REFLECTING TO UNDERSTAND DIRECTING ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS
IN THE LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN THAT CAN DIRECT
YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES TOWARD SUCCESS

by

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B.A. (Morehouse College) 1994
M.A. (John F. Kennedy University) 2005

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice
California State University, East Bay
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Abstract

Young African American males are experiencing disconnectedness from the educational system. The emergence of disconnectedness is extrapolated from the disproportionate numbers of expulsions and suspensions of young African American males as compared to other ethnicities; through academic underachievement as measured by grades and standardized test scores and through external factors hindering their educational and life success. This qualitative study is grounded within the conceptual framework of student engagement, African American male achievement, and resiliency. This research identified elements of success in the lives of African American men that can direct young African American males toward success in their lives. This study was conducted with several African American men in an effort to uncover elements in their lives that propelled them toward success. The findings uncovered the importance of mentoring, self-agency, social capital, and spirituality. One major insight garnered from the research is that it will take a collaborative effort from all stakeholders in the lives of young African American males if we expect them to succeed. The findings from the study will be shared with district leaders and the community in an effort to support young African American males as they matriculate through the educational system. The findings further suggest the need to implement effective and targeted instructional programs that encompass a great amount of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and group learning activities to support the English development of ELLs.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me the strength to continue on during this process when I felt like giving up. When I did not feel like giving up, but I felt like taking an extended break, I would like to thank the love of my life, my wife, Shanté, for inspiring me to stick with it and to believe in myself and the God-given abilities to complete this dissertation. I am truly a blessed man. You are my lovely missing rib. You complete me. To my children, Sacari, DJ, and Imani you all have been inspiring as well as the inspiration to complete this dissertation - I desire to be the father God has called me to be in your lives. I love all of you and may God continue to pour out his blessings on all of you in your future endeavors. Family, I love you with the love of the Lord.

As the baby boy of Andrew and Dolores Lockwood, who have gone on to be with the Lord, I could not have arrived at this place if it were not for you. You introduced me to religion, but you encouraged me to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. There are not too many days that go by that I do not think of your words of wisdom, your encouragement, or your humorous sayings that have kept me grounded. Thank you. To my brothers: Ron, deceased, Daryl, Stan, and to my sisters: Ann, Marva, and Gail you have all been there for me and I appreciate your love and support.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Dr. López, my dissertation chair, who has worked very hard to ensure my success not only on my dissertation, but also throughout my academic journey at California State University, East Bay. Thank you so much for all your patience, encouragement, and words of wisdom throughout the years. I could not have done it without all your support. And to Dr. Matais, Dr. Bowers, and Dr.
Rogers-Ard you all have been invaluable in the completion of this dissertation; I thank you all for your support and encouragement during this process. I would like to thank my cohort for the laughs, the cries, and the intellectual stimuli that allowed us to complete this educational journey and onward to fight for social justice.

I would like to thank the participants in this study. I am so inspired by your dedication to your work, your willingness, and your openness to share. Thank you.
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FOREWORD

In many ways, my journey reflects the voice and the lives of the young men that did not speak in this study, but their lives and the inequalities and the injustices they face on a daily basis have drawn us to this research.

I started out this process full of ambition, full of passion, and full of joy. However, there were days that I did not feel like going to class, there were days that I did not feel like doing the assignments, there were days that I wanted to quit and give up, and there were days when I had to look in the mirror. Some days the mirror was cracked and distorted and the image was unclear and I could not see which way to go because every crack led me to a disconnected place.

Family: While I had a supportive family, at many times family could not understand the pain and the stress I was experiencing.

Mentor: While I had a mentor that has gone through this journey, they could only take me so far.

Social Capital: While I have been exposed to some of the best teachers and read some of the most influential writers to prepare me, they could not write the story for me.

Spirituality: While I was connected and inspired by God to continue on I developed a deeper sense of resiliency that drove me beyond the pain, beyond the days I did not feel like doing it, beyond the disconnectedness, but I arrived at the ledge of this journey, and I had to rely on the God-given faith to give me the strength to complete the process.

I learned that coming into this study I had some preconceived notions, but as time progressed, those notions have become less of a driving force and have subsided into information that serve the purpose of guiding and ways to help me to understand
to become more thoughtful and reflective in my practice. While the research and data
gathered are pointed, I understand that the information coming from only five participants
is only a thumbnail of a snapshot. As a result, the information is not going to solve the
problems as they relate to young African American males and equal success, but the
data can be used to help teachers, administrators, and the like to reflect on their practices
to help young African American males to succeed. I learned that surprises are only
discovered when one looks deeply.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Challenges Facing Young African American Males

David Purpel (1989) purported that the ideals of community, compassion, and interdependence are rooted in a faith in the human capacity to cultivate, nourish, and develop. I entered the teaching profession in 1999. Being one of a few African American male teachers on the school site, I received encouragement and support from “seasoned” African American male teachers who inspired me to believe that I am needed in the field of education. I entered a doctoral program in June 2009 after 10 years in the profession; I have observed the disconnectedness of young African American males toward education. Roderick (2003) found that the disconnect between Black boys and a caring school was most acute when they transition from smaller, attentive middle schools to larger, anonymous high schools.

I have wondered about the ontological perspective – Are there missing components hindering the personal and educational lives of young African American males? How are some young African American males succeeding, while some are not? Martinez (2009) asked the question what is real in the universe? Or in the case of this study, what is real in the lives of African American men that can direct young African American males that may help them overcome a disconnect in their academic development and in their personal lives.

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) reported that during adolescence, children suffer from psychosocial immaturity. This
research was also supported by evidence from developmental neuroscience indicating that the brain structures of adolescents were less well developed than previously thought (Sowell, Trauner, Gamst, & Jernigan, 2002). Further findings from the field of developmental neuroscience indicated that if a particular structure of the brain was still immature, then the functions that it governs would also show immaturity (Baird & Fugelsang, 2004; Luna & Sweeney, 2004); that is, adolescents were more likely to take greater risks and to reason less adequately about the consequences of their behavior.

Furthermore, a cursory examination of academic performance and social behavior among young African American males in PK-12 institutions show us there is a disconnect between young African American males and the educational system. A burgeoning area of sociological and educational scholarship called “resistance theory” has noted that African American students may employ “right to respect” coping strategies (Spencer, 2001, p. 22). This research suggested that when young African American males did not feel a sense of caring or nurturing from the adults in the institutions, they would resort to respecting those who respected them. The strong stance of resistance employed by African American students prompted many school districts to implement a “zero tolerance” policy. According to the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) “Zero tolerance” in its conception implies one-way communication or domination - one powerful group, or alliance of dominant social and political actors, sets the stage for “appropriate” ways of seeing, feeling, being, thinking, acting, and relating in public spaces, namely public schools. Consequently, zero tolerance in its execution defines and polices the parameters of permissible behaviors; it answers the “Questions of who belongs where, what categories mean, and what effect they have on people’s life chances and opportunities” (Lewis, 2003, p. 285).

In a report, Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools 1996-1997, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1998) surveyed a nationally
representative sample of 1,234 school principals or disciplinarians at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. When these principals were asked to list what they considered serious or moderate problems in their schools, the most frequently cited problems at all levels were the less violent behaviors such as tardiness (40%), absenteeism (25%), and physical conflicts between students (21%). The critical incidents that were typically the focus of school safety debates were reported to be at least “a moderate problem” only relatively infrequently: drug use (9%), gangs (5%), possession of weapons (2%), and physical abuse of teachers (2%). The NCES report found that violent crimes occurred at an annual rate of only 53 per 100,000 students (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Therefore, school district governing boards adopted zero tolerance policies to send a get-tough message to the community that violent behavior, incidents, and crime would not be tolerated. Zero tolerance policies assumed that removing students who engaged in disruptive behavior would deter others from disruption and create an improved climate for those students who remain (Ewing, 2000). The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) discovered that emerging professional opinion, qualitative research findings, and substantive empirical literature from social psychology suggested that the disproportionate discipline of students of color may be due to lack of teacher preparation in classroom management (Vavrus & Cole, 2002), lack of training in culturally competent practices (Ferguson, 2001; Townsend, 2000), or racial stereotypes (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Graham & Lowery, 2004). The following reasons were listed for suspension in order of frequency: defiance of authority, failing to attend assigned detentions or other consequences, disruptive behavior, attendance or tardiness problems, fighting, swearing, vandalizing school property, theft, and leaving school without permission (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Therefore, instead of suspensions serving as a means to enhance school safety, its greatest
use is for non-violent disruptive behaviors. As Mark Soler, Executive Director of the Center for Children’s Law and Policy noted, “the pathway from school to prison for African American males not only contributes to their high incarceration rates but also to their inability to support themselves outside of the underground economy and to be[ing] good fathers and husbands” (as cited in Fuentes, 2003, p. 20). Another sphere of the issue includes academic performance.

The underachievement in academic performance of young African American males, as indicated by test scores and the disproportionate number of suspensions among ethnic minority youth, compared to Caucasian youth, is a well documented and a pervasive problem in contemporary American public schools (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2005). In one of the earliest explorations of evidence concerning school suspension, the Children’s Defense Fund (1975) studied national data on school discipline provided by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and reported rates of school suspension for Black students that exceeded White students on a variety of measures. Rates of suspension for Black students were between two and three times higher than suspension rates for White students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. While 29 states suspended over 5% of their total Black enrollment, only four states suspended 5% or more of White students. Research suggests there is a direct connection between academic performance and academic time in the seats. In a 1999–2000 national survey, approximately 10% of teachers reported that a student had threatened them with injury in the past 12 months (NCES, 2005) and a majority of public schools had at least occasional problems with verbal abuse or acts of disrespect toward teachers (NCES, 2000). Whether labeled as a behavior problem or tracked into lower-level classes (Watts & Erevelles, 2004), referred students can miss instructional time (Scott & Barrett, 2004), develop a negative academic identity (Townsend, 2000), become truant (Newcomb et al.,
2002), or eventually drop out of school (Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000). The negative impact of suspension from class should not be underestimated.

**Statement of the Problem**

“These are all our children and we will benefit by or pay for what they become.” – James Baldwin (Baldwin, 2014, p. 1).

Young African American men are experiencing disconnectedness toward education that is impacting their educational and personal development. Researchers have extensively examined the issues of disconnectedness between young African American males and their educational development and social progress (Hopkins, 1997; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Polite & Davis, 1999; Price, 2000). Noguera (2003) documented African American males led the nation in homicides, both as victims and perpetrators (Skolnick & Currie, 1994). In what observers regard as an alarming trend, African American males have the fastest growing rate for suicide (National Research Council, 1989; Poussaint & Alexander, 2000). Incarceration, conviction, and arrest rates have been at the top of the charts in most states for some time (Roper, 1991; Skolnick & Currie, 1994).

Black males have the highest probability of dying in the first year of life (Auerbach, Krimgold, & Lefkowitz, 2000; National Research Council, 1989) and as they grow older they face the unfortunate reality of being the only group in the United States experiencing a decline in life expectancy (Spivak, Prothrow-Stith, & Hausman, 1988). In the labor market, they are the least likely to be hired, and in many cities, the most likely to be unemployed (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Hacker, 1992; Massey & Denton, 1993; Moss & Tilly, 1995; Wilson, 1987).
Noguera (2003) wrote because of the broad array of difficulties confronting young African American males is overwhelming, it is surprising when young African American males are performing well academically in spite of their situations. He further posited that scholars and researchers commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995). There is considerable evidence that the ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of students have bearing on how students are perceived and treated by the adults who work with them within schools (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995). Patton (1995) and Price (2000) stressed that the African American male schooling experience is characterized by low achievement rates, curriculum inequities, and tracking practices. What is less understood is how environmental and cultural forces influence the way in which Black males come to perceive schooling and how those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school (Noguera, 2003). Coleman et al. (1966) wrote that it is not surprising that there is a connection between the educational performance of African American males and the hardships they endure within the larger society.

The advent of high stakes testing has created stressful and pressure packed school atmospheres and caused teachers to set high standards in learning and conduct. Could it be that excelling on an exam is the last thought in the mind of a young African American male who is facing extreme pressure outside of school? In the best case, districts implement relevant and rigorous curriculum, teachers design meaningful and engaging pedagogy, and school sites develop professional learning communities among staff and create personalized learning environments. However, in other cases, the learning environment is not accessible or engaging to students who have disconnected from school.
Summary

The literature purporting the disproportionate discipline of young African American males is clear and the discussion from a policy level raises the question of inequality. The research suggests that there is a correlation between the disproportionate discipline data and academic performance. The impact results in the potential underachievement of young African American males. Society has become experts in predicting who will fail and succeed by looking at behavior, grades, and standardized testing data. Moving from the “what” to the “now this is what we are going to do about it” is the next step needed to overcome the disconnectedness of young African American males toward education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify elements of success in the lives of African American men that can direct young African American males toward success in their lives. This study is grounded in three theoretical frameworks: student engagement, African American male achievement, and resiliency.

Theoretical Framework

Student engagement

This literature uncovered the impact positive inputs from teachers and the direct impact teachers can have in the academic and social development of young African American males. This literature revealed several variables in which to identify student
engagement. Simons-Morton and Crump (2003) examined student academic motivation by asking if students pay attention in class, take school seriously, and want to do well academically. Manlove (1998) measured school engagement as the number of hours spent doing homework, grades, and test scores. Ryan and Patrick (2001) examined two dimensions within student engagement: self-regulated learning and disruptive behavior. Self-regulated learning contains items about student awareness of understanding their schoolwork and whether students check their work. Disruptive behavior consists of questions about the extent to which students disturb class, annoy the teacher, and do not follow directions. For Finn (1993), school engagement included academic participation and identification with school. Academic participation measured attendance, students arriving in class prepared, absences/tardies, teacher report of student withdrawal and lack of compliance, and number of office visits for misbehavior.

**African American male student achievement**

This literature examined the specific nature of the perceptions and expectations that are held toward young African American males and how these may in turn affect their performance within schools. The phenomenon of African American male student achievement is situated in the achievement data associated with standardized tests, grades, discipline data, and graduation rates. Studies have examined the academic achievement of African American males. Hernstein and Murray (1994), McWhorter (2000), and Ogbu (1990) focused on deficit models: educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation and academic underperformance, and disengagement. From the work of Conchas and Noguera (2004) has emerged how environmental and cultural forces, both within and outside of school, influenced the aspirations and goals of Black male students to achieve academically. Along these same lines Harper (2012) examined several anti-deficit achievement dimensions ranging
from familial factors to enriching educational experiences to illuminate the importance of looking at achievement rather than failure. He denoted experiences of Black male students in higher education as they navigate through racial hardships.

