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FIRST-GENERATION BLACK MALE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES, AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT SHAPED COLLEGE – TO - CAREER TRANSITION

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my three power sources- my mama, Jacqueline N. Gilliam, my husband Terry T. Smith, and my three daughters, Jordyn, Kennedy, and Khori Smith. Mama, you supported every wild-idea I brought to you, and made me feel that if *anyone **ever*** did it, *so could I*. And even if no one had, it was up to me to *be the first*. Second, Terry, I dedicate this dissertation to you, because for 30+ years you have given me the space, love, and support to pursue my *ever-changing* goals to ultimately find my passion. I wouldn't have had the focus and drive to complete this journey without you. JorKenKho, ladies, you all hold me accountable by telling me *all the same things* I tell you guys while you're going after your dreams. It means the world to me for you to see me set, and then accomplish this goal. I'm so Blessed to have you ALL in my corner.

Love You All

ABSTRACT

First-generation, Black, male students continue to lag behind their continuing-generation peers in degree attainment, leaving them deficient in obtaining the social and financial upward mobility higher education is expected to afford. Research finds that, despite Black males entering college with higher degree aspirations than their White peers, they were 6 times less likely to achieve them, and only 5% of Black males would eventually graduate with a degree or certificate within three years of enrollment, compared with 32% of White males (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). To close this persistent gap, this research sought to understand the activities, experiences, and relationships engaged in by members of this population who were successful in completing college and transitioning into what they defined as successful careers. This case study was conducted with 10 Midwest college graduates through semi-structured interviews to capture their unique voices and experiences across their college-to-career transition. Themes emerged around leveraging social and cultural capital among faculty, staff, and career professionals of similar race, background. The continuity of experiences between these groups appeared to account for as much as 80% of participants' access to career services. These findings indicate the need for higher education institutions to employ strategic steps to align support personnel with first generation students' (FGS) cultural norms and experiences to establish a sense of belonging and develop a nucleus of trust.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Individuals see higher education as the vehicle to obtain upward social and financial mobility. For many students, the high school to college, and later college to career transition is seamless, while others face social, academic, economic, cultural, and racial and vulnerabilities along the way (Owens, et al., 2010; Tate et al., 2015). First-generation students (FGS) are a group that finds themselves particularly at risk of missing out on the implied upward mobilities of pursuing high education. While there are several versions of the definition FGS are those students whose parents or guardians never attended college or a university (Choy, 2001; Hutchens et al., 2011; Strand, 2013). The studies on first-generation college students are broad as researchers have sought to effectively identify students' barriers and are the institutional responses to them, through the development of varied methods and programs aimed at removing barriers and supporting improved FGS outcomes (Dong, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Garriott et al., 2013; Gofen, 2009; Thayer, 2000).

It is generally accepted that the goal of college students is to identify their interests and strengths that will translate into a career and way of life. Higher educational institutions also provide a range of programs and services that vary from campus to campus, as wrap-around supports to the education component of the college experience. Of those, campus career services offices have been the connection point between students' theoretical introduction and understanding of concepts related to their industry

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of choice and the hands-on applications of these concepts in the workplace environment (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Cohen, 2018; Parsons, 1909). While continuing-generation students (CGS), defined as those whose parents have attended college, may have planned and prepared for their career journey early on, many FGS must first address added systemic racial, cultural, and socio-economic barriers in addition to identifying support systems that will help them map out career goals (Bui, 2002). FGS face societal and often even campus culture resistance against their upward social and financial mobility before the learning of higher education begins (Bui; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Romero, 2016).

The career counselors (CC) serve as a first line of intervention to bridging students into the careers of their choice; although, research has indicated these staff are often ill-equipped and lacking the background to provide FGS the support that addresses their unique needs (Asrowi & Setiawan, 2021; Tang, 2003). As the shifts in career counseling service delivery has manifested over the past 30 years, the career services model within higher education has moved away from a focus of simply making job placements, as was the case with G.I.'s after military service in the 1940s, to more of a self-help model in the 1960s and through the 1980s (Dey & Real, 2010). More recently, the delivery model has shifted toward a social and global networking model with less focus on the career counselor and more toward the students' engagement in experiential learning opportunities (Dey & Real) also known as High-Impact Practices (HIP) as the means to transitioning from student to professional. Historically however, FGS have shown to be less engaged in experiential learning and HIP activities (Miller et al., 2018), resulting in less effective or impactful the career services programming for them.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Aud et al.,2012), one-third of 5-17-year-olds in the U.S are FGS. Black FGS outpaced the national average of 34% at 41%. Although graduation rates have increased over the years among these two demographics, they are consistently below that of their CGS peers (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2018; Owens et al., 2010). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 40% of non-Hispanic Whites ages 25 and older, hold a bachelor's degree or higher, an increase from 33% in 2010, and although degree attainment for Blacks also rose from 19% to 26%, the gap persists (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). It is, however, important to disaggregate the data by gender within these groups, as it begins to paint a slightly different picture. Research finds that, despite Black males entering college with higher degree aspirations than their White peers, they were six times less likely to achieve them, and only 5% of Black males would eventually graduate with a degree or certificate within three years of enrollment, compared with 32% of White males (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Given this disparity, the primary focus of this current research was centered on Black men who have been contributors to the increase in degree attainment, to explore their experiences in navigating the dichotomy of college life and their individual cultural and familial influences (Thayer, 2000).

Much of the existing research takes a quantitative focus on the socioeconomic, racial, social, and cultural barriers impacting the college experience and ultimately employability for FGS (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tate et al., 2015). This stance focuses on what these students lack, are less inclined to do or fail to pursue, without paying much attention to students' accomplishments or achievements based on

their specific life experiences and customs. By simplistic definition, FGS' parents do lack experiential knowledge of the college experience to share with their children (Cataldi et al. 2018; Choy, 2001; Toutkoushian, et al., 2018) however, students' individual experiences have value and can be leveraged for college completion, employability, and career success. To better understand the challenges of FGS, additional research has been conducted within the *social capital theory* framework.

Social capital theory addresses how an individual's network of both family and community can be used as a means of accessing information and resources to enhance career outcomes. Sáenz et al., (2018) research suggested family relationships are a motivational persistence factor for men of color despite multiple roles and responsibilities. Social capital theorists, Batistic and Tymon, (2017) posited there are resources embedded in relationships, and in an empirical quantitative study, found both networking and access to resources can directly increase internal and external perceptions of employability.

The students' perception of what they are capable of achieving is also known as their *self-efficacy*. Bandura (1997) posited self-efficacy is a cognitive resource that involves an individual's confidence or belief in one's ability to effectively engage in behaviors toward desired goals. Batistic and Tymon (2017), advanced this concept, suggesting social and cultural capital have direct influences on self-efficacy. A student's prior relationships, and social experiences are the building blocks of their social capital and are also influenced by their cultural norms (Fukuyama, 2000). These norms are the very essence of cultural capital and hold value within the students' frame of reference (Yosso, 2005). Sáenz et al.'s (2018) research was built on Yosso's community cultural

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wealth framework, that suggests students draw from six sources of capital—aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance theory findings, suggesting Black [and Hispanic] families serve as a catalyst and support network for the men as they strive to find school, work, and family balance. However, without the luxury of familial experiential knowledge of college dynamics as cultural capital to leverage and barter, FGS' need for campus support remains critical. Johnson (as cited in Bourdieu, 1968) stated, "higher education institutions could play a specific function and at least partially offset disadvantages of those who do not receive from their family circle" (p. 233). Solid connection to the college environment is critical for students who may feel out-of-place in an environment so dissimilar from their own. Low socioeconomic status, generally lower achievement rates, and hostile societal and racial factors of Black men plays a role in the reconciliation of their place in the college environment (Hoffman et al., 2002; Thayer, 2000). Understanding the experiences of Black men in society "may contribute to an improvement in their career preparation and development during their college years" (Owens et al., 2010, p. 293).

The CC within the career services offices on college campuses are positioned to provide an understanding of the experiences that play a role in developing foundational platforms that have the potential to launch or at least point students into successful career directions (Cuyjet, 1997; Cohen, 2018). CCs have first-hand encounters and conversations with students that expose many of the challenge's students face, often exceeding the scope of career guidance (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015). The CCs' role also allows them to engage in conversations with company representatives that often extend upward within the organization to corporate leaders as a

means of understanding long-term hiring goals and company culture. This unique access provides career counselors the ability to also create bridges for students by exposing them to experiential learning opportunities for HIPs (High Impact Practices) and relieving feelings of isolation through sharing of personal experiences (Cohen, 2018; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). The counselors' abilities to create this bridge are impacted by how well they understand and adapt their counseling approach to the students with whom they are engaged (Noguera, 2009).

Cohen's (2018) grounded theory study suggested that FGS benefit from the career counselors' personal stories in the context of career planning. The career counselors' abilities to share, expose, and guide students toward their first steps in career development have the potential to have life-long impact, yet research suggests they have not been able to determine, definitively, which activities, experiences or resources offer the most benefit to career development among this group (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Pipkins et al., 2014). By understanding the specific types of engagements that brought value and understanding to the overall navigation of the college landscape, (i.e. faculty, support services, and social groups) and the point at which along this journey these engagements were most critical in developing a sense of self-awareness, relative to career selection, institutions, through career counseling, can employ more targeted strategies to support this demographic early within their program, hence positively influencing career outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to hear from Black men, who were also FGS, and understand the activities, experiences, and relationships that were instrumental in helping them chart their career courses.

Background

The gap in qualitative research highlighted a need and opportunity for a case study that examines the kind of activities, experiences, and relationships that helped to lay a foundation for career success for FG Black men. An opportunity existed to explore the point along the students' journey when they recognized family and other social relationships as valuable resources, a recognition of internal and/or external social capital, and the extent to which career services programs were utilized. The primary outcome goal for college students is to be able to find upward financial, social, and cultural mobility into employment levels that would otherwise be inaccessible. College career services play an integral role in both exposing students to experiential growth opportunities and creating the bridges of access toward career success (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Prior studies have shown that FGS tend not to take advantage of or participate in these opportunities at the same rate as their CGS peers (Finley & McNair, 2013; Martin et al., 2013). In a mixed-method study (Kuh, 2008), FGS *(1.24)* engaged in fewer HIPs than CGS *(1.45)*, *p<.05*. It is through these experiences that students' social capital is broadened and can become more diversified from that of their culture, family, and immediate surroundings (Ramsey, 2016).

Much of the existing research on FGS highlights the limited depth of experiences as it relates to the norms of college experiences and is poised from a deficit framework focuses primarily on what FGS are lacking when they arrive on campus. The TRIO program, for example, is a federally-funded initiative designed to close the gaps for FGS by providing students with a pre-college look at what the collegiate expectations will be. However, historically TRIO's funding serves only about 10% of the students in need

(Pitre & Pitre, 2009), leaving 90% disconnected from these supports. Therefore, the proposed study examines the experiences recalled by former first-generation (FG) Black males to determine how they leveraged their social and cultural capital to help propel themselves forward in both navigating the college experience and transitioning those experiences into a successful career. And, how or if the career services (CS) professionals on their campuses acknowledged and supported their need for tapping into their unique social and cultural capital.

A case study examination of the activities, experiences, and relationships of professional Black men, who were first in their immediate families to attend and graduate from college with an associate degree or higher will begin to help educational institutional leaders better understand the interplay of college institutions' resource programs from a holistic prism as it relates to advancing the narrative of the success of this group. The current study does not assign any weight or preconceived notions about the students' social and cultural capital, only that whatever experiences and networks they possessed were uniquely their own and held value for them.

<div align="center">Situation to Self</div>

The researcher held a strong connection to both FGS, and campus CS. As a prior FGS, the researcher holds a desire to ensure this group is fully supported in the college-to-career journey. Also, the researcher is a manager in a campus career service office with first-hand knowledge of the students who use the services most often. It was important for the researcher to begin to identify elements that were important for FG, Black men who have had a positive experience in their college-to-career transition. With

an ongoing goal to create and provide beneficial engagement opportunities, the researcher sought to take away practical steps to apply within the workplace.

