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## **From The Valley to the Mountaintop: A Case Study of Resilience and Persistence Among First-Generation African American Males Who Have Achieved Doctoral Success**

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FROM THE VALLEY TO THE MOUNTAINTOP: A CASE STUDY OF RESILIENCE AND  
PERSISTENCE AMONG FIRST-GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO  
HAVE ACHIEVED DOCTORAL SUCCESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my father and mother, Drs. Ronald and Tonya Jackson, whose lives as first-generation African Americans who achieved doctoral success despite obstacles encountered, have inspired this research. Mom and Dad, thank you for being resilient and persistent throughout your journeys and serving as my blueprint. I have never once doubted my ability to achieve academically because of your influence and support. Thank you for encouraging me to read as many books as possible, taking me to museums and exposing me to a world outside of my hometown. I am truly grateful for all the sociocultural capital you have bestowed upon me, as it has enabled me to be successful throughout all of my endeavors.

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*"When I dare to be powerful – to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." - Audre Lorde*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This case study examined the lived experiences of three first-generation, African American men whom have persisted to achieve doctoral success in the form of Ph.D. attainment. Participants were interviewed in order to gather data in their own voices about their educational experiences as first-generation African American Males (AAMs). Participants attributed their success to what can be categorized as sociocultural capital in the form of resilience and persistence factors. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made to educational stakeholders on how to transform educational spaces into venues that build cultural capital and promote resilience and persistence within this population so that college success and ultimately doctoral success can be achieved for the betterment of African Americans as well as this nation.

## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

*“A good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity--it is a prerequisite.”* – 44<sup>th</sup> United States President Barack H. Obama

Upon the establishment of Harvard University in 1636, higher education has served as an indispensable fiber in the fabric of the United States. Since then, the socioeconomic benefits of degree attainment have become increasingly impactful on today’s society. Unfortunately, the U.S. has experienced a recent decline in the attainment of degrees in comparison to other nations. Noting this, President Obama and other stakeholders of education in this country have vowed to ensure that the number of citizens with college degrees doubles, with hopes to propel the U.S. back to its standing as the dominant producer of college graduates by 2020 (Zaback, Carlson, & Crellin, 2012; ASCA, 2014). This is imperative as studies indicate the undeniable individual and societal benefits accompanying degree attainment (Baum, S., Kurose, C., & Ma, J. 2013; Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013; Autor, 2010).

The earnings of college graduates in comparison to those only obtaining a high school diploma have steadily risen over the past thirty years. Thus, despite the growing pervasiveness of the number of individuals attaining college degrees, the demand for these students is still not met, as reflected by increased income resulting from their academic status (Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013; Autor, 2010). Concurrently, earnings of those without college degrees stagnated or declined substantially. This is especially factual for males; in 2011, 84% of those only obtaining high school diplomas earned less than the median average in comparison to four year college graduates (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Furthermore, those without college degrees experienced a 12% decline, and those who did not complete high school experienced a 16% decline in earnings (Autor, 2010). Degree attainment is also related to unemployment rates. The unemployment rate for those individuals with a college degree consistently remains half of the

rate of those without degrees. During the recession, 80% of jobs lost were originally held by workers without college degrees. The benefits from degree attainment are not solely individualistic; those who have achieved college success are an asset to society. These benefits include higher tax revenue, decreased need for governmental assistance, increased civic engagement, and the parenting and nurturing of potential second-generation or beyond college students who are more likely to achieve college success (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013; Autor, 2010).

The aforementioned statistics are even more problematic as it relates to African American males (AAMs), as they already lag behind white males, as well as white and black females academically (Autor, 2010, Jackson & Moore, 2006). Baum, Ma and Payea (2013) informed that between 1992 and 2002, while most racial and ethnic gaps remained steady regarding the attainment of bachelor's degrees, the gap between the degree attainment of white and black males increased from 13% to 19% by 2012. Furthermore, from 1982 to 2012, the percent of black females between ages 25 to 29 attaining degrees had doubled, while the percentage of black males within this age and time range only increased by 5 percent (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). These gaps in attainment forecast the lower socioeconomic status that is commonplace among African Americans. Baum, Ma & Payea (2013) notify that in 2012, the poverty rate percentage tripled when accounting for those without bachelor's degrees, in comparison to those who had attained a four-year degree. Moreover, only 52% of high school graduates from families with incomes below \$18,300 enrolled immediately to college, while 82% of those students from families with incomes above the middle income quartile at \$90,500, enrolled immediately. This enrollment percentage does not represent the number of students that actually receive their college degree, which is indeed much lower. Furthermore, low income students are more likely

to attend two-year, or for profit institutions versus private or public four year institutions, which impacts earning potential (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). This phenomenon especially impacts AAMs since they trail their previously discussed counterparts. Thus, degree attainment and social economic status are not typically mutually exclusive and perpetuate the cyclical influence that achievement gaps and financial and social benefits have on AAMs as it relates to higher education.

It was not until 1823 that Alexander Lucius Twilight received a degree from Middlebury College, becoming the first African American to achieve this feat. Following Twilight's success, African Americans were intermittently awarded degrees until institutions, such as Oberlin College, granted access to African Americans consistently (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Access to higher education increased for African Americans upon the creation of educational institutions for freed slaves and their children, including those private institutions founded by White northerners, abolitionists, missionaries, and religious groups who felt it was their duty to educate and civilize freed slaves in the post-Civil War South (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Anderson, 1988). The second Morrill Act of 1890 served as an expansion to the Morrill Act of 1862 by providing federal funding to establish public land grant institutions for African Americans in 17 states in addition to those institutions that afforded education to African Americans from the first Morrill Act, which substantially increased the attainment of college degrees by African Americans (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Seemingly, the U.S. government had finally realized that equal opportunity in regards to higher education should be afforded to African Americans as well; however this was not entirely the case.

Despite access being granted in the form of public, land-grant, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the second Morrill Act of 1890 left much to be desired in

terms of equality. Whites and African Americans were educated separately at their respective institutions, while an emphasis on vocational education for the latter inhibited intellectual scholarship which African Americans were viewed as unequipped to engage in (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Anderson, 1988; Thelin, 2011). Though *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) reaffirmed that Black and White institutions would operate as “separate but equal” entities, under this ruling, land grant institutions educating Whites received state funding “at a rate of 26 times more than Black colleges” (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). This misappropriation of resources at the disadvantage of African Americans has served to remain problematic even a century later (for example, the allocation of Hatch funds).

Although the *Brown v. The Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* (1954) ruling reversed *Plessy v. Ferguson* and called for desegregation, the achievement gap between Whites and African Americans had already drastically widened and would prove to have lasting effects on the state of education (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). The psychological briefs presented in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case proposed segregation should not be legal and informed that, “those subjected to prejudice, discrimination, and legal segregation would experience numerous problems as a direct result, including internalized self-hatred, ‘defeatist attitudes,’ a lowering of personal ambitions and education aspirations, and would generally be ‘encumbered’ by the experience” (Martin, 1998, p. 144, as cited in Zirkel & Cantor, 2004, p. 2).

Zirkel and Cantor (2004) inform that students of color are more likely to be educated in schools that lack diversity and are deficient in funding and resources. While attending these schools, students are less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory coursework and more likely to drop out of college before obtaining a degree, if enrollment occurs at all (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). This is especially true for African American males (AAMs) who are highly stereotyped,

viewed as at-risk by society, and trail behind White males, females and African American females throughout their educational journey (Jackson & Moore, 2006). Jackson and Moore (2006) contend that AAMs struggle in social domains including education, due to “perceived ability and subsequent behavior” as a result of societal challenges they experience (p. 201). These challenges stem from “dismal national statistics on unemployment, education, incarceration, and mental and physical health” (Jackson & Moore, 2006, p. 201). Paradoxically, educational attainment serves as the solution to combat these challenges (Baum, Kurose & Ma, 2013); (Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013). To improve the quality of life in our communities and within society, special attention must be paid to factors that influence the education of AAMs. By being informed on the risk, resilience and persistence factors that affect AAMs along their educational journey, higher education stakeholders are presented to with the opportunity rebuild academic and career development structures, both formal and informal, and in doing so create a pipeline that fosters educational excellence and college success for AAMs, thus benefiting all.

### **Statement of the Problem**

*When speaking of “the achievement gap” it is understood by virtually everyone that this does not refer to a gap between Africans and Asians or a gap between Africans and Latinos or a gap between Africans and anyone else other than Europeans. Therefore, right away, it seems something more than education is being discussed when the language is used (Hilliard, 2003, p.137).*

Though higher education has seemingly become more accessible for minority students, African American males (AAMs) are still grossly underrepresented among college students in the United States (Harper, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). Researchers have found that AAMs account for approximately 5% of the population of undergraduate students in the United States, and that proportion has not increased since 1976 (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). Even more harrowing than AAM enrollment numbers is the percentage of these individuals that

actually attain a college degree. According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, only 7% of the population of AAMs 18 years or older attained a bachelor's degree. These statistics are alarming, especially considering that researchers have found that in the U.S. students who persist to graduate from college are privy to socioeconomic benefits far exceeding those of citizens obtaining only a high school diploma. Higher lifetime earnings, increased likelihood of career satisfaction and overall better health statuses are among the benefits retained by those achieving college success. Additionally, college graduates are also an asset both civically and financially to the government (Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013; Baum, Kurose & Ma, 2013). Unfortunately, AAMs are more likely to be classified as first- generation, and less likely to attend and persist through college, thus trailing their peers regarding college success (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006, Gardner & Holley, 2011). Given the privileges that college success affords, it should be the agenda of higher education institutions to not only recruit AAMs, but also to ensure that support is granted to these students.

Where AAMs are already societally disadvantaged stemming from racism and discrimination, disparities faced along their educational journey due to these constructs further impede opportunities for equity that have been pursued by African Americans for centuries (Noguera, 2003; Cuyjet 2006; Jackson and Moore; 2006; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). In order to aid in combatting hindrances that would inhibit college success for AAMs, a concerted effort must be made throughout their P-12 and postsecondary education by stakeholders to ensure that they are able to persist despite risk factors they may encounter. To accomplish this, stakeholders must resolve to provide equitable opportunities for academic achievement and career and college readiness, as well as promote student engagement and social integration among peers and faculty (Harper, 2007a; Strayhorn, 2008, Bonner, 2010, Harper & Kuykendall,

2012). If higher education institutions seek to be accountable for providing an equitable education to all students, it is essential that they be deliberate about affording AAMs with the tools and resources that assist the journey toward college success. This may be achieved by transforming institutions into spaces that foster and champion persistence on behalf of these students.