**Resiliency**

This body of research, which is discussed in the literature review section, seeks to determine why some people succeed despite their circumstances. Resilience refers to the ability of a person to spring back, rebound, or recoil (Garmezy, 1991) and involves the capacity to respond and endure, or develop and master in spite of life stressors or adversity.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

How do we begin to address the arduous task of disconnectedness young African American males experience in education and in life? The purpose of this literature review is to examine factors that may affect the lives of young African American males that hinder or contribute to their success. This literature review will examine the disconnectedness. By disconnectedness I mean those factors or situations that face young African American males that can hinder or cause them to lose focus on achieving their goals in life. The disconnectedness facing young African American males is occurring on two fronts: external and internal dynamics. The external dynamic factors confronting young African American males, such as meaningful, caring, and nurturing relationships with adults (teachers and mentors), will be examined. It is the intent of this examination to uncover whether these relationships can impact young African American males and assist them in overcoming disconnectedness in school and in life. In addition to looking at relationships, the literature will look to explore the racial socialization issues attached to these relationships. The internal dynamics factors will look at the inner resolve within young African American males to achieve success. Understanding these factors may lead to developing young African American men who are equipped with the skill set to navigate the educational system and empower them to make contributions to society.

While there are many aspects in the lives of young African American males that can be judged as a success or failure, their educational achievement is paramount if they
are going to compete in the larger context of society. It is important for schools systems to understand the hindrances to school success. The development of policies, programs, and professional development based on this understanding can provide more successful approaches to address the low achievement of African American males.

**Teacher Support**

Classroom teachers work most closely with students and play an important role in impacting their learning outcomes. Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings (2010) examined the persistent failure of African American male students and they uncovered data consistent with the work of Tettegah (1996) where prejudicial attitudes based on racism and ethnocentrism can affect the relationship between teachers and students in much the same way it affects counselor and client relationships. Tettegah’s (1996) research suggested that the impact between the teacher’s attitude toward racial identity and their behavior toward students can have either a negative or a positive effect on student’s self-esteem, ability to learn, and subsequent academic achievement.

Quigley (2013) discovered those adolescent Black males who make meaning of their social and schooling experiences affects the development of their identities. Kunjufu (1984) in his seminal work asserted that the most important factor in student performance was not socioeconomic standing, not the home environment, not the school per-pupil expenditure … the most important factor was teacher/parent expectations. Kunjufu (1984) and Comer (1980) concluded that teachers must expect, encourage, and promote excellence among all children regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Teacher support of students has been defined slightly different by various researchers (e.g., Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Goodenow, 1993; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Midley, Feldaeger,
& Eccles, 1989; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), but it generally involves characteristics such as caring, friendliness, understanding, dedication, and dependability. According to Ryan and Patrick (2001) teacher support refers to the extent to which students believe teachers value and establish personal relationships with them.

Perceived teacher support was linked to students’ achievement motivation when students have connected with their teacher and believe they were supportive. This type of interaction resulted in a higher report of interest and enjoyment in the student’s schoolwork (Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Goodenow, 1993; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Midgley et al., 1989; Schunk et al., 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), a more positive academic self-concept (Felner, Aber, Primavera, & Cauce, 1985), and greater expectancies for success in the classroom (Goodenow, 1993). Midgley, Feldauger, and Eccles (1989) found that non-parental adults were especially important as role models and sources of support during adolescence. Midgley et al. (1989) and Klem and Connell (2004) also posited that teacher support had a stronger effect on students’ motivational beliefs during junior high school compared to elementary school.

Investigators in the field of educational research have focused on teachers’ differential attitudes toward students without using race or ethnicity as variables (Brophy & Evertson, 1981; Brown, Harris, & Harnett, 2012; Cooper & Good, 1983; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Willis & Brophy, 1974). Researchers in the field of counseling psychology have maintained that racial identity is embedded in one’s consciousness and value system, the latter of which is socially developed (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993; Atkinson & Thompson, 1992; Carter, 1990; Pedersen, Fukuyama, & Heath, 1989; Phinney, 1990; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995). In turn, they contend, one’s racial identity affects the development of racial attitudes toward oneself and others. While this research supports the importance of teachers being conscious of
their attitudes toward race and focused on building a supportive relationship with their students irrespective of race, this research further implies that teachers will become better educators when they embrace the cultural differences of their students.

Racial Socialization

The socialization processes that promote racial identity development may contribute to educators understanding cultural differences in the education of African American adolescents (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2002; Sherrod, 1997; Stevenson, 1995). One theory is that the struggles of African American young men are represented in the “negative” behaviors expressed in the classroom, in the quad, and at lunch because they have difficulty understanding and coping with interracial and within-ethnicity conflict (Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). This research could suggest that these negative behaviors impact the disconnectedness toward education.

Some young African American males are faced with overcoming negative behaviors in the classroom that are either self-imposed or placed on them due to external factors. Stevenson and Arrington (2009) found that racism experience was defined as the individual’s exposure to perceived acts of discrimination as a function of one’s racial difference. In the case of young African American males, uncovering these processes is crucial as investigators increasingly look to racial identity to explain why racism may or may not hinder one’s psychological well being (Jones, 1998; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Cross (1991) and Delpit (1995) found that providing information about the centrality of racial identity has the potential for providing young people with a framework to identify, evaluate, and buffer the meaning and detrimental effects of racial tension within varied social interactions both in and outside of school. This approach to educating “minority” students addresses to some degree the onus of responsibility for changing the
racialized culture of mainstream education. Socialization processes generally place the stress and tension of change on the student, not the mainstream educator. However, when confronting this issue both sides must address the issue if the culture and climate of a school is to change.

Coping with racial stress and tension presents a very significant challenge and reshapes the culture and climate of schools that are predominantly White (Datnow & Cooper, 1997) or racially diverse (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004) in population. Racial socialization by parents would involve a set of strategies ranging from cultural pride to racism awareness to protect the emotional lives of Black youth, especially in environments where Black youth are in the distinct minority (Tatum, 1997). Children benefit academically, behaviorally, and cognitively when parents are explicit in teaching them to prepare for racial hostilities and to be proud of their culture (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Caughy, O’Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) contributed to the work of Gregory (1996) and Shaw and Braden (1990) that ethnic minority adolescent boys, particularly young African American males, were more likely to be the recipients of harsh school disciplinary practices, like suspensions and expulsion. In an observation of African American men, Payne (2008) noted that they would speak loudly to policy makers and other government officials. This could suggest why young African American males were more likely to talk back to a teacher or administrator when they felt they had been either threatened or challenged in an uncomfortable way. Payne (2008) identified a conscientious thought to help educators to close the gap of disconnectedness between young African American men. Payne (2008) posited that it is imperative to respectfully breach the physical spaces of Black men.

A gap therefore often exists between students’ personal and school-based identities; often it is this gap rather than their intelligence, skills, or abilities that must be reconciled in order for young African American males to succeed in school (Klos,
Faircloth and Hamm (2005) found that belonging completely accounted for the relationship between traditional motivational variables and academic success for African American students. Faircloth and Hamm’s research suggested that students were more successful in school when they felt that teachers’ value, appreciate, and care about them as individuals.

Lee (2007) found that children and adolescents bring to school important perspectives from their lives beyond school and that it was the responsibility of teachers and schools to understand those resources and how they might relate to the demands placed on students by school-based learning. Lee (2007) suggested that through a process referred to as cultural modeling, schools design learning experiences and environments in ways that bridge the differences between students’ outside-of-class and school-based values, skills, and norms. The pressure for African American males to conform to those values is strong. According to Bentley, Adams, and Stevenson (2009), the adolescent perspective on racial socialization recognized that although parents may provide race-related childrearing messages, children and youth mutually are active agents who filter what they hear and then eventually endorse, reject, and express their interpretations of those messages through identity, behavior, and style.

Although this research implies that teachers can strengthen students’ socialization to mainstream schooling experiences, understanding socialization may not be enough to reconnect young African American males to school. This research further implies that the involvement of parents and other adults outside of school can play an important role in providing young African American males with the necessary resources to reframe their schooling experience.
Social Capital

According to King and Furrow (2004) social capital theory provides a conceptual model for understanding how positive outcomes are mediated in a social context through interpersonal, associational, and cultural social ties. Bourdieu (1985) defined social capital as the actual and potential resources that an individual has access to through a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition. Social capital is different from human capital in that the latter refers to the skills and knowledge an individual or group possesses and brings into the labor market (Smylie & Weaver Hart, 1999). Social capital is also different from cultural capital because the latter refers to cultural markers an individual or group ascribes to or is associated with. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), associations are mediated by class structures, which, in turn, frame the relationships that give form and content to capital accumulation—both social and cultural.

Coleman (1988) applied social capital theory to a study of educational outcomes for youths. Coleman (1988) argued that benefits are socially embedded and that these benefits are mediated by social capital. In juxtaposition to the benefits associated with social capital, Giddens (1991) discussed the relationship between social structure and self to a concept of ‘fateful moments.’ This concept referred to times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands at a crossroads in their existence or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences (p. 113). Giddens (1991) further explained that at such times, the individual concerned makes a risk assessment, part of which involves undertaking identity and drawing on a number of expert resources.

Further findings (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995) support the generalization of social capital theory to adolescent development and demonstrate how parents mediate social capital to their
children. It was further reported that youths with greater and deeper social ties within the family (and outside the family as well) reported higher levels of academic achievement, self-competence, psychological adjustment, pro-social involvement, and decreased rates of problem behavior. It was further found that religious affiliation functions as a protective factor against delinquent behavior (King & Benson, 2005; Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Among African American youths, Fegley, Seaton, and Gaskins (2002) found that religious participation was related to a positive self-concept and that religious values were associated with better coping and a more positive future orientation. King and Furrow (2004) argued that religion might contribute to moral outcomes and that an examination of the social influences represented in religious involvement to examine how the relational resources mediate religion’s influence on adolescent moral behavior.

Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) argued for three dimensions of social capital - cognitive, relational, and structural. The cognitive dimension of social capital is characterized by involving a shared vision or a shared code or paradigm that facilitates common understanding of collective goals and expectations for acting in a social system (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). The relational dimension is characterized by the notion that trust describes the quality of a relationship and is the primary construct in the assessment of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995; Morrow, 1999; Putman, 1995; Rahn & Transue, 1998; Romer, Jamieson, & Pasek, 2009). The structural aspect of social capital pertains to social interaction and is concerned with the location and frequency of contacts in the social structure.

Bourne, Bridges, and Searle (1994) and Cohen, Hughes, Ashworth, and Blair (1994) and Blair, Eden, and Harris (2002) found that the majority of excluded children came from difficult home backgrounds. Although it did not seem as if the young people’s family background played a significant role in their behavior at school, the perceptions of the young people, on the basis of their family background, were that they had been
stigmatized by the teachers and schools. This research suggested young African American males had within them the ability to persevere, but connection with resources to enhance their chances of academic and life achievements could be a factor in future success.

While this research suggests how social capital and the role of positive adult relationships can impact the educational and moral development of young African American males, it is equally important that young African American males develop the inner resolve to overcome difficult situations.

**Resilience**

Resilience typically refers to the tendency to spring back, rebound, or recoil (Garmezy, 1991) and involves the capacity to respond and endure, or develop and master in spite of life stressors or adversity. Garmezy (1983), in his seminal work on resiliency, identified a wide array of individual characteristics of resilient students in high poverty areas who succeeded despite their disadvantaged circumstances.

- Positive peer and adult interactions
- Low degrees of defensiveness and aggressiveness and high degrees of cooperation, participation, and emotional stability (teachers’ ratings)
- A positive sense of self
- A sense of personal power rather than powerlessness
- An internal locus of control (a belief that they are capable of exercising a degree of control over their environment). (Garmezy, 1983, pp. 43-84)

In addition to the above characteristics, resilient children also tend to have parents who are concerned with their children’s education, who participate in that education, who direct their children’s everyday tasks, and who are aware of their children’s interests and goals (Winfield, 1994). An intact family was not an identifiable, consistent correlate
In developing a framework on resilience, major areas for potential intervention were identified. These areas included policy, the school, the classroom, and the community.

Rutter (1987) identified four major protective processes and created a matrix as a tool in looking at practices and programs in each of these areas (policy, school, classroom, and community) that support one or more of the four protective processes. Rutter’s (1987) four major protective processes that foster resilience are:

1. Reducing negative outcomes by altering the risk or child’s exposure to the risk.
2. Reducing negative chain reaction following risk exposure.
3. Establishing and maintaining self-esteem and self-efficacy.
4. Opening up opportunities. (pp. 181-214)

Masten (1994) posited that resilience is contextual, and since development is individual, some people are going to be better able to adapt to certain conditions than others. He concluded that individuals could be resilient in one context and not resilient in others if conditions change. Terminology associated with resilience theory includes stressors or adversities, risks, assets, vulnerabilities, and protective factors (Masten, 1994). Stressors or risk factors are characteristics that are known to often result in negative outcomes such as drug use, teenage pregnancy, or violent crimes. On the other side of risk factors are assets. However, there are assets whose absence would not constitute a risk (Masten, 1994). Krovetz (1999) found that resilience theory is based on defining the protective factors with the family, school, and community that exist for the successful child or adolescent missing from the family, school, and community of the child or adolescent who later receives intervention (Krovetz, 1999, p. 7). These interventions included factors in the environment or within the individual that can
mediate the effects of risks (Masten, 1994). Krovetz (1999) identified key protective factors as

- A caring environment: at least one adult who knows the child well and cares deeply about the well being of the child.
- Positive expectations: high, clearly articulated expectations for each child and the purposeful support necessary to meet those expectations.
- Participation: meaningful involvement and responsibility. (p. 10)

Marsh and Wolfe (1999) addressed these protective factors in three areas: individual, familial, and extra familial. Marsh and Wolfe (1999) referred to these years as the protective triad and they must work in conjunction with each other in order to increase the likelihood for positive outcomes for children. Wolin (2003) referred to strengths and qualities residing in the individual, but the development of these qualities depended on more than the natural development process. Wolin further identified subcategories of strengths that exist along with weaknesses as seen in Table 1. Furthermore, resilient children assume a positive outlook toward authority and adults (Gupton, 2009; Milgram & Palti, 1993; Werner, 1990). They readily accepted and followed decisions, rules, and recommendations of parents, teachers, and community leaders. Mandleco and Peery (2000) posited that external factors in the proposed organizational framework often are reflected in the nature and quality of relationships established within and outside the family group. Within the family, the home environment, parenting practices, and particular family members are important. Outside the family, certain individuals and resources available in the community are important (Mandleco & Peery, 2000, p. 101).