Problem Statement

Much of the existing research on FGS highlights the limited depth of experiences as it relates to the norms of college experiences and is poised from a deficit framework that places a most of the attention on what FGS are lacking when they arrive on campus. Those studies neglect to provide equal time to examine what was different for those FGS who either possessed or accessed the necessary resources to support their college - to - success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to explore the lived experiences of FG, Black, male students who completed a minimum of an Associate's degree and were able to transition successfully into their chosen careers, to better align and allocate appropriate resources to further this demographics' college to career success rate. The current study examined the experiences recalled by former first-generation (FG) Black males to determine how they leveraged their social and cultural capital to help propel themselves forward in both navigating the college experience and transitioning those experiences into a successful career. And, how or if the CS professionals on their campuses acknowledged and supported their need for tapping into their unique social and cultural capital. The current study does not assign any weight or preconceived notions about the students' social and cultural capital, only that whatever experiences and networks they possessed were uniquely their own and held value for them. A case study examination of the activities, experiences, and relationships of professional Black men, who were first in

their immediate families to attend and graduate from college with an associate's degree or higher will begin to help educational institutional leaders better understand the interplay of college institutions' resource programs from a holistic prism as it relates to advancing the narrative of the success of this group.

<p style="text-align:center">Significance of the Study</p>

The significance of this research was that it sought to advance the understanding of the experiences that encouraged the persistence of FG Black men. Specifically, the current study examined the activities, experiences, and relationships of those who have transitioned from college to career, but also examined how engagement with campus career services impacted career selection and transition. As college campuses across the country continue to commit resources toward recruitment, persistence, and wrap-around support services through TRiO, Upward Bound, Bridge, and other similar programs for FGS, a theoretical understanding and qualitative analysis of these initiatives have not uncovered practical applications that drive FGS success en-masse, and even less so for Black men. This demographic faces social, racial, and economic barriers that have kept them at the lowest levels of college graduation completion and upward mobility in salary attainment (Bayer & Charles, 2018). Black male college retention and graduation continue to be an area in need of improvement (Brooms et al., 2015), with consistent data that reveal the plight of Black male performance in higher education. Nationally, the Black male graduation rate from four-year institutions was 36.2% over six years compared to 62.7% of White men over a six-year period (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Although more African Americans attending college and receiving degrees increased in the 1990s more than ever before (Nettles & Perna, 1997), they

continue to be underrepresented among both undergraduates (10.0%) and bachelor's

degree recipients (7.0%) relative to their representation in the traditional college-age

population (14.3%) (Monarrez & Washington, 2020; Perna, 2000). In fact, the United

States experienced large educational attainment gaps in 2021 with African Americans

over age 25 receiving degrees at a rate of 28.7%, compared to 41.9% of Whites (Journal

of Blacks in Higher Education, 2022).

A qualitative review and examination of the lived experiences of this marginalized

segment of the U.S. population who have found a route to college completion, career

success, have the potential to reveal themes useful in the development, design, timing,

staffing, and execution of initiatives implemented across higher education institutions.

Advanced clarity and understanding of these activities applied in conjunction with the

ongoing recruitment of FGS could provide positive impact on the completion rates and

career development of FGS across all higher education institutions.

Population and Sample

This qualitative case study sought to explore the college experiences of FG Black

men who were successful in finding a pathway upon graduation into careers they would

define as meaningful, and signify career success. A case study methodology was used to

engage Black, male professionals across varied industries, who completed their degree as

first-generation students at a Midwest community college. According to Feagin et al.

(1991) the case study approach is ideal when a holistic in-depth study is needed. Yin

(2008) explained case study research ideal for understanding the how and why of

contemporary problems and events without requiring control over the events or problems.

This research engaged a subset of FGS, Black men specifically, to explore the activities,

experiences, and relationships that were critical in their navigation of college and that led to what they define as career success. This subset of the FG population was chosen specifically because of the exacerbated systemic social, racial, and economic realities inherent to them in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Mwangi, et al., 2018).

Participants were engaged through one-on-one interviews to gain insight into the prior first-generation students' experiences in college as it related to persistence, support, and career trajectory. Through an in-depth coding process, the researcher was able to parse recurring themes that were analyzed for synthesis which could hold potential for more widespread adaptation. An In Vivo framework was chosen because of the exploratory approach of the research, and the lack of theoretical concepts from which to draw. This approach allows terminology to stay closely aligned with the data rather than taking on any of the researcher's ascribed meaning. This coding method investigates subjective qualities of human experience associated with values, conflicts, emotions, and judgements (Saldaña, 2021). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed first as individual cases and then comparatively across all participants (Yin, 2008). All participants have achieved a minimum Associates degree, have been employed three, but no more than ten years in their career field of choice, and were earning a minimum annual salary of $50,000 for more than two years. Fifty-thousand dollars was the chosen threshold in alignment with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2019), and the Society of Human Resource Management (Miller, 2021) which reported the average starting salary of college graduates in 2019 at $53,899 and $51,347 respectively.

One, all-encompassing definition of success is futile. Subjective career success is defined as the focal career actor's evaluation and experience of achieving personally

meaningful career outcomes (Ng et al., 2005; Seibert, 2001; Shockley et al., 2016).

Operating from the position that most people seek out higher education for higher overall

lifetime earnings, more fulfilling work environment, better health, longer life, more

informed purchases, generational wealth, and lower probability of unemployment to

improve their standard of living through higher incomes (Oreopolous & Petronijevic,

2013; Perna, 2000), career success within the context of this research, was left to the

interpretation of each participant.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

Extensive research (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Martin et al., 2018; Padgett et

al., 2012; Terenzini et al., 1996) addresses both the deficits of FGS, along with the

programs and support services that higher education institutions have put into place to

improve the persistency rates of FGS. According to Yue et al., (2018) Black men's

graduation rates still lag their CG college attending peers. These consistent outcomes of

the majority of FGS suggests the need to hear from FGS, specifically Black men, who

have been able to persist and transition from college to career in a meaningful way. The

basis of the current study sought to address the following research question:

Research question. What college experiences contributed to first-generation Black men's

career success?

Interview questions were designed to elicit participants' experiences around three key

sub-topics: cultural and social capital, the impact of family dynamics, and college career

support.

Sub 1. What role did cultural and social capital experiences play in persisting through

college and into a career?

Sub 2. What role did family dynamics, and relationships play in supporting persistence through college and career selection?

Sub 3. What role did career services programs play in the transition from student to career?

<div align="center">Description of Terms</div>

Continuing-generational college students. Students with at least one parent has some type or quantity of postsecondary education (Somers et al., 2000)

Cultural capital. Preexisting knowledge about interacting successfully in academic settings, including such essential social skills as the ability to recognize and respond to the standards faculty members use when they evaluate assignments (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

First-generation students. Students whose parents or guardians never attended college or a university (Hutchens et al., 2011; Strand, 2013).

High-impact practices. Programs such as learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research with faculty, internships, senior capstone projects or culminating experiences, and study abroad. (Kuh, 2008).

Social capital theory. (SCT) defined as having access to resources and building networks with groups of people. (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social capital. The ease with which students find a faculty or staff member who can help them navigate the university, have instructors think they are capable of producing quality work, talk with faculty outside of class, find people on campus who share their background and experiences, deal with the size and complexity of the

university, have an active social life, and find students in their classes with whom to study (Soria & Stebleton, 2013).

Subjective career success. (SCS). Subjective career success is considered an individual's subjective construction of success. Career success then is what the individual understands as career success. This understanding differs between people, between employment, between age groups, and between cultures. Subjective constructions of career success may also be dynamic and change over time as well as with career stages (Dries et al., 2008)

Summary

The purpose of the current study was to examine the activities, experiences, and relationships engaged in by Black men who were FGS, as a means of understanding the practices they deemed instrumental to their career success. Substantial research exists on the college experiences of first-generation students and the deficits that exist in comparison to CGS. Despite these barriers, several FG Black men have been successful in the pursuit of higher education and successful professional careers.

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2014) 48% of FGS enrolled in 2012 completed undergraduate degrees. Of that, only 14% were Black men. Of the Master's degrees conferred to U.S. students in 2016-2017, 11% were Black males (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2022). Colleges and universities expend substantial resources on retention programs; however, research on career success beyond college is limited. This case study examined the activities, experiences, and relationships engaged in by Black men, their perceptions of those engagements, and the impact on their career success. Understanding

(a) the kind of relationships that helped to lay a foundation for success (b) the point along

the students' journey when they identified family and social relationships as a resource,

the value they hold, and potential of their internal and/or external social capital to support

their professional development, and c) to what extent on-campus career services

programs were utilized, could go a long way toward the creation of embedded systems to

further increase college to career success rates of first-generation, Black men.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The following in-depth literature review provides a basis for identifying and defining first-generation students (FGS) and the inherent challenges of matriculation through college including how college programs and professional services attend to their unique needs. A solid foundation of research currently exists that addresses the constructs ascribed to FGS' barriers, inabilities, and challenges often viewed from a deficit-based approach (Balliro, 2020; Gibbons et al., 2020; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Tate et al., 2015). Across the literature, much of the examination of FGS' success was done using the framework of Yosso's (2005) critical race theory (CRT), that challenged historical and foundational research theories from Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron,1977) on social and cultural capital. FGS culture and experiences, both positive and negative, cannot be separated from the students' ability to plan for and imagine themselves in a career. Self-actualization and self-efficacy have been shown to have a direct impact on the educational outcomes of FGS (Majer, 2009). However, the programs and services that have been put in place across many college campuses, including career services offices and staff, have come up short in their ability to address the unique needs of FGS, particularly men of color without further marginalizing them (Cohen, 2018; Fickling et al., 2017; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2012). (CC) on college campuses are tasked with coaching students on how to maximize their skills and

education through engagements in high-impact practices (HIP), such as internships, with the goal of creating bridges into meaningful career options. While career counselors are often effective in supporting many students on college campuses, many are ill-equipped to address the full spectrum of the needs of the FGS (National Association of Colleges and Employers; Tang, 2003).

Research has provided a foundation for why FGS struggle more than their multi-generation peers to matriculate successfully through college by identifying the various challenges and barriers they face (Bui, 2002; Longwell-Grice et al.; 2016; Terenzini et al., 1996). Higher educational institutions have implemented programs and wrap-around services designed to provide a more equitable experience for FGS to persist and compete on par with their continuing-generational peers (Benson, 2018; Kallison & Stader, 2012; Perna, 2015). However, even with focused attention and resources devoted to the myriad of systemic disparities, the persistence and graduation rates of FGS have remained consistent over the past 30 years (Soria & Stableton, 2013; Tate et al, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau. 2020). An exploration into the unchanged narratives around FGS' disparity and persistence from the lenses of FGS who have successfully completed a minimum of an Associate's degree seems intuitive and critically important to explore. A review of prior relevant research regarding the challenges and barriers, cultural and social capital usage, engagement with high impact practices (HIPS), and self-efficacy will provide a framework to better understand what was different for those FGS who were successful in the college-to-career transition.

Historical Context

The definition of *first-generation students* (FGS) varies among researchers, beginning with the original definition by Adachi (1979), who defined FGS as students without at least one parent with a Bachelor's degree. More recent research has shifted for broader inclusion of parental educational attainment from students whose parents have a high school diploma or less or students whose parents have not obtained a degree, though they may have attended college (Choy, 2001; Cataldi et al., 2018 Toutkoushian et al., 2018). For this research, the Pascarella et al. (2004) definition which identified FGS simply as students where neither parent has higher than a high school education was used as the operational definition.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), 40% of non-Hispanic Whites aged 25 and older, hold a bachelor's degree or higher, an increase from 33% in 2010, and although degree attainment for Blacks also rose from 19% to 26%, the gap persists. Students who were first in their families to attend college began to grow in the 1940s as Blacks took advantage of the G.I. Bill (Turner & Bound, 2003). At the time, this program was looked upon as one of the best examples of education subsidy in the U.S. (Rumery et al., 2018) but was not without its flaws. Turner and Bound posited that collegiate opportunities and attainment had dissimilar effects on Black veterans compared to their White counterparts, with much of the inequity being attributed to the lack of information and counseling. Government services such as the Veterans Administration (VA) were put in place and designed to provide counseling services to help veterans understand their options and access to training and education. Blacks, however, were restricted to only 100 public and private institutions delineated for *negros*. Support and counseling options

were particularly bleak in the southern states, (i.e., Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi), where there were fewer than one dozen counselors between them; Mississippi had none (Turner & Bound).

