

Fall 2022

Identifying and Understanding Factors Which Affect Persistence In Academically At-Risk Minority Prelicensure Nursing Students: An Action Research Study

Christina L.K. Eaton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Eaton, C. L.(2022). *Identifying and Understanding Factors Which Affect Persistence In Academically At-Risk Minority Prelicensure Nursing Students: An Action Research Study*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/7077>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING FACTORS WHICH AFFECT PERSISTENCE IN
ACADEMICALLY AT-RISK MINORITY PRELICENSURE NURSING STUDENTS: AN
ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

by

Christina L.K. Eaton

Bachelor of Science
Anderson University, 2009

Master of Science
Anderson University, 2016

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2022

Accepted by:

Suha Tamim, Major Professor

Terrance McAdoo, Committee Member

Rebecca Morgan, Committee Member

Jin Liu, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Christina L.K. Eaton, 2022
All Rights Reserved.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the nurses and educators who feel powerless to effect change in their professions. You are seen. You are valued. You are loved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My husband, Mike, is the most patient, loving, and understanding man on this planet. He has, not only, stuck by my side but *supported* me through three degrees. He has been my biggest cheerleader, advocate, and source of encouragement. His love for me has never wavered and I am so incredibly blessed by him every day. The care and devotion you demonstrate towards me, and our family is unfathomable and greatly appreciated. “I can see the colors, babe!”

My family: Jay, Brenda, Laura, Tim, MaLinda, Jim, Lindsey, Maddie, and Rachel- I owe you all for the years of patience while I squirreled myself away to write or study. Your support, encouragement, and love mean the world to me; it has not gone unnoticed.

Finally, Dr Tamim. I don't think you understand how much you have done for me, nor how much you impact your students. You are a constant source of encouragement and believed in me when I was at my some of my lowest points. I don't have the words to express the gratitude I have for all you have done for me... other than THANK YOU! Dr. McAdoo, Dr. Liu, and Dr. Morgan- each of you have stretched me, challenged me, and helped me to grow in ways I didn't know I could. Your faith in me demonstrates the love and devotion you provide for all your students. Please know you are so important, and I appreciate you!

ABSTRACT

Increased representation of minority groups is imperative for professions like nursing and education. With the growing rate of minority racial and ethnic groups within the United States, there should be corresponding changes within these professions, however there is not. This action research study seeks to explore the factors that affect persistence in academically at-risk minority nursing students at a small Midwestern Christian University. The main research question for this study asks, “What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?” The use of Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Social Ecological Model and Critical Theory were the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with the minority students and their academic coach, three prominent themes emerged: Issues Surrounding Race, Family/Relationships, and Encounters with and Values of Healthcare. Since action research was used throughout this study, this iteration of the action research cycle is considered investigational. Based on the findings from this study, the next cycle of action research should focus on creating stronger peer relationships and addressing the needs of English Language Learners (ELL).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
List of Tables	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature	17
Chapter 3 Methodology	47
Chapter 4 Findings	65
Chapter 5 Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations	115
References	135
Appendix A: Student Semi-Structured Interview Questions	143
Appendix B: Academic Coach Semi-Structured Interview Questions	145
Appendix C: Invitation Letter for Participants	146
Appendix D: Consent Form	147

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Breakdown of Racial Diversity.....	52
Table 3.2 Timeline for the Research Procedure.....	61
Table 4.1 Example of Students' Altruism.....	71
Table 5.1 Classification of the Factors That Affect Persistence.....	124
Table 5.2 Timeline for the Action Plan	130

CHAPTER 1

Acceptance into a quality nursing program requires applicants to demonstrate a high level of dedication to their studies. This aligns with the rigorous standards required by a program's accrediting body and societal demand for excellent nurses. In the School of Nursing (SON) in which I worked, the program admittance requirements were: students must achieve a minimum 3.2 cumulative GPA, a "C" or better in General Psychology, and Anatomy & Physiology I & II. Once students are accepted into the SON, they need to achieve an 80% testing average, an overall "C" or better after the testing average has been obtained, a "capable" clinical evaluation, a "capable" in all skills checkoffs, and maintain a 2.0 cumulative GPA or higher.

Ravendale University (pseudonym) School of Nursing (RUSON) is comparable to other Midwest, Christian institutions in admittance and retention requirements. However, unlike other schools, Ravendale University (RU) does not set a cap on how many students enter the nursing program (once meeting entrance requirements). During the freshman year, there are anywhere between 70-90 students who identify nursing as a possible major. These numbers drop, significantly, between starting the freshman and sophomore year. The average number of sophomore students who are admitted to the program is 53 while the average number of graduates is 39. These attrition numbers are on the lower end of normal but not outside the norm for a School of Nursing. Anecdotal themes from students leaving the program often include not achieving the 80% test average, financial aid or scholarship monies are not available, personal/family struggles

that require the student to leave (this is usually adult students), or academic dishonesty (D.S., personal communications, June 2019).

Being a smaller, Christian, Midwest school (1,671 undergraduate and graduate enrolled in the 2018-2019 school year) the minority student population is not large. Even with nursing being the largest undergraduate major on campus, the minority student population within the School of Nursing is not representative of the overall nursing community demographics. Within nursing, the “major” or predominate demographic is White, female. Defined here minority students includes those who are Black/ African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, Asian, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, American Indian/ Alaska Native, or two or more races. The overall USA nursing population identify 80.8% of nurses as being White/ Caucasian, Hispanic/ Latino 5.5%, Black/ African American 6.2%, Asian 7.5%, two or more races 1.7%, American Indian/ Alaska Native as 0.4%, and Native Hawaiian & other Pacific Islander at 0.5% (Smiley et al., 2018, p. S11-S12). The Ravendale University SON population breaks down as: White/ Caucasian population at 90.4%, Hispanic/ Latino at 1.1%, Black/ African American at 5.8%, Asian at 2.8%, and two or more races, American Indian/ Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian & other Pacific Islander as being 0% (SON Internal Data, personal communication, July 2019).

Within the population of the SON are traditional students, adult students (those over 25 years old and admitted to the Adult Studies program but still admitted to the traditional program), and an accelerated program. Adult students are closer to the average age of the current nursing workforce. However, they are unique because of previous life experience informing their education and nursing care. In our SON we have adult students entering with traditional students into the undergraduate degree; there are also

adult students entering into our second degree or accelerated track. The second option is available for students who already have a bachelor's degree and meet the prerequisites (outlined above). We have seen an influx of adult students who are English Language Learners (ELL) entering both the traditional program and accelerated track. These students are automatically offered academic coaching to help with the language barrier and testing success.

At the completion of schooling, nurses are required to take the National Counsel Licensure Examination- Registered Nurse (NCLEX-RN or NCLEX) to be able to work. This exam features a unique style of questioning that Schools of Nursing will utilize to prepare nursing students to demonstrate clinical judgement so they can practice safely and effectively. Within the Ravendale School of Nursing, students are required to achieve an 80% testing average within their respective nursing courses to demonstrate competency of the material. Each summative assessment (unit exam) is averaged with the others within the course to numerically demonstrate the student's understanding of the course material, overall. For example, a course may have five unit exams plus one comprehensive final (weighted the same as the unit exams). A student could earn a 92%, 84%, 75%, 80%, and 89% which when averaged together results in an overall testing average of 84%. This student would successfully move onto the next sequence of courses within the Ravendale School of Nursing curriculum.

Any student who identifies as being "academically at-risk" is eligible for academic coaching. The eligibility criteria for academic coaching are as follows: students who achieve less than a 75% on their first exam, score less than an 80% on their second exam, have had a previous nursing course failure, are English Language Learners (ELL),

and/or have been out of the program for longer than one year. Students are not required to meet with the academic coach; however, the option is strongly encouraged to help ensure success in the program. The academic coach will meet with students once a week and will help “pin-point” strengths and weaknesses. Since the inception of academic coaching (2019-2020 school year) both students and faculty have commented on the improvement in students’ academic work, performance on tests, and increased confidence in the application of their nursing knowledge. However, despite the positive reviews, there are a disproportionate amount of minority students identified as eligible and needing academic coaching versus White students.

Problem of Practice

As a nurse educator, I am striving to better understand what factors affect minority nursing students to persist their undergraduate education at Ravendale University. Being considered the majority in nursing (White, female), I have seen in my professional nursing practice the need for greater representation of minority nurses. The diversity in our US culture is increasing with the US Census Bureau projecting by 2044 half of the US population identifying as being among a racial minority (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Increased representation in professional fields is imperative to bringing forth change, growth, and differing perspectives. As nurses, we need to build rapport, gain trust, and diligently care for those patients, families, and communities in which we live and work to serve. As patients, families, and communities change and grow, the nursing profession must adapt and grow in parallel (Ranard, 2015). I recognize my lived experience as being part of the nursing majority can limit my understanding of the experiences of minority nurses and nursing students.

When speaking with a Black male, Adult Studies student the largest factor that prohibited his persistence in our school of nursing was financial in nature. F.H. stated, “More than once I’ve had to decide to pay my electrical bill or something for school” (F.H., personal communication, October 2019). This student was employed full-time while also attending school full-time. He also required major surgery over one of the summer semesters which placed an extra burden on his academics and financial situation.

Persistence and completion are identified as being the student perspective of what academic institutions call retention/ attrition and graduation (Owolabi, 2018). Thorough tracking and review of student persistence is not only beneficial to the institution to improve retention, but also required by accrediting bodies. Ravendale University was awarded full reaccreditation in the 2018-2019 school year by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) (D.M., personal communication, May 2019). Within the fourth criteria for accreditation the university must “pursue educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs” (Higher Learning Commission, 2019, para. 71). In addition to being in good standing with the State Board of Nursing, the SON is also accredited by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), also known as the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). Within Standard IV, Program Effectiveness, schools of nursing must demonstrate, “a systematic process... to determine program effectiveness.” (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2018, p. 19). There are many qualifiers to determine program effectiveness, however, the two of biggest concern are program completion rates and licensure pass rates (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2018, pp. 19-20).

Minority students are most vulnerable to persistence issues that can be compounded by a predominately white campus (Carter, 2006; Sutherland et al., 2017; White & Fulton, 2015). The literature showed that social and academic support and sufficient funding were two pervasive themes that can positively and negatively contribute to persistence and completion in minority nursing students.

Social and academic support

Minority students who experienced adequate familial, social, faculty, and academic support were significantly more likely to persist in their studies than students who did not have the same support (Owolabi, 2018; Sutherland et al., 2017; Wray et al., 2014; White & Fulton, 2015). Social support included those in the students' family, friends outside school, peers (or classmates), and a "sense of community" within the university setting. "The importance of support from family, friends, and peers to continuation has been previously discussed in general student populations, with lack of social integration (into the college) being a significant contributor to student attrition" (Wray et al., 2014, p. 1708). Included in academic support were relationships with faculty, staff, and tutoring opportunities to aid in student success (Sutherland et al., 2017). In the White and Fulton (2015) study, faculty could have either a very positive or very negative effect on the student experience:

Students perceived faculty to have a strong influence, positive or negative, on their nursing school experiences. Positive faculty interactions were described by students as fair, encouraging, allow for student mistakes, and being patient helpful, caring, and understanding. Interactions described as

negative included being unfair, showing unequal treatment, not honoring confidences, and mistrusting students. (pp. 171;173)

Sufficient funding

Students who received full funding had higher persistence rates than those who did not (Carter, 2006; Wray et al., 2014). Wray et al. (2014) reviewed ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, “(the) most significant ‘push’ factor for students was financial pressure: students that had considered exiting were significantly more likely to have struggled financially” (p. 1710). This was found across all demographic fields but was especially prevalent in the African American population (Carter, 2006; Owolabi, 2018). Those students who, not only, had full financial support for studies, but also, for home life were the least likely (despite race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status) to drop-out (Carter, 2006). The students who reported having full financial support had a mixture of grants, scholarships, student loans, and/or able to pay out of pocket; the increase in availability of financial aid promotes persistence, especially in minority groups (Carter, 2006).

“Finding best practices for all students may not be (best) serving all students” (Carter, 2006, p. 42). As it has been noted, the term ‘minority student’ covers a wide array of races, socioeconomic status’, ages, and genders in the Ravendale nursing program. The quote above serves as a good reminder that while I have been speaking in generalities, I do not believe a ‘one size fits all bandage’ is going to be sufficient for all minority students. Ladson-Billings and Brown (2008) identifies the practice of aggregating and assuming those outside the “norm” having similar needs as, “the most dangerous and pernicious practice in the field” (p. 166). Learning the factors that help minority students to persist and complete an undergraduate degree in our SON would,

ultimately, help increase diversity in the professional nursing realm, however small a contribution it may be. The literature in this chapter, and in Chapter 2, will help guide me in facilitating conversations, preparing a more quality interview and, ultimately, better understanding persistent perspectives different than my own.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study lays the foundation to recognize many factors, in and out of the classroom, play a large role in persistence and completion attitudes. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013) and Critical Theory (with an emphasis on Critical Pedagogy) (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011; Diaz, 2020; Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994) both aid in better understanding the student perspective of persistence and completion.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, also known as the Social Ecological Model (SEM), views an individual, not in isolation, but within the contexts in which they live. If this model were a diagram, it would show the individual located within the center of a series of circles, or spheres, surrounded by the various contexts in which they develop and grow. The immediate circle around the individual describes the microsystem. This includes close peers, family, school, religious, or health services that directly influence a person's thoughts, values, social standing, behaviors, and developmental growth (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The mesosystem is the second circle surrounding the individual. The school, work, or institutional system a person may find themselves is encapsulated within this sphere. There is significant interaction between the first three circles as these are the most direct environments and

people which informs their personal and developmental growth (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The exosystem includes the social services, industry, mass media, local or neighborhood politics that shape an individual (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The final sphere, or macrosystem, is the overall beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies of a culture (Darling, 2007). The last two spheres, “do not necessarily involve the person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013, p. 4). Within the parameters of this study, we will refer to the different systems as: Individual, Relationships, Community, and Societal Factors.

As Bronfenbrenner continued to develop his Social Ecological Model various themes were identified that affected his work, “social and historical context, the active person, and the impossibility of understanding individual developmental processes in isolation” (Darling, 2007, p. 205). He explored the concepts of parenting practices, social class, and gender differences on the development of an individual and how these may also shape them or their worldview (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The SEM has been utilized, extensively, within the psychological, sociological, and healthcare settings. It lends itself well to identifying and explaining patterns of behavior from a more holistic viewpoint as compared to similar contemporary theories.

Critical Theory Including Critical Pedagogy

Critical Theory is a social philosophy that analyzes and challenges power structures through reflective assessment (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011). It seeks to challenge the current social order through the context of historical, cultural, and societal perspectives (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Dahms,

2011). Critical Theory also promotes representation of normally excluded groups and promotes human emancipation (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019). One goal of Critical Theory is to avoid dehumanizing marginalized people through intentional aggregation of minorities into graphs, charts, and numbers.

Drawing heavily on Immanuel Kant, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx, Critical Theory was developed in the 1930's out of the University of Frankfurt by a multidisciplinary team (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011). The work of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse was significant and influential at the time considering the rise of World War II, Nazism, and Fascism (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011). Many social scholars were (and are) drawn to Critical Theory due to the idea that it seeks, “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Bohman, 2019, para.1). More modern theories have emerged from the basis of Critical Theory and include: Critical Race Theory, Cultural Theory, Gender and Queer Theory, Feminism, and Critical Pedagogy (Bohman, 2019; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011).

Critical Pedagogy. Paulo Freire is identified as the “founder” of Critical Pedagogy (Diaz, 2020). His most famous work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* details his methods for ensuring equality, learning, and social justice are achieved in the classroom. This is often achieved through relationships with students where the power differential is flattened and teacher and student share in the learning process together (Diaz, 2020). Freire frequently wrote about love being the basis from which mutual respect arose and how relationships foster an equitable learning (Freire, 2005).

Freire's Critical Pedagogy influenced a multitude of educational scholars including bell hooks, Jonathan Kozol, and Ira Shor (Diaz, 2020). bell hooks is especially applicable to this study as her writings addressed critical pedagogy but also racism, classism, and feminism (hooks, 1994). In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks is intentional to build on Freire's student/teacher power differential concept by emphasizing how gender, race, and class can influence the classroom (hooks, 1994). She encourages educators to embrace differences among students as it can enrich the learning process for all involved (hooks, 1994).

I want to be intentional to view each minority student through a holistic lens. Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model and Critical Theory will both aid me and our minority nursing students in identifying factors that can affect persistence and completion. Both theories will also remind me to identify, analyze, and be constantly reminded of biases or hidden prejudices that can impede our student's progression through nursing school.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that affect academically at-risk minority students to persist in a SON program. I am also wanting to know if the students have suggestions or ideas in what changes could be made to enable our identified at-risk minority student populations to be successful. The following research questions will be addressed by this qualitative study:

1. What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?
 - a. What effective supports are identified?

- b. What considerable challenges are identified?
- c. Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?
- d. What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

Researcher Positionality

Using the Herr & Anderson (2015) terms, at the time of this study I was an insider collaborating with other insiders. Since the SON faculty were all considered the majority (White, female- except for one White, male faculty), I wanted to collaborate with identified at-risk minority nursing students. Intentionally partnering with those of different ages, genders, socioeconomic stations, and races will allow for a diverse mixture of perspectives in this study. Something worthy of note under this portion: I no longer work for Ravendale University. Due to this disruption, there was a short pause in the study from January 2022 to May of 2022. No data was compromised, and I received support to continue with and complete this study.

I am a White female and am therefore part of the majority demographic makeup of nurses. The research questions, theoretical framework, literature, and problem of practice provide guidance as I analyze my own role in this action research study. My experience with nursing would be considered a calling in my life. To aid others, put their needs before my own, and in doing so, I'm serving God. Because of this calling I was led to teaching and sharing my passion for the service of others. Encouraging students to empathetically care for those in their communities, provides an invaluable skill set that will, hopefully, stay with them for the rest of their lives.

My interest in this topic has stemmed from observations of minority students struggling to be as successful as they desire. Many excel in the clinical, lab, and simulation settings but may not do as well on their exams. Anecdotally, minority students seem to have the knowledge but have a harder time expressing the knowledge on an NCLEX-style test. This leads me to a larger question of: what challenges or encouragements do our at-risk minority students encounter that enable or prohibit them to persist? There seems to be extra barriers in place that can make success more difficult than it should be- what are these barriers and what can the SON do to help (if able)?

I recognize being a professor, White, and female may discourage authentic discussion surrounding issues of persistence and completion in our academically at-risk minority students. There is a power differential that needs to be acknowledged and managed appropriately. Being the students' teacher, evaluator, and potential reference could stanch open dialogue for the sheer fact of my position and station. I aim to be transparent and humble in my approach to this study as I cognitively understand my personal experiences vastly differ from our minority students.

Research Design

Investigational action research is ideal for practitioner-based inquiry and empowers researchers to flatten power dynamics by partnering with participants and others to perform a successful study (Efron & David, 2013). Since this study is the first of its kind for this SON, it is investigational and will act as the first part of the cyclical process that is action research (Efron & David, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). This study is qualitative in nature and used semi-structured interviews with students, the academic coach, Link, and the notes and observations I made to allow for codes,

categories, patterns, and finally themes to emerge (see Appendix A and B for the student and academic coach interview questions, respectively). I piloted the interview questions prior to using them with the participants and performed member checking.

Students who were recommended for academic coaching and are a racial or ethnic minority were invited to participate in this study. Students are recommended for academic coaching if they meet one or more of the following criteria:

If a student...

- achieves less than a 75% on their first exam.
- scores less than an 80% on their second exam.
- has previously failed a nursing-captioned course.
- is an English Language Learner (ELL).
- has been out of the SON for longer than one academic semester.

Students who are recommended for academic coaching but are not a racial or ethnic minority were not invited for participation in this study. Similarly, if a racial or ethnic minority student was not recommended for academic coaching they were not considered for the study. If a student was a racial/ethnic minority and attended academic coaching but left the university, they were not considered for the study.

This study took place at Ravendale University (RU) with the internal review board (IRB) approval from both Ravendale and University of South Carolina. Ravendale is located in a midwestern state, roughly forty minutes from a larger city. There are dorms and on campus apartments for traditional students, however, there are also programs for adults and commuter students. Nursing is the largest singular major on campus and has been ranked as one of the top nursing programs in the state. The campus population is predominately White and in no way adequately represents the State's or the

overall population of the United States. The SON partners with local hospitals for clinical experiences and provides service learning to people and groups within the local community.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews with the students and academic coach were face-to-face interviews using voice recording. When the transcripts were completed, I sent them to the respective participant to member check the interviews. Pseudonyms were used and chosen by each participant, and I maintained confidentiality of the study by ensuring a two-step privacy protection was in place for all electronic and physical copies of information from this study.

“Data analysis is one of the few aspects of doing qualitative research- perhaps the only one- in which there is a preferred way” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 197).

Simultaneous analysis and data collection occurred and are suggested in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). So, while a linear process may be used for quantitative data, qualitative data can be categorized as ‘messy’ or disorganized. The process of coding, categorizing, finding patterns, and finally themes enriches the data analysis. By viewing the data in different ways, at different times a new perspective is brought forth and can allow for richer data themes to emerge. Something unique about this study is the connection between the student semi-structured interview, research questions, and Bronfenbrenner’s SEM. I used a priori coding to connect these three components and further used inductive coding to identify emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used Microsoft Excel and Quirkos to house the qualitative data analysis.

Throughout the data analysis I performed peer debriefings the findings to help with transparency and trustworthiness of the data.

Summary

Academically at-risk minority nursing students have a series of unique needs that affect persistence attitudes and behaviors. This study used qualitative investigative action research methods to better understand these factors in our distinctive minority students in the School of Nursing. The student semi-structured interviews were aligned with Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model and the Critical Theory lens aided in providing a social justice component to the data coding and analysis. The next chapter will address the pertinent literature and provide a basis for the findings in chapter four.

Organization of the Dissertation

This action research dissertation study is broken into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the problem of practice and provides an overview from the rest of the chapters. Chapter Two addresses the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that guide this study. Chapter Three presents the methodology used throughout the study. Chapter Four presents the findings both using the a priori and inductive codes, while Chapter Five discusses the findings, recommendations for future practice, and summarizes this dissertation study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This investigational qualitative action research study aims to better understand the factors which enable or inhibit at-risk, minority student persistence and completion of our School of Nursing (SON) program. Persistence and completion are the goals of the student, while retention versus attrition are the aims for the university. Better understanding the factors that can positively or negatively affect persistence and completion is the ultimate purpose for this study. An increased knowledge from the direct input of our at-risk, minority students will aid our administration, faculty, staff, current, and future students to improve the SON culture.