Mandleco and Peery (2000) indicated that children might not know supportive adults outside their family group or live in an organized, structured home environment. They further put forward that these children still may be resilient, especially if their
parents, siblings, or peers are nurturing and supportive or if their church or school provides positive experiences.

This research suggests a system whereby children are given avenues to understand and establish coping measures to provide them the strategies needed to meet the challenges of their everyday existence. Furthermore, attaining optimal development through a concerted effort with adults will enable them to gain the resiliency needed to succeed in school and life.

While resiliency involves the capacity of one to bounce back from adversity and challenges in life, spirituality empowers one with the strength to overcome the adversity and challenges of life. Studies have indicated that resilience is more dependent on the kinds of experiences an individual has had (Garmezy & Masten, 1991; Sameroff, 1993). External support systems, including the church, can strengthen the resilience of young people and contribute to their long-term success through an understanding of spirituality (Cook, 2000; Ebstyne King & Furrow, 2008).

**Spirituality**

Fegley et al. (2002) found that religious participation was related to a positive self-concept and that religious values were associated with better coping and a more positive future orientation. Dowling et al. (2004) maintained that religion and spirituality were associated with thriving, which is the absence of problem behaviors. Risk-taking problem behaviors that were influenced by religion were reduction in substance abuse, increased participation in abstinence programs, and lower rates of delinquency and violence (Donahue & Benson, 1995; McBride, Mutch, & Chitwood, 1996). The challenge of including a spiritual voice in the educational arena is one that has the potential of
impacting the lives of young African American males and inspiring them to reach greater levels of academic and behavioral success.

**Defining Religiousness and Spirituality**

Love (2001) defines religion as “a shared system of beliefs, principles or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe” (p. 8). Although spirituality is difficult to characterize, Love and Talbot (1999) derived a series of attributes from their synthesis of the literature and proposed that spirituality involves seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one’s locus of centricity (i.e., recognizing concerns beyond oneself); connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and direction; and openness to fostering a relationship with a higher power or center of value that transcends human existence and rational ways of knowing.

Stevenson (2002) expressed that spirituality provides the avenue to avoid worrying about the uncontrollable and to focus instead on what is possible to manage - one’s self-alienation and self-appreciation. Bellah (1985) wrote there has been a collapse of civic virtue in the society around us, a collapse into expressive and competitive individualism, and a loss of integrated vision. Parker (1987) agreed with the value in this line of argument in that it parallels the way society must be renewed by building structures and teaching the content of civic virtue to bind the community together. However, Parker (1987) believed that at the epistemological core of our knowledge and our processes of knowing that our powers for forming or deforming human consciousness are to be found. He further maintained our modes of knowing that shape our souls by the shape of our knowledge frames the belief that the idea of community must ultimately
take root and have impact if it is to reshape the doing of higher education. Many theorists have recently addressed this issue. Bacik (1987) examined the elusiveness of spirituality as “a mystery...that which eludes control, explanation, and logical calculation” (p. 2). Bacik (1987) likened spirituality to a three-dimensional quality in our one-dimension of spirituality. Helminiak (1996) traced the connectedness of religion and spirituality, and refers to two of the earliest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. The historical quest relates not only religious beliefs, but the mind and the soul. According to Helminiak, modern society has become overly reliant upon scientific and technological insights. Challenging us to realize that we must synchronize spirituality with the laws of physics, medicine, and biology, Helminiak felt that spirituality is not necessarily dependent upon religious practices. Helminiak noted, “spirituality [should] relate to the deepest meaning of humanity” (Helminiak, 1996, p. 5). How one feels about spirituality is contingent upon “how [one answers the] question: what is a human being?” (p. 5). Finally, Helminiak offers, spirituality as an authentic self-transcendence of actions which are directed toward truth and goodness. Stevenson (2002) pointed out that young African American males must either change the game of the world’s images or stop playing the games in being trapped by society. Consequently, whether to play or not to play becomes a battle within themselves that reminds them that our weapons of reason are limited and we must rely on something bigger than our intellectual and social skills to manage the world. Therefore, the application of spirituality is crucial as young African American males are facing the pressures of society. Palmer (2003) explicated that a spiritual crisis arises when we find ourselves in the grip of something larger than society’s expectations or the ego’s needs - do we follow the soul’s calling, or do we bend to the forces of deformation around us and within us?

Spiritual persons follow an essence of inner self guidance, a conscience, a drive from the deepest self. True self identity is a spiritual reality. Accordingly, spirituality is
faith, regardless of one’s religious orientation, it is faith in humanity, and it is present in all persons. Although obvious in many religious leaders, modern theorists now contend that spirituality is inherent in the everyman, regardless of social, political, or religious beliefs (Adler, 1905; Bacik, 1987; Helminiak, 1996; Underhill, 1993). Spiritual persons have been characterized as wise, truthful, honest, and moral. Spiritually influenced persons allow triumph of good over evil. Spiritual persons act with conviction and courage in the face of adversity.

When attempting to trace this quality, it appears that the core of one’s spirituality seems to come from within, transcending formal, covert teaching and appearing as an intuitive personal quality (Adler, 1905; Berdyaev, 1953; Covey, 1970; Helminiak, 1996; Spears, 1994). While the research suggests that spirituality is an important element in the development of an individual, motivation is also an important element.

**Motivation and Self-Esteem**

The Latin root of the word “motivation” means “to move”; hence, in this basic sense the study of motivation is the “inner or social stimulus for an action” (Motivation, n.d). According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), modern theories of motivation focused more specifically on the relation of beliefs, values, and goals with action. When the conversation of motivation is placed in the context of young African American males, Kafele (2009) declared that it was easier to motivate young African American males when the adult knew what the male aspired to become. African American males lead the nation in homicides both as victims and perpetrators (Skolnick & Currie, 1994). For the past several years the rates of incarceration, conviction, and arrest have been the most for African American males when compared to other cultures (Roper, 1991; Skolnick & Currie, 1994). In what observers regard as an alarming trend, African American
males now have the fastest growing rate for suicide (National Research Council, 1989; Poussaint & Alexander, 2000). These indicators raise the question of whether external factors are contributing to the lack of motivation and disconnectedness of young African American males to school and life.

Consequently, classrooms are inherently social places; students do not learn in a vacuum, but in concert. Students pursue both social and academic goals in the classroom (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Juvonen & Murdock, 1995; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1993). Furthermore, teachers are more than subject matter specialists. They are the ones who have the responsibility of shaping, impacting, and supporting the development of their students’ lives.

The building of self-esteem within young African American men is an important area of research studied over the last few decades. James (1980) pointed out that people receive feedback from their environments and that this feedback, if attended to, is perceived. He further found that if those perceptions are deemed accurate or valid, they are incorporated into the self-concept, and if that facet of the self-concept is viewed as central or important, the individual is identified with that domain, thus the changes in self-concept will affect the individual’s self-esteem.

Many studies have reported lower correlations between academic achievement and self-esteem among African Americans (Demo & Parker, 1987; Lay & Wakstein, 1985; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972). Hare (1977) found that African American elementary students based their global self-esteem not on schooling but instead primarily on family and home. White students, on the other hand, based their self-esteem primarily on school, and to a lesser extent, on family and peer interactions. Osborne, Major, and Crocker (1992) discovered that the self-esteem of African American college students was less reactive to academic feedback than that of White American collegians, indicating lower levels of identification with academics.
Steele (1992, 1997) argued that although all students experience anxiety in school situations (such as appearing foolish for giving a wrong answer), students who were members of minority groups, for which negative group stereotypes concerning academic ability abound, suffer from additional anxiety. For these individuals, a wrong answer was not only personally damaging but also confirmed the negative group stereotype. Graham, Taylor, and Hudley (1998) focused on achievement-related cognitions, which largely centered on beliefs about (“Can I do it?”), values having to do with desires and preferences (“Do I want it?”), and were more directly concerned with the perceived importance, attractiveness, or usefulness of achievement activities (Feather, 1992; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Values also were rooted in the moral constructs of “ought” and “should” (Rokeach, 1973) as illustrated by the belief that students should try hard in school regardless of their perceived abilities. Inasmuch as values have motivational properties, it might then be argued that many young African American males do poorly in school because they deny the importance, attractiveness, and utility of academic success, or because their life experiences are discrepant with the notion that students ought to feel morally obligated to exert effort in school.

Graham and Weiner (1996) wrote that the dominant theoretical approach of motivation is cast within an expectancy-value framework. That is, motivation is thought to result from some combination of the likelihood that one will achieve a goal (expectancy) and how much that goal is desired or wanted (value). Eccles and Wigfield (1995) defined tasks in terms of their attainment value (the perceived importance of doing well), intrinsic value (how much enjoyment the individual derives from engaging in the task), utility value (how the task relates to future goals), and costs (the undesirable consequences of engaging in a task).

Most of the research guided by this concept has selected particular subject matter domains to examine whether expectancies and task value predict different consequences,
such as course grades and enrollment decisions, or the extent to which expectancies and value are positively or negatively related (Berndt & Miller, 1990; Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Feather, 1988; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Hudley and Graham (2001) found that studies guided by an expectancy-value framework have not been concerned with issues of race and task value or with the broader socio-cultural context in which achievement values emerge, and therefore cannot shed light on the question of whether African American students devalue effort and school success. In addition, Harper (2012) found that students were engaged on their campuses through developing meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom and participating in enriching educational experiences. It was further found that out of class experiences had spillover effects on academic performance.

Explaining why some young African American males devalue education is a difficult task. For example, sociologists have pointed to the opportunity structure in American society as they have argued that economic and social disadvantage has led many Black students to believe that their efforts in school will have relatively little payoff in terms of economic and social mobility (Mickelson, 1990). The perceived barriers imposed by society perpetuates inequality along race and class lines and communicates to young African American males that there is little relationship between their efforts and eventual outcomes. Hudley and Graham (2001) wrote that one consequence of this history is that acceptance of mainstream values about hard work and school success may be perceived as threatening to one’s social identity. Particularly during adolescence, young African American males may adopt oppositional identities whereby they show relative indifference or even disdain toward achievement behaviors that are valued by the larger society.

While this research values the importance of building the self-esteem and motivation within young African American males in hopes of connecting them to
achieving their education, this research implies the notion that acquiring this internal belief cannot be completed in isolation, but in concert with a caring and nurturing adult.

**Mentoring**

This body of literature described the impact of a strong mentoring program on young African American males. Struchen and Porta (1997) defined and discussed the historical impact of mentoring as it related to helping at-risk youth. They found that for many years, parents, practitioners, philosophers, researchers, and policymakers have agreed that every child needs a dependable, consistent, and positive relationship with at least one adult in order to achieve his or her fullest potential in emotional health, academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and vocational knowledge and skills. Struchen and Porta (1997) also found that without a specific structure to recruit, screen, train, and support the mentors and facilitate their meetings with the youth, the projects could not sustain a significant number of effective mentoring relationships.

Levinson (1978) conducted a classic study dealing with mentoring. He described the complexity of the mentoring relationship to be one of the most complex and developmentally important relationships a man can have in early adulthood. He also suggested that the mentor should be several years older, a person of greater experience and seniority in the world then the young man is entering. He defined mentoring in terms of the character of the relationship and the functions it serves. The relationship needs to be examined closely to discover the amount and kind of mentoring it provides.

Freedman (1991) simplified the complexity of mentoring as he introduced three common elements of mentoring. First, mentors foster their protégés’ achievement. Second, mentors act to help nurture their protégés to adulthood by teaching them specific skills. Finally, mentoring relationships are positive, usually intergenerational,
and characterized by the voluntary assumption of responsibility for members of the next
generation. Freedman (1993) discussed that the breakdown in a mentoring relationship
can be difficult for all those involved. After being let down repeatedly, youth are asked to
trust once again. Sometimes a new mentor keeps the youth at arm’s length, does not show
up, or fails to keep other promises. Conversely, mentors plan time with the youth only to
be “stood up.” This underlying tension can inhibit any bond from forming and negative
feelings may develop.

Mentoring programs may have the capability of providing young African
American males who have been struggling to advance socially, personally, and
academically to acquire the social capital needed for them to succeed in school and life.
Flaxman, Ascher, and Harrington (1989) reported that “[p]lanned mentoring . . . can
improve the social chances of ... disadvantaged youth by giving them resources they
might not have had and it can give them some psychosocial support for new behaviors,
attitudes and ambitions” (Flaxman, Ascher, & Harrington, 1989, p. 11).

This research suggests that linking young African American males with a caring
mentor can make an impact on the social and academic development of the young man.
This research places a great emphasis on stable, supportive structures in the lives of
young African American males.

**Family Impact**

Family environment factors such as undereducated parents, living in poverty
(Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; McLoyd, 1998), and living in single-
parent homes (Bankston & Caldas, 1998; Barbarin & Soler, 1993; Heiss, 1996;
Teachman, Day, Paasch, Carver, & Call, 1998) were variables found in the literature that
contributed to the understanding of the influence that family has on African American
achievement. Mandara and Murray (2000) posited that policy and interventions were more likely to succeed if they target family functioning as opposed to demographic factors. Social scientists have sought to quantify the influence of parental involvement on the educational outcomes of secondary school children (Mau, 1997; Shanham & Walberg, 1985).

While Mau (1997) investigated the impact of parent involvement of Asian and White parents on the academic achievement of Asian and White students respectively, Jeynes (2007) analyzed the impact of parental involvement in the outcomes of urban students. Jeynes pointed out that both urban parents and teachers need specific guidance and information to maximize the efficacy of parental involvement. Jeynes (2007) also posited that one of those areas where specific guidance is needed is in parental involvement in helping African American males mature as young men and students.

Cunningham, Swanson, Spencer, and Dupree (2003) examined the relations between physical maturation and youths’ perceptions of their family context and the associated daily stresses experienced. Cunningham et al. (2003) presented the notion on how parents buffer adolescent males who mature early from potential stresses often associated with urban neighborhoods. Further, Spencer (2001) noted that African American parents used gender specific parenting strategies. Spencer (2001) reported that parents were often viewed as providing different socialization experiences for male and female youths, and stated, “Often males are encouraged to be physical and allowed significant independence, whereas females are frequently assisted rather than encouraged toward independence and mastery” (p. 58).

Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling (1992) suggested that peers might influence behaviors of adolescents more than parents during the second decade of life. However, Spencer, Dupree, Swanson, and Cunningham (1996) reported that parental influences on adolescent behaviors remain important during the adolescent years. The
type of influence varies depending on the strategies parents perceive as necessary given their environment and characteristics of the child. Smetana and Gaines (1999), for example, found that parenting strategies and socio-demographic factors (i.e., family income and parental education) predicted the number and intensity of conflicts between parents and their adolescent children among middle class African Americans. Furthermore, McLoyd (1998) posited that family income affects parenting and child outcomes because it sheds light on the additional stressors associated with a lack of resources.

Early studies found that African American parents’ involvement at home and school was positively related to their children’s academic achievement, especially for elementary school-aged boys (Reynolds, 1989, 1992). For instance, a study of almost 1,500 African American children found that parental involvement had direct effects on first grade reading and math achievement and socio-emotional maturity, even after kindergarten math and reading achievement scores, motivation, and SES were considered (Reynolds, 1989). Marcon (1999) found that parent involvement had an important effect on several outcomes for African American children, including overall GPA, math and science scores, verbal ability, work habits, and social development. In addition, he found that African American young men whose parents were not perceived by their teachers to be actively involved were by far the group at greatest risk for underachievement.

Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) found that teachers rated boys less favorably and perceived their parents as participating at home less often as compared with girls. Their research illustrated a sizable effect of parental involvement on African American young men’s achievement, particularly when teachers perceive boys’ parents as being actively involved. Cork (2005) argued that “Black parents feel marginalized and their concerns are often ignored. There is a need for partnership with schools (who) need
to focus on raising standards and look for support from parents, community and Black teachers” (p. 111).

The literature linking parent involvement to student achievement is extensive. There are different types of parenting practices and behaviors associated with positive student outcomes. These include authoritative parenting practices (Baumrind, 1974; Clark, 1983; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Fletcher, Darling, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1995; Hess & McDevitt, 1984; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989); high expectations and aspirations (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, & Ginsberg, 1986); parent-teacher communications, participation in school events or activities, parental assistance at home, and participation in and discussion about learning activities (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Comer, 1980; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Herman & Yeh, 1983); participation in school-level governing or decision making roles (Comer, 1988; Moses, Kamii, Swap, & Howard, 1989); and strong parent social networks or social capital (Coleman, 1988; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). The literature indicated the critical need for schools to establish connections with parents and especially in schools where there is high need.

**Summary**

This chapter has examined the racial and social process that has impacted the development of young African American males. It has looked at how positive external influences in the lives of African American men can impact their academic and their individual development. The chapter concluded with looking at the role of the family in the academic and personal development in the lives of young African American males.

The literature associated negative schooling experiences coupled with negative external influences in the lives of some young African American males as factors
resulting in lost hope and unsuccessful educational outcomes. Two concepts from the work of Thomson’s et al. (2002) critical moments and Yosso’s (2005) aspirational capital sheds light on the transformation from difficult situations to successful ones. Thomson et al. (2002) defined critical moments as how young people react to significant turning points in the process of growing up. Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This research suggests that there are internal motivational drives that propel one to reach levels of success in their lives. While the component that drives or inspires an individual to succeed may be different for each individual, there may be characteristics or factors that are common amongst successful individuals. Therefore, this research sets out to identify the factors in the lives of young African American males that lead them to become disconnected toward education.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed” – Booker T. Washington (Washington, 2014, p. 1).

Introduction

In order to gain an understanding of young African American male student success, I could interview young African American males and look at education from their perspective and listen to their voice and synthesize an understanding of how they overcame obstacles to become successful in education and life. However, it is often difficult to understand how one has overcome and triumphed over a situation while in the middle of the situation. In the end, I would still encounter the disconnect because the young men do not have enough life experiences to draw upon to connect the interrelatedness of their obstacles and their success. The purpose of this research is to uncover elements of success in the lives of African American men that can propel young African American males to reach and maintain academic and personal success that will carry over to their adulthood.

I have been working with youth in multiple contexts through serving as a teacher and an administrator for over a decade. In addition, I have worked with youth in the community for over two decades and it is through these vast experiences that I have witnessed young African American males on a whole underperforming in comparison to
other ethnic groups when it comes to educational outcomes, but they excel in receiving negative attention by way of referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. It is my intention to uncover the resolve embedded within these African American men to inspire young African American males to succeed “against the odds” they face in their lives.

The importance of defining success as it relates to African American males is central to understanding their social identity. According to Nightingale (1987) in his seminal work entitled, *The Strangest Secret*, he defined success as the progressive realization of a worthy ideal. His work suggested that individuals must not only see themselves succeeding, but also have the capacity to articulate how they will succeed. Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2009) indicated that for Black students, success is best defined by a strong sense of connection to the school community; a positive sense of self across contexts, but especially in the school; social and emotional health; and a racial identity that would serve as a resource as they develop, but particularly when students encounter racism. In case studies of successful African American male students, the relationships with significant others in their lives centralized the meaning of academic and life success (Bowser & Perkins, 1991).

**Definition of Success**

For the purpose of this study, success is determined by one’s inner resolve to overcome obstacles – in their mind and in their surroundings to reach a predetermined goal that they can articulate and positively transfer to the lives of others outside of themselves to help them achieve.
Design Framework

Creswell (2003, p. 4) posed three questions that are central to the design of research

1. What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher?
2. What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures?
3. What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?

As appropriate, with a qualitative world view of the issue of “resiliency” and what causes a person to succeed in life against insurmountable odds is fascinating, and in the world of education, resiliency has a definite impact on student learning outcomes. Racism and discrimination play an integral part in creating resiliency or lack thereof; however, there are personal and societal factors that impact the lives of individuals. The study looks to amplify the experienced voice of the informants. Creswell (2003) described this as “providing voice” (p. 10), however, to imply that one person has voice and the other person does not signifies that one party is in a dominant position.

Design and Method

To obtain the voice of African American men and to capture a holistic picture of their experiences of achieved success, the research design’s goals were to identify and study aspects of five participants (a) their experience as an African American man in their professional settings, (b) their motivating factors for their significance, (c) their challenges, struggles, and barriers encountered prior to success, (d) the contributing factors, outside influences, or people involved in their significance, and (e) their impartation to a young man following in their path. The goal was to capture the
individual interpretations, personal achievement, inner resolve, and the connectedness to society.

Due to the nature of this project, the ideal method of data collection was in-depth interviews. In the 1980s there was a considerable growth in using interviewing as a method for educational research and now it is generally agreed that interviewing was a key method of data collection. There are many kinds of interviews. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) listed nine types: structured interview, survey interview, counseling interview, diary interview, life history interview, ethnographic interview, informal/unstructured interview, and conversations. Cohen and Manion (1994) preferred to group interviews into four kinds, including the structured interview, unstructured interview, the non-directive interview, and the focused interview.

A major strength in in-depth interviewing is that it allows the researcher to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee’s point of view or situation and to explore interesting areas for further investigation. The open-ended questioning presented by the researcher and the probing of the participants wherever necessary to obtain data deemed useful will provide insights and knowledge about how these men think about and make sense of the struggles and obstacles they have had to overcome in order to live a life of significance. As Laitin (2002) noted, “If statistics addresses questions of propensities, narratives address questions of process” (p. 631). In other words, using the method of in-depth interviewing would allow me to explore the experiences of these men and how they were leading lives of significance that could be imparted into the lives of young African American males. The information gleaned from these interviews may call attention to variables that should be measured and included in professional development of administrators, teachers, and parents of young African American males to empower them with tools to lead successful educational and personal lives.
A major strength of the proposed study was that it took advantage of the societal issues facing young African American males that have now surfaced in schools and classrooms. The after effects of some of these issues are dropout rates and academic underachievement. Participants in this study will be African American men who have overcome obstacles in spite of the odds facing them and have obtained a life of significance. The researcher seeks to uncover significant factors in the lives of African American men that were impactful and inspiring that can be imparted into the lives of young African American men. The in-depth interviews will provide the researcher with the unique opportunity to uncover such factors to impact the lives of young African American males and guide them to attain success in their educational and personal lives.

**Instrumentation**

The research questions that initiated the research were

1. To what extent were you connected during your secondary education?
2. In what year(s), if any, did you find yourself underachieving in school?
3. What type of impact did the relationship between you and your teacher have on your life?
4. What beliefs, values, and goals caused you to become motivated in school?
5. What resources were afforded to you by your parents or guardian to help you succeed in school?
6. To what extent did the school you attended provide you with resources to become successful?
7. If you had to do it all over again, what would you change about your education?
8. What beliefs, values, and goals caused you to become motivated in your profession?

9. What type of stressors or adversity, if any, did you experience in your profession?

10. What factors, if any, contributed to your desire to become motivated in your profession?

11. To what extent, if any, did someone outside of your family help you succeed in school?

12. To what extent, if any, did someone help you succeed in your profession?

13. To what extent did relationships with those that helped you to become successful impact your character?

14. To what extent did your relationship with those who helped you to become successful build your confidence?

15. If you had to do it all over again, what would you change about your profession?

The instrumentation for this study was interview questions using the previous works developed by Tracy and Sedlacek’s (1984) as a model. The questionnaire used by Sedlacek was modified to be used as an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Tracey and Sedlacek’s (1984) Non-cognitive Questionnaire contains 36 items and measures eight personal non-cognitive factors (a) positive self-concept, (b) realistic self-appraisal, (c) demonstrated community service, (d) knowledge acquired in the field, (e) successful leadership experience, (f) long-range goals, (g) ability to understand and cope with racism, and (h) availability of a strong support person or system.
In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews took place in several California East Bay locations including Richmond, Oakland, Antioch, and in a city outside of the state of California. The in-depth interviews were conducted with five participants and yielded five transcripts.

The project launched in January 2012 with the recruitment of African American men. The participants were selected based on their direct or indirect relationship with the researcher. All of the participants were contacted via phone and e-mail. The participants were identified based on the following shared characteristics: identification as Black or African American, college completion, and professional attainment in either a corporate or a public entity. The research investigation featured only men. Based on the definition of success used in this study that success is determined by one’s inner resolve to overcome obstacles – in their mind and in their surroundings to reach a predetermined goal that they can articulate and positively transfer to the lives of others outside of themselves to help them achieve. Therefore, I looked for men that I have had contact with throughout my life that I thought reflected the definition of success and I felt they would make a positive impact on this study.

The participants were chosen based on personal relationships and referrals of those participating in the study. I have known several of the participants for over 15 years. The participants did not receive monetary compensation for their involvement in the voluntary study. The participant pool consisted of administrators, lawyers, physicians, educators, clergymen, and business and industry professionals. The participant responses suggested that the scope of this study crossed a variety of professional occupations.

The project interviewing was conducted from June 2012 - October 2012. The interviews were used to gather descriptive data about the participants’ interpretive
experiences of their resilience and inspiration to succeed in life despite the struggles or hurdles they encountered. The participants were asked to reflect about their lived experiences, their influences, and their interface with their professional environments.

The researcher used in-depth face-to-face interviews and phone interviews to pose the questions and gather data. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The goal of this process was to document, by field notes and audio recordings, the experiences of the African American men who have attained a level of success in their lives that can be imparted to young African American males as they proceed through their adolescent stage into becoming a young adult. A list of interview questions was constructed and is included in the appendix of this manuscript (see Appendix A).

**Procedure**

Ethnographic research can involve interviews, observations, and text analysis. If the participants agreed to participate, they were given the time, date, and location of the interview. The in-depth face-to-face interviews took place in a location determined by the participant to respect their time for contributing to the study and to identify with their need for comfort and convenience in order to yield the most valuable data possible. The interview took approximately 1 – 3 hours. Telephone conversations, cyber meetings, and electronic communication were used to organize the initial meetings. If necessary, follow up meetings were conducted to clarify responses or when poor audio quality prevented accurate transcription.

All the names of the participants were changed in the manuscript to protect identities and professional affiliations.

Transcription began in the early part of December 2012. Analyses of the transcripts proceeded through February 2013 and December 2013. The data was kept
in an electronic file and physical copies were stored in a safe, secured location as not to disturb the integrity of the data collected. A strict code of confidentiality was adhered to in order to protect participant identities and sensitive information related to the participants. Additional approval from the Internal Review Board (California State University, East Bay) with respect to human subjects was followed. The above affirms the trustworthiness of the study and the precautions the researcher undertook to ensure that the data remained untainted by researcher bias and how the data collection process was controlled.

**Data Reliability Check**

The reliability of the data was checked in two ways. The participants were given feedback on the transcripts to ensure that their comments and experiences were accurately recorded. The participants had the opportunity to change, edit, or provide additional clarity to their responses. Participants also had the chance to agree with everything in the transcripts with no change to the transcripts.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from five interviews of African American men who have attained a level of success in their various professional occupations were analyzed. The interviews were transcribed by a transcription service. The primary researcher coded and identified themes.
**Researcher Positionality**

Positionality in qualitative research refers to aspects of race, class, and gender and how they relate to and/or impact the process of field research (Ganga & Scott, 2006). This positionality can potentially influence both the researcher and the participants involved in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Therefore, it becomes important for the researcher to remain transparent in who they are and what they represent as an empirical investigator. It is also important for participants to know and clearly understand their position and/or role in an empirical investigation. Knowledge of positionality is a way to control any biases that a researcher could potentially impose on the process of data collection and/or findings.

**Interview Protocol**

The purpose of this research was to identify significant features in the lives of African American men that can impact, impart, and inspire young African American males to succeed in school and in life. The information gathered from each interview session was transcribed and notated in my dissertation as data to impart life changing information to young African American males to help them reach a level of success academically that will translate to their adulthood. A strict code of confidentiality was adhered to in order to protect participant identities and sensitive information related to the participants. The interview took approximately 1-2 hours. The interviewee read and signed a consent form.

Upon the conclusion of the interview, the participants were thanked for their cooperation and participation in the interview. The researcher assured them of the confidentiality of their responses and the potential for future interviews.
The interviews were conducted with African American men who worked in various occupations throughout the Bay Area and in other parts of the United States. The intention of the interviews was to draw on their experiences and interpersonal information as African American men in order to further identify factors that can contribute to the academic and personal success of young African American men.

For the purpose of this study, success is determined by one’s inner resolve to overcome obstacles – in their mind and in their surroundings to reach a predetermined goal that they can articulate and positively transfer to the lives of others outside of themselves to help them achieve.

This study was guided by the following research questions

1. What was the ontological framework (thoughts, values, and ways) that informed the stories of these African American men who achieved a collegiate degree and persisted to become successful in their respective careers?

2. What were the perceived barriers experienced during the achievement of success in the lives of these African American men?