During the 1950s and 1960s pursuit and attainment of higher education increased across the board for Blacks and Whites, with a rise in median school years completed from 7.9 years to 9.8 years for Blacks and 10.6 to 12.2 years for Whites (Farley & Hermalin, 1970). In the 1960s, undergraduate enrollment doubled that of the previous 25 years, exceeding four million (Centra, 1980). By the 1970s, about one quarter of college-aged (18-21) Blacks were enrolled in a higher education program (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1970 as cited in Farley & Hermalin, proportionate to Whites in the same age range, 10 years prior (Farley & Hermalin). In the 1980s, the immediate transition to college after high school increased overall, but at a lesser rate for racial and ethnic groups than for Whites. As time progressed toward the 21st century, minority and low-income students, in alignment with the FGS demographics, were the fastest-growing populations of students attending college (Kelly, 2005; Mortenson, 2006), but not without challenges. Between 1972 and 2003, more FGS than their CGS peers "considered financial factors very important to their college selection, and at college entry were twice as likely than those peers to report having major concerns about college costs" (Sáenz, 2007, p. vii). Between 1980 and 2008 Whites enrolling in college increased from 50% to 72%, 44% to 56% for Black and 50% to 62% for Hispanics (Aud, et al., 2010). By 2018, according to the Center for First Generation Student Success RTI International (2019), 56% of college enrollees were FGS; 25% maintained enrollment after one year, however, after six years,

only 11% obtained a bachelor's degree, compared to 49% of their continuing-generation peers.

Challenges and Barriers

There has been extensive research that focuses on identifying barriers that FGS often face including family support networks, culture and race, disproportion disciplinary practices, and socioeconomic status (Bristol, Mentor, 2018; Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Much of the research that exists addresses the barriers ascribed to FGS' inabilities, from a deficit-based viewpoint (Engle & Tinto; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While FGS' socioeconomic status (household income falls below the national median income level), race and culture identity, and family support dynamics, are neither absolutes nor predictors of students' ability to persist through college or envision a future career, these intersectional conditions cannot be separated from the students' overall experience. The research is clear, however, in that completion rates for FGS are staggeringly low. Fewer than 25% of FGS college students maintain enrollment after the first year, and only 11% confer degrees after six years (Whitley et al., 2018). Additional research suggests even the *perception* of barriers has contributed to the low persistence rates of Black students.

Family Barriers

Research suggests that ethnic minority students have unique motives (e.g., helping family, and proving self-worth) for attending college that might challenge their adjustment, making them vulnerable to lower academic performance and problematic college (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1994). More specifically, although Black men enter college with high degree aspirations, they are six times less

likely than their White peers to achieve them with only 5% degree or certification

completion rate within 3 years (Center for Community College Student Engagement,

2014). Black FGS may find it difficult to adjust and navigate the college campus, feeling

unsupported and unwelcomed amid a host of self-doubts. Researchers (Engle, 2007; Reid

& Moore, 2008) report FGS are more likely to begin college feeling less academically,

prepared, requiring remedial coursework, adding an additional financial strain to students

and their families (Engle, 2007). A mixed-gender study (Reid & Moore) of 13 Black,

FGS reported feeling unprepared academically, including those participants with higher

(4.0/4.0) grade point averages. Although students feel unprepared, studies also identified

a high resistance of FGS to initiate a search for support unless they were first introduced

to a support structure. The Sánchez et al., (2011) quantitative, quasi-experimental study

of FGS (*N=164*), captured pre and post-experiment responses which indicated that

students in the intervention group (participants of a 6-week summer bridge program, led

by professionals committed to college and career development) reported better

relationships with instructors, increased intention to engage in help-recruiting behaviors,

increased network orientation (belief in the usefulness of seeking support), and decreased

help-seeking avoidance.

FGS enter college with several barriers to navigate before any learning begins

(Bui, 2002). One of the main challenges for FGS is identifying support networks among

the resources within the institution because of such tight family and community

dependence (de Souza Briggs, 1998; Gofen, 2009; Holzman & Jorgensen, 1999). During

the transition to college, first-gen students may find previously strong networks

diminished as they move away from home and communication becomes less frequent

(Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Sánchez, et al., 2011). Students attempt to maintain existing relationships while research suggests needing to spend the energy building new networks with faculty and other campus staff who can help to build social capital (Santiago, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2018).

The strength of family bonds can have a double-edged effect on FGS as they try to maintain relationships both on and off-campus. Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) found FGS are further challenged within family dynamics as they find family and community members who were once supportive of their college ambition, becoming distanced and disinterested in their college experiences. Further, while also being alienated on the college campus, FGS face cultural tensions when they bring their college identities home. Longwell-Grice et al. study found that participants expressed concerns about being able to talk about their college experiences and share their intellectual growth without feeling like they are overshadowing or belittling their family members' intelligence. Boyd (2018) suggested the clash of being caught between two cultures contributes to emotional disconnect and isolation. Chang et al. (2020) and Stephens et al. (2012) suggested cultural mismatches among FGS are due to the misalignment of university cultures with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and non-European lineage.

<center>Financial Barriers</center>

The cost of attending college directly impacts the social mobility of families historically within the lower socio-economic status. In a speech, President Barack Obama expressed concern over the notion of higher education being the vehicle for economic mobility, while at the same time being out of reach for all except the wealthy (Slack, 2013). Secretary of Education, during the Obama administration, Arnie Duncan,

summarized the notion saying, "There's a growing sense that college is for the wealthy, for rich folks and not for hard-working people who are doing the right thing every day" (The White House, 2013, p. 1). Bui (2002), O'Sullivan et al. (2019), and Terenzini et al. (1996) indicated that the majority of FGS are from low socio-economic backgrounds and more likely to be people of color, immigrant or foreign, and English Language Learners (Ewert, 2012; Swecker et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education Institute of Educational Statistics, 2011). According to data from the U.S. Department of Education (2016) median incomes of FGS' families are less than half that of continuing-generation students at $41,000 and $90,000 respectively.

Financial programs such as the Pell Grant, a federal, needs-based program that offers students financial support when families are unable to pay out of pocket, is one mechanism available to FGS. Private scholarships and grants first-generation are another vehicle of support to help pay for college, but may also have eligibility requirements attached in the way of academic excellence (higher g.p.a.), and community service components (College Grants Database, 2021). FGS are at risk of missing out on these supports due to lack of knowledge and understanding of what is available to them and how to go about accessing these resources (Fishman & Nguyen, 2021). Forty-three percent of families cited inconsistent guidelines and terminology in financial aid applications including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), private grant and scholarship applications as a barrier (Fishman & Nguyen).

Collectively, confusing information, the disparity of earnings, combined with the cost of attending college disrupts upward mobility for those who embrace the college mobility narrative which touts college as a way up (Crosnoe et al., 2002). Families of

FGS often discourage students from attending college because of the cost burden of college leaving the students with feelings of alienation and even self-doubt about whether they are college-ready (Mukherji et al. 2017). Other stressors plague FGS after making the decision and commitment to pursue a degree exacerbate and contribute to the cycle of low socio-economic status for FGS. For example, Michel and Durdella, (2019) found that freshman Latino/a students who came from low-income backgrounds experienced distress, which affected their motivation and adjustment in college, further contributing to the cycle of higher attrition rates and longer graduation times. According to U.S. Department of Education data (Research Triangle Institute, 2019), 20% of FGS completed Bachelor's degrees within six years, compared to 49% of continuing-generation students.

Cultural and Social Capital

Bourdieu's (1986) research established a foundation for understanding capital and the various types of capital the college students must leverage. Bourdieu (1986) suggested capital exists in three forms: economic, cultural, and social. According to Bourdieu (1986), *economic capital* is immediately and directly convertible into money. *Cultural capital* refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. While it may be more ambiguous and must satisfy certain conditions, cultural capital is also convertible into economic capital, ultimately monetary, with the ability to buy educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1977). The lack of cultural capital has been shown through extensive research to be a factor in FGS' persistence toward graduation (Bathmaker, et al., 2013, Chang, et al., 2020; Garriott, 2020). *Social capital*, according to Bourdieu (1986), is about networks

and connections, which may also be converted to economic capital, under certain conditions, in the form of status.

Bourdieu's (1986) position was that without the three forms of capital—economic, cultural, and social—college persistence for FGS is futile. The very nature of their status as FGS implies these students lack or have limitations in these three areas. Conversely, Yosso's (2005) CRT challenged historical and foundational research theories from Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) on social and cultural capital and its emphasis on a hierarchical or class society. Bourdieu's (1986) position shared that those in the middle and upper class have a network of social capital to trade for economic advancement and if people are not born into the upper or middle classes, they can still obtain or build social capital while pursuing higher education. The broader premise suggested that people of color experience socioeconomic challenges and are considered overall culturally and socially disadvantaged (Bourdieu & Passeron; Schwartz et al. 2018) and that the inability to tap into higher levels of cultural capital, allows these deficits to persist.

Yosso (2005) disputed Bourdieu's (1986) claim by redefining cultural capital and disputing the assumption that students of color enter college with cultural deficiencies or what she describes as deficit theorizing. Yosso, instead, introduced the concept of *community cultural wealth* as an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression, which often go unrecognized or unacknowledged. Moll and Greenberg (1990) and Moll et al. (1992) have introduced the concept of *funds of knowledge* which acknowledges culturally accumulated bodies of understanding essential for individuals and household functioning, specifically within Black and African

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American families. For example, FGS from lower socio-economic status may exhibit skills and funds of knowledge in household management, construction, or farming (Moll et al.). Families and individuals draw upon these funds of knowledge as a means of managing their daily lives, which translates as cultural capital within their realm. Gofen (2009) investigated to find what first-generation Israeli students possessed that allowed them to break the intergenerational position of limited education. The Gofen study found it was not material or economic capital, but instead was their family beliefs and values or culture that were most influential to their success. Once entering educational institutions where customs and cultures are steeped in White, middle and upper-class norms, the opportunities to barter or convert these funds of knowledge to economic and social capital are not as straightforward, but should not be discounted (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Davis (2010), Jehangir (2009), and Yosso have gone further to suggest the need to shift focus away from social capital and more toward the social-emotional wealth of FGS as a means of understanding and promoting student success.

While cultural capital manifests in different ways among families and communities, the concept of social capital among FGS is a two-railed phenomenon. Strong family and communal networks provide a web of support through customs and values that students are familiar with and rely upon (Martin et al., 2013; Ramsey, 2016; Sáenz et al., 2018). However, once making the decision to attend college, FGS find it difficult to break bonds and begin to develop new, critical networks among their broader educational institutional family. These connections keep students tied to family norms, values, traditions, and their socio-economic standings, in direct contrast with bridging capital that allows students to move forward (de Souza Briggs, 1998; Santiago, 2011).

During the transition to college, FGS may be tempted to maintain family and prior community relationships, often missing the opportunity to develop new networks faculty and other campus staff to build social capital.

Strong social capital has been shown to influence the mobilization of students into the workforce (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017). Social and culturally rich norms for developing networks that provide contacts and connections to draw upon for professional development are limited among FGS leaving them further behind their continuing-generational peers (Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Narayan, 1999). Narayan posited that "those with social capital implicitly raises the question of power differentials...social capital can explain much social exclusion because of the same ties that bind also exclude" (p. 5). Further, in a quantitative study of 376 college students, Batistic and Tymon accurately hypothesized that social relationships can influence third parties involved in recruitment and elevate job seekers' credentials by suggesting they bring the desired skills and potential resources. Conversely, the lack of capital and disconnect from those who can provide support to actualize educational goals leave FGS further disenfranchised within the walls of higher education (Ramsey & Brown, 2018).