Since there is a significant demographic shift noted in our American society, it would logically follow that professional career tracks would see a corresponding change in demographics (Burt et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Ferrell et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Owolabi, 2018). However, this is not the case. Even with the demographic landscape changing, there is a noted disparity in the populations who attend university to seek degrees in the helping professions such as nursing, education, and dietetics (Burt et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Ferrell et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Owolabi, 2018). Despite an increased availability of higher education, males, second-degree or adults, and REM students are minority populations in SON (Chen et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2016; Owolabi, 2018). We also need to acknowledge the importance of representation of these minority populations in community health and nursing care. With increased diversity

comes more innovation and connection to patient populations; building rapport and trust with those we serve is paramount to the nurse-patient relationship. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?
 - a. What effective supports are identified?
 - b. What considerable challenges are identified?
 - c. Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?
 - d. What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

Many factors exist that can affect at-risk minority nursing students to persist with their degree, these factors can be positive or negative in nature. Finances, outside supports and commitments, social integration, and academic and faculty support can all be reasons to continue or stop schooling for these populations of students. The topics listed will be examined using the literature found in this chapter.

Literature Review Methodology

The purpose of the literature reviewed provides the information of what has or has not been done to better appreciate the perspective of at-risk minority students. This basis of understanding will better inform and guide my study to be fruitful and meaningful to the SON. This comprehensive review of literature used multiple search engines to compile relevant literature which included: Academic Search Complete, Applied Science & Technology Source, CINHALL Complete, Education Full Text, ERIC, Health Source:

Nursing/Academic Edition, MEDLINE with Full Text, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Science Reference Center, and Social Sciences Full Text. All the articles gathered were peer reviewed and the majority are considered to be formal research studies. A few meta-analysis literature reviews were used to further understand the major themes found *across* the literature and confirm the themes I have identified for our student populations.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks (TF) were used to guide this study, Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Critical Theory. Both theories guided me in critically analyzing the holistic factors that positively or negatively affect our minority students in their persistence and completion attitudes. The TF will also provide the lens by which I relay the experiences of our minority students before, during, and after the study.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (also known as the social ecological theory or model) is rooted in human development and used widely across various disciplines (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). He is most well-known for his scientific analysis of the various systems that affect human development (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). This was different from other contemporaries of his day because it was not focused on just one area of development (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, social, etc.) (Darling, 2007). Dr. Bronfenbrenner's theory was a novel approach for its time because it was an odd dichotomy of focus being placed on the individual *and* the

systems by which the individual may find themselves (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

There were multiple areas of interest that informed Dr. Bronfenbrenner's research. These included: social class parenting differences, gender differences in development (that included individual's views of themselves and differences in parental discipline), and cultural variability in socialization and its significance in human development (Darling 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). These outshoots of research interest always came back to better inform his primary theory of social ecological development (Darling, 2007).

The individual can be imagined being inside a series of concentric circles. The four systems by which the individual may find themselves include: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The systems have different impacts on the development of humans and are not always viewed in positive or negative terms; rather, they are used as an explanation of how a person changes and grows due to influences around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

Microsystem. The microsystem includes the immediate environment in which a person may find themselves (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). "A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). This usually includes the family, school, neighborhood, and/or religious institutions in which they develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). This level has the most impact on the developing person as

the microsystem is the environment that they most interact with others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mesosystem. The mesosystem is concerned with relationships and interrelations between microsystem groupings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). While the mesosystem involves the concepts of the microsystem, it is more abstract and, sometimes, difficult to immediately identify relationships with relation to how this affects human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). “For instance, children who are bullied at school (school experiences) might withdraw from their parents (family experiences) at home” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013, p. 4). In the example, the parents may notice the withdrawal but may not understand why it is happening. This phenomenon is a unique feature of the Ecological Systems Theory and helps to explain the significance of relationships in human development (Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

Exosystem. Similar to the mesosystem, the exosystem acts a link between the individual’s overarching society and microsystem (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The exosystem refers to “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). As the circles move outward, the relationships are noted to be more distant, but still impactful on the individual and community.

An example that helps to explain this relationship is that of a newborn baby and the effects experienced by everyone around him or her (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The new parents will, inevitably, experience a decrease in sleep which, in turn, will affect their attitude, performance at work, and contribution to the community (Onwuegbuzie et

al., 2013). While the birth of a new baby is usually a joyous event, the impacts are not just limited to the microsystem and exosystem, they are felt systemically (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The newborn will also have physiological, psychological, developmental, and sociological needs that will need to be fulfilled over the course of his or her life.

Macrosystem. The final system is that of the macrosystem, “which is the highest level (and), involves the larger cultural context (e.g., society, community) surrounding the person that includes societal belief systems, cultural norms, ideologies, policies, or laws that indirectly influence the person” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013, p. 5). People who come from a similar cultural background or heritage often share common values (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). As a person grows and leaves their home unit, these values may shift and typically evolve throughout the lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

The use of this theory in research helps to guide authors to better understanding the various impacts that affect an individual’s life. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2013) discussed a method by which to direct research studies through the various Bronfenbrenner circles. By identifying the population, relationship, and phenomenon one wishes to study, they can use one or two of the Bronfenbrenner systems to narrow the scope and inform their research (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

At the heart of Dr. Bronfenbrenner’s work is, “... the impossibility of understanding individual developmental processes in isolation” (Darling, 2007, p. 205). For this study the Social Ecological Model served as the constant reminder of outside forces that work on and with our at-risk minority students. These forces have shaped, and will continue to shape, these students to inform their nursing care. Their experiences are

valuable to our SON but, more importantly, will affect the care they provide to patient populations in the community and hospital settings. By identifying factors which enable our at-risk minority students to persist and complete our program, we can make more of their perspectives available to our local community. Within the context of this study, I will refer to these differing levels as the Individual, Relationships, Community, and Societal Factors.

Critical Theory (Critical Pedagogy)

Critical theory strives to promote human emancipation and ensure representation of excluded groups (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019). It challenges the social order to produce changes, especially, since current social order was formed in terms of historical and social context (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Dahms, 2011). It seeks to avoid aggregating people into graphs, numbers, or charts since this practice further perpetuates dehumanization of marginalized peoples. Critical theory also stresses reflective assessment and critique of the current society and culture to promote change (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011).

Critical theory was developed out of the University of Frankfurt by Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011). With significant influence from Sigmund Freud and Marxist philosophy, critical theory sought human emancipation as its guiding principle as it, “was intent upon contesting ‘hegemony’ ... in all its forms” (Bronner, 2011, p. 21). Considering the historical context in which critical theory emerged (World War II and the rise of Nazism and Fascism) the attitudes and beliefs that were brought forth resonated and influenced many (Bohman,

2019). Horkheimer especially valued a multidisciplinary approach and as director of the institute, assembled the team based on the individual perspectives they would bring (as cited in Bronner, 2011).

“Critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative” (Bohman, 2019, para. 3; Crossman, 2019, para. 8). Since critical theory emerged from a multidisciplinary team, it is applicable across many fields of study. Off-shoots from critical theory include feminism, critical race theory, cultural theory, gender and queer theory, post-colonial criticisms, and critical pedagogy (Bohman, 2019; Crossman, 2019; Dahms, 2011). When analyzing how Critical Theory (Critical Pedagogy) influences this study, I wanted to ensure that equity, self-reflection, and mutual respect were at the forefront of any action that is taken.

Critical Pedagogy. Paulo Freire is ascribed as the forefather of critical pedagogy (Diaz, 2020). His most notable work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* outlines major concepts of oppression, the banking method of education, dialogue, the incompleteness of humans, and the mutual process of liberation (Diaz, 2020). Freire’s ideas of the banking method of education bucks the power differential noted in “traditional” classrooms with the teacher acting as the “sage on the stage”, and students being empty buckets to fill. “The banking approach to education will never propose to students they critically consider reality... The ‘humanism’ of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons” (Freire, 2005, p. 74). Instead of this approach, Freire proposes education be a mutual process of learning, growing, and problem-solving for both student and teacher. He also highlights dialogue as being rooted in concepts of solidarity, equal footing, and mutual respect which ultimately stem from love (Freire, 2005). His process of unlearning,

learning, relearning, reflection, and evaluation were especially helpful to liberate the oppression of those students who have been historically (and continue to be) disenfranchised by the ‘traditional’ schooling system (Diaz 2020; Freire, 2005).

Freire’s critical pedagogy ideas have influenced many modern educational scholars including bell hooks, Henry Giroux, Jonathan Kozol, Ira Shor, and Shirley R. Steinberg (Diaz, 2020). hooks (1994) is of particular interest in this study as she promoted racial, classist, and feminist philosophies to be added to critical pedagogy:

Feminist and critical pedagogy are two alternative paradigms for teaching that have really emphasized the issue of coming to voice. That focus emerged as central, precisely because it was so evident that race, sex, and class privilege empower some students more than others, granting “authority” to some voices more than others. (p. 185)

hooks’ book, *Teaching to Transgress*, builds on Freire’s critical pedagogy theory by introducing concepts of feminist pedagogy, further emphasizing power differentials (especially in relation to patriarchy [she terms this classroom privilege]), and embracing the student’s entire identity allowing differing perspectives to enrich the classroom setting (hooks, 1994).

Theoretical Framework Summary

Using both Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and Critical Theory (Critical Pedagogy) in this study will aid in acknowledging various factors that can affect persistence. I am striving to view each at-risk minority student through a well-rounded lens to better explain the various life-events that can affect their persistence in our School

of Nursing. Concepts such as social integration, financial stability, social justice, and self-motivation are important to understand, especially for adult students.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory aids in bringing the systems perspective in which our at-risk minority students live. Better understanding the responsibilities, pressures, and joys these students experience in their lives will provide a clearer picture of their day-to-day issues surrounding persistence and completion. Critical Theory (Critical Pedagogy) will help to bring perspective and social injustice concepts felt by at-risk minority students. Frequently referring to Freire's and hooks' thoughts will aid me better understanding biases felt by myself and my students.

Historical Perspectives

There are significant racial and wealth disparities that need to be examined and are contributing factors to persistence and completion issues. Those of racial or ethnic minority backgrounds and/or from a lower socioeconomic (LSE) class are less likely to persist and complete their degree (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bauman et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Wray et al., 2014). With the end of formal education segregation in 1954 with Brown versus the Board of Education, came opportunities for those races, namely Black and later Latino, that were not previously available (Orfield, 2004). However, a more covert form of racism was and still is prevalent that significantly hinders REM (McBeth, 2019; Orfield, 2004). Orfield (2004) comments that, "...racial segregation is strongly linked to segregation by class: Nearly 90% of intensely segregated schools for Blacks and Latinos are also schools in which at least half of the student body is economically disadvantaged" (para. 10).

By understanding the past inequities demonstrated towards those of LSE status and/or REM groups, we can observe the lasting impacts today. Social scientists understand poverty is cyclical and generational, meaning if the family unit has been impoverished there is a high likelihood of the children and their children also being impoverished (McBeth, 2019). This phenomenon is observed across all racial demographic groups. However, the REM groups are disproportionately observed as being of LSE status due to past and present forms of segregation and racism (McBeth, 2019; Schermerhorn, 2019).

As an American society we have moved our segregation and racism from overt to covert, with the latter being more insidious and dangerous to LSE and REM peoples (McBeth, 2019, Schermerhorn, 2019). Often the present forms of segregation and racism are systematic and are difficult to identify and, thus, make them more dangerous (McBeth, 2019). Using this understanding of the systemic nature of segregation and racism can inform my study as the participants are adults, some being considered of LSE, and all being part of REM groups. By better comprehending the factors that enable or hinder our minority students in persisting and completing their degree, can we bring these systemic inequities to light to create a more just SON.

Relevant Literature

There is ample literature on retention and attrition of undergraduate students. However, there is not as much pertaining specifically to persistence and completion (the student's perspective) of at-risk minority students. While this study is specific to a private, Midwest, Christian university, the implications for other nurse educators to analyze factors that affect persistence in their own at-risk minority population can be

impactful. Identified factors in the literature that can affect persistence are financial considerations, individual, familial, and community support and commitments, social integration, and academic and faculty support.

Financial Considerations

Financial support is one of the largest factors which affects persistence and completion in minority students (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bauman et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Wray et al., 2014). The money needed to attend school was a more specific factor. However, other issues such as living expenses and maintaining a job throughout school were other issues that could affect persistence (Bauman et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Wray et al., 2014).

Financial Support for Schooling. Increased support via scholarships and/or grants is one of the most influential factors that affects minority student persistence and completion (Bauman et al, 2019; Chen et al, 2020; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016). Bauman et al. (2019) sought to better understand the lived experiences of REM and/or first- or second-generation college students (p. 39). The consensual qualitative study used semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling to analyze nine minority students' experiences (Bauman et al., 2019, p. 40). Six major themes were identified with self-motivation and high school educators being the top two themes that affected persistence (Bauman et al., 2019 p. 42). The support and encouragement from high school educators left a lasting impact on these minority students and their desire to have a better life and be successful were demonstrated in the identified themes (Bauman et al., 2019). However, affordability and location to family

were two valued attributes that were noted as “deal breakers” in the decision to attend university (Bauman et al., 2019, p. 42). There were recommendations to increase scholarships to minority and first- or second- generation students attending college (Bauman et al., 2019).

The next method used to help better understand minority nursing student persistence came from Chen et al. (2020). Using grant monies provided by the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) a retention program was piloted and evaluated using multiple, sequential group interviews (identified as being a multiwave format (similar to the concept of action research)) (Chen et al., pp. 73). A multidisciplinary team was used to holistically support minority nursing students that included nursing faculty, evaluators, a licensed counselor, nursing administration, financial planning office staff, minority affairs office director and staff, and the 20 junior minority nursing students willing to participate (Chen et al., 2020, p. 73). The participants were provided with financial support; this was found to be significantly helpful because it allowed the students to focus on their studies and devote more time to schoolwork (Chen et al., 2020, p. 84).

The Ferrell and DeCrane (2016) and Ferrell et al. (2016) research articles came from the same study, that sought to better understand the specific factors which enabled or inhibited minority students to be successful in their nursing programs (Ferrell & Decrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016). The Ferrell and DeCrane (2016) article focused on the qualitative aspect while the Ferrell et al. (2016) article reported both the quantitative and qualitative data. Using a revised version of the Minority Student Nurse Questionnaire (MSNQ), Likert scaled and open-ended questions, 31 minority nursing students, who met

the inclusion criteria, accepted to join the study (Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016, pp. 40-41; Ferrell et al., 2016, pp. 4-5). Both studies identified financial problems and lack of scholarship/grant monies availability as being major barriers to success (Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016, p. 43; Ferrell et al., 2016, p. 9).

The Murray et al. (2016) study was different than the others, in that, a program was used to better recruit and retain underrepresented minority (URM) high school students from the start of college to the end (pp. 138-139). One hundred eighty-five URM students were involved in the recruitment and retention program over a period of three years (Murray et al., 2016, p. 142). A factor that was identified as being influential to URM nursing students' success was the financial aid and scholarship support made available through the grant that funded this study (Murray et al., 2016, pp. 142-143).

Regardless of method, financial support to attend a higher education institution was a major factor that either enabled or inhibited minority students in being successful (Bauman et al, 2019; Chen et al, 2020; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016). The increased need for grants and scholarships is recognized as being vital to persistence. However, ability to navigate financial aid systems is another issue identified, especially in those students who are first-time college attenders (Bauman et al., 2019). Increased access to financial aid advisors and more thorough explanations of processes were found to be helpful to minority students (Bauman et al., 2019).

Financial Support for Home & Maintaining Employment. In addition to financial support for academics, financial support for the home, living expenses, and/or maintaining employment were identified as being factors that can affect persistence and completion in minority students (Bauman et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et

al., 2016; Wray et al., 2014). Bauman et al. (2019) and Chen et al. (2019) both identified support outside of school as being important to aid in persistence. A large deciding factor in choosing a college for adult minority students was the affordability and location to family (Bauman et al., 2019). Those students who lived with families (specifically parents) felt greater relief due to being financially supported in the home (Bauman et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Wray et al., 2014).

In the qualitative, semi-structured, e-questionnaire study, 12 traditional minority undergraduate nursing students identified three major themes that either helped or hindered their progress in school: family oriented (financial issues & family support, positive and negative), school based (peer/faculty interactions, positive and negative), and sustaining/promotive factors (drive to be a nurse, desire to help, and motivation) (Diefenbeck et al. 2016, pp. 41-43). With regard to family orientation, the responses were polarized based on the student's situation. Those students who were financially supported by family had a more positive outlook on familial support (Diefenbeck et al., 2016, p. 42). While those who identified as being the primary source of income for the household or who were supporting themselves had a negative outlook on familial support (Diefenbeck et al., 2016, pp. 42-43). One student commented, "I have a great deal of stress coming from like just financial wise (sic). I have to support myself" (Diefenbeck et al., 2016, p. 42). Many students reported having to work at least part-time, if not, full-time while attending school full-time; this placed an extra burden on time management and devotion to studies (Diefenbeck et al., 2016).

Those students who had to maintain employment outside of schooling were at an increased risk for leaving in the Wray et al. (2014) study. A cross-sectional survey

method was used to identify the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that affected 195 English university students (Wray et al., 2014, pp. 1702-1703). The biggest ‘push’ factor that appeared most often was financial in nature. The issues identified were being able to pay for their schooling, maintain employment while in school full-time, and/or being able to financially support their family while in school (Wray et al., 2014, pp. 1706-1707). Adult students reported especially struggling with the financial aspect of schooling (in addition to family financial commitments) (Wray et al., 2014, pp. 1706-1707, 1711).

Our adult, at-risk minority nursing students have reported on numerous occasions that balancing school and finances is a struggle. Being a private institution, tuition is higher than other technical or public colleges in the area. While the adult tuition amount is lower than traditional students, and scholarships are available, the prices are not comparable. Anecdotal reports from our adult, at-risk minority students on why they choose to attend our university include: its reputation, location to their home/family, Christian perspective, and faculty/staff relationships.

Individual and Familial Considerations

Similar to family financial support during school, minority students found support (positive or negative) from their family to be a factor in persisting and completing their degree (Bauman et al., 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013; Lott et al., 2018; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Those students who were primarily responsible for home life, child rearing, transportation, maintaining financial income, and other familial duties, found family support to negatively affect their schooling (Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018). Students who had a partner or family to rely on to share household responsibilities had a

more positive experience with regard to balancing time between family and school (Bauman et al., 2019; Wray et al., 2014). In some of the studies, family was identified as part of the reason they chose to go to school (Bauman et al., 2019; Tolliver et al., 2020); while in other studies, students listed individual motivators to seek, persist, and complete a higher education (Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Kundu, 2019; Patterson, 2020).

Familial Considerations.

Positive. Family encouragement to attend or persist in school was identified as a factor which positively affected minority students (Bauman et al., 2019; Ferguson & Scruton, 2015; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Students who felt emotionally, mentally, and spiritually supported by their family units, also experienced higher levels of persistence (Bauman et al., 2019; Ferrell & DeCrane 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Cultural factors were identified in the family unit as being a source of comfort since some students experienced culture shock when attending a Predominately White Institution (PWI) (Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013).

In the mixed methods study by Frumkin & Koutsoubou (2013), quantitative questionnaires and semi-structured focus groups were performed with 68 students who were a mixture of adult, traditional, and REM (pp. 151-152). The students were at three different English universities and the major themes identified from the mixed-methods study revealed being a minority student (either racial or religious) increased a feeling of isolation in the academic setting, faculty and support staff who were knowledgeable in the student's heritage increased feelings of inclusion, and role models similar to the

student's racial and/or religious identities were vital to student success (Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013, p. 147). Factors that either enabled or inhibited student success included culture, religion, primary education (identified as statutory education), mentors, and teaching staff (Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013, pp. 153-157). All the minority students identified those who recognized and honored their culture and/or religion as being a factor that enabled them to persist in their education (Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013, pp. 153-155). Families and religious communities were identified as being safe havens for these minority students and reported relying on these individuals frequently during their college experience (Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013).

The Tolliver et al. (2020) study was one of only two studies to specifically analyze adult African American men's experiences in college. The qualitative, phenomenological interviews included 11 Black men to identify themes that enabled success during their college experience (p. 434). The themes that enabled success for the participants included formal schooling, family members, social engagement, and mentoring (Tolliver et al., 2020, p. 434). All the participants noted church participation as a major contributor to enabling success during college; they described that church was not only a place in which they worshiped but also a strong community to rely upon when they struggled during college (Tolliver et al., 2020, pp. 434-435). Nine of the eleven participants identified family members and mentoring as being significantly influential to their success (Tolliver et al., 2020, pp. 435-436). An interesting observation about family members were that influential family members tended to be female; while mentors who had a substantial impact tended to be male (Tolliver et al., 2020, pp. 435-436).

Negative. Not as many articles expressed family as being a hindrance to successful persistence and completion of schooling, however, there were a couple worthy of note. Diefenbeck et al. (2016) provided student narrations that explained family was not able to help financially or, family “is not a big part of my student experience. My mom works a lot so she can take care of the family so she doesn’t really know what goes on in terms of my classes and everything” (p. 42). In the Lott et al. (2018) study, 89 nursing students enrolled in two different HBCUs answered a descriptive survey to analyze supportive and restrictive factors that influenced their ability to persist in their accelerated program (pp. 77-78). The highest-ranking variables that influenced student retention included reliable transportation, encouragement by friends in and outside of school, family support, and personal study skills (Lott et al., 2018, p. 81). The most restrictive variables that could compromise student retention included: financial support and juggling family responsibilities with employment and the class schedule (Lott et al., 2018, p. 81). While both articles highlighted family as being a positive force, family was also viewed by some students as being a negative factor when attempting to persist and complete a degree (Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018).

Individual Considerations. There are many driving factors which can inspire a student to achieve a higher education, however, having determination and being motivated throughout the course of studies is needed in order to persist (Bauman et al., 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Patterson, 2020). Kundu (2019) analyzed the characteristics of underrepresented minority (URM) students that led to burnout and feelings of isolation (p. 684). Twelve URM students (or former students) participated in semi-structured one-on-one interviews (Kundu, 2019, p. 685-686). Of the two themes

identified, the first was most highlighted in this study. Low-income, URM became burnt out when they felt overburdened and couldn't identify the resources or chose not to use the resources available to them to help with success (Kundu, 2019, p. 688). From those students who identified as being highly independent, their desire to fulfill others' expectations came at the expense of their feeling burned out by school (Kundu, 2019, pp. 688-689). In essence, the students lost their motivation and determination. Using guided self-reflection and mentoring, URM students regained their sense of purpose, managed their feelings of stress, and reoriented themselves back to their goal of academic success (Kundu, 2019, p. 689).