3. What were the perceived experiences learned that can direct young African American males toward success in their lives? (Discussed in Chapter 5)

Data Retrieval, Analysis, and Coding

These data were analyzed using a qualitative approach collected via interviews (see Appendix A), which were audiotaped. The interviews consisted of seven main questions about participants’ personal experiences. Words and phrases were organized to facilitate understanding of the essential phenomenon to be studied (Creswell, 2003). The information obtained from the experiences of participants was categorized into themes and trends that facilitated a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The
information was coded using an open coding process that lead to the identification of major themes categorized by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed after each session and were maintained by the primary researcher until completion of this study. Data analysis entailed coding the interview data obtained by the researcher.

Coding the data consisted of determining the appropriate word or phrases that accurately described the presentation of the data by the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). First, the researcher read through each transcription and notated the relevant themes in an Excel spreadsheet. From the initial examination of the transcriptions the researcher used an open coding process to determine a preliminary list of codes.

4. Researcher read through transcriptions and made notes in the margins based on initial impressions.
5. Researcher then organized the data into themes, categories, and patterns to determine meaning.
6. The researcher compiled a final list of recurring themes.
7. The researcher grouped similar categories together.

The researcher coded and sorted through responses to each research question to determine recurring themes, categories, and patterns. The transcriptions were coded according to identified themes. Recurring themes were identified and analyzed for significance.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter 4 presents an overview and analysis of data gathered from in-depth interviews conducted with five African American men who earned collegiate degrees and attained success in their respective careers.

Overview of Background Information

Five African American men participated in the study. Based on the participants’ availability and time limitations, two participants chose their home and one participant chose their work office for the interviews to be conducted, and two chose a telephone interview. Beyond providing a rich body of data on the topic of African American men and success, this study represents a rare occasion for the participants to openly share their stories for the benefit of others.

Chapter 4 is divided into two sections. The first section presents a profile of each participant, including demographic data such as marital status, parental education level, socio-economic status (as defined by parental educational attainment), and aspects of the participant’s success in life. The second section presents (a) the ontological framework as described by the participants, based on definitions and participant quotes and (b) the factors that contributed to the success of the participants. Finally there is a summation of the chapter.
Section I: Participant Demographic Information

Participant: KC

KC was born and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana where he attended Indianapolis public schools. During the time he was in school he experienced being bused from his inner city school to the suburbs where it was predominately White. After high school, KC attended junior college and then transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. After excelling and graduating from Morehouse with honors, KC also attended law school at Howard University and graduated with his J.D. and his M.J.D. He currently lives in Virginia with his wife and two children. KC’s hard work and determination to succeed comes from the upbringing of his parents who worked in the area of public service. KC has been successfully practicing law in Washington, DC for 13 years.

Participant: BB

BB was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and was raised in Oakland, California where he attended Oakland public schools; he has lived in the Bay Area for 63 years. He is a sole proprietor in the fields of real estate and various entrepreneurial businesses. BB graduated from San Diego State with honors and, after working for approximately 32 years, BB returned to school to receive his MBA. BB’s desire to obtain wealth stems from his childhood where he saw his single mother support him and his siblings after the passing of his father. BB currently lives in Antioch, California with his wife; they have one child. BB has successfully worked as a sole proprietor for 38 years.
Participant: EN

EN was born in Northern California and was raised in Pittsburg, California where he attended Pittsburg public schools; he has lived in the Bay Area for 39 years. He graduated from West Point Military Academy with a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. He is a sole proprietor in the field of real estate. EN currently lives in the Bay Area, where he resides with his son. EN has successfully worked as a sole proprietor for 13 years.

Participant: YH

YH was born and raised in Richmond, California where he attended Richmond public schools; he has lived in the Bay Area for 52 years. He attended Howard University for two years before transferring to Patton Bible College where he graduated with his B.A., M.A., and he received his Ph.D. from Mason Bible College. He has founded a charter school and he currently serves as a pastor in the Bay Area. He currently lives with his wife and two children in the Bay Area. YH has successfully worked in the field of education and ministry for 30 years.

Participant: ML

ML was born and raised in Oakland, California where he attended Oakland public schools; he lived in the Bay Area for 30 years before moving to another city outside of the Bay Area, but inside of Northern California. He attended college at Hayward State University and received his B.S. degree in Public Administration.

Section II: Ontological Framework of Participants

Beck (1979) contends, ‘the purpose for social science is to understand the social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action
which they take within that reality’ (as quoted in Anderson & Bennett, 2003, p. 153), then investigating ontological distinctions is a critical facet of the research process because it enables the researcher to uncover how their perceptions of human nature impact on the approach they consciously adopt to reveal social truths (David & Sutton, 2004). Smith, Mestry, and Bambie (2013) discovered that effective leadership hinges upon one understanding the reality of the situation.

For the purpose of this study, ontology has to do with thoughts, values, and ways in which five African American men explain, describe, and view their experience and how they achieved success in life. It then becomes imperative to explore the ontological framework or lens by ways in which they see or attribute their professional success and how it may impact the lives of younger African American males. The ontological framework gives voice to, and allows, African American men to tell their stories of the factors that contributed to their “success” and how they achieved their goals despite distractions, contrarian notions about their educational abilities, and their view of mentors or role models. The ontological framework presented here is the collective voice of these five African American men, who have achieved college level degrees and who now can report their experiences related to their journey to success and assist younger African American males on their journey.

In this research, several categories emerged as the participants described basic assumptions, experiences, perceptions of challenges, and supports on their way to professional success (a) Family Impact (b) Mentoring (c) Race and Racism (d) Self-Agency (e) Social Capital, and (e) Spirituality.
Definitions

Family impact refers to how the participants viewed the influence of their family that directed them toward successful achievement in their lives. Participants viewed that support from the family manifested in a number of ways from social capital to providing a moral and spiritual foundation.

Critical race theorists argue, “racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. xvi). Because the United States has historical structures, institutional structures, and schooling practices that perpetuate racism, critical race theorists assert that racism seems “normal” to people in the United States.

Critical race theory does not follow traditions of positivist scholarship because it allows researchers to employ storytelling as an epistemological resource to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. xvii).

For the purpose of this study, race and racism refer to how the participants see themselves and how notions or ideas of race are imposed on them for the sheer fact that they are African American men who are striving to reach their goals and live a successful life.

The definition of self-agency is derived out of the work of Bandura (2001) where he worked from his social-cognitive theory to further develop the concept of personal agency. He argued that the essence of humanness was contained in a capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life. This is called agency. People exhibit agency through developing intentions and thought before events; self-regulation through self-reaction; and self-reflectiveness about one’s capabilities, performance, and the meaning and purpose of what one does in life.
For the purpose of this study, self-agency is that which is “inside” of a person: drive, desire, motivation and enterprise; the introspection that is necessary to obtain success.

The definition of mentoring was derived out of the work of Pouncil (2009). The research focused on doctoral degree completion of African American men in which he stated mentoring both traditionally and non-traditionally, such as a person or persons, who coach, direct, or guide another person to a goal or objective; this person most often has already achieved the goal or objective of the person he or she is mentoring. He also defined mentoring as those persons, groups, networks, actions, events, or conversations that directly or indirectly led to success. Therefore, mentors can be colleagues, family, friends, or those persons who provide emotional, spiritual, or financial support.

The definition of social capital in this research was derived out of the work of Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) where they argued for three dimensions of social capital - cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions. The cognitive dimension facilitates common understanding of collective goals and expectations for acting in a social system. The relational dimension characterizes the importance of trust in a relationship as the primary construct in the assessment of social capital. The structural aspect of social capital pertains to social interaction and is concerned with the location and frequency of contacts in the social structure.

For the purpose of this study, social capital was the resources afforded to the participants that allowed them to navigate the social system to achieve their goals and to attain success in their lives.

The definition of spirituality was derived out of the work of Love and Talbot (1999). Their study resulted a series of attributes from their synthesis of the literature and proposed that spirituality involves seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one’s locus of centricity (i.e., recognizing concerns beyond
oneself); connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and direction; and openness to fostering a relationship with a higher power or center of value that transcends human existence and rational ways of knowing,

Additionally, participants’ ontological frameworks can be both a singular report by an individual or a singular voice by a homogeneous group. The study framework is informed by participants’ lived experiences and interactions. Participants may relate their perspectives, notions, and ideas about the process of life to the experience of life. The researcher has identified examples from the interviews to demonstrate the themes and subthemes that were considered as important factors in the success of the participants. There is no significant order in how the subthemes are presented.

Overview of Findings

Research Question #1

What was the ontological framework (thoughts, values, and ways) that informed the stories of these African American men who achieved a collegiate degree and persisted to become successful in their respective careers?

This study found that the ontological framework of African American men interviewed motivated, impacted, inspired, and contributed in their achievement of educational and professional success. Along the way there were some surprises discovered during the in-depth interviews; however, the responses are unique to each participant and therefore may not reflect the attitudes of the group as a whole, but they provide insight into the participant’s quest for success. The participants’ collective ontology related their thoughts, values, and ways they described the factors that
contributed to their life and professional success. They also communicated the enormous responsibility they felt to themselves, their respective families, and the importance of giving back to their community.

Additionally, ontological framework has to do with academic self-concept research. Academic self-concept is defined as how a student views his academic ability when compared to other students (Cokley, 2000, 2003a), and consists of attitudes, feelings, and perceptions about one’s academic skills. When we review the timeless work of Kunjufu (1984), we find that the educational development of young African American males hinges upon adults taking the personal challenge to raise their academic self-concept. The findings in this study were consistent with that of Graham (1997, 2000) that maintained that having a high academic and professional self-concept motivated them to succeed because individuals who think well of themselves are believed to be more motivated to succeed. Consistent with Graham’s (1997, 2000) statement, academic self-concept has been correlated with academic achievement for all students (Cokley, 2000, 2003b) and with intrinsic motivation (Cokley, Bernard, Cunningham, & Motoiike, 2001). When young African American males see themselves as academically and intellectually capable students, and when teachers and family reinforce this idea, young African American males are more likely to want to do well in school. In this study, categories emerged as participants described basic assumptions, experiences, perceptions, challenges, and support that allowed them to attain levels of success in their lives.

The ontological framework, as it related to family, proved invaluable as these participants paint pictures of the ways in which African American men think and know to be important in their quest to attain success in their lives.
The Impact of the Family

The impact of the family was the first category that participants identified as an essential component in their lives. The participants reported their familial experiences and interaction influenced their success and contributed to their ontological perspectives as professionals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Paraphrased Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2, A3</td>
<td>My parents used biblical principles to teach me right from wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1, A2</td>
<td>My family was stable. My father and mother provided my siblings and I a loving and nurturing home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3, A4, A5</td>
<td>Even though a single parent raised me, it was not an excuse to not be grounded or to exercise my knowledge of right from wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3, A5</td>
<td>Not having a male father figure in the home did not deter me from wanting to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1, A2, A3, A4</td>
<td>My parents were supportive in my effort to go to college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While my parents were not as familiar with corporate America, however they were always able to provide advice relating to how to deal with people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their advice helped me sharpen my interpersonal skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1-A5</td>
<td>My parents instilled in me the importance of being responsible for my life and being accountable for my own actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1-A5</td>
<td>My parents instilled in me the character and drive to succeed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participant Responses: Impact of Family

Table 1 presents how the participants viewed the influence of their family as they sought to achieve their desired goals in life. The impact of family refers to the guidance and wisdom imparted by family that helped them achieve educational and professional success in their lives. Participants agreed that a supportive family structure was an important component that tremendously impacted their lives and their desire to achieve success.
Participants pointed out that it was their family pushing them and providing them with the foundation for success through supporting them to have a positive mindset to achieve whatever goal they set in their minds. They maintained that they would not have arrived to the place they are in today if it had not been for their family. YH stated, “My parents instilled in me the importance of being responsible for my life and being accountable for my own actions” (YH, personal communication, August 2012).

The participants disclosed that family provided the foundation of stability in their lives. KC stated, “My family was stable. My father and mother provided my siblings and I a loving and nurturing home” (KC, personal communication, August 2012). Responses such as this bring into light - can a young man succeed without two adults in the home? The overwhelming sentiment was “Yes!” Participants agreed that a family does not have to have both parents in the home to demonstrate success because a single parent home can be just as successful. The responses of the participants centered on knowing that they were responsible or accountable for their actions or how to deal with people. EN reported how his parents instilled in him the importance of success. “There were various people that taught me several things as it relates to business and my parents instilled in me the character and drive to succeed” (EN, personal communication, October 2012).

The participants pointed out that not having someone in the home was a struggle, but the end result can still turn out positive. Two of the participants addressed the fact that they were raised in a single, fatherless home, but their mother provided the love and support they needed to survive without a father in the home. BB stated, “My father passed away during WWII and it placed pressure on my mother, but we survived with the help of family” (BB, personal communication, October 2012).

One of the surprising findings is that each participant has achieved a level of success in their lives and they did not come from families that produced models of success; however, they identified the components of success such as working hard,
treated people right, responsibility, and resiliency. Some of these components were taught in the home, but others were gleaned from those they witnessed in their profession. Despite not having someone to pattern their lives after from a professional standpoint, these men were able to gravitate to other men outside of their family structure to witness models of success.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring was the second category that participants identified as a factor in their lives. The participants reported that the component of mentoring or lack of mentoring influenced their success and contributed to their ontological perspectives as professionals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Paraphrased Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>I think that what happened for me is that I was able to have a lot of mentors to help me along.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Having mentors who have been there and done it tells me that I can do it, it was invaluable at helping me remain focused, especially during times when I was struggling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1-A5</td>
<td>I established a relationship with an individual that was willing to help me in my profession. An African American man helped me in terms of learning what corporate America was about and how to survive in corporate America. A Caucasian man helped me to understand corporate America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>I feel mentoring is time constraining for those mentoring outside of the biological family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3, A5</td>
<td>I welcomed the responsibility of teaching and mentoring my son.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: *Participant Responses: Mentoring*

Table 2 presents information on mentoring. Mentoring in this study refers to faculty and peers, family and community members, groups and individuals, or those persons directly and indirectly guiding a person toward success in their lives. Mentors, as defined in this study, were not only persons providing emotional and spiritual support.
The participants viewed mentoring as an important component in their success. People use the term mentoring with different meanings.

As pointed out in the previous sections by the participants, a child’s first encounter with positive mentoring should derive from the home. One surprise is that all of the participants, whether they were raised in a single or two parent home, pointed out that they had taken on the accountability of raising their sons despite not having a father to show them how to conduct themselves as a man. However, the research also noted that one of the factors hindering impactful mentoring was time. YH pointed out that mentoring is challenging because of the time restraint (YH, personal communication, August 2012).