Co-curricular Student Opportunities

HIP

One of the ways students build their social networks is to take advantage of opportunities to engage with the corporate and service communities. Colleges and universities have identified certain activities that foster successful matriculation through undergraduate study and successful transition into careers or positions with meaning, as high impact practices (HIP) (Kuh, 2008). Internships, apprenticeships, service learning,

capstone projects, and global learning are some activities available to students across college campuses (Kuh; Miller, 2013). Students' participation in one or more HIP has been shown to be beneficial for students' skill development, particularly among underrepresented students, with Black and African- American students' persistence surpassing that of White students in some instances (Kuh). Unfortunately, participation in HIPs is inequitable with first-generation and economically marginalized students (Kuh et al. 2017). The inequity of participation in HIPs by FGS may best be explained through an understanding of student engagement. Students who thoroughly integrate into the college setting through an alignment of their experiences and perceptions of belonging have a heightened level of commitment to their educational goals (Sweat et al. 2013). Historically, Black students tend to have a more difficult time adjusting to the college setting during the first-year college experience than their non-minority peers (Brooms et al. 2015; Gloria et al., 1999) and therefore tend not to take advantage of or participate in these opportunities at the same rate as their CG peers Martin et al. (2013). According to National Association of Colleges and Employers study (Salvadge, 2019) FGS engaged in fewer HIPs than their CG peers (on average 1.24 vs 1.45). Between 2015 and 2020 participation in HIPs overall was considered strong with an average of 82% of FGS completing any HIP by the time they graduated compared to 88% of non-FGS. However, only about half (50%) of FGS had completed the recommended two HIPs compared to 67% of FGS (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2020).

Of the students that do participate in HIPs, there is a stark contract in the types and timing of engagements for FGS and CGS. According to a 2020 survey conducted by National Survey of Student Engagement (2020), FGS were more likely to participate in

service learning and community learning projects than other types of HIPs, at a greater rate than CGS during the first year (57% vs 42%). However, by the senior year, CGS exceeded their FG peers' participation in learning communities, research with faculty, internships, study abroad and culminating senior experiences (capstones). FGS continued to outpace CGS in service learning participation (62% vs 59%) although the gap was reduced. An institutional study completed at Endicott College showed results in line with broader research (Kuh, 2008; Miller et al, 2018) which indicated HIPs, specifically internships, yield high career outcome rates. Fifty-three percent of graduates of Endicott reported securing professional positions within one year after graduating from their respective fields of study (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016). It is important to also note the difference in fields of study between first and non-first-generational students. FGS pursue career-oriented majors 3% less than CG students (48.7% and 51% respectively) with the biggest divergence in two majors— engineering and social/behavioral sciences. FGS pursued engineering majors at a rate of 4.7% versus 20% majoring in social and behavioral sciences (Eismann, 2016).

Student Service Organizations

In addition to HIPs, professional student organizations also serve as outlets to support the development of social and cultural capital. Miller et al. (2016) examined professional student organizations as a springboard to experiential learning opportunities or HIPs for college students. These researchers conducted an in-depth examination to determine what factors make professional service organizations appealing in hopes of making them more attractive to a broader audience, thus exposing more students to their inherent benefits. Fundamentally, professional student organizations implicitly promise to

enhance the professional expertise that students will need during their careers by providing students the opportunity to develop presentation and interviewing skills, network with professionals, locate internships, and gain entrepreneurial experience (Peltier et al., 2008). Studies have shown that employers look more favorably upon students who have participated in experiential learning, HIPs, and professional student organization engagements when making hiring decisions (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Gault et al., 2010). However, even with the playbook and evidence of return on investment, FGS' engagements in these activities are still limited. Studies by de Souza Briggs (1998), Martin et al. (2013), and Najmabadi (2017) have shown that FGS tend not to take advantage of or participate in opportunities at the same rate as their continuing-generational peers (50% vs. 67%).

Further, research on social capital by Bathmaker et al., (2013) and O'Sullivan et al. (2019) explained that in a 27 year post de Souza Briggs (1998) study, students with the least amount of bridging capital engage in the least number of high-impact practice activities, further bolstering the premise that these students rely very heavily on the bonding type of capital which has the potential to stifle full professional development (Hayes, 2020; Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018). Not exclusive to FGS, longitudinal research by Bathmaker et al. (2013) on working and middle-class students found that students with the least amounts of social capital participated in the least number of experiential learning opportunities designed to bolster employment upon graduation. In fact, Bathmaker et al. posited FGS tended to conceptualize higher education through a narrow lens, whereby non-academic engagements, such as HIPs or extra-curricular activities were nearly non-existent.

Self-Efficacy

Although the goal in the pursuit of higher education is to be able to realize a fulfilled life, there appears to be a disconnect between what FGS cognitively understand about what they *should do* to improve their chances of advancing their stations in life and what they believe they *can do.* The realization and manifestation vary from person to person; the belief that one's efforts will make a difference in the outcome of one's life is a more universal belief (Bandura & Adams 1977; Rotter, 1966). Research by Bui (2002) and Pascarella et al., (2004) into the psychology of self-efficacy and motivation examined an individual's ability to set goals for themselves and specifically be able to structure a pathway toward degree attainment. Over the years, there continues to be a heightened concern across colleges and universities regarding the academic performance of FGS, yet these students continue to experience difficulties prior to and during the college experience that makes them vulnerable to lower academic performance and susceptible to more problematic transitions adjusting to college (Bui; Ramos-Sanchez, 2007; Stephens et al., 2012; Terenzini et al. 1996). Therefore, the graduation gap between FGS and multi-generation students persists (Hayes, 2020; Mamiseishvili, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997, 2001) *social cognitive theory* emphasizes that high self-expectation or self-efficacy increases one's perseverance, and a substantial amount of research over time (Hackett et al.,1992; Kezar et al., 2020; Lent et al., 1984) bears out the positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. Among a sample of FGS attending university, academic self-efficacy was shown to be a powerful predictor of expectations and performance (Chemers, et al., 2001; Multon et al., 1991). Majer's

(2009) study investigated educational outcomes in relation to self-efficacy among a diverse sample of FGS (*N*=96). Participants responded to a survey Belief in Educational Success Test which is based on Bandura's (1997) cognitive-behavioral self-efficacy theory. McGregor et al., (1991) found that multi-generation college students tend to have a higher self-esteem or self-efficacy rating than their FGS peers. Findings suggested self-efficacy for education is an important cognitive resource among diverse FGS whose socio-demographic characteristics have an impact on their educational success (Bui, 2002; Hood et al., 2020; Majer; McGregor et al.; Verdín & Godwin, 2018). Further, these findings seem to transcend geographic location with similar findings across urban, suburban, and rural FGS (Gibbons et al., 2020).

Career Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is also influenced by past experiences and has some implications on how one envisions the future based on those experiences; this is known as an individual's locus of control (Lybbert & Wydick, 2018; Rotter, 1966), and, among FGS, because of inherent socio-demographic challenges, some do not know *if*, while others *do not fully believe* degree attainment nor career success is possible for them. As research continued in response to Bandura's (1977) theory on *social cognitive theory*, additional research by Hackett and Betz (1981) began to connect the dots on self-efficacy and career development and choice. Thus, Career Self-Efficacy (CSE) was derived to examine how self-efficacy impacts career choices. Super et al. (1996) posits the ability to make career decisions and make them effectively is essential to a young person's career development. Thus, higher levels of career self-efficacy suggest a broader vocational identity, higher outcome expectations, and more extensive career exploration (Gushue et al., 2006).

Qualitative research on college transition and the impact on self-efficacy could be expected (Milner & Hoy, 2003; Stipanovic et al., 2017; Zeldin, & Pajares, 2000) given that it rests squarely in the realm of cognition and psychology. However, mixed-method studies have taken a deep quantitative dive into how program participation is linked to career self-efficacy. Researchers (Kallison & Stader, 2012; Kezar et al., 2020) report that FGS, low-income, and underrepresented college students who participated in comprehensive college transition programs experienced higher levels of confidence in their graduation and career outlook, with as many as 80% reporting feeling academically prepared for college.

Student Guidance and Interventions

The goal of the journey of attending college is to identify and obtain a career that meets one's professional goals, at a minimum, and, if students are lucky, to satisfy other personal needs (Pipkins et al., 2014). Several programs and services exist across college campuses (TRiO, Upward Bound, and Summer Bridge) to provide necessary guidance and counseling. Studies (Cabrera et al., 2013; Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Murphy et al., 2010) reported inconsistent findings around programmatic efficacy, or how effectively students connect to social and academic supports, yet did find a positive correlation to promotion of belonging, academic engagement increased social engagement. Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski reported no change in ethnic identity affirmation or resilience levels. Murphy et al., (2010) found that among data collected on ($N=2222$) participants graduation rates and degree attainment were higher for students participating in the Summer Bridge intervention group, compared to nonparticipants (70% vs 67%, respectively). The Upward Bound program provides support services to

individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to promote achievement in postsecondary education (Department of Education, 2018). Students participating in the program in high school were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education (84%) soon after high school. According to the 2017-2018 Department of Education data, 57% of Upward Bound participants enrolled in 4-year degree institutions, while 26% enrolled in *other* post-high school education programs.

Career services counseling is another program whose purpose is to coach and prepare students for engagements with the corporate world (Pipkins et al., 2014). Career services delivery has undergone several paradigms shifts over the past fifty years (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Tang, 2003). The delivery model has moved away from a focus of placing individuals into roles with limited considerations for the job seekers' passions or overall career goals, as was the case with General Issue soldiers (G.I.'s) after military service in the 1940s, to more of a self-help model in the 1960s through the 1980s (Dey & Real, 2010). Between the 1960s and 2010s, career services programs experienced several additional shifts beginning in the 1960s when the focus moved towards a self-help model and skills development, as students began to focus on making change and bucking the status quo (Dey & Real). Students' self-reflections and visualization of long-term employment and career goals that capitalized on their education and courses of study persisted over the next 40 plus years as technology, social, and global networking slowly gained momentum. More recently, the delivery model has again shifted toward a social and global networking model whose focus is on the students' engagement in experiential learning opportunities (Dey & Real) as the means to transition from student to professional. Stebleton and Diamond (2018) suggested educators consider career services

and career exploration as HIPs, given the positive impact these engagements can have on students during and post-college, but FGS are less engaged in experiential learning and HIP activities (Miller et al., 2018), rendering the career service office experience less effective for them.

Over time, research findings have consistently shown FGS, overall, to be less engaged in support-seeking activities than their multi-generation peers, thus having a negative effect on both academic and social aptitudes (Dong, 2019). Scholars (Parks-Yancy & Cooley 2012; Tate et al., 2015) contended that students, in general, do not fully utilize career services as they were intended, with this finding being even more so among underrepresented groups. There continues to be a lack of understanding among FGS of the importance of these services and the role these career counselors play in opening doors to career opportunities (Behling, 2019; Hirudayaraj & McLean 2018; Ludwikowski et al., 2009). This deficit in understanding is the starting point of the vicious cycle that too often tends to be the fate of FGS: a lack of knowledge of *wha*t services are available, compounded further by a lack of understanding of *how* career service engagements create bridges to employment (Parks-Yancy & Cooley. 2018).

Social capital theory, which suggests the students' relationships, including social, familial, and institutional supports, can be leveraged as currency to navigate collegiate dynamics into careers (Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Ramsey, 2016). However, the effects of limited social capital are evident as FGS are unsure of what services are available to them and further what is expected of them (Martin et al., 2013).