Patterson (2020) was the second study that focused exclusively on Black men, however, the scoping literature review analyzed nursing students (versus African American male students of all majors). Thematic analysis found four major similarities between the seven chosen studies: deciding to choose a nursing career, socially integrating into higher education, being the only Black male in their class (feelings of isolation), and achieving success (Patterson, 2020, pp. 26-28). The studies reviewed revealed Black males may be diverted away from professions like nursing due to the perception that care giving is 'female work' (Patterson, 2020, p. 27). The studies revealed integration into higher education as being significantly linked with persistence and completion of an undergraduate degree (Patterson, 2020, p. 27). Issues which arose that hindered Black males in integration and persistence were feelings of inferiority, being excluded by peer groups, and racism experienced (direct and systemic) (Patterson, 2020, p. 27). Feelings of isolation, loneliness, or alienation contributed to increased dropout rates; often, this was due to Black male nursing students being the only Black and/or

male in their class (Patterson, 2020, p. 27). It was noted that motivation, determination, and having positive support from family and friends were significant impacts on achieving success for Black males in nursing school (Patterson, 2020, p. 27). Other factors that were associated with achieving success were working in the medical field prior to schooling, caring faculty, positive institutional environment, and self-managing financial difficulties (Patterson, 2020, p. 26). While family, friends, and faculty can aid in persistence, there must be some motivation and determination on the part of the student to successfully persist and complete with their higher education degree.

Our at-risk minority nursing students come from a variety of backgrounds with many having families they support. Almost all must maintain, at least, part-time employment outside of school which can hinder some academic success. Typically, these jobs are in the medical field and add value to their educational experience. Anecdotally, I have also found our at-risk minority students to be driven, hardworking, and self-motivated. Wanting a better life and to be able to support their families are, usually, the driving factors to help persist and complete their degree.

Social Integration

Socialization into a new environment aids in feelings of inclusion, community, and investment (Chen et al., 2020; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016, Tolliver et al., 2020). For higher education, these are critical outlooks that can greatly affect persistence and completion behaviors (Chen et al., 2020; Tolliver et al., 2020).

International students, racial or ethnic minorities, and/or religious minorities can feel isolated, decreased autonomy in their education, and a lower sense of belonging when

their culture and/or religion is disregarded or undervalued (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bunce & King, 2019; Museus et al., 2018).

Peers. Chen et al. (2019), Ferrell & DeCrane (2016), Ferrell et al. (2016), and Tolliver et al. (2020) all found peer support to be a vital factor to persistence and completion attitudes in minority students; there was greater temptation to withdraw or quit when peer support and friendship were not present within the academic setting. Within the Chen et al. (2019) multiwave minority nursing student retention program a support group was formed from the minority nursing students participating in the program. One student stated, “it’s pretty much an opportunity for us to mentally build ourselves. I think that [sic] one thing that many minorities lack is that mental preparation [for school]” (Chen et al., 2020, p. 82).

Flateland et al. (2019) performed a study in Norway aiming to better understand the experiences of undergraduate nursing students of cultural or minority background (p. 2). Eight, third-year minority or foreign nursing students were identified, and researchers performed one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Flateland et al., 2019, p. 2). Three main themes of feeling isolated, needing further support, and difficulties with acclimating to the language and culture came about using qualitative, manifest analysis (Flateland et al., 2019, p. 3). All minority students reported significant feelings of isolation, regardless of sex, age, or number of years spent in Norway (Flateland et al., 2019, p. 3). During breaks between classes, minority students did not feel welcome to join native Norwegian students which ties into the lack of support felt by peers as another theme (Flateland et al., 2019, pp. 3-4). Despite the feelings of isolation with native Norwegian nursing students, the minority students found friendship with each other, “I established a group

for all the students at the programme coming from another culture. We meet once a month for exchange experiences and help each other” (Flateland et al., 2019, p. 4).

Similarly, Rivas et al. (2019) aimed to better understand factors that affected international students’ sense of belonging and connectedness and to analyze their view of American culture and social interactions (p. 685). Through qualitative, purposeful sampling 17 international students were selected (ten males/seven females, and nine undergraduate/eight graduate) and using one-on-one semi-structured interviews, questions were asked from a broad and general to specific and probative (Rivas et al., 2019, p. 686). The ages ranged between 19-38 and the students’ countries of origin were Saudi Arabia, Canada, Peru, Brazil, Pakistan, Jordan, Nigeria, Denmark, Iran, Ukraine, and Taiwan (Rivas et al., 2019, pp. 686-689).

Three major themes were identified through the qualitative analysis, “perspectives of the US, factors impacting social belonging and social life, and academic and campus experiences” (Rivas et al., 2019, p. 690). International students observed that while Americans are friendly many exhibited an air of superiority and were difficult to get close to, preferring superficial interactions (Rivas et al., 2019, p. 690). For many of the students, this is a stark contrast to their home culture and negatively colored their perception of American citizens (Rivas et al., 2019, pp. 690-691). Tying into the previous theme, developing and maintaining relationships with those outside other international students was difficult (Rivas et al., 2019, p. 692). A perception observed was that American students were not interested in learning other cultures and did not acknowledge the importance of the international students’ strong connection to their home culture (Rivas et al., 2019, p. 692). The academic and campus experience was expressed by all

the participants and was the most commonly reported theme (Rivas et al., 2019, pp. 693-694). Acclimating to a different culture, language barriers, different educational structure, and overt discrimination were all factors that were cited as being major deterrents to persistence and a sense of belonging in the college culture (Rivas et al., 2019, pp. 693-694). The international students cited other international students as being a large benefit to studying in America; the students all appreciated the diversity that was experienced and exposure to different cultures being a strong reason to continue their education (Rivas et al., 2019, pp. 695-696).

An observation about the Rivas et al. (2019) study is that the Ravendale School of Nursing has experienced an increase in international students since implementing a new accelerated program. Similar themes have anecdotally been observed and further exploring how we can better accommodate and connect with our international students is being investigated by the faculty.

Racism

At least six articles openly discussed racism as being a factor that deters minority students from persisting and completing their education. More articles alluded to racism being a factor but did not outright identify it as a theme. Whether the racism was identified as being individually driven or systemic in nature, there are significant impacts on minority students when racially charged situations arise (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bunce & King, 2019; Museus et al., 2017).

The purpose of the Bunce & King (2019) study was to better understand the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students at an English university. More specifically, the analysis of “structural and cultural inequalities in teaching and learning”

and how this relates to the students' sense of autonomy (Bunce & King, 2019, p. 3). Within this study the term autonomy references the freedom to be oneself regardless of external constraints (Bunce & King, 2019, p. 3). Partnering with ten undergraduate and seven postgraduate female students, three focus groups were conducted with the groups consisting of four, six, and seven students, respectively. All participants were of racial or ethnic minorities, including the interviewers. The open-ended questions were developed from the Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale with two major themes emerging from the three groups: lack of satisfaction of the need for autonomy and satisfaction of the need for autonomy (Bunce & King, 2019, pp. 4-5). Minority students described situations when they would code-switch or police their language to integrate with the majority, instances of professor reinforcing negative and false stereotypes of minority populations, and feelings of being pressured to think and behave similarly to the White students and instructors (Bunce & King, 2019, pp. 4-5). These negative experiences significantly affected their desire to continue with their degree or at that particular university (Bunce & King, 2019).

Dissimilar to Bunce & King (2019), Museus et al. (2018) aimed to better understand how a more culturally engaged campus affected the experiences of White students, Students of Color, and how the experiences were similar or different (p. 471). An accurate demographic representation of the campus was surveyed (1,005 undergraduate students in total) using quantitative methods (Museus et al., 2018, p. 471). The dependent variable in this study is identified as a sense of belonging with the independent variables being: cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, cross-cultural engagement, cultural validation, collectivist cultural

orientation, humanized educational environments, proactive philosophies, and holistic support (Museus et al., 2018, pp. 472-473). Three main conclusions were drawn from the quantitative data. The first was reinforcement that the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) model is reliable and valid and, “a useful conceptual lens for studying the impact of campus environments on the outcomes of both White students and Students of Color” (Museus et al., 2018, p. 479). The second finding proposes there may be more similarities between White students and Student of Color and how they experience culturally engaging in the campus environment (Museus et al., 2018, p. 479). The final conclusion was a discrepancy noted between racial subgroups in the relationship between cultural validation and sense of belonging (Museus et al. 2018, p. 479). This finding indicates the importance of cultural familiarity, and by extension, validation of their culture from the people (peers) in their campus community (Museus et al., 2018, p. 479). While the White students and Students of Color found similarity in experiences of a culturally engaging campus (overall), there were still individual racial issues that affected minority students’ sense of belonging (Museus et al., 2018).

Our academically at-risk minority nursing students often find friend groups, or at least collegial relationships with other students. Minority students have reported issues with individual across campus or in clinicals regarding overt racism. At times patients have refused care from a minority student because of their accent or skin color. Our accelerated program has quite a few minority students, some of which are international or English Language Learners. We have found that these students struggle with the fast pace of the program and, usually, join the traditional students to retake the courses. I am

hoping through this study to better understand factors that may enable these particular students to persist.

Academic and Faculty Support

Academic supports were identified as being programs such as discipline-specific tutoring, writing tutors, professional organizations, and advising (Murray et al., 2016; Stickney, 2008; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Mentoring had a dramatically positive influence on minority students and was either professional or personal in nature (Chen et al, 2019; Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013; Kundu, 2019; Murray et al., 2016; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Faculty were noted to have either a positive or negative influence on minority student persistence; positive aspects included faculty embracing and appreciating student culture, while negative perceptions were the opposite and, at times, racist or perpetuating negative minority stereotypes (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018).

Programs. Academic programs such as discipline and writing tutors were found to be helpful, despite less minority students utilizing the resource (Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Reasons for not finding the programs helpful included inconvenient timing, interfering with a work schedule, and negative peer perceptions of needing tutoring (Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Professional organizations like the Student Nurse Association and academic advising were identified as being helpful programs to aid in persistence of minority students (Chen et al, 2020; Wray et al., 2014).

Stickney (2008) analyzed factors that affected practical nursing student attrition (Stickney, 2008, pp. 422-423). It should be noted that half the students identified as White, and the other half identified as being of a minority race (Stickney, 2008, p. 423).

Using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), a quantitative survey was sent to 153 participants, half in the retention group and half in the attrition group (Stickney, 2008, p. 423). It was found students in the retention group outperformed the attrition group in the TABE survey and other academic measurements; the attrition group had a larger population of Minority students versus the retention group (Stickney, 2008, p. 424). Recommendations for this SON moving forward were to implement programs to help minority students achieve success (Stickney, 2008, p. 424).

Mentoring. Professional or personal mentoring had a significantly positive effect on minority students (Chen et al., 2020; Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013; Kundu, 2019; Murray et al., 2016; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Chen et al. (2020) and Murray et al. (2016) both built minority student retention programs which included formal professional mentoring. Students' responses to the mentoring were unanimously positive and both mentor and mentee valued the relationships built (Chen et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2016). Frumkin & Koutsoubou (2013) and Tolliver et al. (2020) both commented on personal mentoring as being motivational factors that encouraged students to continue their schooling, especially when the students felt like quitting. Kundu (2019) encouraged mentors to use guided self-reflection to, "help young adult students understand and cope with their feelings, manage stress, and remember the original motivation behind their original goal" (p. 689). Mentoring seemed to be one of the only factors that unequivocally positively influenced minority student persistence.

Faculty. Faculty perceptions were significantly varied and dichotomized as being either positive or negative in nature (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bunce & King, 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018).

When faculty-student relationships were noted to be negative there was usually a lack of acknowledgement of the student's culture or blatant perpetuation of racial stereotypes (Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Rivas et al., 2019). Minority students reported not feeling safe to actively participate in class discussion and questioned their persistence behaviors after encounters with some professors (Chen et al., 2020; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Rivas et al., 2019). Faculty-student relationships that were noted to be positive included genuine interest in a student's culture, intentionally including minority students in building more diverse content, and/or acting as a guide or mentor throughout their schooling (building and maintaining a relationship) (Bunce & King, 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2016). Faculty who were mentors (either professional or personal) also contributed to positive faculty-student relationships; these relationships encouraged minority students to persist and complete their degrees and were attributed as being impactful in the students' schooling experience (Bunce & King, 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2016).

The literature reviewed above aids my study in better understanding and identifying themes that could emerge from our at-risk minority students. Throughout the review of literature, I connected the identified literature themes with our population of students and how these themes may present in our School of Nursing. Despite being a smaller, Midwest, private university issues of persistence are demonstrated with variables such as financial considerations, individual, familial, and community commitments, social integration, and academic and faculty support seeming to be universally felt throughout higher education institutions. Using the literature, and better understanding

our specific population of at-risk minority students, we may be able to aid in positive persistence and completion behaviors.

Summary

This action research study is rooted firmly in holistic, social justice factors that may affect at-risk minority nursing students in persisting in our SON. By using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Critical Theory as the lens through which I will conduct the study, I aim to view the students as individuals with unique factors that may enable or inhibit them from persisting. The literature revealed a multitude of themes that can affect at-risk minority students and impede, or even, halt their success. As a researcher, better understanding the themes in the literature can help me to identify unspoken issues amongst our at-risk minority students (or aid them in being able to verbalize their issues). Many of the themes found through the literature review echoed our minority students' experiences and reinforced the need to better understand how we may possibly be able to help as faculty and a School of Nursing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The United States Census Bureau is projecting that by 2044 half of the US population will identify as racial or ethnic minority (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Logically, with an increase in the general public diversity, we should see an increase in diversity within fields such as nursing and education. However, this is not the case. Within nursing, the most common demographic found are White females. To help increase diversity within this homogenous group, Schools of Nursing (SON) need to do better at recruiting and retaining racial or ethnic minority students. My problem of practice is seeking to better understand the factors that affect persistence in academically at-risk racial or ethnic minority nursing students.

For this study, understanding the persistence and completion behaviors of at-risk minority students will be examined. This will include students in our traditional and accelerated programs who were identified as being academically at-risk and a racial or ethnic minority. This will be an action research study to help me, as a nurse educator, better understand the factors that inhibit or enable minority students to persist and complete their degree in the Ravendale University School of Nursing (RUSON).

Research Design

This was the first iteration of a qualitative action research study. My goal as collaborator in the study was to allow the students' collective voice to speak for itself. One-on-one interviews were used as the primary means of data collection. Being able to

openly discuss issues of racial, gender, economic, or age disparities needs to have a foundation of trust, relationship, and openness. The overall purpose of this study was to better understand factors that affect persistence in academically at-risk minority students when pursuing their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree.

Action Research

An investigative action research (AR) approach was used throughout the course of this study. Investigative action research seeks to better understand a problem to have a fuller picture *before* intervening (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Reed, 2005). In AR, topics or areas of concern are identified by the practitioner, group of practitioners, or, even, in collaboration with participants (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Often the research topic is very relevant to the researcher and practical in nature; this is evident in the “bottom-up” or practitioner-based style exhibited by action research (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Professionals in the field, are the ones encouraged to perform AR studies; similarly, participants in AR are encouraged to work alongside researchers in collaboration to find solutions (Cusack et al., 2018; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). This makes the inquiry style in AR more practical, situationally based, and personal to those involved. “Action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 3).

“Unlike much traditional social science research that frowns on intervening in any way in the research setting, action research demands some form of intervention” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 5). The plan, act, observe, and reflect model for AR was outlined in Herr and Anderson. Similarly, Efron and Ravid (2013) identify six steps in

AR and describe the steps as “dynamic, fluid, and [messy]” (p. 8). This aligns with the cyclical nature of AR because our SON has not formally investigated the persistence and completion factors in the academically at-risk minority student population. The information gleaned from this investigation pairs well with action research as a new interventional cycle can come forth from the data collected. The intervention cycle is not the aim of this research but will act as a springboard for the next iteration of the AR study.

AR pairs well with better understanding persistence and completion factors of academically at-risk minority students as, inherently, AR is relationship based. I would not have been able to obtain the data needed without the help of fellow colleagues, former, and current students. In order to better understand minority student persistence, I need to have a thorough knowledge base of student motivation to persist and contextual awareness of at-risk minority students’ development. The theoretical frameworks, literature, and relationships with the students aided me in achieving the above.

“Qualitative inquiry constantly challenges assumptions; questions the obvious; reveals the hidden and overt, the implicit, and the taken-for-granted; and shows these in a new light” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 219). Qualitative research is best used when attempting to understand a topic when little is known or the researcher needs flexibility as the data will help inform the question (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 27). Other purposes for qualitative research can include: “[attempting] to make sense of complex situations... to learn from participants in a setting or process the way *they* experience it... construct a theory or theoretical framework... [better] understand phenomenon deeply and in detail...” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 28). Various methods within qualitative research

can shape the results of the study and need to be chosen with great care by the primary researcher (Richards & Morse, 2013). It is imperative for the researcher to have a firm understanding of various lens to choose the best methodological framework for the study (Richards & Morse, 2013). The chosen method will then help inform the data collection sources (interviews, surveys, observations, video/audio recordings, etc.).

Throughout the qualitative study the identified problem and research question(s) help to guide the primary researcher but needs to be malleable as information is gathered (Richards & Morse, 2013). Flexibility from the researcher is key and research methods may need to change mid-way through the study. Richards and Morse (2013) aptly described how some identified problems may no longer fit in the qualitative methodology and the researcher may need to employ mixed methods to best serve the project:

Forcing such [problems] into qualitative methods has the same effect on projects and researchers as Cinderella's ugly stepsisters' forcing the glass slipper onto their feet has on their marriage prospects- it doesn't work, it will hurt a lot, and the result is a loss of credibility (p. 27).

Within the context of this study, a qualitative approach will be used to best highlight the academically at-risk minority students' voices. An investigational model will be applied to make certain the minority students remain at the forefront of the findings.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that affect persistence in academically at-risk minority students in a SON program. I was also wanting to know if the students had any suggestions or ideas in changes that could be made to enable this

population to be successful. The following research questions were utilized by this qualitative study:

1. What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?
 - a. What effective supports are identified?
 - b. What considerable challenges are identified?
 - c. Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?
 - d. What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

Research Setting

Ravendale University is located in a Midwest state, roughly forty minutes north of a larger city. Ravendale is a small private Christian university with roughly 1,700 students enrolled. The SON is the single largest major on campus and partners with local hospitals for clinical placement. The building in which the SON is situated is dedicated to the sciences and therefore the majority of classes the students take are contained within. There are lecture classrooms, the SON lab space including high fidelity mannequins for simulation purposes, and a large computer lab specifically designated for nursing student use on the second floor, while faculty and staff offices are located on the third floor.

The SON population is predominantly White and female. This includes the student population, as well as the faculty population. While being White and female is the majority, there have been initiatives to help bring minority students onto the campus to better increase diversity. Despite these initiatives the minority population is fairly small

when comparing to the overall nursing or US population (see Table 3.1 below). More needs to be done to help increase representation in our SON, as well as our overall community.

Table 3.1
Breakdown of Racial Diversity

	USA pop. ^a	USA RN pop. ^b	RU pop. ^c	SON pop. ^d
White/ Caucasian	76.5%	80.8%	79%	90.4%
Hispanic/ Latino	18.3%	5.3%	2%	1.1%
Black/ African American	13.4%	6.2%	10%	5.8%
Asian	5.9%	7.5%	2%	2.8%
Two or more races	2.7%	1.7%	0%	N/A
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1.3%	0.4%	1%	0%
Native Hawaiian & other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.5%	0%	0%

Note. ^a- demographic data represented from 2010-2018 (United States Census Bureau, 2018); ^b- demographic data represented from 2015-2017 (Smiley et al., 2018, pp. S11-S12); ^c- demographic data represented from Fall 2017 (IPEDS, 2018); ^d- demographic data represented from Fall 2016- Spring 2019 (SON internal data, personal communication, July 11, 2019)

Sampling Plan and Participants

The participants in this study were undergraduate minority students who were considered to be academically at-risk. Students who achieved less than a 75% on their first exam, score less than an 80% on their second exam, had previously failed a nursing

course, are English Language Learners (ELL), and/or have been out of the SON for longer than one academic year were recommended for academic coaching. If the students met the above criteria, they would be recommended for academic coaching and those recommendations were part of the inclusion criteria. As an aside, students could choose to meet with the academic coach, however, they were not required to do so at the time of this study. The student participants were then chosen using a unique or purposive, convenience sampling method. Students who fit the inclusion criteria were sent an invitation email. Those who responded and expressed interest were sent the formal invitation letter, consent form, and semi-structured interview questions. The student participants were made aware that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study without repercussions at any time. The students who chose to participate in this study are moderately representative of the current RUSON minority demographic breakdown. Despite the smaller sample, rich data was gleaned from the results. The student profiles are highlighted within the first portion of Chapter 4.

The academic coach (pseudonym Link) was an adjunct faculty who specialized in study habits, remediation, National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) questions, and used tools like the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) to help identify student's strengths and weaknesses. Due to her unique knowledge and deeper relationships with the students, her perspectives enriched this study. I have included her under this heading as she was also a participant in the study; however, since she is not the primary focus for this study, she is exempt from the inclusion and exclusion factors.

Inclusion Factors

Identified academically at-risk minority students were defined as students who were recommended for academic coaching and were considered racial or ethnic minorities. Students who were recommended for academic coaching, are a racial or ethnic minority, and chose not to participate in the academic coaching will also be considered for inclusion. Those students who met the above criteria but transferred to a different major were also considered to help aid in persistence knowledge.

Exclusion Factors

At-risk minority students who were enrolled in our School of Nursing (SON) but left the university before completion, were not asked to join the study. Current or former students who were formally admitted to the SON but did not meet one or more of the criteria (at-risk and/or racial or ethnic minority) were not considered. Current or former students not formally admitted to the SON were not asked to join.

Data Collection- Instruments

The primary method for data collection in this study were semi-structured interviews. The student participants and the academic coach, Link, were interviewed using original semi-structured interview questions that were piloted prior to use. My notes and observations were recorded during and immediately following the interviews and were used to provide context and support for the findings in Chapter 4.

Student Interviews

I created, edited, revised, and peer reviewed the semi-structured interview questions for both the students and academic coach. Within the student interviews, I piloted the questions before performing the formal interviews with a senior in the School

of Nursing. This student, Smiles, expressed an interest in my study and was consulted for piloting and peer reviewing the students' semi-structured interview questions and research questions. Feedback from Smiles was invaluable and allowed for positive changes to be made to the interview questions. The session with Smiles took less than an hour, in total. We went through the interview, discussed edits to the questions, and the final version of the interview questions was further peer reviewed with my dissertation advisor. Please see Appendix A for the student semi-structured interview questions with RQ and SEM alignment.