The participants reported that mentors came into their lives in various ways. In some cases co-workers unintentionally became mentors because of the professional advice given, or in other cases mentors were intentional as it related to aiding them to achieve success in their lives and careers. KC expressed the importance of surviving when he said

I think that what happened for me is that I was able to have many mentors to help me along and believe it or not, it was African American men that helped me in terms of learning what corporate America was about and how to survive (KC, personal communication, August 2012).

ML expressed that active mentoring allowed him to obtain success when he stated, “Mentoring was active in my life because I had someone that was able to sit down with me and support me in my efforts” (ML, personal communication, July 2012). The participants in this study have benefitted from their experience with mentors; it is these interactions that have propelled these men to succeed in their personal and professional lives. This data also revealed that one does not have all the answers and listening to
someone who has achieved builds character and wisdom. Two of the participants reported that mentors encouraged them to focus during difficult times in their lives and to cultivate the will for them to succeed despite the obstacles.

The African American men in this study found it important to connect with someone. However, these men also mentioned that there were several people who were not African American that gave them crucial advice in propelling them to success in their lives. BB stated, “A well known Caucasian real estate broker took me under his wing and taught me the real estate business” (BB, personal communication, October 2012). In addition, YH reported that one of his Caucasian professors helped him make it through times of adversity while in the process of receiving his degree (YH, personal communication, August 2012). The participants reported that they received support from mentors, clergymen, and parishioners that prayed for their success. In addition, these men mentioned how their co-workers took the time to educate them on the do’s and don’ts in their respective occupations. Similarly, the participants reported that this kind of mentoring was an aspect of their ontological framework and while they had traditional mentors, they found or expanded, the definition of mentor to include others as well.

One of the key insights gained from this data is that these men were open to receiving from anyone, regardless of race, who was willing to share and help them to reach their goals in life. YH stated, “I was blessed to have close friends that were proficient and astute in biblical studies and they affected me radically and they made me want to study and they made it exciting, so I grew rapidly” (YH, personal communication, August 2012). Not only has mentoring played a key role in the lives of these men, but their acceptance of exposure to the people and places introduced in their lives.
**Social Capital**

Social capital was the third category participants identified. The participants reported that social capital (exposure and access to resources) was a key component that contributed to their ontological perspectives as professionals. The data uncovered in this area overlaps with that comprised in the sections on family and mentoring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Paraphrased Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1-A5</td>
<td>My parents taught me the importance of being responsible for my own life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1, A3</td>
<td>I was somewhat reluctant because I had never known anybody, none of my relatives, none of my personal friends, or none of my acquaintances had attended college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>I did not have a lot of professional people, so I had to learn how to work in the corporate environment and how to communicate in a corporate environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1, A4</td>
<td>I had to learn that I could not communicate on the job the same way I did with my friends or at home. Even though the corporate environment may sort of camouflage itself and say hey you can be free here you can speak freely here there are rules and lines of respect that cannot be crossed to maintain the professionalism that is that corporate environment so you have to learn how to respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1, A2, A3, A4</td>
<td>I had to be true to myself and hone in on the things that were inside of me. This helped me to grow and mature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: *Participant Responses: Social Capital*

Table 3 uncovers how the participants learned within their surroundings. Social capital in this research was derived out of the work of Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) where they argued for three dimensions of social capital - cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions (p. 464). The cognitive dimension facilitates common understanding of collective goals and expectations for acting in a social system. The relational dimension characterizes the importance of trust in a relationship as the primary construct in the
assessment of social capital. The structural aspect of social capital pertains to social interaction and is concerned with the location and frequency of contacts in the social structure.

Participants recognized that exposure to certain careers or colleges were not presented in a positive light early on in their lives. ML reported that it was his lack of exposure to people that achieved professional success that initially caused him to doubt his ability to achieve an education. He further stated, “Because I was experiencing unchartered territory I hesitated because I did not want to make a mistake and fail” (ML, personal communication, July 2012). All participants expressed the following sentiment in one way or another. The participants were somewhat reluctant to move forward because they were embarking on a territory and they did not know anyone who could coach them through the new situation. The situation facing these African American men was that they were the first in their families to come close to obtaining a college degree. Therefore, these participants did not have access to relatives to help them. ML stated, “I could not turn to a relative, a personal friend, or a single acquaintance to help me navigate through college” (ML, personal communication, July 2012). This participant further believed he had to continue despite not knowing someone who travelled before him because if he continued he would meet someone who would be able to help him. KC further reported that while he did not have the exposure to professional individuals growing up, when he attended college he began to learn how to relate to professional individuals. He stated, “I did not have the same type of communication or language and lingo” (KC, personal communication, August 2012). Therefore, he realized the importance of navigating cultural boundaries and contexts.

In addition, participants expressed how they were not privy to the lives of successful individuals. Participants reported that their experience in college provided them the exposure that taught them how to complete tasks and to take responsibility
for their own actions. All the participants agreed that building the right relationships with individuals was important. They particularly thought this was important within today’s social settings because it could be the difference between success and failure. YH reported that it was his relationships with peers that pointed him into a positive direction, which caused him to understand that his purpose in life was to help others (YH, personal communication, August 2012). YH further reported that his involvement with others within his organization helped him to learn more about himself. He stated

I was not engaged in the community. I was engaged in the parties on campus and the bourgeoisie lifestyle. Post conversion I began to get deeper in the community through my church and through the social programs and through evangelizing programs that helped me learn who I am. (YH, personal communication, August 2012)

Again, all participants shared that within social settings it was important to conduct oneself in a professional manner; they discussed the importance of code switching from pedestrian language or slang to pedantic or academic language that was appropriate to the setting. BB disclosed how his relationship with mentors provided him the necessary exposure to achieve success in the professional setting (BB, personal communication, October 2012). In this section, participants highlighted the importance of being exposed to the right people, access to the right resources, and the maturity to perform in the midst of adversity.

One of the surprise findings in this section is that despite not having someone in their family to pattern their lives after they gained success in corporate America. However, these men were able to capitalize on the principles taught by their families such as treating people right and respecting the value of others. Understanding these principles has caused them to maintain their success. While the participants agreed that
the combination of a positive family environment, mentoring, and taking advantage of their social capital has played a role in their development, they also pointed out that they had to remain focused and motivated to overcome barriers and adversity on their journey to success.

**Research Question #2**

What were the perceived interpersonal (motivational, attitude, self-agency) and perceived challenges and barriers experienced in the lives of these African American men?

**Self-Agency**

Self-agency was the fourth category that participants’ identified. The participants viewed self-agency as a key component that contributed to their ontological perspectives as professionals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Paraphrased Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>I have always been self-motivated in that sense, just did not know the direction I wanted to go, but you know it just made me want it more in a sense; it was more to not give them the satisfaction to see me fail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>I think I was mostly motivated because I wanted to achieve something that had not been done in my family and that have a college graduate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>I was willing to undertake the most challenging kinds of task, the kinds of tasks that a number of people did not want to take because they felt either they were not up to it or just did not think they could handle it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>I do know having something you feel passionate about is key to staying focused on doing the things you need to achieve success in that area. Because if it is something you are passionate about you are more willing to hold yourself accountable toward achieving your goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>I had to learn to set alternate plans in my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1-A5</td>
<td>I had to develop a strong intellectual appetite to succeed and I could not focus on what other people were doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1-A5</td>
<td>I had to realize that if I wanted something I had to work hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I convinced myself that what I wanted was not going to come easy, but if I continued I would reach my goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>The majority of the time people believed the stereotype that Blacks are inferior. This mindset created a barrier for Blacks. Therefore, I had to constantly prove that I had the ability to complete the task at hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>You start to learn that what you think you can do and what you actually can do is completely different and you start to learn that you can do a lot more than you perceive yourself of being able to do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: *Participant Responses: Self-Agency*

Table 4 uncovers data reflecting the participants understanding of life’s direction. Self-agency is that which is inside of a person: drive, desire, motivation, and enterprise; the introspection that is necessary to obtain success. Self-agency is reflection and
questioning how, when, and in what ways do participants achieve their goals. The
participants pointed to self-agency as a key component in their quest for success.
YH shared his experience with goal setting when he identified that he had the wrong
perception of school. His mindset resembled the paradigm that exists today. He stated,
“80-90% of my energy went into sports. I believe at that time sports was the dominate
goal in my life” (YH, personal communication, August 2012). This response speaks to the
innate desire that we all have to succeed, and in this case, failure is inevitable if one lacks
direction because it is hard to realize success. The participants reported that one of the
barriers to success is self-doubting. The participants either spoke about the importance of
having a strong mind or having the faith to believe they can succeed. Another participant
believed feeling passionate about something is imperative to staying focused on doing
the things you need to achieve success in that area. Because if it is something you are
passionate about you are more willing to hold yourself accountable toward achieving
your goal (EN, personal communication, October 2012). EN further responded with an
example of how he learned that he could do more than expected. He explained

We got up at about six o’clock in the morning and by 10 o’clock we would have
made our bed, shined our shoes, got a haircut, collected our books, ate breakfast,
got our uniforms, learned how to march, and be ready to march in the parade. And
you are thinking that sounds like two days worth of work. And you are thinking
ain’t no way we are going to get all of that done in a couple of hours, but then
you start with the first task and then doing everything you are supposed to do then
you surprise yourself and say Wow! I did all of that stuff in a couple of hours,
which increased my confidence in my ability. (EN, personal communication,
October 2012).
YH discussed how his involvement with community organizations played a role in his success because it motivated him and allowed him to serve the needs of his congregation. He stated

But as I began to grow in my professional development and earned degrees and sit on boards and committees and activities in the community, I began to be a part of programs that would shape actions within the community by serving on committees and board that were in a sense outside in the community. (YH, personal communication, August 2012)

Like YH, ML discussed how his involvement with community organizations provided him with the confidence to believe in his abilities. He stated

Through those years I also worked and was active with the organizations such as the National Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, and I served as president of the Alameda County branch or branches of the NAACP and we fought many battles there to deal with issues such as school integration and trying to get people to understand how the fair housing issues and all those kinds of issues that we fought with and dealt with, but all those things I think all those battles helped me to build up myself confidence. (ML, personal communication, July 2012)

The participants believed that setting goals in their lives was imperative and that when one fails to set goals they allow barriers to form and prevent them from obtaining success. Participants pointed out that there must be an innate desire to learn and be willing to self-improve through taking on challenging tasks to improve their position for success. Participants reported that having the mindset to succeed was not determined by their environment, but their inward motivation to provide for their family and to achieve a
goal that had not been achieved in their family, which was to graduate from college. The previous statement suggests the importance of setting goals and meeting the expectations for their lives.

ML revealed that his external motivation stemmed from his desire to become a positive pillar in his family. “I think I was mostly motivated because I wanted to achieve something that had not been done in my family and that’s have a college degree” (ML, personal communication, July 2012). Participants shared that overcoming barriers or stereotypes can occur when one believes that they have what it takes to succeed.

A key insight gleaned from these men is that they learned how to survive in areas that were unfamiliar to them. They had the courage to fight to achieve the success they desired. KC acknowledged, “I did in fact fail the bar exam, but I was not a failure in life. I said, as long as the bar exam is given twice a year, I have two chances to take it and pass it, and that is how I looked at it” (KC, personal communication, August 2012).

The notion that success is solely based on monetary achievements, on becoming a famous personality, on becoming a professional athlete, or becoming a well known artist was contrary to the ontological discovery; that success is determined by one’s inner resolve to overcome obstacles – in their mind and in their surroundings to reach a predetermined goal that they can articulate and positively transfer to the lives of others outside of themselves to help them achieve.

The ontological framework, as it related to race and racism, was at times during the research the impetus necessary for them to press on to reach their goal of obtaining success in their lives.

**Race and Racism**

Race and racism was the fifth category that participants identified. The participant reflected on how race and racism was a key component that contributed to their
ontological perspectives as professionals. Race and racism refer to how the participants see themselves and how notions or ideas of race are imposed on them for the sheer fact that they are African American men striving to reach their goal and live a successful life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Paraphrased Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>I was able to overcome race and racism by having faith in God and it helped me to grow as a person, and it helped me to develop my character.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A2, A3, A4   | When my superior officers called me racist names and wanted me to quit, I continued to want to prove them wrong.  
When the school counselors told me that I did not have what it took to go to college and that I should consider going to trade school, I wanted to prove them wrong.  
When people told me that I could not complete a task, I conceptualized that I would complete the task. |
| A1, A3, A4   | I had to overcome racist attitudes on my job toward me because I was one of few Blacks. |
| A1, A3, A4, A5 | I had to overcome obstacles of racism when applying for jobs because they did not want to give me the job because I was Black.  
Because I was one of few Blacks in my platoon, they made it difficult for me to complete my degree.  
I often felt I had to work 10 times harder to be accepted in my profession. |

Table 5: Participant Responses: Race and Racism

Table 5 presents data in this section that refers to the participants encounters with race and racism and how it propelled them toward success. The participants realized what it meant to be an African American, a male, and to overcome struggles and barriers en route to success. All of the participants internalized that they had to work harder than their counterparts because of the color of their skin. ML reported, “I was told that I did not have the skills or capability to succeed on a job, so I should look for a job where I
could work with my hands” (ML, personal communication, July 2012). He continued to express that he had to fight as hard as he could and be as good as he could and he did not let anyone tell him that he could not do something that he wanted to do. Several participants expressed the sentiment that they had to learn how to adapt to survive in a culture where everyone else did not look like them. They pointed out that they had to learn how to speak the language of the job they were pursuing because the language they grew up listening to and speaking was not acceptable in the workplace. KC pointed out he even had to change the type of clothes he wore in order to demonstrate that he belonged (KC, personal communication, August 2012).

Some participants expressed covert and overt messages about their abilities based on perceptions of their race. ML stated, “...by virtue of being Black was a barrier in some cases” (ML, personal communication, July 2012). EN pointed out that his White counterparts intentionally placed them in difficult situations to see him fail. EN stated, “You know why am I putting myself through this additional stuff the stress and the pressure (EN, personal communication, October 2012). He concluded that he overcame these adverse situations because he realized that he was gaining more confidence and resolve to handle these difficult situations. Another participant specifically stated that his guidance counselor told him that he was not smart enough to gain entrance into a prestigious college. The aforementioned experiences provoked all participants to prove their counterparts wrong as they focused to pass every mental and verbal test to reach their educational or professional goal. These African American men had to manage their own politics around race, whether those politics were radical or race-neutral, and was a part of how they considered themselves and how others perceived them. The perception of race and racism can enable or disable the ability of one in their quest to attain success in their lives. YH disclosed that he could not be like everyone else if he was going to overcome racial barriers in his life (YH, personal communication, August 2012). BB
revealed, “I had to ignore and overlook actions or words that were geared toward holding me back” (BB, personal communication, October 2012). He further posited charged words such as “nigga” and “boy” were such words in his day that fueled him to want to succeed despite the negative connotations (BB, personal communication, October 2012).