The uncertainty surrounding career development or career selection, and understanding how to leverage cultural and social capital can incapacitate students (Stebleton & Diamond, 2018). Therein lies the opportunity and responsibility of career counselors to act as support agents for all students, and thus an understanding of the career development needs in the context of FGS status is paramount. College career counselors are increasingly called upon to support students in an ever-broadening range of needs. Notwithstanding, the counselor's ability to recognize that students' needs can far exceed the services of the career office. Davenport (2009), and Shaw et al. (2014) found that as counselors assess and address students' needs, they do so while balancing and mitigating risk to both the student and the college. Shaw et al. posited counselors serve an increasingly diverse student body by way of race, socioeconomic status, transgendered, openly gay and lesbian, cultural minority, and international status, each with its own set of nuances. The American Counseling Association (ACA) (2014) guidelines state that counselors should "practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state, and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience" (p.8). Further, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) engenders college and university counseling as a specialty area that has unique training needs that vary from other areas of counseling and stresses the importance of adequate training for counselors working in college counseling settings (Saginak, 2010). However, college counseling training programs generally offer limited course work in career counseling. And, while CACREP requires the completion of a (single) career-focused course, this seems limited and would seem to leave counselors woefully underprepared to

address the complexities of students (Luke & Diambra, 2017). Zunker (2015) described career counseling as counseling activities associated with career choice over a lifespan. Although most professional counselors will have some foundational understanding of career counseling, they may not fully grasp the impact on a student in the broader sense (Tang, 2003).

Summary

Vast amounts of research and attention have been devoted to understanding, supporting, and advancing the needs of FGS. At every stage, from students to job seekers and ultimately as career professionals, the academic community, familial, and corporate stakeholders, have invested resources to create and strengthen bridging opportunities for this group. Federally-funded programs such as TRiO and Upward Bound, college bridge programs have been in place across academic institutions since 1964 along with programs such as the G.I. Bill since the 1940s, with the goal of providing the academic, financial, and social supports to create a sense of parity between FGS and their continuing-generational peers. Researchers (McCallen & Johnson, 2020; Miller et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017; Park-Yancy, 2012) and education institutional supports have launched diligent studies to understand the psychology of the lives of FGS, to advance appropriate measures earlier, or possibly more frequently throughout the students' academic journey with the appropriate mix of program engagements and professional access opportunities.

In Chapter III, a review of the methodology and research design will be presented. With decades of research, resources, time, and attention expended, FGS Black males continue to lag behind their continuing-generational peers in participation in HIPs, degree

attainment, and career satisfaction. However, there is a collective of FGS, including

Black men, who found their way and closed the disparity gap between themselves and

their continuing-generational peers. The current study provides a rich, and comprehensive

description of Black men's activities, engagements, relationships throughout their college

journey, which supported positive matriculation outcomes, and successful career

transition.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, a comprehensive review of the literature on the career success of first-generation students (FGS) was outlined. The concept and prior research (Adsitt et al., 2016; Bourdieu, 1977; Garriott, 2020; Gemmell, 2017; Tate et al., 2015; Kaiser et al., 2015) on the success of FGS had primarily been positioned and explored by subjugating FGS to a place of financial, cultural, and academic deficit and insufficiency. Colleges and universities have responded to the unique needs of FGS by implementing bridge programs and services (Trio, Upward Bound, and Summer Bridge) to coach and prepare students for college and assist in the college to career transition. Despite these interventions, FGS, particularly Black men, continue to lag in college readiness overall and college completion and career salaries specifically, when compared to their CG peers (Cataldi et al., 2018). The review of the literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013) identifies research that exposes these gaps. What is missing in the research is an in-depth exploration and account from Black men who were able to navigate the academic, financial, and social rigors of college and transition into what they identify as successful and meaningful careers.

The purpose of this study was to explore the activities, experiences, and relationships of first-generation, Black men who persisted at a Midwest community college and made a successful college to career transition. The current study sought to

identify specific cultural and social capital experiences these men engaged in, subsequently aiding their persistence through college and into their chosen careers. What campus services, HIPs, or relationships were utilized or developed as a part of their transition from college to career? The current study engaged Black men who graduated from a Midwest community college and were in their chosen careers for to determine how cultural and social capital were used a resource to persist in college and transition to career.

Research Question

The basis of this study sought to address the following research question:
Research question. What college experiences contributed to first-generation Black men's career success?

Interview questions were designed to elicit participants' experiences around three key sub-topics: cultural and social capital, the impact of family dynamics, and college career support.

Sub1. What role did cultural and social capital experiences play in persisting through college and into a career?

 Sub2. What role did family dynamics, and relationships play in supporting persistence through college and career selection?

Sub3. What role did career services programs play in the transition from student to career?

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was undertaken to give participants the opportunity, through semi-structured interviews, an opportunity to reflect on their college

to career experiences, and provide insight on the activities, experiences, and relationship, as well as the timing, that proved to be instrumental in their self-defined success (Harrison et al., 2017). For this research, the case study design was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore and understand the how and why of problems, without requiring control over the events or processes (Yin, 2008). Gerring (2004) also highlights case studies as a way of analyzing or modeling causal relations...through an intensive study of a single unit to understand the larger class of units. Stake (1995) posits that studying a case or a few cases when they, themselves, are of special interest, is particularly complex, creating a desire to understand their activity within important circumstances

Participants and Setting

Semi-structured interviews were conducted through recorded video conferences with male participants who identified as Black, graduates with a two- or four-year degree, have secured positions in their chosen field of interest, and identify as having achieved career success, based on the parameters of this study. The sample was generated through convenience, non-probability sampling whereby the researcher gathers data from a group that is nearby and accessible. Researchers (Adams & Lawrence, 2019; Rahi, 2017) posit that convenience sampling is made up of volunteers who are readily available and willing to participate, which allows the research to complete interviews and get responses in a cost-effective manner.

Procedures

Permission to conduct this study and obtain access to the participants was granted through the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval process of Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, IL. The participants were college graduates with a minimum

of an Associate's degree, and up to and including a Master's degree. An introduction of the study outlining the purpose and timeframe was sent to the study population to garner interest in participation. The email included compensation of a $10.00 coffee house gift card for participation. The study was designed to be comprised of six to ten Black men who were previous FGS.

<p style="text-align:center">The Researcher's Role</p>

The researcher identified as a Black, FGS who has first-hand relationship and knowledge of many FG, Black men who were successful in their college to career transition. In the researcher's professional role as the Workforce Development Manager within a Midwest Community College, it was apparent that the use of the career services programs attracted very few Black men. Her experience with media, and a fair amount of research, provides a partial picture of the education and professional outlook for FG, Black men, negating the success of those in mid-level to executive level roles across many industries. As a practitioner in the development of the workforce within her community, it was important for the researcher to understand how to best design institutional systems and processes that have been consistent in producing positive career outcomes for a community she is passionate about.

As a FG, Black professional, the researcher was encompassed by FG, Black men whose stories are overshadowed by media and the masses, in exchange for the sensationalized violence, poverty and overall socio-economic lack, framed in a deficit narrative. Given the researcher's proximity and familiarity with the cultural structures, and norms of the Black community, some amount of researcher bias was inevitable. Much care was taken to allow the participants' own words and voices to tell their

individual stories, as the goal of the researcher was to use the voices and experiences of this unique sub-set of professionals to begin restructuring, in a scalable manner, programming that moves more Black men into successful careers.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study was completed over several months, beginning in August 2022. Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews consisting of 9 questions (see Appendix A). The interviews were conducted through video interviews. The first two questions were designed to allow the participant to relax and develop a starting point for the interview. The next four questions sought to answer the first sub-research question of defining cultural and social capital experiences with family and throughout college. Questions seven and eight sought to address sub-question two, which focused on the use of campus services, and participation in HIPS offered by the career services department on campus. The remaining interview questions sought to understand at what point along their college-to-career journey the participants leveraged their cultural and social capital to benefit their persistency or employability.

Data Analysis

To understand what activities, experiences, and relationships of FGS Black men were critical in their college-to-career journey, InVivo coding (Saldaña, 2021) was applied to the gathered data. According to Saldaña, InVivo coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, particularly for those that honor and prioritize participants' voices. In Vivo coding methods investigate subjective human experiences by honoring the participants' voices, using their own words (Saldaña). Manning (2017) further attests that InVivo coding is particularly helpful with participants from cultures to

highlight the language of those cultures. The goal of this study was to identify FGS'

Black men's activities, experiences, and relationships, that were integral to their ability to

persist through college and transition into their careers of choice. Thus, InVivo coding

was chosen as the most appropriate coding method to capture the actual language used by

the participants (Strauss, 1987). The resulting coded data will be available in Chapter IV.

Ethical Considerations

Interviews with participants were kept in a secure place to avoid the risks of

participants' identities becoming known. Although pseudonyms were used, there could be

enough information among the shared stories to reveal their identities. Participants were

asked to recall family dynamics that could evoke positive memories and trauma. While it

was beneficial to retrieve authentic, rich experiences, each participant gave informed

consent and understood they could leave the study at any time. The results of the research

were only shared in the context of identifying opportunities for program offerings and

student engagement within the campus career program.

Summary

This methodology chapter explained the case study design, why it was selected to

complete this research, and defined the participants' selection and data analysis process.

Chapter IV will provide findings from a detailed analysis of the coding and implications

for further research.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the activities, experiences, and relationships that Black men engaged in to support their transition through college and into careers is outlined amid one overarching research question and three sub-questions. Participants were presented with nine interview questions designed to elicit recounts of these men's activities, experiences, and relationships during their college years and immediately following that they felt were instrumental in forging a path forward into a successful career.

Research Question

The study addresses the following research question:

What were the college experiences that contributed to first-generation Black men's career success?

Interview questions were designed to elicit participants' experiences around three key sub-topics: cultural and social capital, college career support, and the impact of relationships developed along the way. The study addressed the following research sub-questions:

Sub 1: What role did cultural and social capital experiences play in persisting through college and into a career?

Sub 2: What role did family dynamics, and relationships play in supporting persistence through college and career selection?

Sub 3: What role did career services programs play in the transition from student to career?

Participants

The 10 participants of the study were first-generation (FG) college graduates who identified themselves as Black or African American. The participant group represented several majors and career fields. In the context of a family's ability to buffer the impact of an adverse event (Leonard et al., 2017) or where families' incomes, education levels, or places of residence fall below or outside societal averages, these participants were all from lower-economic socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants identified varying degrees of trauma growing up ranging from physical abuse and neglect to coping with family members' struggles. Two of the participants entered college after serving in the military. Their experiences offered a different nuance to the college experience, as they were older and had more life experience than the other participants. One participant entered the workforce taking on low-wage jobs before entering college at the age of 24. The remaining seven participants began their college journeys directly after graduating from high school. The research examined each participant's unique journey, highlighting the activities, experiences, and relationships that allowed them to chart their course toward career success. A brief description of each participant, identified by pseudonym, is provided to offer context for their individual stories and experiences and the framework developed by the themes that emerged.

Simon (P1), the oldest of four children was a 2020 college graduate who enrolled in college with an eye on law to assist in his mom's business. Simon indicated his family has Caribbean roots which bled culturally into how he interacted with support personnel such as faculty, tutors, and student services. Caribbean heritage parents place a high value on education, supporting academics where they can, and being active with teachers and staff (Nehaul, 1999). These parents see an American education for their children as an option they would not have had in their home country (James, 2022).

Bilal (P2) was a 2018 graduate raised in a blue-collar, two-parent home. Bilal described his family as supportive of his aspirations to attend college. Bilal began his college career at a two-year college before transferring to two HBCUs (Historically Black College and University), including a leading institution for engineering. Bilal entered his career with a Fortune 100 computer technology company.

Kurt (P3) was a 2015 graduate who attended college after completing five years of military service. Kurt detailed a family unit who questioned his decision to enter the service and attend college. He describes his family as individuals without a plan or vision which influenced his decision to enlist into service. He shared that the military provided a sense of stability, something he was unfamiliar with growing up, and the only way to maintain that stability was through pursuing an education that would lead to a career as an electrical engineer.

Harper (P4) was a 2012 college graduate who is the oldest of five children. Harper's parents divorced when he was young but were both present and supportive. Harper describes growing up amid neighborhood violence and poverty and having limited resources. Harper recounted experiencing domestic violence in his home as a

child although his mother attempted to shield him and his siblings. Harper saw college as the avenue to open doors and allow him to do the things he wanted to do, live where and how he wanted to live and understand what was going on around him. He referenced specifically how getting an education would allow him to *defend* himself. The researcher found the use of the word "defend" interesting considering the violence he observed in his home. Harper obtained a bachelor's and master's degree and pursued a career in Human Resources.