Academic Coach Interview

The semi-structured interview with the academic coach, Link, was piloted, peer reviewed, and took less than an hour. I created and revised the semi-structured interview for the academic coach and upon peer reviewed with my dissertation advisor further changes were made. This resulted in the final semi-structured interview questions. Please see Appendix B for the academic coach's semi-structured interview questions.

My Notes and Observations

My notes and observations were also part of the data collection. When performing the interviews with the participants and academic coach, I would make notes on a copy of the interview questions. Then after the interview, I would write my overall observations in a personal journal and paperclip the notes from the interview with the page in the journal. The journal was always under double-lock or on my person.

Data Collection- Methods

The way that the interviews were obtained included face-to-face interviews with vocal recordings. I used the Voice Recorder application on my computer to record the

interviews. Once the interviews were completed, transcription of the interviews occurred. I performed the first transcription, however, after this experience I used the services of Rev.com to help with transcription. Once the interview was transcribed the document was sent to the corresponding participant within two weeks. The academic coach, Link's interview was transcribed and sent back to her within one week. When performing the interviews, the students and Link were encouraged to identify a place they felt comfortable and safe. I would meet the participants at their chosen location to make it easier on them and help empower them to feel secure and confident throughout the interview. Encouragement to voice any concerns or to stop the interview at any time was provided to all participants.

Student Interviews

The students who fit the inclusion criteria were contacted via email using the Invitation Letter (please see Appendix C) in the early Fall of 2021. From this email, students who were interested in participating reached out to me and a date, time, and neutral location, usually of the student's choosing, was determined. I further emailed the students interested in participating the consent form and a copy of the semi-structured interview questions. Once the interview was completed and the audio file was transcribed, I sent the transcription to the student. No changes were made by the students. The student interviews lasted anywhere from twenty-three minutes to forty-eight minutes in length. The average duration of the interviews was thirty-six minutes.

Academic Coach Interview

The academic coach, Link, was contacted regarding her participation in the academic coaching and potential interest for an interview for this study. Approval to

interview Link was included in the IRB process but was performed in late August of 2022; the student interviews were performed between October and December of 2021. During the interview specific students were not discussed; however, the overall attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics of the minority nursing students in academic coaching were discussed in the interview. The interview was recorded, transcribed, and lasted for thirty-five minutes and forty-one seconds.

My Notes and Observations

During the interviews, I would often make note of when the participant smiled, when their body language changed, if they cried or expressed frustration, and I also noted strong hand gestures or signals. Directly after the interviews, I hand-wrote my observations that helped to solidify the experiences of the interviews with the students and academic coach. It was also helpful to revisit the actual recordings of the interview to review the participants vocal tone, cadence, and pitch. These notes, observations, and recordings aided in providing context for the findings in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis methods were utilized for this action research study. The data were coded, categorized, patterned, and finally the themes emerged, however, this was not a linear process (Richards & Morse, 2013). Similar to action research being cyclical in nature, qualitative data analysis seeks to exhaust data points which is considered data saturation (Richards & Morse, 2013). The three overarching themes of this study emerged at different points of the data analysis but were clear and distinct upon completion. Within this section I will describe the data analysis as it happened for each data point (students' data, Link's data, and my notes and observations data), however,

recognize much of this coding, categorizing, patterning, and theme finding occurred simultaneously. I used the qualitative software Quirkos and Microsoft Excel as my data organizers.

Students' Data

A unique aspect of this study was the alignment of the student semi-structured interview questions with the research questions (RQ) and Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (SEM) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The process of a priori coding was predetermined as part of the data collection and analysis methods. Inductive coding methods were also utilized; however, the varying levels (Individual, Relationships, Community, and Societal Factors) were used to better understand the numerous influences on the students at the differing levels in their lives. The concepts of Critical Theory were also used as a lens by which the data was coded and analyzed. Since Critical Theory addresses all forms of marginalization, it aids in identifying unfair or unjust policies, stories, relationships, experiences, etc. The use of Critical Theory was needed to provide a social justice lens for the data coding, categorizing, patterning, and finding themes. Please see Figure 1 for a screenshot of the Student Interview Codes in Quirkos.



Figure 1
Student Interview Screenshot of Codes

Link's Data

The semi-structured interview with the academic coach, Link, took less than an hour and was helpful to support the minority students' stories throughout their interviews. Since Link was not the primary focus of this study, I did not use the a priori codes prior to the interview; however, during the coding process an inductive method (Richards & Morse, 2013) was used, as well as identifying the Individual, Relationships, Community, and Societal Factors components (essentially, a double-pronged approach was used to code the data). The data provided by Link's observations and interview aided in bolstering the categories and patterns that were organically emerging in the student data. Along with my notes and observations, Link's interview helped to provide data for

triangulation. Please see Appendix B for the semi-structured interview questions with Link and see Figure 2 for a screenshot of the codes from Link’s interview in Quirkos.

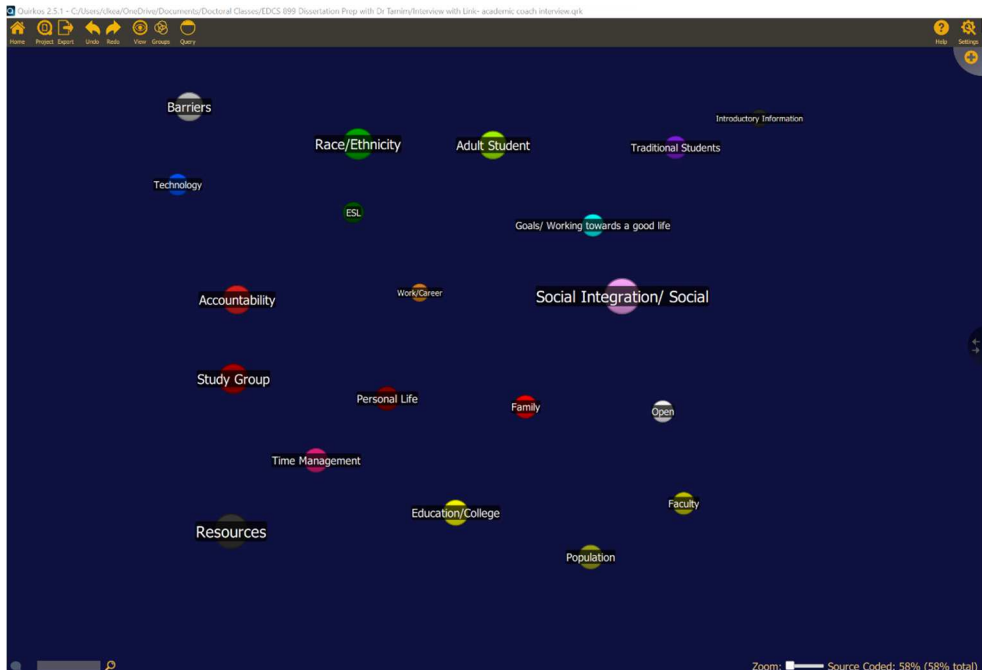


Figure 2
Academic Coach Interview Screenshot of Codes

My Notes and Observations Data

When completing the coding process for my notes and observations, I used inductive coding techniques; like Link’s interview the data was used to help reinforce the categories and patterns that were emerging within the students’ data. Unfortunately, since I highlighted emotions, body language, and reactions I could not realistically use the a prior coded patterns since they would all be coded and categorized under the Individual. The information from my notes and observations were used to strengthen and triangulate the students’ data and is reported throughout Chapter 4. Please see Figure 3 for a picture of the codes from my notes.

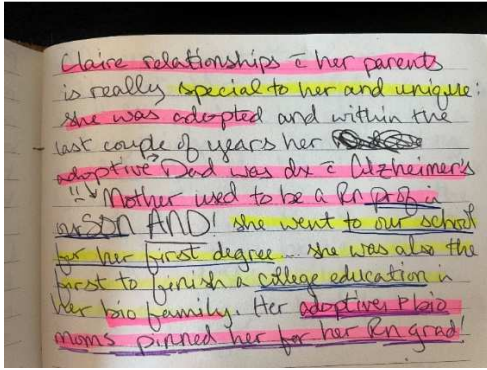


Figure 3
Sample Image of my Notes Coded

Research Procedure Timeline

Please see Table 3.2 for the timeline of the research procedure.

Table 3.2
Timeline for the Research Procedure

Dates	Description of Occurrence
Summer 2019- Summer 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification, development, writing, and research into the Problem of Practice, Review of the Literature, including Theoretical Frameworks, and Methodology of this study. • The development, writing, editing, and piloting of the student semi-structured interviews were done with Smiles in August 2021.
Fall 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection and transcriptions occurred between October and December of 2021. • The transcriptions were sent back to the students for member checking within two weeks of the interview.
January 2022- May 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I took a short hiatus from the study to attend to personal matters. Since I was no longer employed by Ravendale, I sought approval from the ethics boards to continue with the study.

May 2022- September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding, categorizing, and patterning of the data occurred. • Simultaneously, the interview with academic coach occurred and the data from this interview was coded, categorized, and patterned along with my notes and observations. • After the interview with the academic coach was transcribed, it was sent back to her within one week of the interview for member checking. • The SEM themes emerged, as well as the overarching themes of the study.
October 2022- onward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The write-up for this study primarily occurred at this time. • The writing was finalized and submission for review was done.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Multiple measures were put in-place to ensure rigor and trustworthiness within this study. In 1985, Lincoln and Guba recommended that qualitative researchers substitute for the concepts of reliability and validity the following aspects of trustworthiness: truth value, which is the credibility of the inquiry; applicability, which is the transferability of the results; and consistency, which is the dependability of the results (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 215). I piloted the semi-structured interviews prior to interviewing the participants, that aided in transparency and credibility of the data gleaned from the interviews. Performing the interviews, member checking the data, coding appropriately, and performing peer debriefings helped to ensure transparency, trustworthiness, and internal validity were established. The interview with the academic coach, Link, and the notes, observations, and journal I kept aided in establishing triangulation of the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “It is... not the [researcher’s] task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to

provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). The onus for me in establishing applicability in this study lies in producing rigorous and trustworthy results. Please see Chapter 4 for the findings and Chapter 5 for the conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical studies are of the utmost importance, and it is the role of the researcher to best protect the participants. Within this study multiple approaches were used to comply with ethical standards including the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program training, consent forms with informed consent, use of pseudonyms, member checking the data, and peer debriefing. While many of these measures help to ensure data rigor and trustworthiness, they can also act to establish an ethical study.

Since this was a qualitative investigative action research study, I collaborated with others (e.g., other faculty, student participants, academic coach, dissertation advisor) to ensure trustworthiness, transparency, and internal consistency of the data. Methods used that helped establish privacy included using pseudonyms, appropriate coding for the interviews, peer debriefing, and member checking the data. Something worthy of note is that the students and academic coach chose their own pseudonyms for this study. When discussing their pseudonyms, the students seemed excited to pick out their own and I found no issue with complying with the request.

When students were contacted about participation in the study via the emailed invitation letter, those who expressed interest were sent the consent form and a copy of the semi-structured interview prior to the interview (please see Appendices C and D for

the Invitation Letter and Consent form, respectively). The students were encouraged before and during the interview to desist with the interview or questions if they ever became uncomfortable or needed a break. The use of voice recording was agreed upon by each of the participants and the academic coach. All materials either physical or electronic were kept under a two-locking method. For example, electronic materials had their own password for each document and my computer has fingerprint identification to open any applications or use the internet. Similarly, physical documents were in my locked office in my home that has multiple locks and a security system. The measures put in place to ensure confidentiality and maintain an ethical study were reviewed and upheld by myself and my dissertation adviser.

Summary

For this qualitative action research study, academically at-risk minority students partnered with me to better understand factors that affect their persistence in the Ravendale University School of Nursing. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for open discussion and dialogue and using Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (SEM) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013) the research questions and semi-structured interview questions were aligned. Critical Theory provided the social justice lens needed to analyze the data and findings; however, using the combination of a priori and inductive coding allowed for fuller codes, categories, patterns, and themes to emerge in the finding within Chapter 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This qualitative action research study centers around six student participants who are of a racial or ethnic minority (REM) and were identified as being academically at-risk. The study utilized semi-structured interviewing protocols to better understand the persistence attitudes and behaviors of these students and how these views can help effect change in the School of Nursing (SON). Ravendale University (RU) is a small, Midwest, Christian school with a fairly homogeneous student body: traditionally aged (less than 25 years old), White, Christian students. The campus composition (therefore the SON student population) does not reflect the current United States population and with estimations from the US Census Bureau projecting steeply increasing diversity amongst the US population, the Ravendale University School of Nursing (RUSON) needs to better recruit and retain minority student nurses. Additionally, increasing diversity amongst colleges and universities has also been a goal put forth by accrediting bodies. Finally, representation matters. If we as nurses pledge to serve the communities in which we live, it is important for the nursing population to reflect that community in demographics. However, nursing has a long way to go to achieve equitable representation. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?
 - a. What effective supports are identified?

- b. What considerable challenges are identified?
- c. Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?
- d. What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

This study used semi-structured interviews with the student participants and the academic coach, as well as behavioral observation during the interviews and journaling to help triangulate the data. Member checking, use of pseudonyms, and peer debriefing aided in ensuring data rigor and trustworthiness.

Student Profiles

There were six student participants for this study. As per the inclusion criteria, all the students were of a racial or ethnic minority and were invited to participate in academic coaching. Three of the students were international students and English Language Learners (ELL). The other three students were born in America, identify English as their first language, and two of those students were fluent in Spanish. All the students profess holding a Christian faith and chose Ravendale because of the Christian nature of the school. Aligning with the methodology, pseudonyms were used for the students, and each chose their own.

Judith

Judith is a 20-year-old, female who comes from a nuclear family of nine children. The whole family holds refugee status while currently living in a Midwest state. They were originally from a central African country and spent four years in refugee camps while awaiting asylum for admittance to the United States. Judith was seventh in line of

the children and the eldest female. She was also the only child to attend college. Her six older brothers were not afforded the opportunity and currently work to help to provide for their family. The patriarch of the family was disabled and cannot work, and the youngest daughter was severely disabled by cerebral palsy. Both family members require the help of other family and medical professionals. This has placed extra pressure on Judith to be successful in nursing school. She is quiet and reserved but when Judith starts talking her words tend to make an impact on those around her. Judith is fluent in four languages and was a sophomore at the time of the study.

PM

PM is the eldest and only male of the participants. He is 46 years old and is an immigrant from a West African country. PM is a husband and father and works full-time in addition to full-time schooling. He holds a previous master's degree in engineering but was unable to find work as an engineer due to his degree being achieved in his home country. At the time of this study PM was a junior and was close family friends with D'na. It should be noted that throughout the interview, PM portrayed a sense of assertiveness, more than his female counterparts, and some level of discomfort.

D'na

D'na is a 38-year-old wife, mother to four children, and immigrant from a West African country. She has a previous degree in Communications that is more like foreign language degree as she is fluent in six different languages. D'na is the only daughter to her mother (her father has since passed) and sends money back to her home country regularly to help support her mother and extended family. D'na tends to be quiet until you get to know her; she is often well put together, has a huge smile for most anyone she

meets, and carries herself with pose and confidence. She identifies as Catholic, is part of the traditional cohort in the School of Nursing, and at the time of this study was a junior.

Claire

Claire is a 29-year-old, third generation Hispanic female. Claire is unique amongst the participants as she is the only one part of the accelerated cohort. She has a previous degree from Ravendale and has deep ties to the RU community due to her adoptive parents working for the university since Claire's early childhood. Claire is married to a White male and both live in a predominately African American/Hispanic community. She is spunky, outspoken, fights for social justice causes, and enjoys jokes and laughter. At the time of this interview, Claire was a senior nursing student.

Jenna

Jenna is a second generation Hispanic 20-year-old. She is a traditional student in her junior year, plays volleyball, and lives on-campus. Jenna is from a nuclear family that consists of her mother, father, and one older sister, all of whom are fluent in Spanish. She describes herself and her family as hardworking and "solidly middle class". Jenna discovered that she wanted to be a nurse in high school when she was considering majors for college. While Jenna was more reserved in her affect and mannerisms, when asking interview questions Jenna would answer in-depth and with careful thought. As the interview progressed, Jenna became more relaxed and expressive. This aligns with her admission of being more introverted and reserved.

Sparkle

Sparkle is a 32-year-old African American female who is a single mother to two boys and previously worked as a medical assistant prior to full-time school. Sparkle was

previously enrolled in a license practical nursing (LPN) program prior to attending Ravendale. The LPN program unexpectedly closed, and Sparkle was required to restart her educational journey. The impetus to restart her education from medical assistance was the death of her grandmother. She cites this as a pivotal moment in her life that changed her educational trajectory. When asked what pseudonym she wanted to use for the study, Sparkle asked, “any name?” and chose Sparkle because of how she wanted to present herself to others. At the time of this study, Sparkle was a senior nursing student in the RUSON.

Link- Academic Coach

Link is 34-year-old White female who has been a nurse for 12 years and has earned her Master of Science in Nursing Education (MSNEd). Link has worked at Ravendale as an adjunct professor since 2015 and was appointed to academic coach in 2019. However, Link was working with the academically at-risk students prior to the 2019 start date. Link is married and has two daughters. Link chose her own pseudonym as her and her husband met when playing the Legend of Zelda, a video game (Link is one of the main characters in the game). Something interesting about Link is her background in missionary work, especially in Central and South American countries. She is fluent in Spanish and spent some of her formative years in these Spanish speaking countries. Link’s professional background and specialty as a nurse is with emergency medicine. Alongside her adjunct position at Ravendale, Link works in a local emergency room (ER) as a floor nurse, preceptor, and ER educator.

General Findings

I fashioned the student semi-structured interviews using Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (SEM) levels of the Individual, Relationships, Community, and Societal Factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Since the semi-structured interviews were set-up in the SEM, a priori coding and inductive coding methods were used to code, categorize, and pattern the data (see Appendix A for the student semi-structured interview). Aligning with the SEM, the individual is located inside a series of concentric circles. This represents the student participants in the middle of a multitude of other factors that influence their development and decisions. For example, students' persistence attitudes and behaviors were heavily influenced by their families (this would be considered a "Relationships" caption). I have categorized and patterned the rest of this portion using the SEM and highlighted the overarching themes at the end of this chapter.

Individual

The Individual caption was the largest but most ambiguous of the a priori codes. Concepts of altruism, security, and emotions were all expressed across the participants. However, these concepts were not very concrete but more abstract in nature. For example, when asked 'why did you choose nursing?' students would often reply with a traditionally coded Relationship captioned response than a truly individual motivation. Similarly, when expressing emotions or making 'I feel' or 'I think' statements, the students were demonstrating or saying these emotions in relation to other people, groups of people, institutions, or society, at-large. After multiple sessions of coding, peer debriefing, and thematic analysis, the Individual captioned data grew to be the largest but

least focused of the a priori codes. Proceeding with the concepts, I will start with most concrete pattern of the findings and end with the most abstract.

Altruism. Every student, at some point in the interview, said something along the lines of “I want to help other people.” The act of “serving others” or “helping people” was a predominate theme throughout the data. Table 4.1 below shows the various ways the words “help” or “helping” were used to describe the students’ altruism.

Table 4.1
Examples of Students’ Altruism

Student Name	Student Response
D’na	“Yeah. [Doing] what I love, [what] I like... Helping others, nursing.”
Claire	“I want to help these people.”
Sparkle	“So, every person of color that expresses any interest in nursing, I go in. I encourage them because sometimes we don’t have that image of a nurse... so if I’m a nurse and I am inspiring that kid that comes in... I want to help her.”
PM	“I love helping people. Kind of makes me feel whole if I put smiles on the face of others.”
Judith	“Working and being able to meet people because that’s why I want to be a nurse. I want to help people.”
Jenna	“I’ve always been nursing... Medicine is very interesting to me. And [nursing] is a way that I could incorporate both helping others and medicine.”

Along with the altruistic nature, the students cited using healthcare or nursing as the vehicle to fulfill this need to help others. Four of the participants (D’na, Judith, Sparkle, and Claire) recalled certain experiences with healthcare or nursing that spurred them to pursue the career. For D’na it was her uncle being in the ICU; Judith’s

experiences caring for her sister and father who are both disabled; Sparkle's experiences as a medical assistant; finally, Claire's background in athletic training. D'na and Judith both moved states to attend Ravendale, while Sparkle and Claire gave up a steady income to fulfill their goal of becoming a nurse. These students were so significantly impacted by these healthcare encounters that they changed the trajectory of their lives and chose to pursue their nursing degree at Ravendale.

PM, D'na, Claire, and Sparkle all reported having a career prior to attending RU. While they may have enjoyed aspects of those jobs, they report feeling a "calling" or were provided the opportunity to attend Ravendale to advance their knowledge and become a nurse. Again, these students have already demonstrated they are willing to sacrifice temporary financial security, routines with their families, and time to ensure a future as a nurse. When asked to recall the impetus for wanting to become a nurse and if that aids in persistence, each person unequivocally cited that helping others was a strongly significant persistence factor.

Security. Security for the present and future meant different things to the participants. For Jenna, PM, D'na, Claire, and Sparkle this meant financial security. Sparkle cites success as "not living paycheck to paycheck... being able to have a lifelong funding." Whereas Jenna aspires to a "comfortable, middle-class life" like what her father has provided for her nuclear family. PM, D'na, Sparkle, and Claire have had previous degrees and careers that have not fulfilled them or allowed them to lead the lives they want. Claire reported feeling burned out as an athletic trainer and did not see any room for advancement or a solution for how to progress in her career without obtaining a

masters or doctorate degree. “I just felt like I needed to be doing something more. I was severely overworked and severely underpaid... I couldn’t see a way out.”

Judith’s motivations for pursuing nursing were altruistic but also offered a level of security with knowledge and skill for her family. Judith has six older brothers and two younger sisters, and she is the first in her family to attend college. Due to Judith’s younger sister and father being disabled, Judith wants to be able to help with their care. When asked how the familial relationships affect her persistence Judith replied, “They push me to want to continue. I want to help in the future.” Similarly, Sparkle also recounted that by achieving her nursing degree she would be able to provide knowledge, skill, and education to her family and community. Sparkle’s parents are both diabetic and have other comorbidities that affect their health. She is well known in her community as a safe person to turn to for medical help. The knowledge and skills Sparkle learned from RU will help ensure her parents have a medically knowledgeable person educating and helping them in the future. D’na states she needs to be successful because she is a source of income for her family back home (as well as for her family state-side). By achieving her nursing degree, she will have the financial means to provide for them.

While Judith, Sparkle, and D’na cited more traditionally Relationship or Community captioned motivations, they still report feeling the pressure this puts on them to succeed. Within each of these interviews after the students revealed the pressure, I would say something like “that must be hard” or “that sounds like a lot of pressure”. Judith, Sparkle, and D’na all answered in the affirmative that it was a lot of pressure but something with which they must cope. D’na states the following about her family back home, “I’m a leader and I have responsibilities... So, I need to succeed in order for me to

take care of those people. Yeah, I need to succeed.” By pursuing and finishing their nursing degree, these students will relieve the pressure they feel, as well as achieving security in their lives. Most students recounted that keeping long-term goals in mind aided in positive persistence attitudes and behaviors.