Persistence is described as what compels an individual to continue an action despite challenges encountered (Rovai, 2003). Research on the persistence of collegiate AAMs has become increasingly important as the severe implications that their absence among those achieving college success has had on U.S. pursuits toward global competitiveness has been exposed (Palmer, Davis, Moore III, & Hilton, 2010). In his largely cited quantitative study exploring the significance of supportive relationships in the lives of collegiate AAMs, Strayhorn (2008) uncovered the educational disenfranchisement that AAMs experience throughout the educational pipeline. Within the pipeline, a snowball effect of sorts occurs as AAMs are seen as lazy and incompetent, leading them to be treated as at-risk individuals. Thus, inequitable treatment toward these students may ensue by educational stakeholders, such as failing to provide rigorous and college preparatory curriculum or college and career readiness which may be a reflection of perceived competence. If AAMs accept the negative stereotypes they are encumbered by, the self-fulfilling prophecy effect occurs and consequently AAMs become disengaged along the educational pipeline. This ultimately leads to dissatisfaction, which adversely affects resilience and persistence and thus is likely to impede college success.



## **Purpose of the Study**

*"But what about those among this population who beat the odds, make the most of college, and achieve in multiple ways inside and outside of the classroom? Who are they, and what can they teach us?" (Harper, 2005, p. 8)*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain understanding of the resilience and persistence and factors that propel first-generation AAMs toward the achievement of college success and subsequently doctoral success. Doing so added to the growing body of research that seeks to reframe the narrative surrounding AAMs into one that focuses on those who have achieved success despite barriers that accompany their race and social status. An emphasis on success allows researchers and educational stakeholders to approach the needs of this unique population from a solution focused standpoint. By being cognizant of resilience and persistence factors that can be attributed to the success that AAMs achieve, educational stakeholders can work to increase the actuality that these factors are present in the lives of the students they serve, and thus promote the societal uplift that occurs from degree attainment.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do first-generation African American males perceive their educational experiences toward doctoral success?
2. What resilience and persistence and factors do first-generation African American Males attribute to their doctoral success?

## **Overview of Methodology**

### **Participants and Sampling procedures**

The participants for this study met the following criteria: (1) first-generation student, as defined by highest educational attainment level of parent (2) self-identification as African American male and third generation American citizen, and (3) obtainer of a doctorate degree

(excluding professional degrees). Participants were selected based on criteria met, availability and willingness to participate in the study.

Purposeful sampling strategies were employed to gain participants. When utilizing purposeful sampling, “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study”

(Creswell, 2012, p. 156). Participants were solicited through snowball sampling. Through snowball sampling methods the researcher gained participants from referrals from other contacts whom were aware of individuals meeting the criteria needed to fulfil the desired sample, and believed that those individuals would be an asset to the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

## **Design**

Qualitative research served as the methodological framework for this study.

The purpose of qualitative research is to both explore and seek to understand how individuals make sense of an issue (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) further notes that the qualitative research process “involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (p. 247). A multiple case study design approach was utilized to guide the research. Case study design “enables the researcher to answer “how” and “why” type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.556). Each individual’s experiences as a first-generation AAM achieving doctoral success constituted as one case, therefore three cases were analyzed. The anticipated sample size of three aligns with Creswell (2013)’s suggestion to not include more than 4-5 cases within a study. Aligning with

case study data collection methods, documents, artifacts and transcripts from recorded, semi-structured interviews served as data (Creswell, 2013)

### **Analysis of data**

Once interviews were transcribed, thorough data analysis occurred. Data analysis from a qualitative approach occurs by inductive and deductive means (Creswell, 2013) and was approached using the constant comparative method. Constant comparative data analysis involves the comparison and contrasting of categorized data in order to “discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns” (Tesch, 1990, p. 96). Through the coding process, patterns subsequently emerged into themes. Coding, described as “the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 198), occurred within each participants’ interviews as well as across interviews to form themes. ATLAS.ti, a software program designed to manage qualitative data was utilized to assist coding efforts. Emerging themes, in addition to a priori themes, served as indicators of persistence and resilience among first-generation AAMs who have achieved doctoral success.

### **Limitations**

The availability of prospective participants served as a limitation for this study. The criterion of first-generation status greatly reduces the availability of the sample as Mullen, Goyette, and Soares, (2003) found that parental educational attainment impacts graduate school enrollment. Furthermore students whose parents are highly educated are expected to enroll and complete postsecondary studies, including doctoral programs, after attending selective research or liberal arts institutions during their undergraduate education (Mullen, Goyette & Soares, 2003). Additionally, the sample size was also limited due to the requirement of participants

obtaining a doctorate degree which excludes professional degrees such as M.D. and J.D. Because of the limited sample size, generalizability of findings will be difficult to justify.

Other limitations within this study involved self-selection and self-reported responses. Since participants self-selected to participate in this study, biases could possibly exist as participants may have felt strongly, whether positively or negatively about the research topic. Involving self-reporting, participants may have chosen to withhold information or inflate responses. Also, since this study focuses on participants retelling the accounts of their educational experiences, recollection may have been affected due to time lapses between past events and the present.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*African American*- Individual originating from Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

*College Success*- Successful attainment of a four-year bachelor's degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008)

*Doctoral Success*- Doctoral degree completion; not including professional degrees (Gardner, 2009; National Science Foundation, 2013).

*First-Generation Student*- Students of parents who have not attended and/or attained a college degree (Engle, 2007).

*Persistence*- Described as what compels an individual to continue an action despite challenges encountered (Rovai, 2003).

*Resilience*- "the ability to cope with adversity, stress and depravation" (Begun, 1993, p. 28-29).

*"Risk factor(s)"* - Defined by Rolf and Johnson (1990) as circumstances that "have proven or presumed effects that can directly increase the likelihood of a maladaptive outcome" (p. 387).

## **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

This chapter introduced the statement of the problem to be investigated as well as the purpose of the study. This chapter also defined key terms of the study and provides a brief overview of the methods that will guide the study. Chapter two reviews the body of literature that explores the educational plight of African American males, addresses the risk, resilience and persistent factors that may arise throughout their journey, and introduces the theoretical lens that will frame the study. Chapter three discusses the methods that were employed in this qualitative study to address the research questions in depth. Included in this chapter are the procedures for sampling and data collection, as well as data analysis and assertions. Additionally, measures on how rigor and trustworthiness were achieved in the study were discussed. Chapter four is comprised of the results of within-case and cross-case data analysis and will address the research questions based on data analyzed. Chapter five discusses the findings of this study, as well as conclusions, implications for the study, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*"For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness." -James Baldwin*

### **Benefits of Higher Education**

According to Baum, Ma and Payea (2013), bachelor's degree recipients earn on average \$21,000 more dollars annually than individuals obtaining only high school diplomas. Those college graduates who go on to receive advanced degrees experience even higher earnings on average (Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013). In addition to increased compensation, college graduates are more likely to experience an increase in employment status and enjoy health and pension benefits provided by their employer, as well as are more satisfied in their careers. Society also benefits financially from college graduates in the form of tax higher tax payments (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013; Baum, Kurose & Ma, 2013). Furthermore, college graduates save the government money by being less dependent on government assistance programs such as unemployment assistance, Medicaid, or SNAP benefits, thus being less of a tax burden (Baum, Kurose & Ma, 2013). Health and civic benefits also accompany college degree attainment. College degree obtainers generally smoke less, exercise more, and reside in households with lower percentages of obese children than those obtaining only a high school education or less. Civically, college educated citizens are more likely to vote, be more knowledgeable of current issues, and serve as volunteers (Baum, Kurose & Ma, 2013). With knowledge of the opportunities and socioeconomic benefits that college degree attainment provides, it would seem that all U.S. citizens would be provided with the equitable opportunity to increase quality of life, both individually and nationally. The achievement gap and disparity

between college degree attainment rates among Whites and minorities, specifically African Americans, tell a much different tale, however.

### **Risk factors of AAMs**

As informed by Ogbu (1991), within cultural ecological theory African Americans are identified as “caste-like minority” in society, albeit unwillingly, due to the detriments of slavery, (as cited in Irving & Hudley, 2008, p. 680). As individuals whose identities consist of multiple traits that intersect within a social context, AAMs are burdened with societal disadvantages and disparities relative to their race, gender, citizenship and socioeconomic status, which ultimately develop into risk factors (Holley & Gardner, 2012). Cuyjet (2006) illuminated the impact these risk factors have across the spectrum by speaking of the, “dramatic disproportion of African American males in ‘behavior disorder’ classrooms in almost every urban public school district to the extremely low percentage of African American men in corporate boardrooms” (p. 8). Thus, the risk factors AAMs experience threaten to encumber their academic and career success.

### **Teacher Perception**

There is an undeniable link between the adversity that AAMs face and their academic performance (Noguera, 2003). One of the biggest risk factors that AAMs must overcome throughout their academic journey is external perception of their competence. Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges and Jennings (2010) inform that the perception that parents, teachers, school officials and administrators have of AAMs has a direct effect on the academic performance of these students and thus, these stakeholders all play a vital role in the “persistent underachievement” of AAMs (p. 293). Regarding teachers, who are central in influencing AAMs throughout their educational journey, research shows “that schools without caring and competent teachers and adequately resourced classrooms can create further barriers to success rather than opportunities for social and economic advancement” (Lynn et al. 2010). Unfortunately, because

AAMs are more likely to attend under-resourced P-12 schools, they are more likely to be educated by teachers who do not meet highly qualified standards, lack competence and have not received training on culturally competent education strategies (Orfield, 2001; Lynn et al., 2010). Without sufficient experience and training, teachers may experience difficulty motivating and relating to AAM students and as a result buy in to the stereotype that AAMs are uneducable.