Jeff (P5) was a 2014 graduate who attend college after completing four years in the military. Jeff shared that many members in his family had not graduated high school and were not able to offer him any direction or guidance on higher education. In addition to limited guidance, Jeff described himself as not being mature enough to attend college right out of high school and therefore opted to enlist for military service. Jeff is the youngest of four siblings and shared that his mother was his motivation for attending college as she passed away while he was in high school. Being the youngest he recounted often being told what he could not do, and how that became the internal driver to prove himself. Jeff received informal mentoring from an older, black staff member in the human resource department of the company he worked for after leaving the military. Jeff completed his master's degree in human resources and has a director-level role within the same company.

Mark (P6), was a 2015 graduate who began his college career pursuing a business degree, completing a bachelor's degree in finance and economics. He described being brought up in a physically abusive home and receiving little support from family. Mark talked about having a learning disability that was not identified until he entered college

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and how he was labeled as unintelligent and incapable of achieving academically. Mark shared with the researcher how his desire to rise above these stereotypes as a Black man was the catalyst for pursuing a college education. Mark became an entrepreneur, running his own financial advising agency.

Tre (P7) was a 2021 graduate who grew up in a large metro area of predominantly Black and Hispanic families. Tre is the oldest of 4 siblings with a stepfather who Tre described as 'less than supportive'. Tre recounted always feeling like an outsider among his siblings and with his stepfather. Tre was a new father, planning to marry in the next year, attributing many decisions made in college to wanting to be a good husband and father. Tre is a sound engineer for a major entertainment company.

Josh (P8) was a 2012 graduate who describes his home life as abusive and tumultuous. Josh indicated a lack of expectations for him and his siblings to thrive or become successful, recalling his mother leaving him and his siblings to fend for themselves. He credits neighbors and parents of friends for their attempts to shield and support him and his siblings. He recalled the time spent with his father as a child were often around food, which prompted him to seek out a culinary career. Josh completed a degree in culinary management and is working on starting a company that promotes food as medicine.

Larry (P9) was a 2016 graduate working as a quality assurance manager. Larry recalled his immediate family and family friends providing emotional support and encouragement and being held to a standard or being viewed as *the family's last hope*. He described his college experience as intermittent; starting and stopping along the way, taking time away from school to work, as his greatest struggle to persist was a lack of

finances. Though he recognized the limitations of his family to provide financial assistance and appreciated the emotional support and encouragement, he also felt the weight of the family expectation for him to persist. His career goal was to become an engineer but struggled to find guidance among the services offered on campus. His entry into the field came through a professional contact of his girlfriend, now his wife. Larry completed a four-year degree in engineering and has received promotions in management.

Damon (P10) was a 2016 graduate. Damon was adopted and indicated his adopted family members rarely obtained a high school education. He recalls not having many role models in his family or community to emulate and being baffled by family members who could not understand why he wanted to elevate himself or leave home. Damon lamented the friends he lost to violence in his community and sought out a [college] environment that would nourish him. Damon shared how his experiences with child protective services as a child caused him to be sensitive to people's intentions, but says it also gave him the grit he needed to seek out the support and resources he needed to persist through college.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Participants identified activities, experiences and relationships developed because of leveraged cultural and social capital as the most critical aspects of their ability to advance through their college studies and transition into a career. *Social capital* is highlighted in networks and connections, while *cultural capital* addresses knowledge and skills ascribed to a specific culture, where both can be converted to economic capital under certain conditions (Bathmaker, et al., 2013; Bourdieu, 1996; Chang, et al., 2020; Garriott, 2020). Previous research makes arguments for how social and cultural capital

can be used to the benefit or detriment of people of color, particularly those with socioeconomic challenges (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Schwartz et al. 2018; Yosso, 2005). Both social and cultural capital themes emerged as campus groups, professional organizations, and casual relationships.

Campus Groups

Six of the 10 participants identified campus organizations and clubs that directly aligned with their culture and race as Black men, vital to their sense of belonging (Table 1). The Black Student Union (BSU) served as a centralized hub where participants felt welcomed and supported by others who looked like them and had their best interests in mind. BSU clubs and organizations began in the 1960's at predominately White institutions (PWI) to address racial discrimination, campus safety, social and racial injustices. Simon stated, "I participated my freshman year in two different student groups, BSU, and student government ended up becoming president of BSU." Bilal offered, "Honestly, the [BSU] relationships were like another family. The BSU organization, and Black Men Talk . . . were supportive in my journey . . . using them to my advantage." These organizations provided a network where black students could engage with one another as a community that fosters persistence in education, provide leadership opportunities and a sense of agency to the members. Additionally, these clubs and organizations were places where the double-consciousness that Du Bois (1999) spoke about could be set aside, avoiding the stress and negative impacts on persistence (Sinanan, 2016; Luthar et al., 2000).

Table 1

Social and Cultural Capital Support

Participants	BSU	BMX/BEA	MOV	Greek and Professional Orgs	Peers	Faculty / Staff
Bilal	X	X	X	X	X	X
Harper	X			X		
Mark					X	X
Tre				X	X	X
Simon	X	X	X			X
Kurt	X			X	X	
Larry	X		X			
Josh						X
Damon	X			X	X	X
Jeff				X	X	X
Totals	6	2	3	6	6	7

Note. This table identifies groups, organizations and individuals identified as support structures. BSU (Black Student Union), BMX (Black Men Excel), BEA (Black Excellence Alliance) MOV (Men of Vision).

Faculty and Staff as Family

Participants reflected on how both formal and informal relationships played a role in keeping students grounded and focused as well as outlets to access educational, financial, civic and leadership opportunities. The researcher found participants developed relationships with campus mentors with similar cultural backgrounds outside of formal

clubs and organizations. Relationships with Black faculty and staff were forged by way of commonality of experiences and genuine care for the success outcomes of Black students. These participants found campus organization leaders were eager to provide guidance, through mentorship to professional, financial and cultural support networks of which they had no prior exposure. Mentors were identified in the categories of professional, and peer-to-peer. These findings align with Gofen (2009) who found it was not material or economic capital, but instead social and cultural beliefs and values held by support persons, i.e., campus faculty and staff, that were most influential to FGS success.

The theme of faculty and staff connections came through with seven of the ten participants who shared experiences of the positive impact of faculty and staff at their campuses. Tre noted "Professors at school had the biggest impact, not the career services," recounting how three of his professors took interest in him, even providing the reference for his first professional position in his field of study. He was specific to highlight how faculty played a larger role than the career services office for career guidance. He recounted, "[For] other students maybe, but for me, it was really three of my professors that got me connected with (his employer) as a sound engineer for concerts." Larry posited "Chef Rob was somebody who really inspired me; he brought in a lot of passion." Simon and Damon recalled the impact faculty members had on their decision-making. Damon offered "One of the reasons I chose my school was because of the attention of the faculty. It felt like a family." Simon recounted "Being an African American man or woman, you need somebody there that's gonna say, hey, get your stuff together. Miss B. [faculty] brought me into a huge community of people that were willing

to help." Bilal credits his experiences and relationships with faculty advisors of the group Black Men Talk, as key components of his support system. Bilal remembered "These relationships were honestly like another family. Everybody was supportive of my transition and my journey through college. When I needed people to talk to, when things weren't going well, which was often, they pushed me through, and I embraced that." The emergent code of faculty as family aligns with prior research (Santiago, 2011; Schwartz et al., & Spencer, 2018) suggesting the need for FGS to build networks with faculty and other campus staff as means of building social capital. The current research, however, highlighted students' willingness to embrace new networks as a resource, a position prior studies suggested FGS avoided.

Professional Organizations

Six of the participants shared how their experiences with professional and Greek organizations in alignment with their fields of study and cultural provided networks and a sense of belonging during their matriculation. Damon joined a group called National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), and the Black fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi. He reflected, "these [organization members] were people in the same field as me during that time. We would go to [NSBE] conferences and see other African American people who already walked this journey and we just connected with these people." NSBE provides students and professionals in STEM fields, leadership development, and training, with top leaders of Fortune 500 companies. NSBE members are also introduced to professional development via many workshops, seminars, and networking opportunities at conferences and local chapter functions (National Society of Black Engineers, n.d.). Kurt also referenced being a member of NSBE for three years, progressively advancing

into leadership roles, citing, "NSBE was critical in my success when I came back [to campus]. The first year I was a general member. The second year, I was the treasurer, and the third year, after I graduated, I became president." Another participant referenced membership in Black Excellence Alliance (BEA), an organization that "celebrates those who exemplify excellence and accelerate the growth of the exceptional through education, employment, and entrepreneurship," (Black Excellence Alliance, n.d.). The theme of professional organizations stands out as a vital resource supporting persistence through college and as an entry to students' chosen fields of study. These organizations provided connections to professionals of similar backgrounds and experiences.

Peer-to-peer

The theme of peer support surfaced for two of the participants, referencing how peers opened themselves up to provide social and housing support, which proved integral to their persistence. These relationships supported the students' self-efficacy in boosting their confidence to persist toward their goals (Bandura, 1997; Batistic & Tymon, 2017). Tre, a new father, was a member of a peer group for college-aged fathers on campus. These men supported one another around a demographic of young fathers in college. Kurt shared, "I never really had any big brothers... anybody who I looked up to. Randall [peer] seemed to have figured it out a little bit better than I did." Kurt shared how a peer opened his home, providing him with a place to sleep, and without that support, may not have stayed in school.

The Role of Family Dynamics, and Relationships in Supporting Persistence and Career Selection

The participants' family dynamics were varied in terms of siblings, single or two parent rearing, expectations of careers, and the ability or willingness to support these men through their academic journeys (see Table 2). However, all the participants identified family dynamics that impacted how they initially approached college, how they settled into college life, and made career choices. The researcher gleaned from participants' stories, that in cases of both strong and minimal family support, the participants possessed an internal drive, which supported their college persistence and career trajectory.

Table 2

Family Dynamics as Drivers

| Participants | Drivers | | | |
	Supportive Family	Limited Family Support	Wanting More	Family Expectations
Bilal	X		X	
Harper	X		X	X
Mark		X	X	
Tre	X		X	
Simon			X	X
Kurt	X		X	X
Larry	X		X	X
Josh		X	X	
Damon		X	X	
Jeff	X		X	X
Totals	6	3	10	5

Note. This table shows the occurrence of themes participants identified as drivers of persistence.

Positive Family Support

Family support emerged as a theme with six of the ten participants (see Table 3). Participants identified how members of their immediate families, though not familiar with the college experience, created a backdrop of support and encouragement. Harper shared "Overall, my family was the nucleus. My mom encouraged me, even though she

didn't know much about how to navigate it." Simon shared how his mom, of Caribbean descent, had very specific expectations around pursuing higher education. "In the Caribbean culture, you need to be a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer or something. My mom has always been very supportive of anything I've done." Similarly, Larry felt that his family held him to a higher standard, thinking maybe he was the 'last shot' for the family to have a college graduate. The family also fueled his internal drive to persist. He shared, "the encouragement that I received from my fiancé, who's my wife now, and my mom, motivated me to go back [to college]." Participants also became aware that the praise and support heaped upon them, positioned them as beacons or symbols of success to other family members, particularly younger siblings, nieces and nephews. For example, Larry beamed, "just to hear about that cousins and nephews look up to me, I felt like I had to fulfill that goal [college completion] for my family". Harped echoed a similar sentiment saying, "younger family members have seen [me] and know that I've gone through and completed my degrees and say okay, well, that's supposed to happen, right. There's no question."

Lack of Family Support

Three participants shared how their home environment was extremely volatile and family members offered limited guidance or support (see Table 2). This dynamic was a carry-over from the participants' childhood. One of the participants expressed overt negativity toward him, while the other two referenced how little guidance or support they received from family. Josh remembered, "When I got to high school, I was stressed out my junior, senior years, because I was trying to figure out what [college] school I was going to and I didn't have any idea. My parents didn't know anything about that stuff.