Emotions. Phrases or sentences that used the words ‘I feel’, ‘I think’, or expressed some type of emotion (e.g., a student laughing, crying, furrowing their brow, etc.) were captured under the Individual category. This not only included the interviews but my notes throughout the interviews, the journaling that occurred after each interview, and the interview with Link (the academic coach). However, the participants emotional reactions were appropriate and aligned with the tone and cadence of their voice, as well as the words that were being said. For example, when Claire was asked to name the most influential people in her life she started to cry. She explained that her father was diagnosed with dementia and her mom has become his primary caregiver. Similarly, when PM was recalling an incident that was racist, he leaned forward, spoke louder, and was furrowing his brow. He seemed to be expressing frustration that was appropriate for the situation. So, while these emotions were suitable for the situation that the students were describing, only a couple reactions were consistent *across* most of the students: when discussing their families or friends five out of six participants smiled. The act of thinking about their loved ones made the participants happy. Similarly, when the African American students described situations of racism, all expressed frustration or disgust. Their speech patterns would increase in speed, they would talk with their hands more, and the students would shake their head in disappointment. Unfortunately, while the emotions were coded and captured there were not many discernable patterns *across* the

participants. Along with this observation, students did not identify emotions as having an impact on their persistence attitudes or behaviors.

Summary. The Individual category was the least focused of the a priori coded themes, yet it was the largest. Despite similarities such as altruism and security, the Individual portion did not reveal many patterns or themes across the data. Emotions were expressed during the interviews, and they were appropriate for the situations being described; however, there were only a couple emotions that were outwardly expressed across the student participants. All this to say, altruism and security were found to be positive persistence factors, while emotions were not very telling regarding patterns or themes across the students' experiences.

Relationships

The Relationships caption was the second largest a priori coded theme (behind the Individual category) and the most tangible of the themes. These relationships included those of family, friends, peers at school, faculty, support staff, and administration. The student participants cited many of these relationships as being positive in-nature and an encouragement to persist in their schooling. Paradoxically, those same relationships could simultaneously act as barriers to the students' persistence. I will proceed with addressing the familial relationships first, friends and peers second, and faculty, staff, and administration last.

Something that should be noted before progressing further is the difference between the Relationship and Community categories. The Community system covers more of the institutions, places, or collections of people, whereas the Relationship caption focuses on the actual relationships themselves. For example: the students often discussed

their friends or peers at the university. When the students discussed those specific or individual relationships, they were captured under “Relationships”. However, when they discussed community or general friendships from the university (not referencing one singular person or the dynamics of their relationships), the finding would be captured as Community. Another example: when the student participants mentioned religion and the outward expression of their faith, this would be categorized as Individual. Whereas, if the students mentioned going to church, or attending a faith gathering, this would be considered a Community caption. Second to the individual category, relationships were mentioned as being a significant force to persist (positive, negative, or both) by the participants. Relationships, even those that did not affect or negatively affected persistence brought happiness to the students. This a priori coded pattern was the most constant across the data (Link’s interview, my notes/observations, and the student interviews). Member checking the coding, patterns, and themes resulted in consistency across the data and clarification of the differences between the a priori and inductive coded interviews.

Family. Across all the participants, familial relationships were found to be mentioned more than any other relationship and were predominately positive. Family was so important that it had even been discussed with the academic coach, Link, “I’ve even had some talk about family and home life... [academic coaching provides] a platform I think that helps them and just to have that voice within an academic setting, but for non-academic concerns.” The students would also smile and their body language relaxed when discussing their families. In the journaling after Claire’s interview I wrote, “Claire’s adoption into a White family changed the trajectory of her life but I feel bad

that she is now dealing with the slow decline of her Dad into [dementia].” Judith’s observation was similar, in that when done with school she plans to help care for her disabled father and sister. So while the nuclear family relationships were overtly positive regarding persistence attitudes and behaviors, there are certain tragedies that accompany such close relationships that are unavoidable.

Claire, PM, and D’na were the student participants who were married and Sparkle, PM, and D’na were the participants with children. Judith and Jenna were traditional students in that they lived on campus, went to college directly from high school, and were part of the traditional program in the School of Nursing. Both students (Judith and Jenna) mentioned their nuclear families’ more times than their peers or friends but were more vocal about their friendships than the other participants. Those with spouses and children of their own would mention friends or peers but not to the same extent as Jenna and Judith who did not have children. This aligns with their current developmental stage and is appropriate for their age. I will start with spouses, move to children, and then address the nuclear family.

Spousal Relationships. As mentioned above, Claire, PM, and D’na were the married participants and spoke of their spouses as being supportive of their educational endeavors. D’na relays, “I have my husband who is a big support for me. And he was telling me you are not going to fail”. D’na’s reports of her husband were nothing but positive and she expressed satisfaction with the words and actions he has taken to support her. Meanwhile, PM and Claire described both positive and negative support from their spouses. Claire stated three separate times how supported she feels by her husband, however, described times in which they “bicker, we fight”. Claire said, “He’s had to take

on the most responsibility... we've done the whole, 'Oh, I'm the one who's making money, I'm paying the bills.' So, while she reports that she feels supported, there is still conflict that affects her concentration, mood, and performance in school. When asked who the most influential people are in PM's life he stated, "The most important person in my life is my wife, then my children, then my friends, then my teachers." PM was incredibly matter of fact when reporting this to me and when I responded with a request to elaborate, he said, "that's the way it is." The physical movements that coincided with these prior statements were punctuated and terse. For example, with his hand in a flat blade, he hit the table when saying each person (or group of persons); or, when saying "that's the way it is", PM took his hand (still in the flat blade position) and swiped through the air in a horizontal movement. His face was not smiling but also not angry. Based on his words, body language, and tone, I decided to probe further to ask how these relationships affect his persistence. PM had this to say about the relationship with his wife:

For example, let me start with the first person, my wife. I told her I have an exam, and she's still going to call me and told me, maybe I'm trying to read, and say, "Hey, you got to make this, or unfortunately you got to do this, got to come home now." [PM said] "But I just told you I have an exam the next day. You want me to fill it?" [PM's wife] "You can just do this, then you go back to reading."

Okay, if I do that, and I went back to reading, five minutes later, she's going to come up with something else for me to do. So, it's, I mean sometimes I wish, can I just leave the house you know?

So, while PM verbally professed that his wife was his number one priority, the language and tone surrounding his relationship with his wife seemed more annoyed or pestered than loving and caring (as with the other students). After this response, PM did not discuss his wife or children again throughout the interview.

Parent/ Child Relationships. The parent/ child relationships were paradoxical in nature. All three participants with children (D’na, PM, and Sparkle) stated that they wanted to act a role model for their children or as Sparkle says, “because I preach it so I have to walk it.” This desire to be a role model for their children was emphasized throughout the interviews by D’na and Sparkle. Which makes the next part the paradox. When I asked D’na about challenges she faces her first response was family:

Yes, because I have four children, so it’s not easy going to school and having family like that. When I started here, my last kid was my baby was maybe eight months or seven months. So, at that time it was not easy at all. And we didn’t have a good house, or stuff like that. Homeschooling all my children at the home, going to school, and it was not easy at all.

So, while D’na has a strong desire to be a role model for her children and loves them, she also finds that caring for children while going to school is a hindrance to her persistence.

I want to note here that D’na was homeschooling her children during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was not a responsibility she would normally take-on for her children, but rather an unusual circumstance that significantly affected her persistence. At this point, D’na and PM were both in the accelerated program that occurs during the summer semester. With the limited resources available during the summer, online classes versus in-person attendance, and extra pressures in the home, these were the factors that led to

D'na withdrawing from an accelerated program to enter the traditional program that fall semester.

Sparkle was the most vocal about acting as a role model for her children, “they look at me daily and they don’t understand why I would start over. But they are watching. So, I’m showing them that if you fail, you continue.” When saying this Sparkle had a small, satisfied smirk or smile on her face. She cites this throughout her interview and not just in reference to her children (see the Community section for further detail). However, when asked about challenges Sparkle cites feeling like an imposter. She explains how she often feels as if she is pulled in many different directions and one of those directions is, “[I] couldn’t study ‘cause [I] had to be a mom.” Sparkle cites the parent/child relationship as being a strong motivating factor to persist in her degree. However, due to the nature of being a single mom and having to provide financially and parent her children, she doesn’t feel as if there are enough hours in the day.

Finally, PM’s priorities for his relationships were made clear as he stated, “The most important person in my life is my wife, then my children, then my friends, then my teachers.” When asked to probe further about the relationships with his children PM had this to say:

Then the same thing with my children. You know, [they] call me for something I believe they could solve by themselves, or they will seem [to] make [a] big thing about it, and start disturbing me... You know, just, at the end of the day, what they call me for is not something that is useful to me.

Like his response about his wife, PM seemed more annoyed or pestered by his children than loving and caring. Also like his wife, after I asked about his children in the “Relationship” portion of the interview, PM did not discuss his family again. Since this phenomenon happened with only his family (friends, peers, and faculty, support staff, and administration were mentioned a few times later), he seemed more private about his family life, or for whatever reason, did not feel open to sharing further with me. Regardless, based on the data provided to me, I would say that the demands of his wife and children seemed to create a barrier to his persistence.

The above findings lead me to conclude that the parent/child relationship was strongly positive *and* negative in persistence behaviors. The ideal or abstract thought of being a role model to their children aided Sparkle and D’na to persist. While the day-to-day practicalities of raising children seemed to be a strongly negative persistence factor.

Nuclear Family Relationships. The nuclear family relationships are distinguished from the other previous two familial relationships and are defined as the student’s parents or siblings. This section will not cover the dynamics of the spousal or parent/child relationship. Jenna, Judith, Claire, and Sparkle all extolled the support, love, and admiration they have for their parents and siblings. Judith, D’na, and Sparkle also cited the relationships they have with their family as being part of the impetus to study nursing.

Judith’s story was incredibly compelling as her youngest sibling has cerebral palsy that requires 24-hour care. She was able to see the types of care her sister received in Central Africa, in the refugee camps, and, finally, in America. “I saw how nurses were taking [care] of my sister. Nobody spoke English in my family, so I saw how nurses were

caring for us... that made me want to be a nurse.” She cites her family as being one of the largest reasons she chose nursing and for her to persist in her degree.

D’na’s uncle (she described him as a second father) was in a car accident that led to him requiring a three weeklong hospitalization in which she was his primary caregiver. “I was there with him the whole time and seeing how they was taking care of him; I fell in love with nursing.” While D’na had a previous degree in Communications, her love for nursing was sparked by this encounter. She reported that she loves caring for others and that helps to sustain her persistence goals.

Sparkle’s parents were both diagnosed with diabetes and have other comorbidities that affect their overall health. Prior to attending Ravendale, Sparkle was a medical assistant and the only medically knowledgeable member of her family. She says this about her parents: “me having to, you know continue this journey so that I can educate them so they can have better health for themselves.” So, while Sparkle painted a positive picture of her parents’ support, there was also a sense of obligation to persist in her degree to help her parents with healthcare education and expertise.

Claire was employed as an Athletic Trainer before pursuing her nursing degree. Both of her parents worked at Ravendale, and her mother retired from the RUSON in which Claire was enrolled. With this perspective, Claire reveals her mom is uniquely qualified to give advice and help her process the content covered in her courses. Unfortunately, Claire’s father was diagnosed with dementia a week before her wedding in 2020. Claire did not report being a caregiver for her father but said, “being able to be there for him and understand what’s going on with him... him [supporting] me while he still can is huge. It’s the little things hearing, ‘good job kiddo’ or him just realizing that

I'm still in school". When disclosing this information, Claire started to cry and was obviously upset at the diagnosis. I wrote in my notes/reflections that Claire seemed to value the small 'normal' interactions with her father that we tend to take for granted. The relationship between Claire and her parents was only cited as a positive, motivating factor for Claire to persist and finish.

Finally, Jenna mentioned her nuclear family the most of all the participants. She will be the first in her family to enter the medical field but expressed nothing but support from her family to choose, persist, and finish her nursing degree. She discusses her father's work ethic and how it is an inspiration for her to achieve success as he did. "He's always just been a very good example of hard work and determination because things never came easy. He's always given us a comfortable middle-class life. I think that's something I just want to pursue too". Jenna cites her parents as excellent examples of what she wants her life to be and that partially motivates her to continue with her degree. Jenna mentioned her father the most out of all her nuclear family members (father, mother, and sister). I found this to be interesting and made the following comment in my journal, "Jenna and her dad give the impression of that 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' mentality." The nuclear family was mentioned more by traditionally aged students, but all participants (barring PM) *stated* their nuclear families were nothing but a support and encouragement to persist in their nursing degree.

Friend/Peer Relationships. The friend relationships were overtly positive in nature and provided support for the student participants to persist in their degrees. However, unlike friendships peer relationships were not portrayed as being motivators to persistence. I will start with the friendships and move to the peer relationships.

Friendships. All friendships cited in the interviews were reported to positively impact persistence amongst the student participants. While D'na's friends are still back in West Africa she states with a smile, "They will always tell me... they have encouraging words. They're supporting." Judith and Jenna both discussed their friends more than the other participants. They reported enjoying a few close friends "who support me". Jenna is more methodical in her friends stating "I'd say everyone I surround myself with has a same sense of motivation and hard work, like a drive... I surround myself with what I want to be." Whereas Judith seemed to make friends through her room assignment, classes, and major, "I've made good friends and they're also in nursing school. They motivate me to keep going. They're very smart and outgoing... my roommate she's very helpful. Whenever I feel down and I want to cry, she always encourages me." PM even relayed positive words towards his friends, "Well, I love them. I mean they make me learn things from other people's perspectives." Claire and Sparkle did not discuss their friendships at length but reported feeling supported and encouraged in their friendships.

The results from this portion of the study are unsurprising as each participant is in a different stage of life. The cultural history of the participants also needs to be acknowledged. With PM, D'na, and Judith coming from cultures that were more community-based than individualistic, it is unsurprising that they mention relationships with friends as being important and supporting.

Peer Relationships. PM, Sparkle, and Claire reported negative encounters with peers that all seem to stem from age and maturity differences. Claire observed, "the challenge is just the age range. It's the maturity levels." Sparkle made a similar connection. She reports that coming out of exams or on assignments her traditional

student peers will often ask “how did you do?”. Similar to Sparkle’s desire to be a positive role model for her children, she feels that she takes on a mentoring role for her peers. “So, being the perfect image of success for them is the relationship I have with them.” While the words seem to be positive at first glance, Sparkle reported the relationships with her peers as “exhausting”.

Finally, PM described instances of peer interactions that would be considered microaggressions. He did explain that his peers are an example but that “it’s about Americans. They are not patient.” PM stated, “I was talking with [another student] and noticed... they kind of get disinterested so fast. Because they don’t quickly get what I’m saying... All they want is, not trying to understand what I’m [saying], they just want to move on.” He relays another example of a traditional student not understanding his accent and instead of demonstrating patience stated, “You know what? Send me an email about it.” PM was confused as to why an email was needed since they had time to discuss the issue in that moment. He recognized that this student was trying to find a way to better communicate with him, but it was on her terms rather than building a relationship together. PM follows with, “Most Americans call you up because of what they want from you, not because what they think both of us can benefit.”

The other three participants (Judith, Jenna, and D’na) did not mention the relationships with their peers. So, with the interviews presented as they are, the student participants recalled neutral to negative interactions which *could* affect their persistence. At the time of these interviews, Claire was 29, Sparkle 32, and PM 46. The explanations of the age and maturity differences were evidence to support frustration with the peer relationship dynamics and could result in a negative persistence factor for these students.

Faculty, Staff, and Administration Relationships. All six participants described positive and significantly helpful relationships with the RUSON faculty, staff, and administration. Sparkle states the following about the faculty at Ravendale, “the relationships here makes you feel like you’re gonna be successful.” Link (the academic coach) was mentioned, by name, by three of the participants and was described as “a Godsend”. Link has a similar fondness for the minority students stating, “I feel like I get the closest to those students because you’re along for the journey with them.” The support staff are described as “awesome” and “pleasant to work with”. The Dean was also mentioned twice, by name, as being supportive, understanding, but fair.

The relationship between the students and the academic coach needs to be highlighted as this was a strongly positive persistence factor. Language barriers have been cited by the international students as being one of the biggest challenges to their persistence. More about language and culture will be discussed within the next portion, Societal Factors. Since language barriers have been identified as a problem within the SON, measures have been implemented to help overcome the barriers. Extending testing times, providing resources in the student’s primary language (when or if available), and working with the academic coach, Link, have been found to be helpful for English language learners (ELL) students. Link had this to say about ESL (English as a second language) students:

The ESL students actually are their own group... and a lot of the minority students and all of the ESL students, have perfect attendance. And if they miss, they want the quiz assigned to them for them take on their own time... Like I could tell you on one hand, how many times an ESL student

has missed a meeting. It's just, it's something they value because they want any resource that can help them do well.

The academic coach, Link, made a strongly positive impact on all the minority student participants, but most especially with the ELL students. Each of the international students mentioned Link, by name, during their interviews as a person and resource that aids them in persistence. Judith says, "I've been doing so good now with the help of [the academic coach] ... She really helps a lot." PM recognized that a lot of schools do not have academic coaching, especially academic coaching for ELL, "they set up kind of learning time, private coaching, a lot of schools don't do that... [Ravendale] does and that's a big encouragement." D'na also provides a specific example of how Link has helped:

Because whenever I feel overwhelmed... I talk to [Link] and she will have encouraging words for me- 'you can do that!' I remember [Link] asking me how many languages do you speak? I say 'I speak French, I speak English, I speak Spanish. I speak maybe more language back home.' She say 'if you do that, then you can do this. This is nothing compared to what you are used to. You have good memory; you can do this.'

On the flip side, one participant, Claire, reported feeling as if "[faculty] don't take into the fact that there are adult students, and they just see us as kids." The accelerated cohort joins the junior traditional cohort after finishing their summer intensive. Due to the sequencing of classes, budgets, and faculty availability, separate sections for the accelerated cohort are not realistic for the RUSON. The ages for the accelerated cohorts are older due to the nature of the program (requiring a previous four-year degree for entrance) as compared to the traditional program. So, on any given day, faculty can be

teaching age ranges anywhere from 19 to mid-50's. This is a challenge for some adult students, and I made a similar note in my journal afterward, "Claire brought up a good point that I've heard from other adult students...". All this to say, RUSON faculty, support staff, and administration have been labeled as relatable, personable, supportive, encouraging, and uplifting by the study participants, however, there is room for growth in the faculty to better address adult learner needs to aid in persistence.

Summary. Relationships were an overall significant force in persistence for these six student participants. Those relationships with their nuclear families, friends, and with the faculty, staff, academic coach, Link, and administration were overtly positive and aided in their persistence. Spouses, children, and faculty relationships were both strongly positive and negative in nature regarding persistence attitudes. Finally, peers could be categorized as being a neutral or negative persistence factor for these student participants. What I can conclude about the relationships expressed throughout the interviews are that the students value the relationships but feel as though they cannot commit as much time to them while in school. This is natural and corroborated with the findings in the review of the literature. This paradox creates frustration within the relationships and can positively and negatively affect persistence outcomes.

Community

The community caption covered concepts like institutions, buildings, and/or groups of people the student participants mentioned throughout the interviews. As stated within relationships, the community category will not address the individual relationships, feelings, or dynamics experienced within relationships, but rather the community systems or institutions in place that affected their persistence. Similarly, the

Societal Factors caption overlaps with the Community category when addressing culture, especially with our international students. I will address larger cultural findings within the Societal Factors. In general, three areas revealed themselves through the interviews: the educational setting (this was not limited to RU but also addressed previous educational institutions and high schools), the church community, and the workplace.

The Educational Setting. The educational setting caption covers all forms of education, not just the current experiences at Ravendale. Mentions of previous degrees, high school education, and academic experiences were coded under the Community category. Due to the wide net this caption casted, it was the largest of the community findings. Overall, the student's experiences of previous education positively affected their current attitudes towards Ravendale, which in-turn seemed to be a positive, motivating factor in persisting with their nursing education.

With Jenna being a traditional student, she would reference back to her high school community and how this community helped to prepare her for college, "each community I've been in, is just like, 'What are your goals? What are your dreams? How will you achieve that?'" She cites this mentality as challenging her motivations and making her think about the steps she needs to achieve to realize her goals. Like Jenna, Claire's experiences attending RU for her athletic training degree and growing up on the campus influenced her choice to attend RU. She described the campus and community as growing and challenging her to help her to fulfill her goals. Claire also stated she values comfort and familiarity. Due to reporting this and her history with RU, I noted that Claire seemed nervous to step outside her comfort zone when choosing schools for higher

education. When probed, Claire stated she did not investigate any other schools to fulfill her nursing degree.

Despite D'na having a previous college degree, she recalled a group in high school that made her consider nursing. The group's name was Jeunesse du Monde that when translated means Youth of the World. She recounted the community service the group performed and described the joy she found in helping others. This, along with the experience with her uncle, helped establish a love for helping others and by serving others through nursing. Similarly, PM did not mention his previous masters or undergraduate schooling encounters but reported being grateful for the experiences he had at RU. So much so, that he is sponsoring his cousin to move the United States to attend nursing school at RU.

Sparkle's educational experiences were not as positive as the other student participants. Sparkle was previously in school to become a license practice nurse (LPN). She reported being successful in their program, but the school unexpectedly shut down. The RUSON reached out to her cohort and worked with the students so that they could continue their education. Comparing the experiences between her LPN schooling and the RUSON, Sparkle was encouraged, "it feels like the closer I am to getting done, the more I wanna go further." Sparkle felt pushed and supported to pursue career options (advanced practice nursing (nurse practitioner) or nursing education) that she had not considered before. "So, the [RUSON] here makes you feel like you're gonna be successful. And then the fact that they talk about further careers, like advance practice... [the expectations] kinda sets your standards a little bit higher".

Finally, connecting the educational setting and a Christian community- Judith was adamant that she attended a Christian university to pursue her nursing degree. She cites the Christian atmosphere of Ravendale to be a positive force that drives her to continue fulfilling her goal of becoming a nurse. Overall, the previous educational experiences of the students influenced their decision to *attend* RU; however, their desire to persist and stay was partially due to the experiences they have had on the RU campus itself.