Milner (2007) reminds, however that:

Whatever the source, some teachers have unsubstantiated, unquestioned, and inaccurate thoughts and beliefs about Black male students; put simply, these thoughts can be harmful and quite detrimental... Black male students can and do succeed in every type of school across the world. Their success in urban schools is not an exception. (p. 245)

External perception also alludes to teachers' perception of their own ability to educate AAMs. Researchers have found that teacher self-efficacy is highly correlated to the achievement of the students they educate. If teachers believe that they cannot impact their students within the classroom, their actual effectiveness might be inhibited (Lynn et al., 2010). Ultimately, teacher perception is a vital component of the educational journey of AAMs because it affects the student-teacher relationship. Positive relationships between students and teachers increase the likelihood of student achievement and retention and have even shown to decrease negative behaviors outside of the classroom (Zirkel, 2005). Conversely, negative student-teacher relationships simply do not foster achievement and may have long-lasting adverse effects on the educational engagement of AAMs.

### **Parental Influence**

Along with teachers, parental influence also plays a vital role in the academic achievement of AAMs. Engle (2007) informs that parental education level is a strong indicator of college success in students. Students whose parents have not obtained a degree are more likely to live in low-income communities, be academically underprepared, and drop out of college



before completion. Even when risk factors such as finances, background, and academic preparation and performance are controlled, college success is still threatened when classified as a first-generation student, as first-generation status is a risk factor itself (Engle, 2007). If first-generation students do persistent to attend college, they are more likely to require remedial coursework, be employed while in school to help counter financial burden, commute in lieu of residing on campus, and refrain from being involved in student organizations and activities. These characteristics ultimately jeopardize the opportunity to achieve college success. This is particularly problematic since AAMs disproportionately identify as first-generation students.

### **Academic Disengagement**

An additional risk factor that AAMs and the stakeholders who serve them must combat is academic disengagement. Research shows that teachers of AAMs are likely to “halt their efforts to nurture and promote achievement among Black males as early as fourth grade” (Harper & Davis, 2012, p. 104; Kunjufu, 1995). This places AAMs at a severe disadvantage since they are less likely to remain engaged in school if they feel that their teachers are not invested in them (Lynn et al, 2010). Consequently AAMs are more likely to disengage in learning by the end of elementary school (Harper & Davis, 2012).

There are many theories on why AAMs become academically disengaged. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) proposed that for African Americans opposition to achievement is a result of the realization of the societal inequities between themselves and Whites that stem from unmerited and unfair White privilege. Because students may be cognizant of the imbalanced bestowment of resources between them and Whites, both within school and outside of school, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) concluded that they are more likely to be disinvested in education when seen as more appropriate and benefitting for Whites. From this belief stems the concept that African

American students “act White” when they are actively engaged in education (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Harper & Davis, 2012).

Another theory might address why AAMs become disengaged in education is that of learned helplessness. Curry and Milsom (2013) explain learned helplessness as condition that develops when children “internalize their failures” and “believe that they are absolutely helpless to overcome a situation (such as academic difficulties)” (p. 29). African American students have been found to enter school performing at a lower academic level than White students, and continue to lag behind throughout their educational career (Lleras, 2008). If these students are not affirmed and motivated when they are in their prime developmental stages as it relates to education, they may develop learned helplessness and put forth less effort because they do not see sufficient return (Belsky, 2007). Bandura (1986) contended that by ensuring students experience success by planning small tasks that they can accomplish, stakeholders build up student efficacy, and thus learned helplessness is combatted (as cited in Curry & Milsom, 2013).

Stereotype threat might also explain academic disengagement among AAMs. Stereotype threat is explained as the “fear of possibly confirming a negative stereotype, sometimes combined with a fear that the stereotype might be true”, which causes students to be fearful of pursuing achievement (Zirkel, 2005, p. 110). Studies show that when African American students are asked to perform a task that they have been informed will assess their cognitive abilities they tend to perform lower than when oblivious to the variable being measurement (Zirkel, 2005). If AAMs have received damaging messages from society or stakeholders about their capabilities that have not been negated, their academic performance may be jeopardized, which is not conducive to academic success.

## Career Development

To ensure that AAMs are positioned for postsecondary success and beyond, equal attention must be paid to their career development in conjunction with academic performance (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Gottfredson's (1981) Theory of Circumscription and Compromise outlines the pertinence of students engaging in career development at an early age. This theory describes the developmental process by which children self-eliminate careers to be explored based on their self-perceptions of ability. As children journey through Gottfredson's (1981) four developmental stages, their self-concept is cultivated and influenced by the environmental factors they experience. For African American students, race plays a major role in the development of self-concept. As students learn about careers within and outside their home environments, it is likely they will discern career and socioeconomic disparities specific to their race when compared to majority culture. These factors affect student self-concept which in turn causes children to circumscribe, or limit careers that they feel are unattainable. Once certain careers are circumscribed, students are left with a *Zone of Acceptable Alternatives* consisting of careers in which they have compromised, or conceded due to appropriate fit on the basis of their altering self-concept (Curry & Milsom, 2013). Combatting career circumscription and compromise among AAMs is essential because these students are highly at risk of having a lowered self-concept based on the messages they receive from society. Ensuring that these students are engaged in career exploration and development as early in their educational journey as possible serves to increase the amount of careers that they perceive they are capable of pursuing and expands their *Zone of Acceptable Alternatives*. Thus, opportunities are presented to expose AAMs to careers they are unfamiliar with and close employment gaps between them and students of other ethnicities in fields such as STEM.

## **Vital Role of School Counselors**

In P-12 schools, school counselors serve as the primary advocate for career and college readiness. Along with teachers, school counselors can greatly impact the students they serve, including AAMs (Lynn, et al., 2010). It is imperative then, that school counselors exhibit multicultural competence when working with AAMs and employ culturally inclusive strategies to keep them engaged in career development throughout every grade level. These strategies range from inviting in AAM community partners in elementary school who are in careers that may not be represented in their home environments, to pairing up AAM high school students with AAM college students to foster mentoring (Curry & Milsom, 2013). An effective school counselor also allocates the adequate amount of time suggested toward direct services as directed in the American School Counseling Association Model (ASCA, 2012) to ensure that career and college readiness actually occurs. Because it is more probable for AAMs to attend more urban schools that are under-resourced, school counselors may not have the time needed to devote to career readiness. ASCA (2012) suggest that the ratio school counselors to students should not surpass 1:250, however the actual average is approximately 1:513 and in urban schools this ratio can be observed to exceed 1:740 (Tierney, Corwin & Coylar, 2003). Furthermore, in schools that educate students from high-poverty communities, the school counselor may be given additional responsibilities outside of the scope of counseling. Considering these factors, it is unsurprising that AAMs do not receive the career and college readiness needed and thus are at risk of being unsuccessful in postsecondary and employment avenues.

Due to their societal status in a post-slavery context, AAMs are faced with many risk factors that threaten their journey toward career and college readiness and degree attainment. While being cognizant of these risk factors is imperative, placing emphasis on positive factors that aid in the

resiliency and persistence of AAMs, assist stakeholders in remaining solution-focused, and championing the educational success of these individuals is also critical.

### **Resilience factors of AAMs**

Despite the onslaught of risk factors that AAMs face, there are those who have overcome disadvantages to achieve college success. Scholars have termed this notion of accomplishment under inimical conditions as resilience (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) defined resilience as "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543). Regarding academic achievement, AAM students who are educationally resilient are influenced by protective factors that shield them from negative outcomes (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010).

### **Culturally Competent Teachers and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Just as ineffective teachers can serve as risk factors to the educational journey of AAMs, those who are competent can foster resilience within these students. A defining characteristic of a competent teacher is the acknowledgement of the importance of utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms where AAMs are educated. According to Ladson-Billings (1995) in order for pedagogy to be considered culturally responsive, it must promote academic success, foster cultural competence among students, and students must "develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). Lynn et al. (2010) found that teachers of African American students that were identified as highly qualified respected the culture of the students they served and sought to connect with them through their culture. When teachers engage AAMs in the classroom by link home and school life through culturally responsive pedagogy, AAMs are more likely to become and remain invested in education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Harper & Davis, 2012).

Competent teachers also are aware of the value of rigorous coursework for AAMs. Rigorous coursework better prepares students for college and increases their chances for retention and graduation. While taking these courses, students develop study skills and self-regulatory skills that socially and emotionally prepare them to thrive within the college environment (Foust, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2009; Curry & Milsom, 2013). Furthermore, rigorous coursework may help to improve AAMs academic self-efficacy, which is a resilience factor (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). Competent teachers disregard the myth that AAMs are not academically gifted and advocate for them to be placed in gifted, honors, and advanced courses while simultaneously supporting these students as they matriculate through the coursework.

### **Parent Monitoring**

Because AAMs are likely to classify as first-generation students, their parents may have limited educational experience and may not have the opportunity to be as involved in their students' academic journey as parents who reap the financial benefits of degree attainment (Engle, 2007; Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013). Although parental education and involvement are essential to achievement of AAMs, research shows that parents of these students still have the opportunity aid in the building of resilience through parental monitoring (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). Parental monitoring is defined as the awareness and supervision of the daily activities and interaction of children by their parents and serves as a buffer to daily stressors that AAMs endure by providing structure and attempting to minimize risks that AAMs are exposed to (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010).

It is very possible for AAMs to overcome adversity through the building of resilience. Engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy and rigorous coursework fosters academic self-efficacy within AAMs and prepares them for college success. Also when AAMs are held

accountable by their parents through monitoring, the coping skills they have developed can be geared toward daily stressors that are normal to their development rather than risk factors stemming from their intersectional identity (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). It is through the development of these resilience factors that AAMs are propelled toward degree attainment and through persistence factors that college success is secured.

### **Persistence Factors of AAMs**

Retention for all students has garnered the most attention in higher education related research, as scholars have realized that focusing on enrollment is simply not enough (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Although resilience might be considered as the characteristic that ultimately gets students to college, persistence is what keeps students on the path toward success. Regarding AAMs, the struggle to retain them once they enroll in college is equally if not more difficult than getting them there. Just as overcoming challenges stemming from risk factors to build resilience serves as a hurdle to college success, persisting despite the unique challenges faced on a college campus may too serve as an uphill battle for AAMs. Receiving adequate support is the overarching theme as it relates to AAMs achieving college success (Harper, 2007a; Strayhorn, 2008; Bonner, 2010). This support on a college campus comes in the form of sound and culturally competent advisement, faculty/staff and peer relationships, and mentoring.