Nobody was telling me about school or anything, so it was really stressful." Being taken from his mom due to her drug use, Kurt relived how he struggled to focus due to a lack of guidance. Kurt felt the military was his only option and would give him the support he had never had, recalling, "I wanted to go to school, but I didn't have the money for it. I also didn't have the focus for it, and I needed something that was gonna get my head right. So, I said, I'll just join the army, hopefully, they will get me right." Mark's experience was more overt as he referenced his abusive upbringing. He reflected, "I was told that, what's the point of going to college? You're just wasting your money, you're wasting your time. You're never going to be successful, and you're better off doing something else." Despite counterproductive influences of family members, participants were not deterred in pursuing internal goals.

Driving Factor of Persistence

Wanting more

The theme of wanting more was expressed by all ten of the participants (see Table 2). Each expressed a desire to achieve more for themselves than their parents and immediate family members could. Most identified internal motivations to improve their quality of life and surpass what they experienced growing up. Bilal, Mark, and Harper shared similar accounts of how motivation to 'carry out the things that [their] parents did not get to do in life played a critical role in keeping them motivated to persist. Mark said, "Ever since I was young, I always knew that I always wanted to rise above and elevate from the background that I came from." A similar account by Harper said, "When I looked around at and the people that were a part of my support system, didn't come from a lot of money. I was always thinking that I wanted more." In at least one case, the

participant highlighted how it was not the lack of outward, or purposeful display of support by the family for his advancement, but the lack of drive and initiative by family members to do more for themselves. Kurt recalled conversations with family when he would call home, and the disappointment he felt, saying "Y'all [his family] gave me a beautiful example of what not to do. When I call to check in to see what they had going on, it was the same shit, ain't nothing changed, you know." Kurt spoke further of how he experienced stability for the first time in his life while in the military, and he knew based on the blighted conversations with family, he would have to pursue an education to maintain that stability.

Influences on Career Selection

Supportive family

Six of the participants identified their families were supportive. However, the researcher found family needs to be minimal or have negligible impact on career selections among the participants. Only one participant, Simon, named family input as impacting career goals. Simon identified his motivation to pursue college and selected his major in legal studies to assist his mother in running her business. He offered, "So, when I initially I started the program at College of Lake County (CLC), I was doing it to help protect my mom's business. I started doing the paralegal program to see if I even liked the legal field to help my mom in her business, because she did not have anybody helping her," (see Table 2).

Faculty guidance

Three of the participants, Tre, Bilal and Simon attribute input, and guidance from faculty as helpful in guiding their career choices. Tre began a career as a sound engineer,

Bilal a mechanical engineer, and Simon pursued a career as a paralegal, based on the input from one of his Black law instructors. All three participants recalled how Black faculty members took a strong interest in them and introduced them to career opportunities. Tre knew what he wanted to do when he began his college journey but was not sure how to go about finding positions that fit his skill level. He said, "I was already self-taught, I just needed a little professionalism, to take me to the next point. My professors were the ones that got me to the point of understanding how to make money. He put a good word in for me and told me the only thing I had to do was to show improvement." Bilal added, "When I needed people to talk to, when things weren't going well, which was often, [they] pushed me through, and I just embraced that. That genuine love that they had for me and wanting to see me get through because it wasn't really a lot of us [Black and African American students] represented." Simon provided a similar recount of knowing there were faculty members interested and willing to invest in his success. He said, "[Faculty member] was huge. I looked up to her so much, because when I got into my [paralegal] program. To know that I had a Black professor at all, I was like, wow, I have a Black professor teaching in my program. That's amazing. She was a mentor to me, helping me with a lot of decisions, even going forward."

The Role Career Service Programs Played in the Transition from Student to Career

The pursuit of a college degree often represents the desire to secure a profession that requires comprehension of theory and development of very specific skills within the students' field of interest. The career services offices on college campuses are the connection between students and the workforce. These career offices are generally staffed with professionals who assist students with developing and refining the pertinent tools

necessary for a students' transition from college to career. Experiential learning

opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships, and study abroad programs are HIPs

that allow students to experience short stretches of work in their fields of interest.

Support services offered to students include resume and cover letter development,

training on the essential employability skills or soft-skills employers look for in

professional hires, such as strong communication skills, strategic thinking, teamwork, and

time management. These skills are not often incorporated into college course work as part

of academia, but are delivered in workshops, videos and one-on-one preparation sessions

with career services staff. Cohen's (2018) grounded theory study suggested that FGS

benefit from the career counselors' personal stories in the context of career planning. The

career counselors' abilities to share, expose, and guide students toward their first steps in

career development have the potential to have life-long impact. However, research has

indicated career services staff are often ill-equipped and lacking the background to

provide FGS the support that addresses their unique needs (Asrowi & Setiawan, 2021

Tang, 2003), as well as FGS are less engaged in experiential learning and HIP activities

(Miller et al., 2018), rendering the career service office experience less effective for

them.

Awareness and Visibility

As seen in Table 3, the researcher found the theme of invisibility emerged in

terms of why their engagement with campus career services programs, was limited. Eight

of the ten participants credited their use of networks of social and cultural capital to find

experiential learning opportunities such as internships, and study abroad programs.

Participants Mark, Tre and Bilal shared varying degrees of awareness, experiences, and engagement with the campus career offices.

Table 3

Awareness and Engagement with Campus Career Supports

Participants	Aware of campus career services	No campus career services engagement	Engagement with campus career services (2yr)	Engagement with campus career services (4 yr.)	Social / Cultural and Professional networks
Bilal	X		X- Limited	X Limited	X
Harper	X				X
Mark	X		X-Limited		X
Tre	X		X-Limited		X
Simon	X		X-Limited		
Kurt	X	X			X
Larry			X -Limited		
Josh		X			X
Damon	X		X-Supported	X Supported	X
Jeff		X			X
TOTALS	7	3	5-Limited 1-Supported	1-Limited 1-Supported	8

Mark recounted, "I didn't really know much about internships... because it wasn't really presented to me. I feel like they [campus career offices] kinda left me in the dark." Bilal's experience echoed Mark's, while attending the two-year college. Bilal stated "I feel like no one sough me out. They didn't stop. They didn't see us [Black and African American men]." Conversely, upon transferring with an engineering major, to a

Historically Black College and University (HBCU) he recalled, "Career service people were basically tripping over themselves, to make sure incoming [transfer] students knew that they were there, and what services they had available to them, and to take advantage of it."

Limited Engagement

Half of the participants recounted some engagement with the career services office in a very limited capacity. Although these participants were aware of the career office, they did not take advantage of the services. Kurt commented his engagement with the career office was limited because he largely felt unseen. He says of his experience, "Lightly, like, very lightly, because they had [limited]connections, but they never really went above and beyond to provide any opportunities for us, [Black and African American Men]. Simon, "I went to one event, and it was very, powerful, and I enjoyed it. But I only went to support a friend who was speaking."

Three of the participants recalled no engagement with campus career services. Jeff described an informal job shadow arrangement with his then employer that exposed him to a career in Human Resources, "I didn't [participate in any career services programs]. When I first started going to college I worked in the dispatch overnight in the utility company, then I would volunteer to work [and learn] from my HR director." Professional Networks

Harper recounted career services having very little to do with his career connection and transition. "With my fraternity, there were older members who had already gone through it [career preparation]. They would do things like resume workshops and preparing for interviews. We'd do all that in-house, taking direction from

older members who graduated and came back to offer help." Three members identified NSBE, as key to establishing a professional network and providing HIPs in their fields of study. Kurt also relied heavily on the professional network, NSBE. "The biggest piece of [career support] for me came from NSBE at their yearly conference. When I first started school, I met a beautiful group of like, intelligent black men, and I've never seen this before. I'm looking at these guys who are doing the things that I want to do. I was able to go to two national conferences, and I got two internships through them." Larry added, "I believe, I just Googled engineering internships and found a group called NSBE. I met different vendors at [NSBE] conferences and got information that way. I just submitted my resume to different people. And, I got one of my internships through my girlfriend at the time. I don't ever remember going to career services."

The participants' heavy reliance on social and cultural connections emerged as key to the participants' exposure to HIP or experiential learning opportunities. Miller et al., (2018) posited FGS engage less in HIP activities, rendering career services programming less effective for them. The researcher noted the participants relied on social and cultural capital derived through relationships with campus staff, professional organizations and family members. These networks are built on commonalities across race, social-economic status, and understanding of life experiences and customs.

Summary

Findings among these participants revealed that social and cultural capital was the primary resource used in the development of relationships with campus programs specifically designed to meet the needs of Black and African American students and professionals, such as BSU, BMX, and NSBY. Faculty members engaging in cross-

functional roles of instructors and organization or club leaders served as mentors that

participants were able to identify with through commonalities of race, socio-economic

status, life experiences, and customs. All the participants identified some form of

experiential learning during their college career that allowed them the opportunity to

transition into the workforce at a professional level upon graduating. The researcher

found the relationships that emerged between students, industry professionals, and

campus faculty associated with Black and African American resource groups, gave

students agency over their professional pursuits. The researcher was not able to correlate

the timing of these experiences as the participants were gathered through convenience

sampling. While all the participants started their college experience in a two-year

program, five of the participants transferred to four-year universities.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this chapter an overview of the intersectionality of prior research and findings from the current research will be provided, along with recommendations for further research to inform continued action steps supporting college persistence and successful career transitions for (FGS).

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences that contributed to the college persistence and career success transition of FG Black men. Operating from the belief that college is considered a vehicle for upward social and financial mobility, many FGS fail to ascend due to inherent academic, economic, cultural, and racial vulnerabilities A case study to understand how Black men were able to persist, provided insight into potential strategies two and four-year college administrators could consider to directly address this groups' needs.

Summary of Findings

Prior research on college persistence and career trajectory of FG Black men historically had been viewed from the lens of the deficits of this population based in comparison to their CG peers, highlighting the low percentage of completion rates for this group, less than 25% maintain enrollment past the first year, and only 11% had degrees conferred within six years (Whitley et al., 2018). Existing research around the impacts of social, cultural, and family relationships among people of color are limited or

disadvantaged suggesting this population is unable to translate social and cultural networks and experiences into persistence and career capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Schwartz, et al. 2018). Based on the findings embedded in the recounts of the participants, the researcher found these FG, Black men's activities, experiences, and relationships were often similar with respect to how they leveraged social and cultural capital to support their ability to persist through college, and transition into their chosen careers. The researcher found these participants' experiences aligned with only some of the prior research around the perceived importance and impact of social and cultural capital but shed new light on the impact of individual experiences when specific support systems were in place.

Discussion

The Role of Social and Cultural Capital on Persistence and Career Transition

Much of the prior research takes a quantitative view of the economic, racial, and cultural barriers traversed in the college-to-career experience of FGS (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tate et al., 2015). By basic definition, FGS' parents lacked experiential knowledge of the college experience to share with their children and are therefore ineffective in supporting their college persistence (Choy, 2001, Cataldi et al., 2018; Toutkoushian, et al., 2018). However, these analyses may have failed to consider the students' life experiences, customs, and family dynamics. Themes in the current study suggested that the relationships with and fostered outside of family members proved to be valuable to the students, and were leveraged to support college completion, employability, and career success. Sixty percent of the participants recounted similar

experiences of parents and family members providing consistent moral support, and 70% cultivated campus and professional industry mentor relationships.

Social and Cultural Capital

Early research (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) on social and cultural capital and its emphasis on a hierarchical or class society suggested those in the middle and upper class have a network of social capital to trade for economic advancement but that those not born into the upper or middle classes, can still obtain or build social capital while pursuing higher education. The broader premise of that research, however, suggested that people of color experience socioeconomic challenges and are considered overall culturally and socially disadvantaged and that the inability to tap into higher levels of cultural capital, exacerbates low college completion rates, stunting opportunities to covert social capital into currencies of advancement (Bourdieu & Passeron; Schwartz, et al., 2018). Bourdieu, (1997) stresses in later research that cultural capital can only be converted through the educational system, and espoused the belief that higher education institutions play a specific function in the convertibility of education into economic capital. Presumably, immersion in the academic environment at least partially offsets disadvantages of those who do not have social and cultural pools of capital to draw from within their family circle.