The Church Community. The church community was the second largest Community captioned concept behind the educational setting. Each student professed choosing RU due to the Christian nature of the campus. In fact, D’na’s family relocated from another East Coast state to the Midwest state to attend Ravendale. “We saw [RU] who was a Christian school... that would make me come to Ravendale University... [we] moved from [a state] just for Ravendale University.” D’na and her husband prioritized relocation based on a Christian institution that featured a high performing nursing program. The rest of the participants relayed choosing Ravendale and the Christian atmosphere to grow in their faith and learn in an institution that aligns with their values. Jenna states, “I went to a private school, it was a Christian private school... I liked that and wanted something the same for college.” So, while Ravendale was addressed within the educational institution, it also offers a faith community with its chapel services twice a week, small group gatherings and bible studies, and opportunities to serve and minister to the local, national, and international communities.

Judith, D’na, and Claire all cited specific churches in which they found community. Judith communicated her need to find a church and prioritized this need early in her college education. With a smile on her face Judith recalls, “I found a church

here which I attend every Wednesday and Sunday. Those people are very loving, and they want to make me feel included.” Meanwhile, D’na’s family professes a Catholic faith that is different than the Protestant faith in which the other students ascribe. D’na had this to say about her church community, “when we come here first, when I went to church, I was like my family was the only black family in the church... but at the end of the church, they were so friendly, everyone was.” She further explains how this friendly and welcoming community helps to sustain and support her while attending school.

Claire reported growing up in a conservative church community that she broke away from to attend another church that better aligned with her values. Now working while she was attending school, Claire stated she was unable to attend church as often as she liked because she worked nights. However, despite her lack of weekly participation, she still found support from her previous church communities, “I see them from time to time here in [this town] ... having that positive reinforcement of ‘Good job. So proud of you’ ... and they’re just like, ‘Keep up the good work, we love seeing you grow.’” She described the support and encouragement from her former church family with a smile on her face and relaxed body language. Despite only three participants providing specific examples of how the church community supports and sustains them, each student addressed their faith as a priority in choosing Ravendale. Within the context of this study, church or faith communities were found to be a positive factor to aid in persistence amongst the students.

The Workplace. The workplace was neutral or seemed not to significantly impact student persistence. The students who work in addition to their schooling reported time management issues but did not describe the conflict as big enough to derail them

from persisting and finishing their degree. PM reported working full-time while attending school so he could provide for his family. When saying this PM backed away from the table and crossed his arms. Even when probed, PM did not expound upon working while in school. Sparkle relayed difficulty in making time to study “cause you had to work. Or you couldn’t study ‘cause you had to be a mom.” So even though Sparkle described having “too much to do and not enough time to do it”, she did not mention it affecting her persistence. Claire cited arguments with her husband about money since she was not working full-time while in school. Claire maintained part-time employment, but her financial income was significantly less than working as an athletic trainer. Despite the issues described above, none of the participants out-right identified working or their workplace as a positive nor negative persistence factor.

Summary. The Community caption was the ‘smallest’ regarding influence over persistence attitudes and behaviors. Previous educational experiences affected students *attending* RU, but it was the experiences on RU’s campus that encouraged the students to persist. Similarly, the Christian nature of RU’s community strongly encouraged persistence, as well as the church or faith communities the students sought out. The workplace, while impactful in the students’ lives, was not reported as being positive or negative when thinking about their persistence attitudes and behaviors.

Societal Factors

The last and most encompassing Bronfenbrenner a priori coded theme was the Societal Factors. Three major patterns emerged, and while they are similar there are notable differences. Culture addresses the language, mannerisms, dress, etc. of the student participants. Each of these students span at least two differing cultures that can

make social integration more difficult than those of the ‘dominate’ culture. Each of the international students mentioned “back home” or “my home country” on numerous occasions. This differs from Culture portion since the description of their home culture was *then* compared to American culture. There were enough instances of this happening to warrant its own caption. Finally, the largest theme throughout the study were Issues Involving Race. Under the Societal Factors I highlight *how* Race/Ethnicity affected student persistence, whereas later in this chapter the theme Issues Surrounding Race will cover more general experiences the students’ communicated to me.

Culture. Each student, whether it was verbally identified or not, brought their own culture to the School of Nursing. In turn, this cultural lens by which they experience and view the world influences their perceptions. Three of the participants were international students, two of the students regularly spent time outside the United States each year to visit family, and one student had never travelled outside the United States until opportunities at Ravendale made travel possible. With this being said, despite the word ‘culture’ not expressly being stated, the term still applies to the students’ examples and descriptions. For example, language was identified as being a largely negative persistence factors for the international students, and indirectly the Spanish speaking students. When asked about challenges during their time in the SON, Judith, PM, and D’na all identified language as being a large barrier in their persistence. PM expressed frustration that others were not able to understand him, “I speak English. In [home country] we speak English... it’s just the tongue, the way I pronounce things, and the way they seem to be hearing it.” Similarly, D’na cited the language barrier as the second most challenging thing she faces while in nursing school (this is second to familial

responsibilities). Judith outright stated, “I would say the language barrier... It’s really difficult. Some of the diseases, I have to interpret them in my language in order to know what it is, but for other students they already know. That’s very difficult for me.” As elaborated upon further within the Relationships category, the academic coach, Link, was found to be pivotal person to aid in persistence for the international students. Resources provided by and tutoring from Link were “awesome... The relationship with [Link] has been amazing.” (Sparkle). Link also acknowledged that “the ESL students have it harder than [the] other students in academic coaching.” So, while positive measures have been implemented to aid ELL students to be successful, the language barrier is still identified as being a large challenge to student persistence.

The two Spanish speaking students, Jenna and Claire, did not state that language was a barrier to persistence; however, both cited how spanning two cultures is difficult for them. Claire laughingly said to me, “I always joke around with my friends and my family, especially my biological family that I’m like, I’m not a good Mexican.” Similarly, Jenna and her sister “were born both speaking Spanish but then we had to learn English” but when visiting family in Mexico and “I’m with my cousins... they’re like, ‘you kind of have an odd accent when you talk in Spanish.’” However, when with her peers at Ravendale one stated, “that’s so Hispanic of you.” Jenna describes herself as “white passing” and expresses feeling the struggle of being from two distinct cultures. So, while these particular students do not identify language as being a barrier to persistence, holding two identities (Mexican and American) simultaneously is a struggle for them.

A second observation from the cultural perspective that was relayed during the interviews, again, came from the international students: feeling stuck between two cultures. This was similar to what was expressed by the Mexican American students above; however, when the international students reported feeling stuck between two cultures, it was in reference to the individualistic nature represented by American culture and the community centered nature they are most familiar with from their home countries. PM states:

While here I kind of start learning that it's all about me. All about the individual, and not about the group. I was brought up with the group. Like you don't just do things for yourself. You do it for the group. Everybody benefits from it, while here you do things for yourself.

Similarly, when recalling supportive communities, Judith says, "I was in a village. People are really social. The community we would share everything. I moved in the refugee camp when I was 10 or 9. We used to communicate and share what's there." D'na also cited the community versus the individual as being a cultural conflict, however, she also discussed a downside to this community mentality:

Because compared to back home something we have a lot of tribe. Sometimes they will say 'you are not for my tribe'. So, if the person who the manager for example is not, you are not the same tribe, the manager will say 'you no work here.' He will want somebody who is from the same tribe like him to work there. But here in America I don't see that too much.

So, while the international students describe a cultural conflict of individualism versus a community mentality, they did not expressly state if it affected their persistence attitudes and behaviors.

America versus Home Country. With half of the participants being international students, comparisons between America and their respective home countries were identified. It should be noted that the previous caption of ‘Culture’ differs from this section through the coding process. When the students mentioned America, it would almost exclusively be followed up with a comparison to their home country. Culture would be addressed but there were enough instances of comparisons across the interviews that both captions deserved their own categories.

Students expressed being “glad that I’m in America” (PM) or “I’m happy to be here, to be in America. America give us opportunity that we don’t have back home” (D’na). Similarly, Judith acknowledged the opportunity to seek education while in America. The students body language and tone echoed the happiness they expressed when talking about living in America. However, there was also an expression of longing or desire to have similar community as what they experienced in their home country. PM described a situation that would be normal in his village but afterward joked, “I try that kind of thing [here], you might shoot me.” He explained that if we were friends (PM and me), he would come into my house and if I had food prepared, he would take the food and just let me know what he’s eaten. Similarly, if I needed rice to finish my meal, I would walk into his house and take the rice. We would both be happy to share the resources, “And you will be glad that I did, because next time you will call me, I have rice in case you ask me, and I would be happy you took the rice.” PM’s explanation of

this common scenario was echoed by Judith who revealed, even in refugee camps that everything is shared. “The community we would share everything. I moved in the refugee camp... we used to communicate and share what’s there, but you know you’re in a refugee camp.” D’na seemed to miss the relational culture when discussing her friends, “They have encouraging words. They’re supporting. And some of them, I know some of my friends will just tell me to keep going. I miss them.”

Throughout the interviews, the international students expressed in their words, tone, and body language a strong desire to stay in America. Nevertheless, they also conveyed a longing for cultural norms from their home countries. The students did not state that either of these desires influenced their persistence attitudes, however, by being in America they felt as if they were afforded more opportunity.

Race/Ethnicity. Every student participant described at least one story of racism they have experienced, and the majority described multiple. By default, I coded all racism under one code but found the Societal Factors category to overlap so frequently that racism will be discussed here, as well as a theme later in this chapter. Within the context of Societal Factors, I will focus more on *how* the racism impacted their persistence here, then later describe generalities of the racism.

The four African American or Black participants (Sparkle, Judith, D’na, and PM) reported specific examples of racism they have encountered. Sparkle described how she feels as if she must wear a mask or hide from others because she has been judged, “I feel like if I reveal my real self, along with being African American, and my situation as a single mom, it’s so much judgement or sympathy.” Sparkle reported that she does not typically disclose where she lives since it’s “the ghetto” and she doesn’t want to have

“that east side reputation”. When probed about how the judgement affects her persistence, Sparkle replied in derision, “I don’t need their sympathy because I’m making it and I’m gonna be successful.”

When asked ‘how do you think society views minority nurses, therefore by extension minority nursing students?’ Judith immediately responded with, “I feel like, for me personally, English not being my first language and being a refugee, they assume that I won’t be able to achieve my degree.” When probed to elaborate and how this affects her persistence Judith responded, “Well you feel discouraged, and you feel like even if you fail on test, they will not value you, or they’ll not feel like your competent.” Judith mentioned feeling this way three times throughout the interview that reinforced the impact this has had on her persistence attitudes. Each time she described feeling discriminated against, I noted the escalation of her energy and attitude in the observation.

D’na described a situation in clinicals where she was supposed to care for her patient and administer medications with the clinical instructor. The primary nurse caring for the patient told her no and said she did not want D'na caring for that patient. When confronted by the clinical instructor, the nurse said that the patient did not want a Black nurse caring for them. What was found to be the case was that the primary nurse, specifically, did not want D’na caring the patient. D’na had this to say about how it impacted her persistence attitudes and behaviors:

I was just like maybe she didn’t want me to participate maybe because of my accent, because I’m Black, because I don’t know. She was not nice to me at all. And I was just like, if I have people around me like this, will I

really be able to be a nurse? How would they view me when, if working sometimes having people like that make me a little bit afraid.

D'na further elaborates that while it makes her feel afraid, she will not let it derail her from becoming a nurse. During my observation in the interview, D'na was more animated when telling this story, her accent became thicker, and she spoke faster. I wrote down that D'na seemed “almost nervous or uneasy” telling me this story.

PM described a similar situation in clinical when he was caring for two patients: an older White woman, and a younger Black man. “The lady welcomed me and asked me to help her. This guy I’m talking about... he was like, ‘no, I don’t want you in my room. Get me somebody else.’” PM recalled having a good experience caring for the older woman but was confused by the younger man since they have the same skin color, “But he did that, and the lady that I was expecting to be hostile to me, accepted me.” When asked if interactions like this affect him and his persistence attitudes he emphatically and forcefully insisted, “It does. That’s what I’m saying. It does, but I refuse to let it.”

The experiences of the African American and Black students were not echoed by the Mexican American students. Claire and Jenna recalled little to no instances of experiencing racism personally. They did, however, discuss assumptions held about minority communities and their views of *how* these assumptions affect minority nursing students. When asked ‘how do you think our society views minority nurses, and by extension minority nursing students’ Jenna replied with describing how many minorities are not able to go to college due to money. She also cites, “it’s like if you’re a minority and you come from a background where school wasn’t as important, you had to work multiple jobs, it’s harder to go into something like nursing.” Jenna additionally says, “A

lot of minority cultures you have a lot of siblings or, you have to help out at home... At least Hispanics a lot of the times if you're a girl you're expected to help at home, cook, and stuff." Short of outright saying it, Jenna described the intersection of minority populations and lower socioeconomic status. She acknowledged that she is a minority and with a shrug to her shoulders stated, "but thankfully to God I've always passed."

Claire described a similar phenomenon she had experienced, "I am probably considered privileged to the fact that I was adopted by Anglos- Whites. So, I've been given the White experience." However, Claire also recalls when she was younger, "I was that 1% when you looked at Zillow of the schools like, 'oh, it's a majority White school but there's that 1%.' And I always hated being a statistic." Eventually Claire said with a smile on her face that she learned to embrace her heritage and that "I enjoy being a statistic now".

Something else worth mentioning, Claire described an exercise another RUSON professor had the class perform, "she was like 'Google nurses and go to images and look at the images.'" The resulting search revealed "a bunch of White females" but also highlighted some males and minorities. Claire explained that she was proud that she does not fit the "stereotypical nurse" description because "the face of nursing is changing". Sparkle also cited how nursing is changing and how this factor aids in her persistence. "So, every person of color that expresses any interest of nursing, I go in. I encourage them because sometimes we don't have that image of a nurse." Both Claire and Sparkle agreed that increased representation of minority populations in nursing would encourage younger generations to pursue the profession. They also cite this as being a persistence factor that encourages them to finish their degree.

Summary. Language was, by far, the largest negative persistence factor as cited by the ELL students. Within the Race/Ethnicity caption, the racism incidents and discrimination the African American and Black students described were negative factors that affected persistence; however, the students' internal drive and determination to obtain their degree and meet their goals overrode the negativity and the students reported those incidents as being motivating factors to persist and obtain their degree. While not affecting persistence, per se, the Mexican American students revealed that spanning two distinct cultures is difficult. The African American and Black students also compared culture and their Home Country versus America. Again, the students did not indicate that the cultural conflicts they experience between their country of origin and America affected their persistence; nonetheless they did express significant gratitude for being in America and the opportunities they enjoy.

Themes

Three large themes emerged throughout the data: Issues Surrounding Race, Family/Relationships, and Encounters with and Values of Healthcare. The theme of Issues Surrounding Race emerged fairly quickly and was consistent across all the student participants. While the majority of patterns from Race/Ethnicity were found in the Community and Societal Factors portion of the a priori codes, this theme was easily found across all the interviews. I discussed how Race/Ethnicity affected persistence above in Societal Factors, under this caption I will discuss Race/Ethnicity in generalities. The Family/Relationships theme also became quite obvious as the students more often discussed others versus themselves. Since Family/Relationships had its own a priori coding, I exhausted the findings within that section and will not further elaborate on them

here. Finally, Encounters with and Values of Healthcare emerged as I was categorizing and finding patterns within the data analysis process. Healthcare encompassed phrases like “I want to help others” or “I love nursing...”. References to clinicals, encounters with the healthcare setting, and/or working in the healthcare setting were also included here.

Issues Surrounding Race

There were numerous references to race and ethnicity across the student participants and across the interview categories. This was by far the largest coded, categorized, and patterned theme. Everything from discussing language, culture, and socioeconomic status to acts of racism, discrimination they have experienced, increasing representation in nursing, and providing strong examples for their children were brought up by the students. I will share more of the stories the students disclosed during their interviews under this section; however, many of these stories were not exclusively identified as affecting persistence. Therefore, this section will be used to describe the students’ experiences and if connections to persistence were made, I will relay this as well.

PM described one situation that he found to be both positive and negative in nature. PM was driving to work and there was construction that required diversion off the road he was travelling onto another street. He saw the car ahead of him (White, male driving the car) turn into the gas station to bypass the stop light. PM followed the man but knew the action was wrong. He was running late to work and wanted to save some time since the traffic light was backed up. Unbeknownst to PM and the other driver, a police officer was patrolling the area and pulled PM over. The police officer approached PM’s

car, "he came angry. Like, 'why did you do that?'" Once PM spoke, the police officer noted his accent and PM felt as if the angry energy coming from the police officer decreased:

So, he kind of reduced that. And he now come in and told me, "I know what you did, and I know why you did it. But I have the question for you." I said, "What's the question?" And he said, "Do you want to lead, or you want to be led?" You don't get it. That guy did it, I did it *with* that guy. So that guy, that guy was leading. To him, I just followed the footstep of that guy, which was wrong. So, he came to me, "Do you want to be leading? You want to lead? Or you want to be a follower, to be led?" And I said, "I always want to lead." [He] said, "Now what do you think you did?" And I said, "I'm sorry Sir." And I kind of love that guy for that. I mean, I never said that I never do that kind of thing again... Because to me that guy brought out something good in me, with his anger, with his approach, and his words. And he never gave me a ticket because I know it was because of me.

There were two police officers in the cruiser and PM explained that both were White, males. The primary officer actually encouraged PM throughout their interaction, however, when the second officer approached PM's vehicle he was not as kind. PM described that both officers got into an argument over whether to ticket PM. The second officer said, "If he [doesn't] get a ticket he [won't] learn." The first officer stood his ground and PM reported the second officer as rolling his eyes and saying, "If it were a White man you wouldn't do this." This interaction PM relayed to me was in conjunction

with the incident described within the Societal Factors about the White elderly female patient and the Black younger male patient. The point PM was communicating through these stories was: “What I’m trying to say is this: We don’t judge the action of a society, or a community based on one person, no matter how close that person is to you.” When asked if PM felt as if these interactions affected his persistence, he affirmed that the incidents bothered him, but he will not let it impede his goals of becoming a nurse and providing for his family. An observation I made during this story of PM’s body language, “PM leaning forward, more animated, and talking with his hands.” I also noted in my journal after the interview, “[PM] seemed inspired by his own story with the police officers. I wonder if storytelling is important to him or to his culture?” I was unable to answer this question with PM but highly suspect this to be the case.

Judith shared a few times when she felt discriminated against. She described first attending school (college/university) and assumptions were made about her academic performance:

They were like, “Oh you need to study hard.” I mean, I need to study hard, but that felt bad. Yeah. They said, “You need to study hard because English is not your first language.” That’s good, but the way they said it made me feel like I can’t do this.

Within Judith’s freshman year, she struggled to maintain grades that would allow her entrance to the SON. She received tutoring with a university academic success coach and upon acceptance to the SON, she was automatically connected with the academic coach, Link. While Judith was adamant that these resources “have helped a lot”, the presumption and lack of faith in her abilities didn’t “feel good”. She explained that the extra help from

the tutors helped with her persistence but the lack of faith in her abilities (and presumptions) did not aid in persistence.

When Jenna discussed race and ethnicity, she seemed to remove herself from the equation. She talked in generalities or perceived stereotypes of minority populations. It also seemed like an uncomfortable topic to discuss. Jenna's body language changed to being more guarded and she seemed to choose her words more carefully during this part of the interview. Jenna also seemed to be in conflict by spanning two differing cultures:

I think when I was younger, I felt more like I was trying to fit in with my Caucasian peers. I feel like that's just natural, especially when you're younger. But then as I grew up, I think I did appreciate it more... I think my whole life I did have a lot more of the trying to fit in with the mannerisms here. But I think it did take time. Like over time, I think towards the end of high school, was finally when I was appreciating more of my own heritage and my features that are different.

Jenna explained she was embracing her culture more but didn't have many people on campus with whom she could share the experiences. Jenna describes herself as introverted and that she "likes to have a small group of friends". Additionally, her friend group is fairly homogenous and is comprised of many of her teammates from volleyball and fellow nursing students. Based on Jenna's outward appearance, her race/ethnicity has been mistaken for "Italian... I've gotten Asian. I've gotten Hawaiian, Native American. Usually, Hispanic is one of the last that people guess actually." This disconnect from her Hispanic roots has caused some internal conflict, as if Jenna is not honoring a large part of herself. "When I go to my family in Mexico, I feel really American but when I'm here

on campus, I feel really Hispanic.” Jenna did not indicate if these feelings affected her persistence, but she was not alone in expressing the struggle of straddling two cultures. Claire also cited feeling this way, however, not to the same extent as Jenna. One reason for this difference may be the age difference between the two students. At the time of the interview Jenna was 20 years old and Claire was 29. Another possible reason for the difference is that Claire has a more “traditional Hispanic look”. Jenna described this stereotype as, “a lot of Hispanics are short, I’m not. A lot of Hispanics are curvy, I’m also not very curvy... some Hispanics will have wider noses, flatter noses, and mine is relatively small.” These general physical descriptors align more with Claire’s overall appearance than Jenna’s. Both women described the two cultures and their perceptions of where and how they fit. Neither Jenna nor Claire cited their heritage as being a positive or negative persistence factor.

Sparkle and Claire made references to their current living communities. Both students reported growing up in communities that were “totally different” than where they currently reside. Sparkle says, “the community that I live in now is totally different from the community that I grew up in.” She further elaborates, “I grew up in a more suburban area with both parents and all my friends had both parents. My adult [home] is not a suburban area, but it’s on a rural side of town.” However, by reputation the part of the city where Sparkle lives is... less than favorable. “So, it’s like we don’t live in the ‘hood but because you say you live east, that’s what people assume.” The demographic makeup of her neighborhood is comprised of primarily minority peoples of lower socioeconomic status. Sparkle explains that the discrimination she gets makes her avoid

answering the question of where she lives or states another location. “Because if I say I live on the east side, even though it’s an area that’s secluded, you know, I get judged.”

With Claire being adopted by White parents, she was “given the White experience.” Claire recalls growing up being the only Hispanic girl in her classes and community. This background makes her current residence a stark contrast:

I live in what’s considered the ghetto. It’s the whole game of, “was that fireworks or was that gunshots?” So, I live in a neighborhood where my husband unfortunately, might actually be the minority being White. And so just being able to interact with that community and then also go to a hospital where we’re near such an area, I wouldn’t say it’s culture shock... but it is different the way people talk, the way people live, how they present themselves.

Claire did not state she received much discrimination for where she lives. However, she has noticed a distinct difference in the patient population and healthcare needs of the community in which she serves. Things like sexual assault, domestic violence, and overdoses are common occurrences, “And there’ll be people who come into the ER and I’ll just glance at their patient information, and I’m like, “you literally live down the road.” Claire describes this as “surreal”.