### **Culturally Competent Academic and Career Advising**

AAMs are likely to experience a more difficult academic transition to college, especially during their first year. They are less likely to take rigorous coursework in high school, and thus less likely to obtain the strength in cognitive and critical thinking skills as well as study and time management skills that rigor provides. AAMs also may find navigating academic arenas more challenging, especially as it relates to major and course selection, as they are less likely to receive this information from familial sources due to their possible first-generation status (Engle,

2007). It is for these reasons that sound and culturally competent academic advisement should be made readily available for these students. Academic advisement, whether provided by faculty or staff, should refrain from endorsing stereotypes that would try to negatively define AAM, yet take into account that these students may enter college disadvantaged in comparison to students who are enrolled already having college knowledge (Cuyjet, 2006). For AAMs effective and supportive academic advisors “can offset the socioeconomic disadvantages (e.g., inadequate academic preparation for college, lack of rigorous courses in high school) that may threaten their odds for success in college” (Strayhorn, 2008, p. 40).

Coinciding with the importance of academic advisement for AAMs is sound career advisement. Receiving comprehensive career development during P-12 education, including engagement in conclusive and culturally responsive career curriculum, creates a solid career foundation for AAMs and promotes career self-efficacy. Once AAMs are enrolled in college, the continuation of career development is vital. Career theorist Donald Super (1963) believed that career development should occur across the lifespan. As AAMs are exposed to college majors and corresponding coursework, their career interests might change or be affirmed. Utilizing the career support services on campus can be very helpful in providing career and college major information, assessing values, skills and interests, facilitating career specific work experience and educating students on employability skills. It is dire that these services, too, are culturally responsive and take into account the unique needs of AAMs.

Because AAMs are less likely to use student support services on campus (Engle, 2007), postsecondary institutions should meet these students where they are in order to be deliberate about fostering college success for these students. Universities around the nation have begun to institute programs that recognize the value that AAMs bring to society and provide safe spaces in



which these men are educated, mentored and supported, thus enhancing their overall development as college students (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). It is the hope that programs such as these increase persistence in AAMs as they feel supported and invested in by their institutions.

### **Postsecondary Persistence Fostered Through Support**

Support for AAMs through peer and faculty relationships are also vital to their persistence through college. As students matriculate through primary and secondary education, peer relationships become increasingly important, and their value continues through their undergraduate schooling (Curry & Milsom, 2013; Harper, 2007a). As aforementioned, the burden that AAMs endure when being accused of “acting white” due to their level of academic investment and intellectual ability during their P-12 years either causes them to become academically disengaged or separated from peers of the same race. For those who have persisted to college, it is likely that they have little contact with other high achieving AAM students if not engaged in student organizations or institutional programs catering to minority achievement. Thus AAMs are likely less acclimated to observe those sharing the same race and gender be academically successful (Harper, 2007; Fries-Britt, 2002). Student involvement, then, serves as an avenue to facilitate and promote collectivism between collegiate AAMs.

### **Student Involvement**

Student involvement is critical to the collegiate survival of AAMs, especially those who attend Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) (Bonner, 2010; Fischer, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Harper and Quaye (2007) and Bonner (2010) found that membership in student organizations is also critical to the development of AAM self-identity during undergraduate years. Students who are involved and hold membership in student organizations experience

greater benefits, both academically and socially than those who are not and are more likely to feel personally invested in the institution and be retained (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Engle, 2007).

Researchers have found that AAMs are more likely to join predominately African American organizations versus mainstream campus organizations as they feel that they are the best venue to engage in social activism and racial uplift, as well as assist disadvantaged populations (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Through membership in these organizations, AAMs are able to develop leadership skills and network with contemporaries sharing the same race and gender, which reaffirms their ability and right to achieve within higher education (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Fraternal organizations, specifically those that are Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) exemplify prominent sources of extracurricular engagement for AAM college students, especially at PWIs (Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Harper, 2007b). The first BGLO was conceptualized by collegiate men in 1906 as response to the isolation and exclusion they experienced while attending a PWI. What started as a secret society at Cornell University for academic and social support amongst AAMs blossomed into an international service organization and influenced the creation of eight other organizations at other universities, now recognized as BGLOS. Sororities exclusive to women are also included in this number as they too derived from this model and sought to serve the same purpose of providing service and uplift to the African American community. Since their inceptions, these nine incorporated organizations have been influential at the campuses that house their chapters as well as in the lives of their members (Ross, 2001).

Despite their initial purposes, the necessity of their existences on college campuses has been questioned by scholars, such as Kimbrough (2005) due to their inability to gain separation

from a blemished history of hazing, which was outlawed in 1990, and overall membership intake concerns. Instead of augmenting the literature surrounding the issues that plague BGLOs, Harper (2007b), however, sought to bring awareness to the value they add to the classroom as well as the collegiate student experience. Upon investigating using qualitative methods, he found that members of BGLOs were more engaged in their classes compared to African American students who were not affiliated with BGLOs. This engagement stemmed from the responsibility members felt to represent their organizations in a positive light and to serve as role models for their respective African American student bodies. Furthermore, Harper (2007b)'s study confirmed the findings of other scholars (Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson 1998; Pascarella et al. 1996) which revealed that BGLO involvement promoted positive cognitive and identity development, higher levels of self-esteem and the enhancement of social and leadership skills among students.

Additionally, engagement in African American student organizations, including BGLOs, may serve as an opportunity for AAMs to gain confidence before engaging in mainstream organizations. Those that do join mainstream organizations may do so in attempts to diversify them and bring attention and resources to underrepresented student. Learning to work with other cultures as a member of a mainstream organization is also an added benefit (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Regardless of the cultures represented within them, faculty, staff and administrators should champion student involvement for AAMs and ensure that support is provided to these organizations if they are committed to AAM college success (Harper & Quaye, 2007, Bonner, 2010).

## **Student-Faculty Engagement**

The integral presence that faculty hold on the path toward college success for AAMs is only second to peer engagement (Bonner, 2010). Meaningful relationships with faculty are dire as faculty members provide opportunities for expanded learning and are privy to college knowledge and resources that can propel the educational career of AAMs. These relationships also lead to satisfaction which directly and positively impact persistence (Strayhorn, 2008). Collier and Morgan (2008) proposed that the mastering of certain college student roles positively affects student persistence. They noted that engagement with faculty constitutes a major role that students must master and that first-generation students may have more difficulty doing this (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Engle, 2007). Research indicates that AAMs particularly find it difficult to foster relationships with faculty, specifically at PWIs, due to their perceived aloofness, inaccessibility and cultural insensitivity (Strayhorn, 2008; Guiffrida, 2005).

Strayhorn (2008) proposed that to combat this difficulty, diversity trainings, facilitation of cross cultural interactions and the urging of self-examination to counter cultural bias should occur campus-wide to foster tolerance and cultural appreciation. Additionally, faculty should prioritize engagement with these students. This could be achieved in numerous ways such as providing these students with opportunities to assist in research endeavors or sponsoring/advising organizations that these men hold membership in (Strayhorn, 2008).

Students are more inclined to establish relationships with faculty whom they feel exceed the role of a teacher and engage in “othernothering” which is traditionally seen when educating African American students (Guiffrida, 2005; Collins, 2001). Subsequently, these relationships become reciprocal in nature as AAM educate faculty through their very existence by chiseling away at

negative stereotypes and exposing their falsehoods (Cuyjet, 2006). In addition to faculty, cultivating relationships with higher education staff professionals is also beneficial.

## **Mentoring**

Lastly, mentorship serves as an equally fundamental tenet to the persistence and college success of AAMs (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Mentorship is described as the exchange of knowledge, ideas and ideologies between those who obtain those resources and those who are willing recipients (Ahn, 2010). The attainment of these resources increases social capital, thus making AAMs more valuable to society when they are mentored (Ahn, 2010; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). In Palmer and Gasman (2008)'s qualitative study on the role that social capital plays in AAM college success, their AAM participants illuminated how valuable mentoring can be. The participants identified significant instances in which their mentors helped them overcome barriers throughout their educational journey. They also shared how having access to individuals they could identify with was very impactful on their academic success. When minority students, such as AAMs, are partnered with mentors they are more likely to be academically engaged and exhibit higher academic performance than those without mentors. However when these mentors share the same gender, race and career field, the self-efficacy of these mentees is likely to be even more positively impacted. One reason for this is because their motivation increases as they perceive that they too can have a successful future despite societal constraints (Zirkel, 2005, Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Each participant interviewed by Palmer and Gasman (2008) on the topic of mentoring encouraged and urged older men, including administrators, faculty and staff, to serve as mentors and AAM college students to seek mentors as soon as they arrived on campus.

Despite messages received from society about their capability, AAMs are indeed intelligent, gifted and educable. It is the responsibility of stakeholders in education to incubate their brilliance and provide an equitable educational experience during their P-12 schooling during which educational resilience is built. Once achieved, AAM can embark upon their college journey with the necessary resources, knowledge and skills to be successful. Furthermore, by supporting AAMs through college, their persistence and chances for success are increased. This ultimately reduces the number of first-generation AAMs in future generations as well as the risk factors associated with this status. Just as educational disenfranchisement regarding AAMs is cyclical, college success can also be cyclical in nature and if promoted can serve to close the achievement gap as it relates to AAM and impact our nation favorably.

#### **African American Males and Doctoral Attainment**

According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, 30% of the population has attained at least a bachelor's degree. Of the 30%, ten percent have received a Master's degree or above and only 2% have successfully obtained a doctoral degree. Based on past studies, attainment of a master's degree earns 90% more than a high school diploma, and full time workers with doctoral degrees earn 2.6 times more after taxes than full time working high school graduates (Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013). In considering the return that a doctoral degree earns, it is notable that in 2013, of the 52,000 students who earned a doctorate, only 2,147 or 4.1% of these students identified as African American. Furthermore, only 798 or 1.5% of doctoral students in 2013 were African American males who identified as U.S. citizens (National Science Foundation, 2013). These statistics are indeed troublesome considering the career, financial, and societal benefits that accompany a doctorate, coupled with immense disparity when compared to doctoral degree attainment of majority culture members.

