climate of the traditional high school in terms of cause and effect. Subject responses went back and forth between their perceptions of the relationships in credit recovery versus the relationships in the traditional high school. As can be seen in the responses below, the relationships with the instructors in the credit recovery program are regarded as mutually respectful, more developed, attentive, and supportive than those in the traditional high school setting:

Mr. _____ (credit recovery instructor), he was focused on teaching but it also seemed that he was more into getting to know the kids like personally and who they are and how they think and stuff like that so he can really be there and try to help them and know what they're talking about—understand them. Like there weren't too many teachers like that at the [traditional high school] if you ask me. (G1)

Like, the teachers [in a traditional high school setting] couldn't really focus on that one person that really needed help. I mean, [in credit recovery] you don't have to go through all the hassle of trying to get a teacher's attention to answer your questions. In credit recovery, you did a lot of the stuff on your own but if you needed help, like, one of the teachers would be there for you and explain exactly how it needs to be explained. (G1)

Yes, a whole lot more support [in credit recovery]. Since the principal we had at the high passed away, all the support and all the people who was there for us earlier when she was there, they all dropped off. (G2)

They [traditional high school teachers] talked to us like we're not smart enough even though you know you're smart enough. They'll talk to you as though you're a nobody. They'll talk to you in a disrespectful way. (G2)

Like, [the credit recovery teachers] were really encouraging us to graduate. In credit recovery, they encourage you. It was more like they understood where you were coming from...they talked to you like an adult. (G2)

Well, our twelfth grade teachers [in credit recovery] were a whole lot different than what we were used to. When you needed him (credit recovery instructor), he took the time out to sit there and explain to you and help you out. He was just really there. (G2)

...but it's also the teachers who are teaching them. The teachers who are teaching, they'll make it seem like it's a joke. "Well, I don't care. I'm getting paid. So, if you don't want to do your work, don't do it." (G2)

Like, Mr. _____ and Mrs. _____ (credit recovery instructors), they're very cool people; down to earth people. [Traditional high school teachers] were just teaching. They're not really trying to get to know the students or anything. They just teach. (G3)

I'd see Mrs. _____ (credit recovery instructor) and say, "Hey, Mrs. _____" and bust it up or whatever. I see the teachers at John Harris standing at the door [and] I'd walk right by them and go sit down. (G3)

Because my [traditional high school] teacher would always try to tell me what to do- bossing me around. You don't want to be listening to this dumb lady talking all day about stuff that I already know. (G4)

I didn't really like high school like that. I didn't really get along with some of the students and teachers. But when I got over to credit recovery, it just seems like I just bonded. (G5)

I was comfortable with [credit recovery]. I liked it a lot. I didn't really like to do work sheets or be taught by teachers because some teachers make it complicated. They confuse you. (G5)

These student responses reveal deficiencies in teacher to student relationships at the traditional high school. From the responses, a connection between student and teacher was underdeveloped and could potentially breed hostility between student and teacher. Female student participant responses indicate a lack of support towards student achievement and success. The presence of a divide, perhaps due to racial stereotypes, bias, and a lack of professional training and understanding pertinent to minority student development and culture, negatively affects student attendance, participation, and motivation in a high school setting. To this point, the relationships in the credit recovery program seemed to have a positive affect on student ambition, perception, and outcome.

Without interviewing the traditional education teachers, limited instructional time could have an adverse effect on relationship development and student progress when there is an excess of students in the classroom. Unlike a traditional high school setting, credit recovery students are in the same classroom with their instructor for a four-hour period. Therefore, the opportunity to foster an effective and professionally adult relationship is available through the experience while enrolled in the credit recovery program.

Feedback session

I conducted a series of brief feedback sessions with the five subject participants. The feedback session included one general question about the future of the asynchronous credit recovery program and an opportunity to provide additional comments from the initial interview sessions. I conducted two feedback sessions telephonically and the remaining three in person. I provided their earlier responses to such inquiry and specifically asked if there are any changes from their initial responses regarding the recommendations and future of the asynchronous credit recovery program.