Summary. Since the population for this study are minority students, it did not come as a surprise that Race/Ethnicity was the largest theme across the data. With that being said, the students’ reactions to discrimination and racism were surprising to me, as well as how these reactions spurred them to move forward to persist with their degree. Similarly, all but one of the students expressed difficulty in reconciling cultural identities

and navigating their way through relationships, community, and society, at-large. The students have demonstrated their commitment to achieving their goals, despite discrimination and racism.

Family/Relationships

The family and significant relationships caption was covered in-full within the a priori codes portion of this chapter, however, I will provide a summary of the findings. Familial relationships were found to be a mixture of both positively and negatively affecting persistence attitudes. For example, the parent/child relationships were found to be the most dichotomous in affecting persistence. The participants who had children wanted to be role models for their children (positive factor), but also found the day-to-day monotony of caring for their families as hindering their persistence. The nuclear family was found to be a positive persistence factor. This was especially true for those students who are single or traditionally aged.

Relationships outside the family including friends, peers, and those in the university setting were found to have positive and negative effects on persistence. Friends, especially those from tight-knit communities were found to encourage persistence. Whereas peer relationships impeded or were negative persistence factors. Faculty, staff, and administrators had a positive effect on persistence, especially the faculty and academic coach.

Encounters with and Values of Healthcare

Healthcare was the third largest theme identified across the data. Whether the students referenced previous experiences that made them want to pursue nursing or they relayed current workplace or clinical incidents, this theme was pervasive across the

students (it was not very deep but pervasive). When coding and categorizing what would be the theme of Encounters with and Values of Healthcare, phrases like “I want to help others”, “caring for others”, or “I love nursing” were identified then combined into categories and patterns with explicit usage of the terms: nursing, healthcare, hospital, medicine, clinicals, etc. Due to these codings and patterns, there was a lot of overlap between the Individual, Community, and Healthcare themes. Many of the references to healthcare have been discussed throughout the a priori themes, however, I will highlight remaining stories and experiences.

D’na relayed her experiences caring for her uncle while he was in the ICU in her home country. Similarly, Judith also helped care for her younger sister who suffers with cerebral palsy. Judith’s perspective was unique in that she has experienced differing healthcare settings and was able to compare those experiences. Finally, Sparkle’s parents have chronic illnesses that require ongoing care. Claire and Sparkle worked in healthcare prior to attending university to pursue their nursing degree. PM and Jenna were the only participants who did not express previous experiences in healthcare. In fact, Jenna was interested in pursuing a medical degree but when analyzing the amount of time required for schooling, she found nursing to be a happy medium between medicine and helping others. Jenna will be the first in her family to enter the medical field, in any capacity. When asked if her family was surprised, Jenna smiled and chuckled then answered:

Mm-hmm, oh yes! Because I used to be very squeamish. I still don’t really like getting shots or getting my blood drawn. Then when I told them, I was like, “Oh yeah, nursing.” They were like, “What? Are you going to pass out every time you see blood?” I was like, “No. I feel like I’m getting used

to it,” or just smells too. I’m very bad with smells, but I feel like I got used to it during clinicals and stuff. They were also like, “You get grossed out by everything. How are you going to do nursing?” I was like, “I know. I really am not sure if that’s going to work out.” But then as I started doing it, I was telling them more about it and they’re like, “Okay, it sounds like you’re liking it, fitting in with it.”

Despite concerns for Jenna’s success, Jenna states her family was supportive and encouraged her to pursue and persist with her nursing degree.

Claire’s experiences working as a pediatric Athletic Trainer helped inform her choice to go back to nursing school. Claire described feeling burned out, she did not see room for growth, nor opportunity to advance in her field unless she pursued advanced degrees. The cadence to her voice increased when describing the burnout but she smiled when thinking about her former pediatric patients. She had this to say about changing careers:

So, I was an athletic trainer for five years. And I absolutely love that job, but... Even though athletic training is a clinical-gearred occupation, I did like the clinical setting, as in going into the hospital, going to the orthopedic center, and working there. Don't get me wrong, I love my kids. They were amazing. They were the best part of my day, but I just felt like I needed to be doing something more. I was severely overworked and severely underpaid. So, I just thought, what is something I can do that is still in the medical field that I can still stem off from athletic training?

Claire went on to further explain the intricacies of her job and the amount of dedication that was needed to meet minimum requirements. As mentioned previously, Claire's adoptive mother was a nurse and worked for Ravensdale. The encouragements of her mother and the comfort of a familiar educational setting finally prompted Claire to go back for an accelerated degree in nursing. Later when discussing Community and Societal Factors, Claire expressed being thankful she is Hispanic and lives where she does, "So yeah, I think having a face that is familiar to the skin tone, the facial features, the curly dark, thick hair. It can be comforting to the patient saying 'Well she's Hispanic. I can open up to her.'"

Sparkle also acknowledged how representation in nursing is important, especially since she lives in an area that has a larger Black or African American population:

I worked at an urgent care setting. And although it was an urgent care setting, after 4:00 we became the STD capital... But it's just that image that I've given that you trust me. Because we look alike. And you didn't judge me when I came in. And when I came in the following week, and the following week. You just took care of what I needed. And so I am that hero the community because I helped them, and I didn't judge them. And then I didn't tell everybody about what was going on.

Sparkle's experiences as a Medical Assistant within her community encouraged her to go further to pursue her LPN degree. When the LPN track fell through, she decided to pursue a BSN degree. Both Sparkle and Claire found being of a minority group and entering nursing to be a positive persistence factor since they want to be a role model for younger generations in their communities.

Summary. Much of the Encounters with and Values of Healthcare theme revolved around the students' experiences which informed them pursuing nursing as an option; or their hopes and inspirations as to what they want to accomplish as a nurse. Altruistic reasons were at the top of the list when considering nursing as a career. The students cite various and individual motivations for persisting with their nursing degree, however, the ultimate goal to become a nurse was predominate throughout the interviews.

Triangulation

The findings from the student participants in this chapter were key in better understanding their persistence attitudes and behaviors. The triangulation process occurred organically throughout the study. The observations during in the interviews, my journaling after each, the student interviews, the tone, pitch, and cadence of the students' voices, the interview with Link (and subsequent patterns found within), and finally the peer debriefing and member checking all contributed to identifying the themes and supporting evidence for said themes. The a priori coded SEM levels helped to pinpoint where the influences in their lives were originating (e.g., relationships, societal influences, etc.). With the individual being at the center of the SEM, we were able to analyze the various inputs that affected their persistence. The three themes that emerged (Issues Surrounding Race, Family/Relationships, and Encounters with and Values of Healthcare) were influential when analyzing the students' attitudes and behaviors towards persisting and completing their nursing degree. For example, the altruism exhibited within the Individual caption overlapped frequently with the theme of Encounters and Values of Healthcare. The students desired a life of serving others and healthcare was how they chose to act out that altruism. Similarly, discrimination and racism were

identified as being positive *and* negative persistence factors. The individual student's beliefs and perseverance did not allow for the racism and discrimination to derail them from achieving their goal of becoming a nurse. When describing the racism or discrimination the students' nonverbal indicators and voice tone/cadence changed and they seemed to be on-guard. Relationships may those be with family, friends, peers, and/or RUSON workers, were found be complicated but *mostly* positive in nature. Students exhibited happiness when thinking about certain relationships and Link echoed the same sentiment when thinking about the relationships she has with the students. The congruency between the findings was what pointed Family/Relationships as being a larger theme throughout the study.

The different levels of qualitative data allowed for the layers to be peeled back to identify the themes in this study. Obtaining unique perspectives and cross analyzing the information allowed for more in-depth context and richer findings to emerge throughout the analysis process. Using both a priori and inductive coding techniques also added a layer of rigor to this study that was unexpected but pleasantly enriching. The process of triangulation aided in providing trustworthiness and rigor to the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative action research study centers academically at-risk, minority prelicensure nursing students and the factors that affect their persistence attitudes and behaviors. The American Nurses Association (ANA), the National League for Nursing (NLN), and the American Association of Colleges of Nurses (AACN) have all put forth challenges to Schools of Nursing (SON) and healthcare settings to increase diversity within the nursing workforce. Unfortunately, there are still significant disparities in minority nursing representation.

Another factor that prompted my inquiry into this subject was the disproportionate amount of minority nursing students involved with academic coaching versus their White counterparts. Academic coaching was trialed in the 2018-2019 school year and “officially” came onboard in the 2019-2020 school year. Within that time, those students who were identified as meeting the entrance criteria were predominantly of a racial or ethnic minority. Since this is an action research study and it is the first formal investigation into the topic, this study would be considered investigational with no intervention (this will come in the next iteration of the action research cycle). The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?
 - a. What effective supports are identified?

- b. What considerable challenges are identified?
- c. Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?
- d. What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

Chapter 4 discussed the findings for this study in which the three overarching themes that emerged were: Issues Surrounding Race, Family/Relationships, and Encounters with and Values of Healthcare. More findings emerged using the Social Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013) as a priori codes that translated to this study as the Individual, Relationships, Community, and Societal Factors. Within the next section of this chapter, I will be analyzing the findings from this study and answer the research questions (RQ). After that, I will be reflecting on this iteration of the action research cycle and developing practice recommendations and an implementation plan for proposed changes for the next cycle of action research.

The Research Questions, Findings, Theoretical Frameworks, and Literature Connections

Within this portion, I will answer the research questions with the findings of the study and make connections to the literature and theoretical frameworks (TF). I will address the RQ subcomponents first, then move to the RQ, lastly an overall analysis of how the RQ, findings, TF, and literature connect, moving from simpler concepts to more complex. There will be overlap in some of the RQs, but the information will be highlighted in different ways. The RQ and its subcomponents were left broad and open-

ended to capture natural and organic responses from the participants. See Appendix A for the a priori alignment with the RQ and RQ subcomponents.

RQ- What effective supports are identified?

Since the first RQ subcomponent was not specific as to what ‘support’ meant, the students cited numerous things like friends, the academic coach (Link), on-campus resources, online or book resources, altruism and security (long-term goals), and the nuclear family. Other family members, like spouses and children, were identified as both a positive and negative persistence factor, while the nuclear family was exclusively a positive persistence factor. The spouses and children were found to be a positive factor when adequate familial and home support were given, as well as wanting to be a role model or when the students wanted to make their spouses or children proud. The families were identified as being the most supportive when the student was provided the time and space to pursue their studies.

Overwhelmingly, Link was identified amongst the students as being a person who helps aid in their persistence, along with the resources she provides to help them to be successful in nursing school. This includes the on-campus resources like the library, the academic center (which houses the student tutors, writing center, and professional academic services), and lab resources in the School of Nursing (SON). Link also provides online resources, accountability, book resources, and dedicated time. Link recalls the following in her interview:

I think for some of them it gives them a place to fit and kind of an accountability to study or prepare because I've had some students tell me

that, "You make me want to study before these meetings because I want to be prepared and not look like I don't know what I'm doing."

The students echoed this sentiment and found Link to be a "huge help" and positively aided in their persistence attitudes and behaviors.

Resources like tutoring, writing services, professional organizations, and academic advising were identified within the literature as having a positive impact on persistence in minority students (Kornbluh et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Murray et al., 2016; Stickney, 2008; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Mentoring, may it be professional or personal in nature, was also found to have a strongly positive impact on persistence (Chen et al, 2019; Diefenbeck & Klemm, 2021; Frumkin & Koutsoubou, 2013; Kundu, 2019; Matthews et al., 2022; Murray et al., 2016; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014). Within the literature, faculty had the power to both positively and negatively impact persistence attitudes and behaviors (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018; Matthew et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2019; Trent et al., 2021). While Link is an adjunct faculty member, the students seemed to make a distinction between how they perceive Link and the full-time faculty.

Finally, keeping long-term goals like "wanting to help others" or financial security also aided the students in persisting with their degree. These were coded and categorized within the Individual a priori code but the students reported keeping long-term goals in mind, aided in persistence attitudes. Despite the students using racist or discriminatory acts against them as a motivating factor to persist with their degree, I did

not include it here under ‘effective supports’. I will further elaborate on this in the next section addressing challenges.

RQ- What considerable challenges are identified?

The largest, overarching theme of the study involved Issues Surrounding Race. Each student described, at least, one story of racism and/or discrimination. The students explained how these interactions made them doubt if they would be able to achieve their goal; however, the students recalled “using this” to turn the negative interaction into a motivating factor towards persisting and completing their degree. While listed as both a positive and negative factor towards persistence, the other theoretical framework guiding this study, Critical Theory, seeks to emancipate and challenge the current social order to promote equitable change. “Critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative” (Bohman, 2019, para. 3; Crossman, 2019, para. 8). Connecting the first two RQ subcomponents with Critical Theory means that racism and discrimination should not be identified as an ‘effective support’ but rather a ‘considerable challenge’. Racism and discrimination should not be normalized, nor tolerated. While the students used the racist and discriminatory experiences as motivations to achieve their goals, those experiences do not meet the three criteria for Critical Theory outlined above and therefore are a challenge not a support to the students within this study. However, I will continue to echo the students’ experiences by labeling Race/Ethnicity as both a positive and negative persistence factor since that was their lived experiences.

The English Language Learners (ELL), without reservation, cited the language barrier as one of the biggest challenges toward persistence. Judith specifically mentioned

having to translate the diagnosis' between languages to better understand the content. This extra step costs her and the other students valuable time during classes and tests, both of which have time restrictions. Link also recognizes that language is a unique challenge for the ELL students, and that they need extra support. "Yeah, the ESL students need that extra time... the extra resources also help a lot."

The literature cites racism as a strongly negative persistence factor for minority students (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bunce & King, 2019; Kornbluh et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2017; Trent et al., 2021). No matter the type (overt or covert) and no matter the source (person, relationship, system), racism and discrimination were found to consistently be a factor that impeded persistence (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bunce & King, 2019; Kornbluh et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2017; Trent et al., 2021). Within this study the students reported using the experiences to fuel their desire to succeed but that does not justify the experiences.

Not as large a barrier to persistence, certain relationships acted as a challenge to some of the students. Those students who were married (Claire, PM, & D'na) and those who had children (Sparkle, D'na & PM) cited those relationships as being both a positive and negative persistence factor. The challenges of day-to-day life while attending school full-time was cited as "grinding" and that there aren't enough hours in the day. This aligns with the literature as family was found to have a positive and negative effect on persistence (Diefenbeck & Klemm, 2021; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019; Tolliver et al., 2020; Trent et al., 2021; Wray et al., 2014). When family was unable or unwilling to provide encouragement and support, the likelihood of

persisting significantly dropped in minority students (Burt et al., 2019; Diefenbeck & Klemm, 2021; Lott et al., 2018; Matthews et al., 2022). The support described ranged from moral support to helping with household chores, child rearing, and/or financially providing for the student and the family (Diefenbeck & Klemm, 2021; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Matthews et al., 2022). This aligns with what the student participants described when stating how spouses and children can negatively affect their persistence.

The final challenge worthy of mention included an abnormal finding (or inconsistent with the literature) that half the student participants noted how peers could act as a negative persistence factor. People identified as ‘friends’ were found to be overtly positive towards persistence attitudes and behaviors. However, there was a significant demarcation of friends and peers. The age gaps, differing maturity levels, and lack of higher educational experiences were found to be bothersome and distracting for some of the minority students. However, the literature overwhelmingly cites peers as being a positive persistence factor (Chen et al., 2020; Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016; Flateland et al., 2019; Kornbluh et al., 2022; Rivas et al., 2019; Tolliver et al., 2020). This contradiction needs further exploration.

RQ- Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?

The findings from the students included the nuclear family, spouses and children (again, these were both positive and negative persistence factors), friends, Link the Academic Coach, and faculty, staff, and administration. Ultimately, this RQ-C was asking about social integration and social supports while in nursing school. I will not revisit the conflict that arises with spouses and children being positive and negative

persistent factors; however, the nuclear family was consistently identified as a source of positive support while in school. The nuclear family provided the minority students encouragement, assistance, guidance, and support while in school. The literature is consistent with the findings that family can be both a positive and negative persistence factor (Diefenbeck & Klemm, 2021; Diefenbeck et al., 2016; Lott et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019; Tolliver et al., 2020; Trent et al., 2021 Wray et al., 2014). Despite using Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (SEM) in a practical sense (connecting the model with the interview questions and a priori codes), we also need to connect the concepts inside the model as well. The various contexts within the individual's social sphere can significantly affect their attitudes and behaviors. Those that are closest to the individual will have a larger influence, especially if they are family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Therefore, it makes sense that family would hold a larger sway over persistence attitudes and behaviors as compared to other relationships outside the family such as faculty, staff, or administration relationships. There were more references to family than any other relationship which was appropriate according to the literature and theoretical frameworks.

The faculty, staff, and administration relationships were defined as positively affecting persistence, especially the Academic Coach, Link. Only one participant described 'issues' with the professors but it did not affect her persistence. The support staff are described as "awesome" and the Dean was depicted as supportive, understanding, but fair. Mitchell et al. (2019) states, "Student retention has also been associated with faculty support and interest in student success, whereas a lack of support from the faculty can have a negative impact on students' motivation to successfully

complete their program” (p. 30). The literature acknowledges that faculty, staff, and administration relationships can have both a positive and negative affect on persistence attitudes and behaviors in minority nursing students (Matthews et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2019; Trent et al., 2021). Within this study, the students identified these relationships as being encouraging, supportive, and “the relationships here makes you feel like you’re gonna be successful.” (Sparkle).

RQ- What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

By far the biggest service identified by the students as being helpful was the Academic Coach. There was not a distinction between Link (the current academic coach) and Link’s role; however, since the students called Link by name and described her as a “Godsend” and, “she helps me a lot” (Judith), I will infer it was the relationship with Link specifically that aided in student persistence. Along with the relationship with Link, the various services she pointed out or provided to the students were also mentioned. For example, the library, online book, and SON lab resources were all revealed as helpful to the students. Similarly, the literature acknowledges when academic services are used, they are found to be beneficial (Murray et al., 2016; Stickney, 2008; Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 2014); however, a couple studies identified minority nursing students often having barriers that makes accessing these resources difficult (Tolliver et al., 2020; Wray et al., 201). Due to the academic coach being a central person for these resources, there seemed to be increased satisfaction with the resources within the SON and this aided in a positive persistence factor.

RQ- Overall

The research question guiding this study was, “What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?” As described above, the various subcomponents to the research question helped to answer this overarching research question. See Table 5.1 for the quick overview and labeling of the findings that answer this research question.

Table 5.1
Classification of the Factors That Affect Persistence

Positive Factors	Negative Factors	Both Positive and Negative Factors	Neutral, or No Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term goals (altruism and security) • Nuclear Family Relationships • Friendships • Faculty, Staff, and Administrators • The Educational Setting • The Church Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Barriers • Peer Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spousal Relationships • Parent/Child Relationships • Race/Ethnicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Workplace • Cultural Factors • America Versus Home Country

These are the results from across the data of the student interviews, the interview with the academic coach Link, and my notes and observations from those interviews. I classified the findings into four types: Positive Factor, Negative Factor, Both Positive and

Negative Factor, and Neutral, or No Effect. The various pattern that emerged from the findings aligned fairly well with the literature, especially regarding the relationships with family and language barriers. They are also supported by the two theoretical frameworks guiding this study: Bronfenbrenner's SEM and Critical Theory. The SEM aided in providing the structure by which the data was organized and reported; while Critical Theory was the lens by which I looked at the data and performed the coding, categorization, patterns, and themes.

Reflections on the Action Research

Action research is so cyclical in nature that this study is only the starting point for the RUSONs inquiry into better equity practices. Since I no longer work at RU, I will need to be diligent to partner with those still at RU to help effect change; essentially, using the Herr and Anderson (2015) term for researcher positionality: an outsider partnering with insiders. From where I stand, I can also influence a new SON to partner with their minority student populations and what information we can glean to change antiquated and racist policies. I think this is one of the biggest things I have learned from this study: action research empowers practitioners to critically examine their surroundings to create necessary and equitable change. But for action research to be most effective, performing cyclical studies to perpetuate change is needed. There are, of course, changes to this study I would want to enact before trialing again at another location, however, the overall experience of being a qualitative researcher was enriching and empowering.

Practice Recommendations

There were a few different directions and implications for this action research study. It was clear through the findings and literature that English Language Learners (ELL) struggled with the language barrier. This makes logical sense and is not an actionable option as things stand at Ravendale. However, the discrepancy between the findings and literature (peer relationships) would be a feasible alternative for the RUSON to implement an action plan for change (or the next iteration of the action research cycle). I will further elaborate on the peer relationship plans but will first visit some options for future practice recommendations.

One moderately favorable option for practice would be partnering with local hospitals to ‘sponsor’ students with mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. For example, a local hospital would sponsor the academically at-risk student, provide exclusive space for the student to perform clinicals in their hospital with a dedicated preceptor, and upon completion of their nursing program the student will work for the hospital for “x” number of years. This idea is not new to nursing practice and is something other Schools of Nursing are pursuing as an education to workforce pipeline. How this may be beneficial to the minority students is extra resources, funding, and training for those involved to solely help those particular students. While this option has significant limitations, in that it does not benefit *all* the minority students, it could be a viable option for some students.

Within the Diefenbeck and Klimm (2021) study a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant was utilized to provide scholarship, education, training, and stipend monies to increase diversity in the nursing workforce (titled: Nursing

Workforce Diversity program). Diefenbeck and Klimm (2021) described a four-pillar of support approach towards serving the needs of their minority nursing students. The financial pillar helped cover expenses for school as well as at home. The academic pillar provided a full-time retention coordinator (similar to the RUSON's academic coach) and better connected the students with on campus resources to aid with their academic needs. The social, emotional, and cultural support were housed by the retention coordinator, and they developed continuing education for the students, staff, and faculty, hosted at least one social event per semester, encouraged family involvement in the School of Nursing, and partnered with the university cultural resource center to promote programs beneficial to the minority students. Finally, the last pillar of support was that of leadership and professional development. This included starting a peer-mentoring program, coordinating job shadowing experiences, and organizing testing preparation supports. The RUSON could plausibly do something that could address inequities and concerns from this action research study. A replication of the Diefenbeck and Klimm (2021) study or loosely basing another study using HRSA grant money could be a realistic option for the RUSON (Diefenbeck & Klimm, 2021).

Further musing on the peer relationship plan: since the peer relationships were out of the norm according to the literature and a negative persistence finding within this specific study, I will focus my Action Plan on this topic. Utilizing the help of colleagues and the Academic Coach, Link, we can train the faculty on incorporating antiracist and diversity inclusion concepts into lesson plans and further educate the faculty on Andragogy practices. This is a gap in the RUSON and both incorporating inclusion practices and better teaching adult learners can help close this gap. The accelerated and

ELL students were the participants to cite peer relationships as a problem and both populations of students are the fastest growing in the RUSON. Link would be the best person positioned to perform the actual education/training for the faculty as she has some of the closest relationships with these students. She could also provide a perspective with real-world examples of how best to incorporate antiracist and andragogical practices. I will further elaborate on the plan and implementation of improving peer relationships in the next section.