If barriers to educational access and degree attainment were removed, such as financial constraint and limited college choice, those who are disadvantaged would indeed earn higher than average returns when college success is achieved (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013; Brand & Xie, 2010). This theory can be extended to the underrepresentation of AAMs among doctoral students in the U.S. Holley and Gardner (2012) informed that of the 37% of first-generation doctoral students, half of those students are African American. Because fostering college success is less likely to be intentional throughout the primary and secondary education of AAMs, access is not promoted at the collegiate level and degree attainment is less likely to occur (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). This undoubtedly impedes possible doctoral success, which is challenging even without factoring in racial and gendered barriers or first-generation status. If, however, doctoral access and success is achieved more frequently, AAMs would reap above average benefits and thus perpetuate a positive cycle related to degree attainment and success. In order to address doctoral access for AAMs, education stakeholders must take heed to the factors that impact their educational journey.

### **Theoretical Lens**

Creswell (2013) informs that the use of a theoretical lens within qualitative inquiry provides:

an orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race (or other issues of marginalized groups). This lens becomes a transformative perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change. (p. 64)

Furthermore, theoretical lenses “guide the researchers as to what issues are important to examine (e.g., marginalization, empowerment, oppression, power) and the people who need to be studied (e.g., women, low economic social status, ethnic and racial groups, sexual orientation, disability)” (Creswell, 2013, p. 64). Creswell (2013)’s definitions of theoretical lenses are

befitting to the purpose of this study and align with the choice to view AAMs through a Social and Cultural Capital Theory lens. In this study, however, Social and Cultural Capital Theory are approached from a racialized discourse viewpoint, which seeks to “raise important questions about the control and production of knowledge, particularly about people and communities of color” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 65), in an effort to bring light to educational and socioeconomic incongruences experienced by AAMs.

### **Social Capital Theory (SCT)**

Austin (1996) relayed that:

Today, education is arguably more important than at any other time in American history. It determines, in large measure, the degree of social mobility one has or will have in American society. Quality of life tends to be highly correlated with one’s educational attainment. (as cited in Jackson & Moore, 2006, p. 203)

As previously discussed, the benefits of college success are far reaching and directly impact one’s lifestyle. However, the journey toward college success is rarely, if ever, achieved individually, but is made possible through a culmination of resources. These resources emerge in the form of social capital, which is positively related to college success when attained (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

As informed by Bourdieu (1986), *social capital* is defined as the resources individuals attain due to their affiliation to a network (as cited in Palmer & Gasman, 2005). Within these networks, members learn to understand “norms, trust, authority and social control” in order to succeed (Coleman, 1988, as cited in Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 55). It is through participation in these privileged networks that individuals are supported and gain social rewards including higher career and social status positions (Brown & Davis, 2001; as cited in Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Lin 2000). Consequently, those who have acquired more capital yield more power (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Bourdieu believed social capital to be a means of control used by the



dominant class to preserve supremacy (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Lin 2001). In this way the attainment of social capital can serve as an immense form of social inequity to those not afforded the same attainment opportunities (Kingston, 2001; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Considering the notion that success is unachievable when certain forms of social capital are absent, examining SCT is vital when addressing the educational trajectory of AAMs (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

### **Cultural Capital Theory (CCT)**

Cultural Capital Theory (CCT) is closely related to SCT and both theories can be found to overlap so frequently that the two have been combined to create the term *sociocultural capital* (Strayhorn, 2010; Throsby, 1999, Holley & Gardner, 2012). However, CCT focuses on the attainment of nonfinancial resources and is specifically related to educational attainment and social reproduction of children. These students attain certain forms of cultural capital that are directly influenced by the social networks they hold membership in; thus showing the relationship between SCT and CCT (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Van de Werfhorst & Hofstede, 2007; Yosso, 2005; Kingston, 2001). Bourdieu (1977), who pioneered the theorization of cultural capital, conveyed that:

Cultural capital is concerned with the contribution made by the educational system [and family socialization] to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes, by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of distribution of cultural capital among these classes. (p. 487)

Bourdieu argued that in a hierarchical society, if one is not born into a middle or upper-class family attaining valuable capital, such as certain forms of knowledge, this lack could be supplemented through formal schooling in an effort to achieve social mobility (Yosso, 2005, Holley & Gardner, 2012). Cultural capital does not only consist of the attainment of knowledge, however. Based on CCT, students are advantaged when exposed to what may be observed as widely shared, institutionalized, upper-crust cultural *tastes*, such as art and certain genres of

music, which is seen as being inherited from familial background (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Additionally, Lamont and Lareau (1988) noted that middle and upper-class students learn certain linguistic codes at home which differ from codes inherited in working class households. For Bourdieu and his counterparts, the attainment of these forms of capital served as an explanation as to why children born to educated parents achieve academically (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Yosso, 2005; Kingston, 2001).

Lareau and Weininger (2003) argued that any analysis of cultural capital must grapple with its role in education. According to CCT, since schools are institutions that augment capital not inherited due to socioeconomic status, once students complete their education, they should have the opportunity to acquire the same amount of capital as those students who possess inherited capital, theoretically (Yosso, 2005). Yet, most schools are a direct reflection of the socioeconomic status of the students who attend them and the communities they are a part of (Holley & Gardner, 2012). Additionally, what is perceived to be the norm both micro-systemically and macro-systemically is derived from the institutionalized beliefs of the dominant culture on what constitutes as cultural capital (Kingston, 2001).

### **Sociocultural Capital and African Americans**

Despite the *Brown v. The Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* (1954) ruling on educational equality, overall racial segregation in schools has not ceased, nor has equity been achieved. In fact, resegregation has become a trend in regards to the current ethnic composition of schools in the U.S (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). This is due to the phenomenon Orfield (2001) termed as *White Flight*. This notion coincides with Lin (2000)'s mention of homophily, which describes the nature of individuals to seek the company of those within the same social group. In the wake of White Flight, minority students are left in communities and schools with reduced

capital; they are more likely to attend schools that lack funding, resources and qualified, competent teachers (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004; Orfield, 2001; Lynn et al., 2010). In this way, CCT would prove to be illegitimate for African American students regarding the belief that formal schooling is a vehicle by which social upward mobility can be achieved by attaining cultural capital (Yosso, 2005; Kingston, 2001). For many African American students, equitable opportunities for the amassing of capital do not exist within schools, just as cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1977), is less likely to be inherited outside of schools; thus equitable opportunities for success are few.

Students from within dominant culture have the upper hand regarding cultural capital that is valued within schools. Kingston (2001) contends that:

The socially privileged receive better grades in school, perform better on standardized tests and earn higher degrees. And because education is the prominent pathway to economic success, it is hard to overestimate the significance of the connection between social privilege and academic success. (p.88)

Meanwhile, first-generation African American students may struggle to overcome barriers to acquire dominant social and cultural capital to succeed in school. Their efforts may seem additionally burdensome as they often do not receive equitable resources that would assist in achievement. Furthermore, researchers have found that if African American students acquire equitable cultural capital, it is without the inherent ease that students who are members of dominant culture attain; thus they are penalized and equity is still not fully realized (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Kingston, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Furthermore, when addressing SCT and CCT and African Americans, it is problematic to be inconsiderate of the likelihood that African Americans amass culture and maintain tastes that may not be recognized or valued in educational arenas, or viewed as nontraditional when compared to dominant culture (Strayhorn, 2010). Yosso (2005) addressed this perceived lack in

capital by schools as it relates to minorities. She contended that by buying into this notion, schools approach students from a deficiency perspective, as well as label and engage them as disadvantaged. Because schools assume that African American students are deficient in cultural capital, they fail to take into account the worth of the capital these students do acquire (Yosso, 2005), which equates to missed opportunities to build on resilience and promote persistence within these students.

Concurrent with the works of Carter (2003) and Yosso (2005), according to Lamont and Lareau (1998) and Kingston (2001), CCT's exclusionary nature of perceived cultural capital based on upper class ideologies is arbitrary in that it does not account for merit or diversity in performance. Usually, gaps in achievement are explained by capability versus the transmission of privilege and cultural capital. Therefore, under the guise that advancement is the direct result of merit, CCT has not always been seen as a legitimate reason to explain underachievement (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). However, Barone (2006) notes that, "pedagogical practices and assessment procedures are related, to a significant extent, to the culture of the upper class" (p. 1040). Just as Ford (1995) relays that there are other ways to assess giftedness in African American students outside of mathematical and linguistic proficiency (the latter being a competency recognized within CCT as cultural capital [Kingston, 2001]), there are categories outside of the institutionalization of the dominant culture from which cultural capital can be recognized.

Carter (2003) favorably referred to cultural capital obtained by African Americans as non-dominant cultural capital and describes it as a "set of tastes, or schemes of appreciation and understandings, accorded to a lower status group, that include preferences for particular linguistic, musical or interactional styles" (p. 138). Carter (2003) proceeded to state that those

who are members of the lower status group use these resources in an effort to present as authentic within their communities. These efforts include their display of linguistic proficiency, also referred to as linguistic currency (Carter, 2003; Kingston, 2001).

In educational realms, the Standard English versus African American English, or Ebonics, debate is ongoing, especially as it relates to what constitutes culturally responsive pedagogy (Delpit, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Hollie, 2001). Though researchers have shed light on the negative implications of not acknowledging the language used at home by African American and other minority students within classrooms, all educators might not be accepting of these findings or knowledgeable on how to respond to them (Hollie, 2001). Hollie (2001) contended that:

Still, many African American students will walk into classrooms and be discreetly taught in most cases, and explicitly told in others, that the language of their forefathers, their families, and their communities is bad language, street language, the speech of the ignorant and/or uneducated. (p. 54)

Dr. Hollie proceeded to shed light on the Linguistic Awareness Program, which serves minority students' language needs and was created to counter the damage done in the education system concerning which linguistic proficiencies are considered valuable cultural capital (Hollie, 2001; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Kingston, 2001). He explained that:

The program's rationale is that too many minority students are failing in American schools, trapped in classrooms where their language is devalued and teachers' low expectations and limited understanding about their language and culture negatively impact achievement. (p. 55).

Goals of the program include facilitating teacher acknowledgement of the value of students' central language as well as ensuring that students are proficient in Standard English without devaluing their central language. The achievement of these goals increases the likelihood that students will improve linguistically, which will extend to other content areas (Hollie, 2001).

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) found that teachers who adhere to pedagogy that is culturally responsive prove to be highly effective with their African American students. If schools are reflective of dominant culture as proposed by CCT (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Kingston, 2001; Lin 2000; Yosso, 2005), African American students may perceive schools as “hostile” and “alien environments” in which they cannot be their authentic selves (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 151). In an effort to provide educators with accounts of efficacious teaching practices, Ladson-Billings (1995) provided insight into her extensive research on teaching excellence as a direct result of the utilization of culturally responsive and relational pedagogy with African American students.