The respondents maintained that the asynchronous program is a benefit to the Harrisburg School District, should increase the capacity to engage a larger student population who would be better suited for such an educational delivery model, and should have its own independent school site:

I see the credit recovery program in five years—I wouldn't even give it five years. [I would] say about two or three [years] in a nice big building. [Offering] a lot of different classes, a lot of good teachers and a lot more students. (G1)

I think they're going to end up building another school so that they can have a whole school of kids that need to get in credit recovery instead of a waiting list to get in credit recovery. You can have your own school. (G2)

I wouldn't change it. Unless like you can get more people who are really struggling in high school to come and have more classes for them. To expand it more [sic] would be great. Because a lot of kids who are really struggling in big classes or any school that is in the Harrisburg School District, they'll want to go there because they can do hands on and get help. (G2)

I think in the next five years they could put the credit recovery program [deeper] into the public school system. Hopefully.

I don't think it should go away. It should still be here because it helps people. (G4)

I think they need to expand it a lot. I can see it being more of a building than just classes. I can see it being a nice little building for credit recovery students and more students—hundreds of students; more than before. I really see it expanding a lot. (G5)

Summary of Chapter Five

Chapter five answered the research questions (1.) How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect non-traditional African American female's perceptions of education? (2.) How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect the lives of non-traditional African American female student participants? and (3.) What are the factors that contribute to the success of the non-traditional African American female student participant?

Chapter five presents the analyzed data through three themes: (1.) Internal motivation (2.)

Teacher encouragement and support effect and (3.) Program effects. In the first theme, I describe internal motivation and the development of such through enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program. This section considers the asynchronous program and emphasizes the affect on the autonomy and centralized focus of the non-traditional African American female student. Through the asynchronous program application, the non-traditional female students became more confident about their educational pursuits and abilities as the potential to graduate was realized.

In the second theme, Teacher encouragement and support effect is described. When the students entered the asynchronous program from a traditional urban school setting, they immediately responded to the degree of positive interaction and encouragement received within the credit recovery learning environment. Positive reinforcement and the presence of a caring and supportive leader had a significant effect on the subject participants (Sakiz, 2009). Participants developed positive relationships and began to attend school with increased regularity. The supportive environment reduced the potential for hostility and conflict as was frequently evidenced in the traditional high school learning environment. Through this, encouragement and support for student learning and achievement positively affected student attitudes and perceptions of education.

In the third theme, the effect of the asynchronous program on the student population is described. Due to the hourly requirements, the technology based curriculum, and the independent and self-paced learning components, the asynchronous credit recovery program enhanced student achievement unlike a traditional learning environment. Further, the participants were able to address the demands of school while balancing the ever-present obligations associated with child rearing and employment. Free from personality conflicts, social dilemmas, and the physical transition between classes, enrollment in the asynchronous credit recovery provided a platform where students could focus on the task-at-hand without the turbulence caused by external influences or forces within a traditional school setting.

When observed, the three themes of the research contribute to an understanding of the phenomena of the non-traditional African American female student in terms of identity development and the ability to adapt and create strategies to navigate a non-traditional

educational system with them at the center for consideration. Over time, the students radiated an assuredness that was underdeveloped in their previous educational surroundings. As the students progressed through the asynchronous program, each student became more connected to the learning environment. The resolution of learning environment coupled with the necessary academic and personal support contributed to the development of an independently functional identity for the student participants. The strengthening of their independent identities advanced their ambitions to graduate from high school as well as enhanced their abilities to move confidently through decision-making processes resulting in higher rates of educational attainment, task accomplishment, personal satisfaction, and self-esteem.