Student activity groups and organizations are commonplace on most higher education campuses with the aim of creating a sense of belonging for students, around a common theme. The participants' experiences within this study mirrored prior research, in as much as experiences gained through culturally specific professional and college groups were shown to have the largest impact on students' college persistence, and career

entry. All the student participants reported benefiting from support systems beyond their family circle, within the sphere of the college campus. Sixty percent of the participants recounted experiences with campus organizations that reflected their values and culture as Black men as having a profound, and lasting impact on their lives. Campus-based student activities, clubs, and organizations such as BSU, BMX, MOV, Black Men Talk, and NSBE, and identified Black staff members as a persistent theme among participants' experiences. Through group conversations, meetings, leadership trainings, workshops and exposure to Black professionals in the participants' career fields of interest, students were embedded into networks, convertible as capital. These findings aligned with Batistic and Tymon's (2017), quantitative study of 375 undergraduate business students that suggested there are resources embedded in professional relationships, and through networking within professional organization, students access resources that directly increase internal and external perceptions of employability.

Mentors

Prior research suggested FGS find it difficult to break bonds and seek out critical networks among their broader campus network. Strong family and communal networks provide a web of support through customs and values that students are familiar with and upon which they rely (Martin et al., 2013; Ramsey, 2016; Sáenz, et al., 2018). These studies suggest FGS fail to embrace the need to spend time and energy building new networks with faculty and other campus staff who can help to build social capital (Santiago, 2011; Schwartz, et al., 2018 & Spencer, 2018). The current researcher found all the participants were open to building and seeking out relationships beyond their family nucleus. These relationships were both formal and informal in nature with faculty

and other support agents and campus staff members who were advisors of the Black

students-focused clubs and organizations. However, only two of the participants indicated

they initiated engagements to actively seek out faculty or staff for the support developed

into meaningful networks for them over time, while the other eight participants'

relationships were the product of staff members taking an active interest in the students'

success. The researcher also noted that the staff and support mentors were individuals

who also identified as Black or African American, having similar backgrounds and

experiences as the participants. Such ideation leads the researcher to question if the

participants saw these mentors as extensions of their home networks. Peer-to-peer mentor

relationships were also found to be valuable support among six of the participants,

lending to participants 'career and academic self-efficacy. Participants embraced support

from peers who, *seem to already have it figured out*, and wanted to bring them along.

The Role of Family Dynamics and Relationships in Supporting Persistence and Career

Transition

Yosso (2005) and Sáenz et al., (2018) established the concept of community

cultural wealth framework around six pillars of capital - aspirational, linguistic, familial,

social, navigational, and resistance theory findings, suggesting families serve as a catalyst

and support networks for men of color as they strive to find school, work, and family

balance. Among the participants of the current study, varying degrees of socioeconomic

stress or trauma was referenced in their backgrounds, including several who expressed

family dynamics that were volatile and abusive in nature. In alignment with Yosso (2005)

and Sáenz et al., (2018) the researcher found that all the participants expressed

aspirations and a desire of *wanting more* than what they experienced growing up.

Interestingly, participants did not overwhelmingly [overtly] express the drive to persist through college being tied to a desire to acquire wealth or status, specifically. Only one participant specifically identified the drive to persist through college and pursue a career in Human Resources was directly tied to *being able to live where he wanted, go where he wanted and have the lifestyle he'd always dreamed of.*

Prior research by Longwell-Grice et al., (2016) found participants expressed concerns about being able to talk about their college experiences and share their intellectual growth without feeling like they are overshadowing or belittling their family members' intelligence. One participant did express a feeling of *survivor remorse,* aligning with Longwell-Grice's study. However, the phenomenon, commonly referred to as crabs-in-a-barrel mentality, meaning, *if I can't get out, neither can you,* although not completely absent, was not a common thread among this group of participants. Most recounted receiving expressions of support, encouragement, and admiration from family, campus, and community members. The researcher concluded social status, increased economic mobility, and the desire to achieve what their parents or other members of the family could not, was the strongest driver for persistence. Consistent encouragement from family, and being reminded that they were a beacon of possibility for other family members proved paramount to steady persistence.

The Role of Career Services Programs in the Transition from College to Career

Disconnected Career Services

Campus career services offices have been the connection point between students' theoretical introduction and understanding of concepts related to their industry of choice and the hands-on applications of these concepts in the workplace environment (Dey &

Cruzvergara, 2014; Cohen, 2018; Parsons, 1909). According to prior research, FGS are less engaged in experiential learning and HIP activities (Miller et al., 2018), rendering the career service office experience less effective for them. These findings were consistent among the participants of this study as well. The researcher noted participants' varied degrees of awareness and engagement with campus career services programs from not at all to fully engaged. Most utilized networks of social and cultural capital to find internships and pathways into career positions. One participant completed multiple internships, including a study-abroad experience which he located on his own through his social network. The study parallels Parks-Yancy (2012) and Tate et al.'s (2015) position that career services are underutilized by FGS and Black students in general, with this finding being even more so among underrepresented groups.

Implications

Several factors impact the continued gap in persistence and the career pursuits of FG Black men relative to their CG White peers. Even with focused attention and resources devoted to systemic disparities of FG Black students, their persistence rates over the past 30 years have remained largely unchanged (Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Tate et al., 2015; U.S. Census Bureau. 2020). Black men are a group that is often seen as most destined for failure in the United States, and in effort to improve persistence rates, and subsequently close economic gaps between them and their CG White peers, it is imperative that we understand the activities, engagements, and relationships germane to the experiences of FG Black men who have been successful in the college-to-career journey.

Lesser Impact of Systemic Barriers

Through participants' recounts, the researcher found persistence and career success were less impacted by systemic barriers of race, failed family support systems, financial instability, or childhood traumas when students engaged with mentors of similar social and cultural affiliations. Networks of Black faculty, staff, and professional organization mentors created a sense of belonging by providing guidance and exposing students to professionals in their desired career industries. This finding implies that while acknowledging, supporting, and continuing efforts toward closing the gaps felt by racial and financial disparities remains important, these gaps may be best bridged through culturally aligned support systems.

Career Services Sought Elsewhere

Contrary to prior research which suggested FGS do not have an appreciation of the need to take advantage of campus supports such as career services and participate in HIPs (Miller et al., 2018), 70% of the participants indicated an awareness of career services available to them and the importance of engaging in some form of HIP as an advantage for college-to-career transition. However, many of the services provided within campus career offices (resume preparation, interview preparation, internship, apprenticeship, job site tours, and job shadow opportunities) were brought directly to them through professional or cultural groups the students easily identified with and felt supported. This finding suggested career services office would support more Black students through a broader engagement and intentional partnerships with culturally aligned professional organization, including the Greek networks of fraternities and sororities.

Intentional Intersection of Services and Culture

Potentially, college career offices could support more Black students by intentionally partnering with these student groups to bring services directly to students in circles of trust. Additionally, career and industry exposures through job shadowing and job site tours could be introduced and led by Black professionals with whom students relate for an ongoing mentoring relationship. Further, in alignment with the socioeconomic status of most FGS students, which indicates the median incomes of these families are less than half that of their continuing generation peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), there is an opportunity to use financial aid data to create targeted career support campaigns for this student population featuring people of color in sustainable wage ($< \$50,000$ annual salaries) career roles.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Participants of the study were confined to individuals no more than 10 years post-degree as the researcher was concerned about the participants' ability to accurately recall their experiences beyond this timeframe. The research window was limited to approximately ten weeks; therefore, the case study research model was deliberately chosen by the researcher to gather as much information as possible in a brief period, and with minimal intrusion to the participants.

Limitations

Several limitations to the design of this research should be acknowledged. The research was conducted with participants engaged via convenience sampling, which opened the study up to two-year and four-year college graduates and individuals who had

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military experience before starting their college careers. The variation in age and life experiences may have influenced the activities, experiences, and relationships and thus the college persistence, career trajectory, and outcomes. It is also important to recognize the length of time taken for each participant to complete his degrees and enter his career varied. The participants pursued different majors and sought out different career paths. And, because the current study was limited to ten, male cases, the findings may not be generalizable across Black FGS.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research could be expanded upon by changing the setting from a Midwest, suburban area to a larger urban area with a larger population of Black residents. This change could impact the participant pool overall and, therefore, may reveal different student experiences. Also, a narrower scope including only FGS who graduated from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) would provide additional insight on the impact of Black faculty and staff on persistence and career transition, as 96 % of U.S., tenured Black faculty are employed at these institutions (Strauss, 2015) while only 8% percent of tenured faculty in predominately white degree-granting post-secondary institutions are Black or African American (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Further, an expanded study to include FG Black women would offer additional insight into how the experiences vary between genders, if at all. Finally, the structure of this study represents a static snapshot of career outcomes of an exceedingly small group of participants, which may not be generalizable to all FG Black, men. A quantitative, longitudinal study with a larger group may reveal additional themes related to the activities, experiences, and relationships that impacted career success, over time.

Additional research focusing on an expansion of populations and a more granular scope of institutions (HBCUs only) may inform future student-focused programs, campus staff training, and career preparation services colleges and universities can implement or expand to support increased FGS career success.

Summary

The current study examined the activities, experiences, and relationships of FG Black college men who successfully navigated through college and were able to transition into their career fields of choice. A review of the literature revealed a deficit-focused framework within mostly quantitative studies, focused on the challenges and barriers that historically plague the group. Prior research pointed to continued gaps in persistency and graduation rates among FG students compared to their CG peers, even given available support programs across campus services. Some studies suggest that FGS are not willing to leave and expand their networks beyond their familiar nucleus. The current study went beyond the quantitative data, to hear from members of this population who were successful in their college-to-career journey and found that support programs and services are, in fact, important to this group. The findings of this study suggest a clear need for those programs to be administered or facilitated by individuals of similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. This group relies heavily on social and cultural capital as currency to build or become enveloped by support structures that foster mentorships, academic achievement, and career pipelines. The current study aligns with Bourdieu (1986) in that higher education institutions create space for FGS to develop social and cultural capital. However, the implication for higher education institutions is that they must also consider the support personnel used to connect with FGS, in that they

must first address FGS cultural sense of belonging to establish a nucleus of trust. Within these spaces, the FGS exercises a sense of agency to move forward academically and professionally.

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Appendix A

Participant Interview Questions

1. How do you define success? Do you consider yourself to be successful? Why or why

   not?

2. What does it mean to you to be a college educated Black man?

3. What did or does it mean to you to be a first-generation student?

a. What did / does it mean to your family or community?

4. What community or social groups were you involved with in college? How did they align

   with or support the development of your social or cultural capital? This study

   operationally defines social capital as networks and connections, which may also be

   converted to economic capital, under certain conditions, in the form of status. Cultural

   capital, similarly, will be operationally defined as an accumulation of cultural knowledge,

   skills, and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society.

5. What resources, such as mentoring, peer-to-peer groups, religious affiliations, or cultural

   clubs, were available to you as a first-generation student while you were on campus?

   These might include Greek organizations, intermural or organized sports.

a. If you participated with these types of programs, did which ones did you find helpful to

   being able to persist through college?

6. What family dynamics and relationships did you have that may have helped you identify

   career pathways? Describe those relationships.

7. At what point during your time in college were you introduced to social, cultural, and

   career programs to assist in your college to career transition? For example, a social

   program would include groups or clubs centered around shared interest in business or

community service. Career programs would include formal programs such as internships, service-learning events, or job shadow, job site visits, apprenticeships, and study abroad programs.

8. Describe your engagement with career services as an on-campus resource:

a. What high-impact practices (internship, apprenticeship, capstone, volunteering, study abroad trips, etc.) were made available to you? What were the outcomes?

b. If you participated in HIPs through career services during college, to what extent did these HIPs impact your transition, from college to career? Would you consider the impact as positive, negative, or other? Please explain.

c. If you did not engage with the career services programs on campus, what were the barriers or reasons?

9. What experience did you have that allowed you to use resources within your social, cultural or racial circles to advance your career? To what extent do you feel these experiences impacted your ability to transition from college to career?