In one account, Ladson-Billings (1995) shared the experience of one teacher’s engagement in culturally responsive pedagogy through the acknowledgement of language. This teacher allowed her African American students to use the language they spoke at home in addition to Standard English within the classroom. They were allowed to both speak and write in their language, which likely promoted feelings of efficacy and comfort. She then required students to translate their works to the standard version. As a result of this process, her students improved in their fluidity and usage of both languages

By adjusting the narrative surrounding cultural capital to be inclusive, Ladson-Billings (1995), Hollie (2001) and Carter (2003) and other researchers accomplished what Yosso (2005) described as reclaiming power from “disempowered theories” through theoretical “transformative resistance” (p. 70). In this way, where African Americans would initially be disqualified and cast as deficient based on SCT and CCT, their differing tastes can now be viewed as valuable and significant. Taking into account Carter (2003)’s addendum to CCT, it is apparent that African Americans, and specifically AAMs, are encumbered as they must pose a

dual front as they struggle to juggle the attainment of both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital throughout their educational journey.

Considering the extensive research on SCT and CCT, it is evident that social stratification within the education pipeline serves as a fundamental explanation of the current educational state of AAMs and the lack of doctoral degrees they attain. As with any institutionalized ideology, in order to disrupt its dominance and subsequently affect change, resistance must first occur at a foundational level. It is essential that primary and secondary education interest holders ensure that the social and cultural capital that AAMs already attain is valued, in addition to consistently augmenting equitable social and cultural capital.

If equitable capital is acquired, access as well as success is ultimately promoted. Unfortunately, the disparity in the number of bachelor's degrees and ultimately doctoral degrees acquired by AAMs in comparison to other ethnic groups exposes that foundational cultural capital building is not occurring nearly enough. There are certainly cases in which students do not obtain the capital valued in CCT, yet still achieve despite their perceived deficiency. However, Sullivan (2001) notified that despite these students' success, CCT is not exposed or challenged, but strengthened due to the "appearance of meritocracy" (p.4).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter expounded on the societal and personal value of higher education attainment in an attempt to bring light to the critical issue of AAMs and their access to and success in higher education settings. Because there is a clear disparity in the educational achievement of AAMs and their peers, this study seeks to acknowledge the risk factors that could potentially derail AAMs in the P-20 pipeline, but to a greater degree seeks to investigate the persistence and resilience factors encountered throughout their educational journey that first-generation AAMs

ultimately attribute to their doctoral success. This chapter also introduced the social and cultural capital theory as the theoretical lenses through which resilience and persistence factors will be examined.



## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

*“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”*  
-Toni Morrison

### **Introduction**

Presented in this chapter were the research methods that guide this study. The study: (1) explored the lived experiences of first generation AAMs who were resilient and persisted to achieve collegiate and doctoral success, and (2) sought to gain understanding on the resilience and persistence factors serving as sociocultural capital, which attributed to their success. Participants shared their experiences regarding their academic, professional, and personal journeys.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research served as the methodological framework for this study. The purpose of qualitative research is to both explore and seek to understand how individuals make sense of an issue (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) further noted that the qualitative research process consists of data collection that occurs in the setting of participants, accounts for the emergence of questions, themes and processes, and analyzes and interprets data through inductive and deductive means. Based on the research questions guiding the study, qualitative inquiry served as a more humanistic vehicle to understanding participants' experiences, and sought to assist the reader in better relating to the data conveyed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, qualitative research allowed for richness and depth as it relates to data analysis.

### **Case Study Design**

Creswell (2013) informed that a case study approach to research has been largely utilized across many disciplines. Case study research was defined by Creswell (2013) as:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. p. 97

Utilizing a case study design provides a method in which researches might gain the answers to “how” and “why” questions while exploring the influence of a phenomenon by the context it occurs in (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study research methods involve observing single or multiple cases (Creswell, 2013). Stake (2013) informed that when choosing cases to study, we must also study its situation, as case study design must also account for the way that a case interacts with systems in its environment. For this particular study, a multiple case design was employed and each participant served as an individual case. Within multi-case research, cases should share commonalities and be “categorically bound”, while serving as participants in a specific group or as “examples of a phenomenon” (Stake, 2013, p. 6). Furthermore, multiple case studies highlight both similarities and variances among selected cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition to being multi-case, this study is classified as an instrumental case study, which focuses on a specific issue (doctoral success for first-generation AAMs) and uses cases (AAMs) as vehicles to better comprehend the matter (Stake, 1995; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Yin (2003) relayed that the outcomes of multiple case study research include the prediction of similar results which constitutes a “literal replication” or the prediction of opposing results, though for anticipated reasons which may add to theory (p. 47).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do first-generation African American males perceive their educational experiences toward doctoral success?

2. What resilience and persistence factors do first generation African American Males attribute to their doctoral success?

### **Sampling and Participants**

To ensure that data collected was rich in quality, purposeful sampling was utilized. Purposeful sampling selects participants based on the rich data they can contribute to the phenomenon being studied versus the need to satisfy a sample size (Hays & Singh, 2011). Specifically, snowball sampling was the method used to acquire participants. Using snowball sampling methods, the researcher obtained referrals from colleagues, classmates and mentors who were aware of possible participants fitting the criteria for the study. Participants of this study met the case-binding criteria of self-identification as an African American male and third generation American citizen, as well the obtainer of a doctoral degree. For this study, African American is defined as an individual of Black African descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Additionally, during their doctoral programs, participants qualified as a first generation students, whose parents/guardians had not attained a two or four year degree. The criteria was gender specific in requesting male participants due to statistics concerning AAM educational achievement in comparison to their African American female and White counterparts (Harper, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). The criteria was bound in this fashion to illuminate the success of first-generation AAMs despite the disparities that African Americans have long faced as citizens of the United States regarding access and success in higher education arenas (Noguera, 2003; Cuyjet, 2006; Jackson and Moore, 2006; Harper, 2006; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Gardner & Holley, 2011). Considering multiple case research design, three participants (as seen in Table 3.1) were selected to fulfill sampling criteria and each represented one case. This number was chosen based on the suggestion made by Creswell (2013) to limit

cases to a quantity of four or five. When addressing purposeful sampling, Hayes and Singh (2011) informed that a large sample in qualitative research is not needed when theorization is not the desired outcome. The three individuals that participated in this study were assigned pseudonyms (Jonathan, David and Charles) and their identifying information was not included throughout the study so as to preserve anonymity.

Table 3.1 Participant Sample

Participant	Age	Parental Educational	Date of Doctoral Degree Conferment
Jonathon	53	Grandmother ( 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade)	May 2006
David	49	Mother (High School) Father (High School)	December, 2009
Charles	34	Mother (High School) Father (High School)	December 2012

### **Data Collection**

Unique to case study design is the call for multiple forms of data to support the study (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this study, qualitative data collection primarily occurred through individual semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed. The qualitative interview process allows for participants to author their stories and share their perspectives in their own words (Creswell, 2013). Interview protocol consisted of open-ended, guiding questions that assisted in answering the research questions. The relationship between the research questions and corresponding guiding interview protocol is included in Table 3.2. Questions were

Table 3.2. Research Questions and Guiding Protocol Relationship

Research Questions	Guiding Protocol Questions
<p>1. How do first-generation African American males perceive their educational experience toward doctoral success?</p> <p>Corresponding Guiding Questions: 1, 2, 4,7, 8,9, 12</p> <p>2. What resilience and persistence factors do first generation African American Males attribute to their doctoral success?</p> <p>Corresponding Protocol Questions: 3, 5,6,10,11, 12</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me a little about yourself and your educational background?</li> <li>2. What difficulties, if any do you perceive you faced as a first generation, African American male throughout your educational journey?</li> <li>3. What or whom influenced your decision to attend college?</li> <li>4. Do you feel that your academic preparation for college was sufficient?</li> <li>5. Could you tell me about times you felt supported during your educational journey?</li> <li>6. What were your most important relationships throughout your educational journey?</li> <li>7. Why did you choose to pursue a doctoral degree?</li> <li>8. Tell me about the institution you chose to attend for your doctorate and why you chose to attend that particular institution?</li> <li>9. What challenges did you face while pursuing your doctorate?</li> <li>10. What factors do you attribute to your success in beginning and completing your doctoral program?</li> <li>11. How has your doctoral degree affected your career journey?</li> <li>12. What would you want your legacy to be as a first generation AAM student who has achieved doctoral success?</li> </ol>

Questions were determined in advance based on the research questions and developed from literature regarding first generation AAMs, cultural capital and doctoral success discussed in Chapter 1. However, before data collection occurred, potential participants identified through snowball sampling methods were sent an initial email, which can be found in Appendix A. The email disclosed the purpose of the study and the presented qualifying demographic criteria requested. Willing participants who met the criteria were asked to email the address provided to

signify their interest in participating in the study. Those participants were then emailed an informed consent to be signed and returned back, which reiterated the study's purpose and outlined the measures to be taken to ensure confidentiality, including the use of pseudonyms when referring to participants' demographic information. This informed consent document was also included in Appendix B of this document.

In addition to the informed consent participants were emailed the guiding questions from the interview protocol in advance to deter bias. Because interviews were semi-structured, questions pertaining to participant responses also emerged during interviews. Once interviews concluded they were immediately transcribed in preparation for data analysis. Any necessary follow-up questions were relayed to the participants via email. Additional forms of data included data from doctoral institutions attended, as well as field notes of the researcher's cognitive processes during interviews. Furthermore, a participant demographic form that was created by the researcher and emailed to participants along with the informed consent and interview protocol also contributed to data, in an effort to achieve triangulation. Triangulation, which is expounded upon later in this chapter, is described as the incorporation of multiple sources of data in a study to increase rigor by "assessing the integrity of inferences" drawn from the data. (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 579).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is critical to all methods of qualitative research, including case study design (Basit, 2003). The purpose of data analysis is to, "determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondents' view of the world in general and of the topic in particular" (McCracken, 1988, as cited in Basit, 2003, p. 143). Once data is collected and

organized, case study design calls for a thorough description of each case and setting, and subsequent analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method for both within-case and cross-case analysis. In utilizing this method, data was conceptualized to unearth patterns within individual cases and to discover similarities and differences among cases. (Tesch, 1990; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). For within-case analysis, the researcher continuously reviewed the data collected for this study in order to identify patterns. From those patterns, codes were created, as researchers code data in an effort to make sense of the voluminous amount of qualitative data collected and subsequently aids the reader navigating the data (Basit, 2003). ). . Subsequent themes emerged from the observation of relationships among codes. Analytic memos were created throughout data analysis as data was reduced into themes through the coding process. In qualitative research, themes are the aggregation of multiple codes that represent a broad idea and are given labels to represent those ideas (Creswell, 2013. Just as researchers have noted that data analysis, including thematic coding, is continual and reoccurring (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003), the researcher constantly reviewed the participants' interview transcripts throughout the data analysis process in order to find new themes and reorganize existing themes. As suggested by Wolcott (1994) and Creswell (2013), codes and themes were displayed using visual aids in the form of tables. Following the presentation of the findings, assertions for each case were made based on the researcher's interpretation of what was found during the analysis were conveyed (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

Specifically for this study, viewing participants as individual cases allowed for cross-case analysis to occur. Cross-case analysis was vital in underscoring the differences in the journeys of the participants in order to further counter the belief that the AAM experience is homogeneous.