CHAPTER 6 IMPLICATION FOR POLCIY AND PRACTICE, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion

This research is a qualitative case study on the perceptions of a group of non-traditional African American female graduates who completed high school through an asynchronous credit recovery program. Few qualitative research studies are conducted on the investigation of how non-traditional African American female students make sense of their daily lives and navigate the often obstacle laden course towards high school graduation. The research focuses on the observed phenomenon within an asynchronous curriculum delivery program at a mid-size urban school district. The urban school district is located in the mid Atlantic region of the United States. Three research questions guided this study: How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect non-traditional African American female's perceptions of education? How does enrollment in an asynchronous credit recovery program affect the lives of non-traditional African American female student participants? What are the factors that contribute to the success of the non-traditional African American female student participants?

The research utilizes interviews, observation, and school district records to collect data. The data presented the status, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of the subjects enrolled in an

asynchronous credit recovery program. This chapter discusses the findings, the implication for policy and practice, and describes the limitations as well as offers suggestions for future researches. The three themes found in this research are internal motivation, teacher encouragement and support effect, and program effect. These themes parallel the description of how the non-traditional African American female participants of the credit recovery program transitioned, assimilated, developed, and aligned themselves for success while enrolled in a technology based asynchronous curriculum delivery program. They describe how students perceived the learning environment, the affect the learning environment had on their progress and personal lives, revelations about the effectiveness of such programming, and the identity development that occurred while attending the asynchronous credit recovery program.

The first theme of internal motivation describes how the non-traditional African American female student enrolled in the credit recovery program overcomes credit deficiencies, makes efforts to adapt to a new learning environment, and the struggles they negotiate to their goal. These non-traditional African American females exhibited resilience and self-efficacy in an environment that placed them in a position to be self-reliant. Therefore, their motivation and confidence increased as they witnessed academic success (Thomas, 2009). Their success became a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of academic success fueling their motivation, which, in turn, inspired increased efforts to succeed. This circularity became the method from which the non-traditional African American female drew to maintain continuity towards improved behaviors and academic achievement.

The second theme of this study, teacher encouragement and support effect, reveals a fundamental contrast between a traditional learning environment and a non-traditional asynchronous learning

environment: how to effectively develop powerfully positive and enriching relationships and redefine the role of the teacher in the learning space towards academic and social success. School affective support is associated with the process, growth, and sustainability of a significantly impactful relationship between the student and the school they attend. A student's attachment to the learning environment and the educational leader or teacher has a significant impact on the success of an educational program. Study participants stated that an undeveloped, discouraging, and unsupportive relationship with their teachers led to misunderstandings and negatively affected their academic progress and attachment to the traditional school environment. It was not until these students relocated to an asynchronous learning environment that they felt supported and encouraged by teachers and facilitators. The effect of such fostered more concentration on the attainment of lost credits, modification of negative behaviors, increased student attendance and time on task. The encouragement received in the asynchronous credit recovery program offset institutional pressures and threats thus allowing personal growth and intrinsic motivation to manifest towards academic and personal success.

The third theme, program effect, recognizes the relevance of an asynchronous design and autonomous structure. Time, as a factor in the personal lives of the student participants, became manageable through their participation in the asynchronous credit recovery program. Moreover, incremental success and periodic assessment through the isolated learning environment inspired a reinvigorated application of previous knowledge, skills, commitment to learning, and credit accumulation. Student participants stated that the isolation from negative influences was influential in the sustainability of focus and task completion. Students found that this type of educational programming was beneficial to their learning as well as their motivation in pursuit of

a high school diploma. The personalized instructional component and the self-paced structure is supportive of the learning capacity of each student. Therefore, the program platform coupled with teacher encouragement enhanced the intrinsic motivation of the non-traditional African American female towards identity development and an assuredness that they could achieve great things through participation in a technology based educational vehicle.