One of the key insights gathered during interviews is that these men identified who they were and believed in their ability to achieve their purpose despite the adversity they encountered. Another surprising piece of information gathered from these interviews is that these men pointed out that violence, whether verbal or physical, was not going to help them reach their goal of success. Several participants expressed that their involvement in community organizations geared toward benefitting others was where their energy should be directed. BB pointed out, “When I began in this profession, Blacks could not buy into certain neighborhoods nor could Blacks work in those neighborhoods as real estate professionals. That is why I fight so hard because these practices are still going on (BB, personal communication, October 2012). Not only was it important for these men to identify their purpose, but they used the negativity as intrinsic motivation.

**Spirituality**

Spirituality was the sixth category that participants identified as a factor leading to success. The participants reported that spirituality has played a large role in developing the character and the resilience to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Paraphrased Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>I can only say that my faith in God has helped me to change and help me grow as a person; it has helped to develop my character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>A key part to having a made up mind is a person’s spirituality. I believe that having a “made up mind” has a lot to do with praying and having faith in God that anything is possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants | Paraphrased Responses
--- | ---
A2 | I am seeing myself receiving that degree and walking across that stage that is faith conceptualizing what does not exist and manifesting that conceptualization over time that is faith.
A1 | My connection with God has been the thing that has given me strength, courage, and knowledge throughout my entire career. Without God’s grace and mercy, I would not have completed my education nor would I be on my current journey to improve myself by improving the lives of others.
A3 | If I depended upon God that God would help me and in the way my father taught it to me it wasn't that we achieved because that is what we wanted, so the church teaching helped me to stand up and say hey if I fall I have someone to help pick me up.

Table 6: Participant Responses: Spirituality

Spirituality refers to how the participants discussed their belief in God as the Supreme Being and the Biblical principles learned that empowered them to gain strength to overcome struggles and adversity in order to obtain success.

Three of the participants found that while striving to reach their goals, they encountered insurmountable situations; however, they continued to fight until they achieved the desired result, and in doing so, they shared that they had to rely on their spirituality. Some participants revealed that they had to exhibit strong character to overcome their inner struggles and struggles within the professional environment. KC stated, “My faith in God allowed me to overcome and to grow into the person I am today” (KC, personal communication, August 2012). He further reported that there were times in his professional career where he had to make decisions that were opposed to his beliefs, so he had to rely on God because what he was dealing with was a situation that far exceeded his wisdom. Other participants reported that their faith in God provided them with the motivation to succeed when they did not have the degree or the job in their hands. Additionally, ML reported that faith gave him the confidence to succeed and that because he was facing so many obstacles and negativity, it was his faith in God
taught to him by his father that everything would be okay (ML, personal communication, July 2012). Other participants shared that it was their faith that gave them the belief that anything was possible for them to achieve when they made up in their mind that they were going to accomplish their goals. Some participants discussed how they relied heavily on their faith in God to complete school because they would not have made it in their own strength; they also attributed their faith in providing them the focus to improve on their character and to help others succeed because they were succeeding. YH reported that not only was it important for him to have a strong mind, but he realized that he could not complete the task of becoming successful without divine intervention (YH, personal communication, August 2012). EN stated, “A key part to having a made up mind is a person’s spirituality. I believe that having a “made up mind” has a lot to do with praying and having faith in God that anything is possible” (EN, personal communication, October 2012). The participants made known that divine intervention propelled them to success in their lives and careers. One of the surprises in this section is that some of these men came from situations such as single family homes, or lack of role models, or exposure to resources to help them succeed. Despite not having all of what one would perceive they would need to succeed, these men used their faith to fill a void in their life.

**Summary of Findings**

The first research question describes the ontological framework of the participants. The ontological framework in this study sought to capture the singular voice of the five participants as a holistic explanation of how they viewed their experience as African American men. Their basic perceptions illuminated the six subthemes that were addressed in the literature review: impact of the family, importance of mentoring, social capital, self-agency, and spirituality. How these six categories impacted their ontological framework may be the most critical aspect of this research.
The second research question asked, “What were the perceived barriers experienced during the achievement of success in the lives of these African American men?” The variables reported as barriers were encounters with negative individuals and institutional obstacles.

These African American men discuss their interpersonal interactions with family, friends, and colleagues as successfully impacting their ability to obtain success in their lives. There were also divergent themes among the participants that were surprises and should be mentioned, although they were not consistent among other participants: delayed gratification, surviving in unfamiliar areas, and gaining strength from seemingly weak circumstances.

Each participant reported their experiences and ontological perspectives differently, but there were overarching themes related to how each participant obtained success in their lives. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research findings, conclusions, K12 implications, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The chapter offers a discussion of researcher bias, limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research.

The purpose of this research was to identify elements of success in the lives of African American men that can direct young African American males toward success.

The participants reported that it was their desire to see a paradigm shift in the lives of young African American males. Additionally, the goal of this study was to describe and explain the experiences of African American men that have achieved success in their lives.

The importance of this study lies in part in locating African American men within the context of obtaining a collegiate degree and achieving success in their respective careers. The literature discusses the causes and effects that have impacted the lives of young African American males as well as strategies to help them succeed in their academic and personal lives. It therefore becomes important to look at the experiences and achievements of African American men and to report their singular voice as individuals and as a homogeneous group. Therefore, we can view their experiences in hindsight and allow the sentiment of their experiences to impact and inspire young African American males to success in their academics and in life. Furthermore, this research is important as a contribution to the literature for young African American males and K-12 educators and school systems that desire to support young African American males to complete their education and to become successful contributors in society.
This research located African American men in various occupational settings who have achieved success in their lives. The study, based on this sample, revealed that African American men may achieve success if they (a) experience support from their families, (b) seek out and interact with resource people, both in and outside of their immediate environment, (c) have an inner drive to succeed, (d) manage perceptions of racism successfully, and (e) understand that success is not achieved alone. In addition, the participants were keenly aware that their experiences and responses to these experiences would fall in purview of educators, parents, and ultimately young African American males. With this in mind, Research Question #3 was, “What were the perceived experiences that can be imparted into the lives of young African American men to propel them to reach and maintain academic and personal success that will carry over to their adulthood?” This question is addressed in the K-12 implications, which is attached to the ending of the various factors leading to the success of the participants in the review of findings.

**Researcher Bias**

Bracketing (Small, 2001; Spiegelberg, 1965) is the process of controlling for researcher bias by exploring the researcher’s thoughts and experiences about the phenomenon studied before collecting and analyzing data. Prior to meeting with participants, the researcher bracketed his preconceptions by writing down and analyzing his experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings about how he has worked with young African American males. The researcher used self-exploration to identify and acknowledge personal biases in order to maximize objectivity when interpreting the data to attain the perspective of African American men (Hill, 2005). After a thorough analysis of bracketed material was conducted and documented, the researcher aspired to
suspend his beliefs so that he could be open to the discovery of participants’ perspectives (Munhall, 1994).

**Overview of Research Findings**

**Research Question #1**

What was the ontological framework (thoughts, values, and ways) that informed the stories of these African American men who achieved a collegiate degree and persisted to become successful in their respective careers?

This study found that the ontological framework of these African American men interviewed motivated, inspired, and contributed to their educational and personal success. The participants’ ontological framework, how they saw themselves within their personal, educational, and professional interactions was the lens by which they persisted to success.

**Impact of the Family**

The impact of family refers to the guidance and wisdom imparted by family that helped them achieve educational and professional success in their lives. The participants reflected on how their families played a large role in their development as a young African American man. It was this interactive impact in their lives that caused them to achieve success; it was this impact that taught them the importance of hard work, determination, and to believe in their intellectual ability.

The participants reported that their parents were the first mentors in their life and while there may not have been a male figure in their lives, they learned how to take responsibility for their own success. They were keenly aware of the impact families can
have on the development of a young man and more importantly the absence of a male in the home. However, the participants also pointed out that the absence of a male in the home did not detrimentally impact their development as long as the importance of a strong foundation was taught.

Their responses were consistent with the research of Jeynes (2007), which suggested that specific guidance was needed in the area of parental involvement to help African American males mature as young men and students. Jeynes’ (2007) research indicated that the above characteristics in a family were important; however, when the above characteristics were not present, as the participants in this study have reported, seeking the advice of others who have experienced life, and were able to assist another in reaching their goals, was key to one’s success. The participants’ responses were consistent with the theory presented in the research of Reynolds (1989, 1992) where it was found that the involvement of African American parents’ in the lives of their children had a direct impact in their success in school. The participants in this study agreed that optimal development of young African American men required them to immerse themselves in an environment that offered both supportive and nurturing responsiveness (e.g., warmth and love) and firm guidance. The participants also pointed out that mentoring played a key role in helping them develop as men because it added a presence in their lives that they did not have at the time.

Implications for K-12

A key element uncovered in this section was that there must be an understanding and recognizing that within the home there is both positive and negative interactions; however, it is important to find the good or the positive intent within every situation to help a young man to grow into the person they want to become. While focusing on the positive intent, young men must hold themselves accountable for their own actions and
this does not give place to blaming others. Another equally important point is to not allow external distractions, such as people that do not have their best interest at heart or the mindset to make choices that do not benefit their lives, to hinder their focus from obtaining success for their lives. Therefore, it is important for young men to understand the type of interaction that is taking place in the home, and no matter how negative a situation might be, find the good. Also, accountability is important and as a result the interactions with others and the choices made are paramount to success. While this section revealed the importance of a strong family structure in terms of principles, this research also stressed the role mentoring plays in the development of men.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Having a comprehensive approach to partnerships between schools, families, and communities allows schools to build on their strengths. A comprehensive approach fosters positive attitudes about the school and about families and community members because it respects the varying capacities of the school population as a whole. The researcher recommends that school districts incorporate parent institutes where parents or guardians can learn about the educational system so they can better assist their child during their educational journey. Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon (1997) have developed a systematic approach to incorporate opportunities to become involved. The approach looks at six key focus areas, which educates all stakeholders connected to the students.

- **PARENTING**: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
• COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

• VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

• COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups.

• LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

• DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

Mentoring

Participants revealed areas of mentoring, such as educating and training, were paramount to the development of young African American males. In addition, it was also recommended that young African American males have the opportunity to share their experiences either with a mentor (family member, community representative, etc.) or other students who are striving to achieve success. This interaction will provide the academic, moral, and spiritual support needed.

Another major finding from this study was how these African American men expressed the impact mentoring had in their lives. As mentioned, mentors was defined traditionally as a person who has experienced or completed the same or similar process,
or as these men purported, mentors can be defined as a person who supports the process either directly or indirectly. Mentors can be community people, people in ecclesiastical organizations, friends, educators, and family who inspire and encourage young African American males to succeed in school and in life. The participants reported that their positive relationships with men who had attained success on their jobs coached them to understand how to become successful. The participants’ responses were consistent with the research of Struchen and Porta (1997), which bear out the importance that every child needs a dependable, consistent, and positive relationship with at least one adult in order to achieve his or her fullest potential in emotional health, academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and vocational aspirations. While it was extremely important to have a caring adult in the lives of young African American males, the structure of mentoring programs may not always consistently address the needs. The research of Levinson (1978) posited that time limitation hindered the full implementation of mentoring. This research also revealed that where full implementation of mentoring was not available to them, they realized and took advantage of the exposure to people, places, and events to propel them to success in their lives. In addition, this research yielded that one must be proactive in identifying a mentor and develop an internal desire to succeed despite the obstacles and struggles.

K-12 Implications

Participants expressed high regard for the role mentoring played in their development as young men and as professionals. They saw mentoring as the proverbial light guiding them through places they have never been. Mentoring served as the impetus for motivation amongst the participants and the comfort and belief that they had what it took to succeed. The participants pointed out that seeking the advice of someone outside of their immediate family directed them toward success in their lives. One surprising
aspect realized during the participants’ involvement with mentoring was that they were open to advice that was aimed at helping them. As one of the participants pointed out, he had many different people serve as mentors in his life and in some cases mentors may not take on the same culture or nationality. Mentoring takes time and dedication and the quality of the interaction aimed at developing and helping young men succeed is crucial. Therefore, it is critical that young men find someone that they are comfortable with receiving advice; next, remain open to the information given and realize that mentors may not have the same background or culture, but the key is finding someone who is willing to help them succeed. However it was also mentioned that an important barrier to mentoring that should not go overlooked is the difficulty in finding someone that was willing to invest the time in helping a young man develop. Mentoring in addition to exposure to social resources helped the participants succeed.

**Recommendation for Practice**

The researcher also recommends that mentoring opportunities be expanded for students preferably beginning in elementary and middle school, but definitely in high school and remain consistent through professional schools. The following recommendations can support all children. Exposing all children in the K-12 system to participate in college readiness programs, the researcher recommends that K-12 systems incorporate federally funded TRIO programs, like Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services into their offerings to provide them with other avenues and ways of instructing and or motivating aspects of self-agency and reflection. The researcher recommends that exposing young African American males to successful environments will place these young men in a position to succeed and to hone in their leadership abilities.
Social Capital

Social capital in this research was derived out of the work of Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) where they argued for three dimensions of social capital - cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions (p. 464). The cognitive dimension facilitates common understanding of collective goals and expectations for acting in a social system. The relational dimension characterizes the importance of trust in a relationship as the primary construct in the assessment of social capital. The structural aspect of social capital pertains to social interaction and is concerned with the location and frequency of contacts in the social structure. Across the board, the participants felt there was more to life than where they were. The participants explained how they did not necessarily know where to start, but they kept on moving forward. The participants realized they needed help to make it to their goals. This line of thinking is similar to the concept expressed in Giddens (1991) where he explained that at such times, the individual concerned makes a risk assessment, part of which involves undertaking identity and drawing on a number of expert resources. Participants believed that their exposure to resources allowed them to overcome internal and external obstacles. Further, participants revealed that the antithesis of parents raising children was the external influences vying for the time of young African American males. One participant pointed out that there must be positive examples in the lives of young African American males to help them create a strategic plan that will positively impact their lives.