Action Plan

Action research is cyclical and a practitioner-based style of research (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Since this was the first study of its kind for this SON, the next iteration of action research requires some type of action or action plan. This action plan is the formal start to the next cycle of action research.

I need to preface this section with the statement: I no longer work at Ravendale University. Since the Ravendale University School of Nursing was the original setting for this study, I will continue to discuss the action plan as if I was implementing the next iteration of action research at RU. I would need the help of the academic coach (Link), the administration, and former colleagues to make this happen; however, it is not outside the realm of possibility that I could duplicate this new study at another institution of higher learning (thereby either confirming or enhancing the data results).

I chose the direction for the action plan from the practice recommendations. These were informed by the students' feedback and inconsistencies between the findings and the literature. There seemed to be issues surrounding peer relationships and some faculty not being able to address the needs of adult learners, especially those who are

minority students. My action plan centers the adult, minority learner and will provide continuing education to the faculty to promote a change within the RUSON. This seems to be an ongoing issue and, as evidenced by the student interviews, warrants further investigation and change.

Since the relationship with the academic coach, Link was identified and valued above all other faculty, staff, and administrator relationships (as reported by the students), this relationship needs further investigation. Link's background and role as the academic coach is ideal in providing continuing education and support to the full-time faculty and staff. I would collaborate with Link and at least one other colleague (still at RU) to create the ongoing educational plan and help field evaluations and questions. The education would involve lessons like learning about educational theories such as Andragogy, Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory. Other more practical lessons could include concrete lesson plan ideas for adult and minority learners, inclusivity in teaching plans and evaluation, and a 'How To' guide for navigating issues surrounding adult learners and race/ethnicity.

The timeline for the training would start in January 2023, with the goal of presenting initial education at the SON faculty retreat in May 2023. The training would continue into the fall semester, starting in August 2023 with encouragement to implement education in faculty classrooms by January 2024 of the next year. Evaluation and ongoing faculty support would be required throughout the training and implementation processes. A mixed methods study could be beneficial to enhance the findings. For example, the adult and minority students would be provided with a survey with a combination of Likert scaled and open-ended questions at the beginning of the semester.

Then the faculty would implement their ideas, lesson plans, and policies and the students would perform a post evaluation. Faculty feedback would be another source of data, plus observations from the research team (myself, Link, and a colleague). See the Table 5.2 below for more details surrounding the action plan.

Table 5.2
Timeline for the Action Plan

Date	Activity
January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with Link and other faculty to communicate results of this investigational action research study and to plan the teaching/training, evaluation, and goals for the next iteration of action research. • Once topics are agreed upon, divvying up the workload and create a more concrete timeline. This will include development of the education, determining who will teach the faculty, who will be the ‘resource’ person for the faculty, and evaluation methods. • Establish projected costs (if any) and apply for grants if applicable. RU has faculty grants available for training such as this that could be used. • Meeting with the Dean and administration to green-light the project.
May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first education and training would occur at the faculty retreat in May 2023. The training would include the results of this study and rationale for ongoing education based on these results. Transparency in discussing the training with minority and adult students to seek their input for evaluation will also be communicated within this meeting. • Perform predetermined evaluation of the training from faculty and make plans to adjust future education based on the initial findings.
August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with training sessions and adjusting topics, format, and/or overall education based on faculty feedback. This will start in August 2023 and continue throughout the fall semester. • Since minority and adult students are the target audience, a Town Hall meeting will occur at the beginning of the semester.

These students would be invited to participate in the evaluation of the changes they notice starting in January 2024.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| January
2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The formal training/education will be completed by this time.• Implementation of the lessons, strategies, and changes would start on the first day of the spring semester.• Link, the other faculty, and I would be available for questions, planning sessions, and/or advise on implementation.• Faculty evaluation would be ongoing. |
| May 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The end of the spring semester 2024 would mark the end of this new iteration of action research.• The ongoing evaluation from faculty would be viewed overall for common themes, issues, or trends.• Minority and adult student evaluations would be collected and reviewed. Again, common issues, themes, and/or trends will be noted.• Finally, observations, notes, and reflections from the research team will be utilized to find commonalities between all the data.• The official write-up and report will be split amongst the research team and findings will be given to faculty, staff, and administration. |
| August
2024-
onward | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depending on the reception of the study from the faculty, students, staff, and administration future iterations based on feedback could be discussed and implemented starting in the fall semester of 2024. |

Implications for Further Research

Several variations of the action research cycle could come from this study. Within the RUSON further research could include partnering with other departments to better address the ELL needs and help with interpretation. Another investigation into the minority students' relationships, specifically between their spouse and children, could be warranted as these were the most complicated relationships per the student participants.

Finally, further delving into *how* racism and discrimination seemingly became a positive and negative persistence factor. This phenomenon was perplexing and requires further exploration.

The aim of this study was to be holistic in identifying the multitude of factors that affect persistence in academically at-risk minority nursing students. However, due to the open and holistic nature, various lens such as feminist theory, queer theory, gender theory, and critical race theory were not explored. Future replications of this study could incorporate any of the offshoots of Critical Theory to narrow the lens by which the data and study were viewed. For example, Critical Race Theory was heavily considered when constructing this study, however, the goal was to keep an open mind as the researcher. By changing the lens of the study, the emphasis on results would be different but enlightening.

Along a similar vein, comparing the minority students' experiences based upon their identified race or ethnicity could also be an interesting avenue of research to explore. Within this study, the Black or African American students were more vocal about their personal experiences with discrimination and/or racism as compared to the Hispanic or Mexican American students. Would these differences still hold true in how racism and discrimination were reported if Chinese American and Samoan students were interviewed along with the Hispanic and Black students? Comparing experiences could help find the similarities amongst minority groups, which could in-turn further promote diversity and inclusion efforts within a School of Nursing. The findings could also help a SON and their faculty to better serve their individual students' needs.

In a macro sense, this study could be replicated in another similar SON. In fact, performing this study at another university or two could help with generalizability of the findings and inform future practice. Similarly, introducing training such as what was proposed under the Action Plan, could also improve minority student and adult learners' experiences in higher education, thereby, aiding in retention of these populations. Since action research is practitioner and situationally based, keeping the study relevant to current issues within Schools of Nursing is important and required from the research model.

Summary

The factors that affected academically at-risk minority students found in this study aligned with the previous literature and experiences reported by other minority students. This investigational action research study was performed due to the observation of a disproportionate amount of minority students needing academic coaching. The various findings (see Table 5.1) were discovered to either positively or negatively affect student persistence. Students who were ELL were found to have a significant barrier in trying to translate the information and learning. Similarly, all the students reported instances of racism and discrimination that both positively and negatively affected their persistence. Other things like the workplace, culture, and American versus their home country were found to have no impact on the students' persistence. Overall, nuclear family relationships, long-term goals, friendships, the faculty, staff, and administrators, the educational setting, and the church community were found to aid in positive persistence attitudes and behaviors. This study provided a unique opportunity for the Ravendale University School of Nursing to analyze the various factors affecting

persistence in our academically at-risk minority students. From this study, the next iteration of the action research cycle should be conducted to help promote advocacy and social justice for the students affected by persistence issues.

REFERENCES

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2018). Standards for accreditation of baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs.
<https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/CCNE/PDF/Standards-Final-2018.pdf>
- Baker, D. J., Arroyo, A. T., Braxton, J. M., Gasman, M., & Francis, C. H. (2018). Expanding the student persistence puzzle to minority serving institutions: The residential historically black college and university context. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice*, 22(4), 676-698.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025118784030>
- Banks, T., & Dohy, J. (2019). Mitigating barriers to persistence: A review of efforts to improve retention and graduation rates for students of color in high-education. *Higher Education Studies*, 9(1), 118-131. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v9n1p118>
- Bauman, S., Acker-Hocevar, M., Talbot, D. L., Visaya A., Valencia, M., & Ambriz, J. (2019). Exploring and promoting the college attendance and success of racial/ethnic minority students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 47, 37-48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12119>
- Bohman, J. (2019, November 9). Critical Theory. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press.

- Bronner, S. E. (2011). *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Bunce, L., & King N. (2019). Experiences of autonomy support in learning and teaching among black and minority ethnic students at university. *The Psychology of Education Review*, 43(2), 2-8.
- Burt, K., Delgado, K., O'Hara, J., Gissen, J., & Stopler, M. (2019) Persistence in nursing education and credentialing among low-income minority students: A qualitative exploratory study. *Journal of Best Practices in Health Professions Diversity: Education, Research, & Policy*, 11(2), 107-122.
- Carter, D. F. (2006, June 1). Key issues in the persistence of underrepresented minority students. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 33-46.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.178>
- Chen, H.T., Morosanu, L., Bellury, L.M., & Kimble, L. (2020). Multiwave formative evaluation of a retention program for minority nursing students: Intended effects, unintended consequences, and remedial actions. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 4(1), 71-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214018803595>
- Colby, S. L., & Ortman, J. M. (2015, March). *Projections of the size and composition of the U.S. population: 2014-2060*. Retrieved from United States Census Bureau: <https://census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>
- Crossman, A. (2019, October 15). Understanding Critical Theory. Retrieved from ThoughtCo.: <https://www.thoughtco.com/critical-theory-3026623>

- Cusack, C., Cohen, B., Mignone, J., Chartier, M., & Lutfiyya, Z. (2018). Participatory action as a research method with public health nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 74*, 1544-1553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13555>
- Dahms, H. F. (2011). *The Vitality of Critical Theory* (Vol. 28). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Darling, N. (2007). Ecological systems theory: The person in the center of the circles. *Research in Human Development, 4*(3-4), 203-217.
doi:10.1080/15427600701663023
- Diaz, K. (2020). Paulo Freire. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy:
<https://www.iep.utm.edu/freire/>
- Diefenbeck, C. A., & Klemm, P. R. (2021). Outcomes of a workforce diversity retention program for underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students in a baccalaureate nursing program. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 37*, 169-176.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2020.06.001>
- Diefenbeck, C., Michalec, B., & Alexander, R. (2016). Lived experiences of racially and ethnically underrepresented minority BSN students: A case study specifically exploring issues related to recruitment and retention. *Nursing Education Perspectives, 37*(1), 41-44. <https://doi.org/10.5480/13-1183>
- Ferguson, B., & Scruton, J. (2015). How do support mechanisms for adult Black and minority ethnic students affect retention, progression, and attainment? *Race Equality Teaching, 43-46*.

- Ferrell, D. K., & DeCrane, S.K. (2016). S.O.S (students' optimal success): A model for institutional action to support minority nursing students. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 23*(2), 39-45.
- Ferrell, D.K., DeCrane, S.K., Edwards, N.E., Foli, K.J., & Tennant, K.F. (2016). Minority undergraduate nursing student success. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 23*(1), 3-11.
- Flateland, S.M., Pryce-Miller, M., Skisland, A.V.S., Tønsberg, A.F., & Söderhamn, U. (2019). Exploring the experiences of being an ethnic minority student within undergraduate nurse education: A qualitative study. *BioMed Central, 18*(63), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-019-0389-0>
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Frumkin, L.A., & Koutsoubou, M. (2013) Exploratory investigation of drivers of attainment in ethnic minority adult learners. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 37*(2), 147-162, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2011.644777>
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2015). *The action research dissertation* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, California: Sage.
- Higher Learning Commission (2019, February). HLC Policy: Criteria for Accreditation. <https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html>
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- IPEDS. (2018). Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/InstitutionProfile.aspx?unitId=acb0ababb11>

- Kornbluh, M., Bell, S., Vierra, K., & Herrnstadt, Z. (2022). Resistance capital: Cultural activism as a gateway to college persistence for minority and first-generation students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 37(4), 501-540.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211006920>
- Kundu, A. (2019). Understanding college “burnout” from a social perspective: Reigniting the agency of low-income minority strivers towards achievement. *The Urban Review*, 57, 677-698. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00501-w>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Brown, K. (2008). Curriculum and cultural diversity. In F. M. Connelly (Ed.), *The sage handbook of curriculum and instruction* (pp. 153-175). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. United States of America: Sage Publishing.
- Lott, S., Davis, B.L, Montgomery, A.J., Burns, D.P., & Baker, S.R. (2018). Accelerated baccalaureate nursing students’ perception of and the variables influencing their retention: An HBCU perspective. *The ABNF Journal*, 76-85.
- Matthews, A. K., Abboud, S., Smith, A. U., Smith, C., Jeremiah, R., Hart, A., & Weaver, T. (2022). Strategies to address structural and institutional barriers to success among students of color in nursing programs. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 40, 96-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2022.03.005>
- McBeth, K. (2019, February 28). The truth about poor people and the cycle of poverty. Fiscal Tiger: <https://www.fiscaltiger.com/the-truth-about-poor-people-and-the-cycle-of-poverty/>

- Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th Ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Mitchell, K. M., Chorney, M. A., Gural, D. M., Simmons-Swinden, J. M., Picheca, L., & Baxter, C. E. (2019). Social and academic integration strategies for retention of nursing students: a scoping review protocol. *JBIR Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports*, 17(1), 28-36. <https://doi.org/10.11124/JBISRIR-2017-003745>
- Murray, T.A., Pole, D.C., Ciarlo, E.M., & Holmes, S. (2016). A nursing workforce diversity project: Strategies for recruitment, retention, graduation, and NCLEX-RN success. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 37(3), 138-143. <https://doi.org/10.5480/14-1480>
- Museus, S.D., Yi, V., & Saelua, N. (2018). How culturally engaging campus environments influence sense of belonging in college: An examination of differences between White students and Student of Color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(4), 467-483. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000069>
- National Nursing Workforce Study*. (2019). Retrieved from NCSBN: Leading Regulatory Excellence: <https://www.ncsbn.org/workforce.htm>
- Onwuegbuzie, A., Collins, K., & Frels, R. (2013, April). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to frame quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 7(1), 2-8.
- Orfield, G. (2004). Brown v. Board: Where are we now? Teaching Tolerance: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2004/brown-v-board-where-are-we-now>

- Owolabi, E. (2018, June 1). Improving student retention, engagement and belonging. *Lutheran Education Journal*, 148, 58-72.
- Patterson, L.D. (2020). African American males as Registered Nursing students: A scoping review. *The ABNF Journal*, 19-30.
- Ranard, C. (2015, November 4). How nursing has changed over time. *Minority Nurse*.
<https://minoritynurse.com/how-nursing-has-changed-over-time/>
- Reed, J. (2005, May). Using action research in nursing practice with older people: Democratizing knowledge. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 14(5), 594-600.
<http://dx.doi.org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2005.01110.x>
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. M. (2013). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications.
- Rivas, J., Hale, K., & Burke, M.G. (2019). Seeking a sense of belonging: Social and cultural integration of international students with American college students. *Journal of International Students*, 9(2), 687-704.
<https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v9i2.943>
- Schermerhorn, C. (2019, June 19). Why the racial wealth gap persists, more than 150 years after emancipation. *The Washington Post*:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/06/19/why-racial-wealth-gap-persists-more-than-years-after-emancipation/>
- Smiley, R., Lauer, P., Bienemy, C., Berg, J., Shireman, E., Reneau, K., & Alexander, M. (2018, October). The 2017 national nursing workforce survey. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 9(3), S1-S88.

- Stickney, M.C. (2008). Factors affecting practical nursing student attrition. *Journal of Nursing Education, 47*(9), 422-425.
- Sutherland, J. A., Hamilton, M. J., & Goodman, N. (2017, August 1). Affirming at-risk minorities for success (ARMS): Retention, graduation, and success on the NCLEX-RN. *Journal of Nursing Education, 46*(8), 347-353.
- Tolliver, D.V., III, Kacirek, K., & Miller, M.T. (2020). Getting to and through college: African American adult men talk about increasing underrepresented student participation. *College Student Journal, 53*(4), 430-439.
- Trent, F., Dwiwardani, C., & Page, C. (2021). Factors impacting the retention of students of color in graduate programs: A qualitative study. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 15*(3), 219-229. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tep0000319>
- United States Census Bureau. (2018, July 1). *Quick Facts- United States*. Retrieved from United States Census Bureau:
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218>
- White, B. J., & Fulton, J. (2015, May 1). Common experiences of African American nursing students: An integrative review. *Nursing Education Perspectives, 36*(3), 167-175. <https://doi.org/10.5480/14-1456>
- Williams, M. T., Skinta, M. D., & Martin-Willett, R. (2021). After Pierce and Sue: A revised racial microaggressions taxonomy. *Perspectives of Psychological Science, 16*(5), 991-1007. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691621994247>
- Wray, J., Aspland, J., & Barrett, D. (2014). Choosing to stay: Looking at retention from a different perspective. *Studies in Higher Education, 39*(9), 1700-1714.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.806461>

APPENDIX A

STUDENT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What factors do at-risk minority nursing students identify as affecting their ability to persist in our nursing program?
 - a. What effective supports are identified?
 - b. What considerable challenges are identified?
 - c. Which people are identified as being helpful to aid in persistence during their time in our nursing program?
 - d. What services are identified as being helpful during their time in our nursing program?

Introductory Questions:

1. What is your name, age, race/ethnicity, and grade level in our School of Nursing (SON)?
2. What drew you to nursing and what made you choose this school to fulfill your goal of becoming a nurse? (A)

Microsystem (Individual)

3. What does success look like to you when pursuing your nursing degree? (1, A)
4. What motivates you to continue to pursue your degree here? (A, C)
5. What sort of challenges do you face in your pursuit of a nursing degree? (B)

Mesosystem (Relationships)

6. Tell me about the important people in your life or the most influential people in your life. (A, C)

Probing question: how do these relationships affect your persistence?

7. How do the relationships in the school setting affect your persistence? (A, C)

Exosystem (Community)

8. Tell me about the community in which you live (think of your living, religious, academic, etc. communities). (A, B, C, D)

Probing question: do the views of your community affect your persistence?

9. How do these communities affect your attitudes and behaviors towards achieving your goals in becoming a nurse? (A, B, C, D)

Macrosystem (Societal Factors)

10. How do you think society views minority nurses (and by extension minority nursing students)? (A, B, C, D)

a. In what way do these views affect your goal to becoming a nurse?

11. Are you aware of any local, state, or federal laws or policies which affect your goal to becoming a nurse? (A, B, C, D)

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX B

ACADEMIC COACH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(before recording the interview)

- What pseudonym would you prefer to use?

Start recording:

1. Please tell me your age, race, how long you've been a nurse, what is your highest level of education, and how long have you been working as an academic coach.
2. Describe the minority nursing students you encounter in academic coaching.
3. How does academic coaching change the minority student's academic performance?
4. In your experience what are some of the persistence factors affecting (positively or negatively) minority nursing students in academic coaching?
5. Are there any specific persistence *attitudes* and/or *behaviors* you have observed amongst the minority nursing student population?
6. How much of a role does academic performance play in our minority nursing students persistence behaviors/attitudes?

APPENDIX C

INVITATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear _____,

My name is Christina Eaton. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my Doctor of Education degree, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am striving to better understand the factors which enable or challenge academically at-risk minority prelicensure nursing students in persisting with their degree at [Ravendale University]. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an individual interview.

In particular, you will be asked questions about individual, relationship, institutional/community, and societal factors which affect your ability to persist in your pursuit of a nursing degree. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place and should last less than 60 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal will not affect your grades. If you begin the study and later decide to withdraw, no ill-effects will occur in any way.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at [phone number] or [email] or my faculty advisor, Dr. Suha Tamim at [Dr Tamim's email]. If you would like to participate, please respond to this email. Thank you for your consideration!

Warm Regards,

Christina Eaton MSNEd, RN
[phone number]
[email]

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Identifying and understanding factors which affect persistence in academically at-risk minority prelicensure nursing students: An action research study

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:

You are invited to volunteer for a research study conducted by Christina Eaton who is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, at the University of South Carolina. The purpose of this study is to better understand the factors which enable or challenge persistence in academically at-risk minority prelicensure nursing students. This study is being done at [Ravendale University] and you are being asked to participate due to your involvement with academic coaching.

The following is a short summary to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later in this form.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the factors which affect academically at-risk, minority, prelicensure nursing students with their persistence behaviors. Racial or ethnic minority students who have been invited to attend academic coaching are the target population who will be invited to participate. Using the Social Ecological Model, various domains in a student's life (individual, relationships, community, and societal factors) will be explored to better understand the factors which contribute to, or prohibit, persistence. The study aims to holistically analyze these various factors through an action research lens. The semi-structured interviews will be conducted face-to-face, at a neutral space, and should last around one hour. A hybrid form of a priori and inductive coding of the qualitative data will be utilized for this study and will align with the Social Ecological Model. All information revealed during the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and only pseudonyms will be used (either in writing or in-person). Christina Eaton has completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program training specifically for social and behavioral research with human subjects. This special certification demonstrates further education on research ethics and compliance with professional research standards.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will do the following:

1. Complete an interview with Christina Eaton regarding your thoughts and feelings about individual, relational, institutional/community, and societal factors which affect your ability to persist in your pursuit of a nursing degree.
2. Have your interview audio recorded in order to ensure the details that you provide are accurately captured.
3. Once the interview has been transcribed, Christina Eaton will send a copy of the transcription for your review.
4. All identifying information will be kept located in password protected digital files, in further password protected devices (essentially a minimum of two-levels of password protection will be utilized to help ensure privacy).

DURATION:

Participation in the study involves one interview in one day. The interview will last about one hour.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

There are no identifiable risks other than a potential loss of confidentiality. There is always a risk of a breach of confidentiality, despite the steps that will be taken to protect your identity. Specific safeguards to protect confidentiality are described in a separate section of this document.

BENEFITS:

Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. However, this research may help future students in a similar situation as yourself.

COSTS:

There will be no costs to you for participating in this study other than perceived time lost (about 60 minutes).

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS:

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this study is voluntary. **You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences.** Your participation, non-participation, and/or withdrawal will not affect your grades or your relationship with your professors, college(s), the University of South Carolina, or [Ravendale University].

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:

Information obtained about you during this research may be published, but you will not be identified. Information that is obtained concerning this research that can be identified with you will remain confidential to the extent possible within State and

Federal law. The investigators associated with this study, the sponsor, and the Institutional Review Board will have access to identifying information. Study information will be securely stored in locked files and on password-protected computers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email Christina Eaton.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. **If I have any more questions about my participation in this study, I am to contact Christina Eaton at: [phone number] or [email].**

Concerns about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, [address], [phone number] or [email].

I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

If you wish to participate, you should sign below.

Signature of Subject / Participant

Date

Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent

Date