The method used for cross-case analysis required that each case was paired to the remaining cases in order to thoroughly examine the commonalities and dissimilarities present. Additionally, cross case analysis allowed for the discovery of overarching themes amidst the three cases.

I-Poem analysis also served as a quantitative analysis method for this study. Edwards and Weller (2012) informed that I-poems are “concerned with accessing meaning in relation to self (p.204) and trace “how participants represent themselves in the interview and concerns the stream of consciousness that is carried by the first person references that run through the interview” (p. 205). The researcher created I-poems by first identifying all I-statements within each participant transcript. Words within the I-statement that the researcher believed ascribed to the desired impact of the personal association were further highlighted. The statements were then transferred from the transcript in sequential order and composed into stanzas. (Edwards & Weller, 2012)

### **Rigor**

Researchers have suggested that although qualitative and quantitative research designs clearly differ, qualitative design should be approached with the same resolve in establishing reliability and validity of results as quantitative design (Krefting, 1991; Cavanaugh, 1997; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). By approaching qualitative research from this stance, the researcher exhibits competence for the need to provide findings of worth that justify the purpose of the study (Tracy, 2010). Within qualitative research, the term *rigor* is used to describe the measures taken within a qualitative study to ensure that it is rich in quality and is valid (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010).

Regarding data collection methods, rigor was exhibited through purposeful sampling strategies, quantity and duration of interviews, strength of interview protocol, and the accuracy in



which transcription occurred (Tracy, 2010). In addition to rigorous data collection methods, rigorous data analysis was demonstrated by the researcher through efforts to ensure that the steps taken to analyze data and interpret data were thoroughly explained and transparent to the reader Tracy (2010).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is a vital component of a rigorous study and establishes trustworthiness through displaying that the study measured what it intended to measure (Tracy, 2010; Creswell, 2013). Several methods will be employed to achieve credibility including: including: (1) triangulation, (2) thick descriptions, (3) member checking, and (4) external coding.

*Triangulation* involves using multiple sources information to show concurrence between themes or ideas (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The most popular practice of triangulation is data triangulation, which includes the use of multiple participants as well as methods in which data is collected (Morine-Dersheimer, 1983; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2013). The more participants affirm an issue or the more frequent that a code or label appears across cases, the more credibility is established (McKenna, 1999). As aforementioned, for this study, sources of data included interviews, documentation in the form of participant demographics and institutional demographics, and field notes were collected to achieve triangulation. Because, multiple forms of data are essential to case study design in order to explain the phenomenon being researched (Yin, 2003; Yin 2009; Creswell 2013), case studies are rigorous by nature and promote credibility as variability of data adds strength to the study (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Qualitative data is aptly named so because of the quality expected to be present when engaging in this method of inquiry. One approach to achieving quality within this study is

through the composition of thick descriptions. Thick descriptions are detailed explanations that figuratively paint a comprehensive picture of how participants navigate in the context of the phenomenon being studied (Hays & Singh, 2011, Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). Ponterotto (2006) informed of the significance of thick descriptions by stating that, “Thick description leads to thick interpretation, which in turns leads to thick meaning of the research findings for the researchers and participants themselves, and for the report’s intended readership (p. 543). In an effort to ensure that this study was rigorous and credible, thick descriptions are present throughout the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that member checking is the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility in a study” (p. 314). Member checking involves providing participants the opportunity to clarify or add to data in order to verify interpretations perceived by researchers (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Baxter & Jack, 2008). There are different stages during the research process in which member checking can occur. Some researchers have proposed that participants be provided with interpretations and findings to evaluate accuracy, while others suggest that veracity be established by supplying participants with raw data, such as transcripts and field notes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study, participants were provided with transcripts in an effort to allow participants to verify the credibility was present during data collection. All participants reported that they perceived their transcripts to be accurate.

Employing an external coder who is experienced in qualitative research design analysis as well as the topic of study also augmented the credibility of the study (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Carlson, 2010; Creswell 2013). The role of an external coder is to analyze data independent of the primary researcher and generate their own categories and themes from the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). An experienced coder also helps to combat researcher

bias and can be considered a form of triangulation (Carlson, 2010). The primary researcher and external coder compared analyses in hopes of finding congruence among interpretation, which added to the trustworthiness of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this study, the external coder was a doctoral candidate who had experience in conducting qualitative research studies and is published on the topic of resilience in African American college students. External coding results were presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the primary instrument in qualitative data collection, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge personal biases and assumptions held regarding the research (Creswell, 2013). As a second-generation African American college graduate and eventual second-generation Doctor of Philosophy, I have always been conscious of the cultural capital I am privy to due to my parents' educational attainment, despite the barriers they encountered as first-generation, African American students. In my experience as a doctoral student at a PWI, I have had the pleasure of participating in a doctoral program that is an uncommonly high producer of Ph.Ds. obtained by AAMs. During my first week of classes in the program I was taken aback by the significant number of AAMs who were present. As I matriculated through my coursework and attended seminars and workshops dedicated to addressing critical issues in higher education, I was afforded increased insight into to what I already knew to be true: something needed to be done about AAMs and higher education attainment. As research approaches have shifted to address these issues from a success model instead of highlighting deficits, I too, sought to change the way I conceptualize the issues surrounding AAMs. My personal and professional experiences ultimately led to inquiry on (1) What is the driving force that propels AAMs to doctoral success,

(2) How does first generation status affect AAM doctoral success. It was these initial questions that led to the desire to implement this study.

Due to my familiarity with the literature regarding the role of race and gender in higher education attained prior to this study, as well as my own lived experiences as an African American doctoral candidate, my awareness and sensitivity to the plight of first generation AAMs who seek educational success is heightened. Though it is my desire to display objectivity throughout data collection, analysis and presentation, my perceptions and inferences may be affected by the subconscious biases I may hold (Creswell, 2013; Hoepfl, 1997).

### **Institutional Review Board Statement**

Prior to seeking participants for this study, an application was submitted to and approved by Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct research.

### **Limitations**

The criteria that bound the cases within this case study are also limited the study. Because parental educational attainment is a strong indicator of graduate study pursuit and completion, and the sample calls for AAMs whose parents have not attained a two or four year degree (Mullen, Goyette & Soares, 2003), it was more challenging to fulfill the sample. The sample was also limited due to the requirement that participants hold a doctorate degree (i.e. Ph.D or Ed.D) versus a professional degree (i.e. M.D. or J.D.). Generalizability will not be sought due to sample size.

Patton (1999) informed that when the researcher is present, it is possible for participants to embellish or exaggerate their experiences. Participants may also evade sharing details about themselves that they may deem unfavorable. Thus, because of self-selection, participant bias as

also possibly served as a limitation. Additionally, a large component of data collection involves self-reporting, which is dependent upon the ability of participants to elicit memories. The challenge of maintaining accuracy when requiring recollection of past experiences also served as a limitation of this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter summarized the qualitative research methods that guided data collection and analysis. A multiple case study design was implemented, with each participant serving as one case. Those asked to participate in the study were males who self-identified as African American and who were of first-generation status, based on parental educational attainment. Multiple forms of data were collected including, interviews and documentation. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method and the thematic coding process occurred following within-case and cross-case analysis. Throughout data collection, analysis and interpretation, measures were taken to ensure that rigor, credibility and trustworthiness were present within the study.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

*“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*

### Summary of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of three first-generation African American men who achieved doctoral success through the attainment of a Ph.D. A qualitative, multi-case research design guided data collection and analysis. By asking participants to narrate their own educational journeys through interviews, it was the intention of the researcher to provide readers with authentic insight into what factors aided participants in the attainment collegiate and graduate degrees despite experiencing educational disparities stemming from risk factors such as single parent rearing, financial instability, lack of role models and mentors, insufficient academic preparation for college and deficient college and career readiness preparation. Furthermore, due to the lack of literature surrounding the plight of first-generation AAMs who go on to pursue and successfully attain doctoral degrees, it was the researcher’s aim to pique the interest of other researchers and higher education interest holders to continue to discover and instill cultural capital in the form of resilience and persistence factors that will aid AAMs in achieving educational success. The research questions guiding this qualitative, multi-case study were:

3. How do first-generation African American males perceive their educational experience toward doctoral success?
4. What resilience and persistence factors do first-generation African American Males attribute to their doctoral success?

Once approval from the Institutional Review Board was received, the researcher began the process of identifying participants. The qualifying criteria for participants of this study were: self-identification as first-generation student, African American male and at least 3<sup>rd</sup> generation

American citizen as well as the obtainment of a doctoral degree. Since a multiple case study should have no more than four cases (Creswell, 2013) and it was decided that each participant would represent one case for analysis purposes, the researcher sought 3-4 participants for the study. The researcher was previously familiar with two potential participants and knew that based on their educational successes, qualifying criteria, and willingness to contribute to the study, they would serve as viable participants. Two other participants were acquired through snowball sampling methods; those associated with the researcher recommended the participants based on their alignment with the research criteria as well as the perceived richness their experiences could add to the study. After receiving recommendations and email addresses, an initial contact email was sent to all participants disclosing the purpose of the purpose of the study and asking participants to respond with their willingness to participate. Though all four participants initially agreed to participate, only three were actually able to contribute to the data.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis occurred constantly throughout the collection of multiple sources of data. As shown in Table 3.2 within the previous chapter, a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of twelve questions was designed in consideration of the research questions and sociocultural capital as the theoretical lens for this study. In addition to responding to questions within the interview protocol, participants also addressed emerging questions posed by the researcher which helped to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. The researcher initially noted the development of primitive associations while interviewing participants through analytic memoing and the creation of field notes. Subsequently, data analysis continued while listening to and transcribing interviews with accuracy. This raw data in the form of transcripts was reviewed repeatedly for each participant serving as an individual case. Also reviewed were

field notes and as well as the participants' personal demographic information and corresponding institutional demographic information.