Implication for Policy and Practice

This study examined three aspects of the asynchronous as well as traditional learning environment: motivation towards accomplishment, teacher encouragement and support, program delivery and the effect on a group of non-traditional African American female graduates. The findings of this study could prompt traditional educators to be responsive to the current issues relative to methods to increase the presence, effectiveness, and quality of support within a traditional learning environment and help those charged with the responsibility of conducting professional development become knowledgeable of the cultures, perspectives, and life experiences of the student population. Further, findings can inspire school districts to investigate the positive outcomes emanating from an asynchronous credit recovery program and the means by which an asynchronous program accommodates the learning styles, responsibilities, and time sensitive nature of the student participants.

This particular study can provide educational leaders, traditional and non-traditional school educators, and researchers additional insight into the trends, lives, and needs of the growing non-traditional African American female population. As stated in chapter five, more than fifty percent of African American households are head by the mother or female guardian. With this in

mind and if held true, a large percentage of recently graduated African American female students will be responsible for the safety and financial security of their future households in a country of diminishing resources. These women are often underprepared for a life that demands more resourcefulness, access, education, and effort towards stability and sustainability. The African American community is dependent upon the solid infrastructure of a socially responsible urban learning network. As early as elementary school, support for the success of African American female students should be an integral part of the curriculum and supplementary programming. Female students who do not feel acknowledged, accepted, or considered in the classroom run the risk of developing resistant, disruptive, and isolationist behaviors. Such behavioral shifts result in apathy, academic failure, increased absenteeism and, ultimately, dropping out. The consideration of a hybrid classroom that incorporates group focused teaching practices, culturally relevant student development exercises, and autonomously technological applications can provide an alternative instructional design to the traditional classroom paradigm.

This study also offers the experiences, practices, and perceptions of the participants to advocates of online asynchronous learning programs as an insightful interpretation of program effect on a non-traditional learner. This information may assist advocacy groups and companies relative to their research and development towards the ongoing assessment and subsequent enhancement of product delivery as a means to satisfy the needs of the school program and non-traditional student participant beyond academic credit accrual.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that affect its transferability to other situations. The study was limited to one graduating class through the non-traditional asynchronous curriculum program. The graduating class population was eighty-eight students, and interviewees included five non-traditional African American female students. The behaviors and perceptions of the female graduates do not encompass a generalized representation of all credit recovery programs, enrollees, or African American females. Moreover, the research site is located in a third class city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and does not represent the demographics of other regions or their secondary student population. The research may not reveal or accurately imply the same phenomenon of future studies to the same subject. This research can only explain the phenomenon specific to this case within the conducted space and time. With the increasing research and development of credit recovery programs, upgraded facilities, and the demand for expanded programming, the eligible candidate pool is growing. When future researchers use the results of this study, there needs to be an acknowledgement and understanding of these factors to maintain the objectivity of the studies.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research highlights an aspect of the effect of an autonomous technology program on a group of non-traditional African American female graduates. As there is relatively limited research exploring the effect of asynchronous online programming and non-traditional African American female students, additional research will further reveal aspects of the identity development of non-traditional African American females as well as the burgeoning credit recovery program as technology integration expands its presence in all facets of our everyday lives.

Few studies have explored the effects of the traditional urban school environment on African American females. This study suggests that the traditional urban school setting can negatively influence and disrupt the behaviors of the non-traditional African American female when supports and resources are inadequate and influences are in stark contrast to the needs of the non-traditional African American female. Further, this study suggests that researchers investigate the influences and results of an asynchronous curriculum delivery model on a larger and more diverse group of urban minority students. Additionally, expanded research should be conducted on the learning styles, shifts in learning styles, and instructional design of the asynchronous curriculum delivery program. Research is needed to divulge and interpret the impact and influence of the factors that play a crucial part in the growth and expansion of asynchronous credit recovery programs and the parallels associated with non-traditional African American female participants.