While the participants did not report having deep social ties within and outside the family, however, they used the resources given to them to the best of their abilities and the results of their behavior as chronicled by their ability to stay out of jails and prisons. Their outcomes were consistent with the research of Lerner and Galambos (1998) where it was reported that youths with greater and deeper social ties within the family
(and outside the family as well) reported higher levels of academic achievement, self-competence, psychological adjustment, pro-social involvement, and decreased rates of problem behavior.

**Implications for K-12**

The participants’ responses uncovered a surprising element in this research. The notion that success happens when caring and nurturing individuals, in addition to exposure to people, place, and resources, come together. The coming together of these components can guide the cognitive understanding of young men and inspire them to want to set goals, meet expectations within social settings, build relationships with people they trust, and expose them to resources to succeed. Therefore, it is important for family and educators to provide young African American males with the tools, both inside the school as well as outside the school, to place these young males in the best possible position to succeed. A variety of tools can help in this regard; exposure to mentors and exposure to field trips to businesses and colleges. As one participant pointed out, it was his trip to the Historical Black Colleges that inspired him to want to achieve a higher education. Not only did this research address the need for exposure, it also discussed the importance of motivation and desire to overcome barriers and challenges.

**Recommendation for Practice**

The researcher recommends that the information introduced as a recommendation for practice in the mentoring section mentioned above can also serve in building social capital into the lives of all children through programs such as TRIO, Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services into their offerings to all children to provide other avenues and ways of instructing and or motivating and exposing young African American males to successful environments that will place these students in a position to
succeed and to hone in their leadership abilities. In addition, the educators in the lives of young African American men are key pieces to young men having the access to the social capital they need in order to obtain success on their educational journey. The ability of a well trained and caring teacher can make a huge impact on the lives of young African American men.

**Research Question #2**

What were the perceived interpersonal (motivational, attitude, self-agency) and perceived challenges and barriers experienced in the lives of these African American men?

**Self-Agency**

Self-agency is that which is inside of a person: drive, desire, motivation, and enterprise; the introspection that is necessary to obtain success. Self-agency is reflection and questioning how, when, and in what ways do participants achieve their goals. The participants reported that they had to work extremely hard to achieve their goals and in many cases they had to overcome stereotypical or racist attitudes in order to succeed.

The participants addressing of self-agency were consistent with the research of Kafele (2009) where he stated that young African American men must overcome societal perceptions in order to obtain success. In addition, these examples were consistent with the research of Graham and Weiner (1996) whose work centered on the expectancy-value framework and that individuals must desire an achievable goal.

Across the board, the participants agreed that they all at some point in time set goals for themselves and achieved them. However, some participants did feel like giving up, but they did not want to feel like a failure so they continued on despite their feelings. The experiences of these participants’ willingness to succeed despite the odds are
consistent with the literature reflected in Graham et al. (1998) where he wrote that one’s success may threaten their social identity if they deem their actions to defer from the status quo of young African American men. Their responses also mirrored the research of Garmezy (1991) where he stated that an individual must have the ability to respond and endure the hardships that they encounter.

**K-12 Implications**

Some factors uncovered through this section that can be imparted to young African American men is to understand that maintaining a positive mindset is key to reaching the goals in their life; to avoid becoming blocked by barriers it is important to set goals. Another key factor uncovered is to find an innate passion to help one remain focused on goals. Finally, just because a goal is not realized immediately, it does not mean that the goal will not come into fruition. One participant pointed out that it was his ability to set goals for himself that caused him to obtain success in his life. A surprising element discovered during this research for young men to realize is that goals are meant to happen over a period of time. Thus, young African American males must understand that delayed gratification is a process that will take place in their lives. Therefore, we see that delayed gratification can serve as a barrier if one remains stagnant because they have not received their goal immediately; it is important to remain patient and continue moving toward their goal. Additionally, success does not come easy and in these instances, one must understand that when a goal is delayed, it does not mean the desired result is denied. In addition to delayed gratification is resiliency. Resiliency is not something that can be taught, but it has to be lived out through experiences and therefore, young men must remain patient while undergoing the process toward success. Delayed gratification and resiliency are important elements for young African American males to understand and to live out because when faced with adverse situations either by
individuals or institutions one must continue to move forward. Therefore, the emphasis and the value of a student should be placed on the quality of one’s work as opposed to the color of one’s skin producing the work.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this research study suggests that self-agency, what is inside of a person: drive, desire, motivation, and enterprise; the introspection that is necessary to obtain success can be taught and effective mentoring that focuses on the quality of the relationship as opposed to the quantity of the relationship can contribute to all children succeeding in school and in life. It should also be noted that the success of young African American males and other students do not rest solely in their hands, but in the hands of those raising, guiding, and leading them. The African American men in this study stated that it took more than themselves to achieve success; they purported that those outside of them helped the most (family, mentors, spiritual intervention, etc.) to succeed. The results of this study suggest that if young African American males are going to succeed in school and in life, they too may need similar internal and external supports.

**Race and Racism**

Race and racism refers to how the participants see themselves and how notions or ideas of race made them stronger and more eager to succeed. The participants recognized and realized what it meant to be an African American male and to achieve success in their lives. They were keenly aware of racist practices in school and in their various professions, but yet they were not deterred from achieving their goal of achieving a successful life. The participants expressed that there were moments in their lives where they had to overcome adversity in order to reach success. These moments at times knocked them down, but they did not quit. Their actions were in accord with
Garmezy (1991) where he referred to resiliency as the ability or the tendency to spring back, rebound, or recoil (Garmezy, 1991) and involves the capacity to respond and endure or develop and master in spite of life stressors or adversity. The stressors of the racism experienced by the participants were motivating factors that guided them toward success. Their response to the racism corroborated the work of Stevenson and Arrington (2009) where they found that racist experiences were defined as the individual’s exposure to perceived acts of discrimination as a function of one’s racial difference. All the participants reported that because they knew who they were, they did not allow themselves to quit. The participants ability to frame in their mind the desire to succeed was in harmony with the work of Cross (1991) and Delpit (1995) where they found that providing information about the centrality of racial identity has the potential for providing young people with a framework to identify, evaluate, and buffer the meaning and detrimental effects of racial tension within varied social interactions both in and outside of school.

**K-12 Implications**

A key component for young African American men to understand is that race and racism are realities and to overcome experiences tied to those notions whether they are intentional or unintentional is to remain focused on their goals. Additionally, it is imperative to turn negative ideas and notions into catalysts to propel them toward success. Another key component is to understand that the dress or language of a young African American man can either attract or distract others from believing they have what it takes to succeed in the educational or professional environment. It is also imperative to believe that one can obtain whatever goal is perceived in the mind. As several participants pointed out it was their encounters with educators that demonstrated racist attitudes and a lack of confidence in the abilities as learners. Therefore, it is important for educators and
people who are in a position to make an impact in the lives of young African American males to remain aware of the power of their words and their disposition and mannerisms that can convey negativity.

**Recommendation for Practice**

It is also recommended that young African American males combat negativity associated with race and racism. A reality revealed through the experience of these African American men was that negative or positive words spoken by educational leaders can impact the educational mindset of not only young African American males, but in all groups of students. While these men did not overlook the racist remarks and attitudes directed toward them, they confronted those words by using them as motivation to prove the author of those negative words wrong. This in itself is a strategy that young African American males, or any other marginalized student, can use to help them overcome racist, stereotypical, gender based remarks or attitudes that they may have experienced. Noguera (2003) posited that scholars and researchers commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995). In some cases where children do not have the family support and mentoring available to them, creating a safe place for children supervised by a caring adult with the skill to problem solve is important. Also, schools can develop partnerships with community organization where positive words are spoken and geared toward building the confidence of young people can assist in meeting their needs and can help them overcome negativity. In addition to working with outside organizations, districts and schools can examine teacher preparedness programs that focus on social justice as a way to increase their pool of socially conscious educators.
While we see that race and racism is real, it has played a significant role as the impetus that forced these men to develop the mindset that they can achieve whatever they set their mind to do. Consequently, these men developed their inner strength and spirituality in order to achieve success.

**Spirituality**

Spirituality refers to how the participants discussed their belief in God as the Supreme Being and the Theological principles learned that empowered them to gain strength to overcome struggles and adversity in order to obtain success. The participants posited how they relied on their belief in God to overcome or deal with situations that were beyond their control. Their responses reflected the work of Palmer (2003) where he explicated that a spiritual crisis arises when we find ourselves in the grip of something larger than society’s expectations or the ego’s needs — do we follow the soul’s calling or do we bend to the forces of deformation around us and within us? In addition, their experiences coincided with Stevenson (2002) in that he wrote spirituality enables one to avoid worrying about uncontrollable situations and to focus on what is manageable. When the participants saw that their reliance on God produced positive results in their lives, their responses were consistent with the research of Fegley et al. (2002) who found that religious participation was related to a positive self-concept and that religious values were associated with better coping and a more positive future orientation. Through the participants connection to their spirituality they realized their actions were connected to more than themselves, which is a reason why they did not involve themselves in hurtful delinquent behavior. Their experiences were compatible to the research of Lerner and Galambos (1998) where they found that religious affiliation functions as a protective factor against delinquent behavior.
All in all, the participants believed that spirituality played a key role in their personal and professional development. They saw spirituality as a guide to help them when they did not know what to do.

**K-12 Implications**

Some of the key aspects from this section that can be imparted into the lives of young African American men are that they must realize that in school as well as in life they are not expected to reach levels of success in their lives alone. It will take trusting in someone greater than himself or herself to propel them to their next level. Additionally, it is important for these young men to have the visualization to see themselves beyond their current reality and the faith to believe that they have the necessary skills to succeed. Another aspect realized from this data was using faith to make the necessary decisions to succeed. One participant stated, “Many of our young black men have the mindset that it is sports or die. Not too many have alternate plans and of course it leads to frustration and loss of energy and life” (YH, personal communication, August 2012).

Therefore, it is important for young African American males to have time and space to find out who they really are outside of their peers’ influence. These types of mindful exercises can take place during reflective journal writing and essays. Also, discussions on principles of wisdom can help them in making solid choices for their lives. Furthermore, for those young males who are involved in religious activity outside of school or within school clubs geared toward homogeneous activity with other young African American males can aide in this development. Lastly, schools can partner with spiritual based organizations to provide guidance and support for students.
**Recommendation for Practice**

The area of spirituality is challenging and not as prescriptive because it is an area that is not regularly practiced in schools. However, the researcher understands that while the discussion on the literature relating to spirituality is not a new area of study, it does contribute to the body of literature connecting the principle of spirituality as a component to assist in guiding all children to obtain success in their education and life. Therefore, the literature implementing spirituality should be explored as a way to educate children to provide them with other avenues of support for those who struggle with confidence in their abilities and who struggle with their character development. Current media is filled with bad news about the breakdown of morality in society and prophetic voices, which demand social change and educational intervention. There are many possible educational approaches to moral education. They include an emphasis on underlying ethical issues and dilemmas while teaching all disciplines; curriculum highlighting heroic moral figures and movements in history and contemporary society; a direct focus and explicit teachings on morals and values; frequent student discussion and reflection on the moral dilemmas of life; an emphasis on respect for differences, including the understanding and valuing of cultural difference; the development of democratic communities that encourage student participation in the relevant moral dilemmas of their everyday lives; and student involvement in service projects which impact local and global moral concerns. In cases where students may not have a spiritual connection, principles of meditative and reflective practices can be integrated into the design of lessons to allow for a time of connectedness and grounding. Another recommendation is that district and school leaders can develop strategies to have conversations with teachers and families around the area of students connecting with who they are as a person.
Study Limitations

The limitations of this study included the geographical location of the respondents, timeline of data collection, and the ability of participants to recall salient information related to their lived experience. Another limitation was the lack of experience conducting interviews, which resulted in conducting follow up interviews. While this study could have national implications, all but one participant lived inside of California. Another limitation of the study was that it looked solely at the experiences of African American men. Because of the definition of success used in this study, it lent itself to selecting participants of a certain age and generation. This was intentional because these men were able to share from their experiences and were able to articulate their journey. The research could have benefitted from interviewing young African American males to understand their perspectives, experiences, and struggles. A random sample of African American men who achieved success in their lives who live outside of the state of California may have yielded different data. Additionally, this study was a qualitative look at African American men who have achieved educational and professional success. However, data collection for this research was limited to five participants, so the data gathered may not have been as rich and full as a study with a greater number of participants that may have yielded different findings related to the success of African American men. Therefore, a quantitative analysis of African American men who have attained success in their lives may have yielded different data.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirmed certain conclusions referenced in the body of literature on factors leading to the success of young African American males. These findings are in no means the answer to all questions or problems leading to the success of young African American men; however, I do believe that when all of these areas
are working in concert success can be achieved. The purpose of this research was to uncover elements in the lives of African American men to direct young African American males toward success. Additionally, the goal and purpose of this study was to aid in the development of a successful model for educators, parents, and others working with young African American males to better understand what it will take to inspire these young men to reach levels of success in their academic and personal lives. Indeed the research findings could be helpful in retaining young African American males who are in a K-12 setting and inspire them to achieve success in their lives. Lastly, the purpose of this research was to record the experiences of African American men and to report the ontological framework that led to their academic and professional development in hopes of directing young African American males toward success in their lives, and it yielded the important finding that it is going to take a collaborative effort between all stakeholders in order to propel young African American males toward success.
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Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your time and participation in sharing your information that will contribute to the development of young African American men. The purpose of this research is to identify significant features in the lives of African American men such as yourself that can impact, impart, and inspire young African American men to succeed in school and in life. The information gathered from this interview session will be transcribed and notated in my dissertation as data to impart life-changing information to African American boys to help them reach a level of success academically that will translate to their adulthood. A strict code of confidentiality will be adhered to in order to protect participant identities and sensitive information related to the participants.

Please respond to the following questions:

Background Information

1. Where were you born? ________________________________

2. Where did you grow up? ________________________________
   a) How long have you lived in the Bay Area? ________________
   b) How long have you lived in your current state? ________________

3. What is your level of education? ____________________________
   a) What type of degree did you earn and when? ________________

4. Have you had any specific training in working with African American young men?
   If yes, please describe this training. ____________________________
5. Where do you work? ________________________________
   a) How long have you worked there? ____________________________
   b) What is your position at this workplace? ____________________________
   c) Please describe your work setting (e.g., community based organization, type of services provided, targeted population served, etc.).
      ____________________________________________________________________

6. How many different institutions have you worked for? ____________________________

7. What types of institutions were these? (public or private). ____________________________