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APPENDIX A TIME LINE

June, 2009

- Secure Superintendent approval
- Write research proposal

August, 2009

- Complete research proposal

October, 2009

- IRB approval
- Proposal defense
- Identify graduated African American female participants (5) for interviews
- Send research and letters to graduated African American female participants
- Contact graduated African American female participants for interviews

November, 2009

- Schedule interviews and conduct interviews with African American female participants
- Transcribe interviews with graduated African American female participants
- Review school documents and student records
- Conduct member checks and feedback sessions

December, 2009

- Code observation series
- Conduct interview member checks with African American female participants
- Code graduated African American female participant interview transcription

January, 2010

- Data analysis

March, 2010

- Submission and revision

April, 2010

- Defense

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Investigator/Researcher: Eric L. Waters

Respondent: Non-tradition African American female participant

1. How did the transition from middle school to high school affect you?
2. What events in your past led to your enrollment in a credit recovery program?
3. Why did you enroll in a credit recovery program?
4. How is your day different in a credit recovery program than in the traditional high school setting?
5. How have your feelings about the school environment changed since enrolling in credit recovery?
6. Do you see your goals as being any different than the girls enrolled in a traditional program?
7. How have your feelings about school completion (graduation) changed since enrolling in credit recovery?
8. How did enrollment in a credit recovery program affect your ambition to graduate?
9. How have your behaviors changed since enrolling in a credit recovery program?
10. How would you compare your social experiences in credit recovery and your experiences in a traditional high school setting?
11. How has your perception of education changed over time?
12. How has enrollment in a credit recovery program affected your attendance?
13. How does this independently structured education model contribute to your learning?
14. How comfortable are you with this type of online learning?
15. How has credit recovery enhanced your ability to perform electronic research?
16. What are your feelings about a computer based education model?
17. How does your relationship with the credit recovery facilitator differ from your relationship with a classroom teacher?
18. How would you change the credit recovery program?
19. What are some of your responsibilities outside of school?
20. How has credit recovery allowed you to maintain your outside responsibilities?
21. What does your typical day look like?
22. How has a credit recovery program prepared you for life after graduation?
23. What are you doing since graduating?
24. How was the credit recovery program valuable to you?
25. Where do you see credit recovery programs in five years?
26. Are there any comments that you would like to add or do you have any questions for me at this time?

TITLE: A Qualitative Analysis of African American Female High school Graduates' Perceptions of Participating in an Asynchronous Credit Recovery Program

Eric L. Waters, Student Investigator
Temple University/Education Administration
717-695-3508

Vivian Ikpa, Principal Investigator
Temple University/Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Ritter Hall 256
1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122-6091
215-204-6169

I am currently engaged in a study of African American female achievement. To help me gain further insights into this area I will ask you to respond to a series of questions associated with your graduation from high school.

The data you will provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence.

I welcome questions about the study at any time. Your participation in this study is on voluntary basis, and you may refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice.

Questions about my rights as a research subject may be directed to Mr. Richard Throm, Office of the Vice President for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 3400 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19140, (215) 707-8757.

Singing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Permission to Audiotape

Investigator's Name: Eric L. Waters

Department: Education Administration

Project Title: Non Traditional African American Females' Perception of Participating in an Asynchronous/Credit Recovery Program

Subject: _____ Date:

Log #:

I give Eric L. Waters permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose (s):

(Choose one)

CLINICAL

This audiotape will be used as part of my treatment. It will not be shown to anyone but my treatment team, my family, and myself.

EDUCATION

This audiotape may be shown to education professionals outside of _____ for educational purposes. At no time will my name be used.

RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

MARKETING/PUBLIC INFORMATION

This audiotape will be used to promote _____ to educational or health professionals, referral sources, and/or the general public. At no time will my name be used.

OTHER

Description:

Permission to Audiotape - Page 2 of 3

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period: July 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009.

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from: July 1, 2009
to July 1, 2010.

Audiotape and the associated transcription data will be securely stored for three (3) years after completion of the study.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with

Eric L. Waters in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Investigator's Name: Eric L. Waters

Department: Education Administration

Institution: Temple University

Street Address: 3502 N. 3rd Street

City: Harrisburg State: Pennsylvania

Zip Code 17110

Phone: Office 717-829-5590 Home 717-695-3508

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