To approach a within case analysis in the study, each participant's transcript was thematically coded while taking into account relationships that could be observed throughout the data. After reporting the findings of each case, assertions were made as themes were observed through the theoretical lens. Cross case analysis involved placing the participants in juxtaposition to each other in order to compare and contrast their experiences as first-generation AAM who have achieved doctoral success. The researcher also further analyzed participant data by creating I-poems composed of direct I-statements from each participant in order to draw attention to the personal connections the participants made while relaying their lived experiences. Finally, in an effort to add trustworthiness to the study, the researcher employed an external coder to provide data analysis that was free of researcher bias.

### **Introduction of Participants**

#### **Jonathan**

Jonathan is a 53 year old, first-generation, AAM who earned his PhD in Organizational Leadership and Development within four years from a PWI in the spring of 2006. He is married with three daughters and has three grandchildren. He was resides in the Southern state that he was born and raised in. He currently serves as an executive coach and a chief manager of Human Capital for a state government office.

#### **David**

David is a 49 year old native of Connecticut who received his doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision from a PWI institution in the southeast region of the U.S.



He is currently an Associate Professor in the Counselor Education and Supervision graduate department at a PWI in a southern state in the U.S. and is married with two young children Charles

Charles is currently an Assistant Dean of Instruction and Interim Executive Director at a community college in the southwest region of the U.S. at the age of 34. He chose to pursue his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from a PWI, also in the southwest region, and consequently attained doctoral success within 4.5 years of initiating the doctoral process. He is married with one child.

### **Within Case Analysis Findings**

As aforementioned, within-case analysis allows researchers to become extensively familiar with each case to discover patterns and associations without the initial obligation to make inferences across cases (Eishenhardt, 1989). This within-case analysis was framed in a way that highlights the social and cultural capital the participants obtained. All participants had both social and cultural capital present, however the prevalence of these forms of capital varied among participants. Nonetheless, each participant added significant value to this study and presented unique experiences that enriched the data.

#### **Case #1**

Jonathan was interviewed at his home, as the researcher is personally acquainted with him. During the interview, he presented as very professional and spoke enthusiastically about his experiences as a first-generation AAM who achieved doctoral success. Upon analyzing data concerning Jonathan, the four themes that subsequently emerged from the recurring coding of data (as shown in Table 4.1) are presented.

Promotion. The theme Promotion was comprised of five codes that were present among Jonathan's data. Throughout his interview, he spoke to the unwavering support and

encouragement he received throughout his educational journey. First and foremost, Jonathan recalled being supported both emotionally and financially by his family, especially his maternal grandmother. Despite her limited education, his grandmother inspired him and his two brothers to be courageous and to advance past perceived boundaries to reach their full potential. When asked to divulge the influencing factors on his decision to attend college, he credited his grandmother with initially sparking his interest in higher education:

Actually my grandmother encouraged me to go to college. She knew that she wanted me to excel and told me that she wanted me to make her proud and that I had the capacity and capability to go to school. So listening to her encouraging me to “do what I couldn’t do, be what I wish I had been able to have been” was certainly a first step in encouraging me.

Jonathan continued to pay homage to his grandmother’s impactful role on his educational journey and also attested to the support of his aunts, who were also very involved in his rearing, noting that:

I think all throughout my college experience, my grandmother was a support system. Just the encouragement, just the feedback, just the acceptance, just the “atta boys, you can do that”. And my aunts also really helped from that vantage point. They were, from an undergraduate perspective really excited, because again I’m the first in my family to ever earn a college degree, so they felt very proud that I stuck it out...But at the end of the day I knew I had that strong support system with them, to continue my journey academically...So those individuals, my aunts, my grandmother, were very foundational and very supportive in my being able to continue on in college.

Jonathan’s membership in his first social network, consisting of his grandmother and family members who served as promoters of his educational success, was where his foundational social capital was built.

Table 4.1 Case #1 Codes and Themes

Codes	Themes
Familial Support Competent Instruction Peer Support Mentoring Academic Collaboration	Promotion
Academic Self-Confidence Educational Goals Career Goals	Transcendence
Recover Self-Sacrificing	Collectivism
Leadership Uplift Role modeling	Generativity
Self-Efficacy Religious Faith	Faith

He continued to relay what can be attributed to the building of social capital by discussing the competent instruction that he benefited from while in pursuit of his education. Regarding his K-12 experience, he lauded his teachers for their effectiveness, clarity and preparation concerning the conveying of course content. He used the term “old school” when describing how passionate and knowledgeable they were about the subjects they taught, as well as their practice of “teaching bell to bell”, as a likely comparison to his perception of the current state of teaching in his home state, or possibly even nationwide. He highlighted the fact that those teachers were competent because they challenged and pushed their students toward success, in addition to being able to practically convey their knowledge on the subjects they taught to their students.

Further in his interview, he credited his doctoral success to the expertise that was present among the faculty he had access to in his Ph.D. program. He endorsed his professors for their primary role in adding value to his specialized degree program. He noted his professors were prominent in their career fields and some even held foundational roles within major, multimillion organizations. He relayed that by, “tapping into that knowledge base of those professors, in terms of the exposure that they had, the educational background that they had, and then just that intellectual framework really helped me to be successful in my program”. This testament to the instructional expertise that Jonathan was exposed during his K-12 and graduate schooling exemplifies how instructors, when competent, are promoters of the building of sociocultural capital in their students.

Jonathan also experienced promotion as social capital was produced through interactions with classmates and professors. Regarding peer support, Jonathan told of the reciprocal influence that he and his high school friends had on each other, sharing that “not only did they influence me but I influenced other friends also to attend college”. In addition to his high school classmates being influential, Jonathan also recounted the cohort system that was adopted by him and his African American peers in their Master’s program. They would visit each other’s residences to share resources and cover course material to ensure that everyone was prepared for assignments and exams.

It was not until attending an HBCU for his undergraduate degree that Jonathan gained additional social capital in the form of African American professors who subsequently became his mentors. These mentors challenged his thinking and provided him with opportunities within the academic environment that would serve to cultivate the potential that they recognized in him. He continued to gain academic mentors as he matriculated through his graduate studies, and

consequently has engaged in the reproduction of social capital through mentoring his employees and the students that he teaches, as he has personally experienced the promotion that mentoring provides by expanding one's social networks (Wenk, 2011).

Having the opportunity to engage in academic collaboration with his peers and professors also augmented Jonathan's academic experiences. In addition to benefitting from the learning community formed among his classmates within his Master's program he also benefitted from that same model in his doctoral program. Regarding collaboration within his doctoral program he informed:

There were other learners apart of my dissertation that I had the opportunity to network with, to align myself with, to connect with, that still today I have those relationships with, that are still intact by in large and have also expanded my network of resources...that was really key.

Jonathan also specifically spoke of the need for intensive collaboration with his professors during the dissertation writing process. He recalled of the constant feedback and flow of communication between he and his committee and his need to be able to provide a final document that was a product of collaboration from both sides. When speaking of his doctoral process holistically, he emphasized the value of collaboration, stating that:

I was truthful to myself in the fact that it took a very collaborative effort for me to complete that process. Again bringing all of the stakeholders that I needed within my learning community, to make sure that that happened in order for me to be successful, so that's basically the foundation on how I completed it.

Jonathan was cognizant that in order to complete the doctoral process, promotion and collaboration with those possessing the necessary sociocultural capital needed to be successful was essential, especially when endeavoring to navigate the educational terrain as a first-generation AAM student.

Transcendence. The synthesizing of three codes attributed to the development of the theme Transcendence. Jonathan's desire to transcend beyond what others in his environment had accomplished is what essentially kept him motivated to actively pursue what is deemed as social and cultural capital throughout his pursuit of educational success. At an early age he recognized the value of education, which was cultural capital instilled into him through promotion from his grandmother. Because "children internalize what is expected of them" (Swartz, 1997, p.198), her promotion combined with his academic ability fostered an academic self-confidence which exuded as he spoke about his achievements. This self-confidence is what would ultimately set him apart from his two brothers who chose to pursue careers after high school despite receiving the same promotion as Jonathan. He relayed that he did "exceptionally well" in K-12, and specifically excelled in English and Spelling. He continued that trend during his undergraduate studies after transferring to the HBCU he attended and subsequently graduated with Bachelors in Communication, and received his Masters the following year. As Jonathan continued to experience academic success and promotion from the expansion of his social networks, his academic self-confidence also grew. His experiences align with Bourdieu's belief that, "academic success is directly dependent upon cultural capital and on the inclination to invest in the academic market" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 96). After deciding to pursue a Ph.D. years later, he recalls performing very well in his first class, despite the challenge of becoming acclimated to the demands of PhD coursework. This confidence stemming sociocultural capital built played a major role in facilitating his journey toward doctoral attainment and the success that has followed as a direct result of his educational achievements.

Obtaining academic self-confidence led to the development educational and career goals, which both derived from and fueled Jonathan's desire to transcend his surroundings.

Encouragement from his family and friends to attend college was rooted in the opportunity for transcendence that accompanied that decision. He noted:

... in my generation, college was kind of the Great White Hope; it was the opportunity to move past the neighborhood that we lived in to achieve and to acclaim some of the things in life, the nicer things in life, the finer things in life that we were capable of achieving.

In Jonathan's rural community, the sociocultural capital accumulated from attaining a college degree was seen as an opportunity to leverage the attainment of economic capital and improve one's socioeconomic status, which coincides with Dumais (2002)'s statement that "exceptional students from the lower class may see the accumulation of cultural capital as a way to overcome the obstacles that are typical for those in their class position" (p. 47). This perspective led to the cultivation of his lifelong dream of attaining a doctoral degree. In fact, on multiple occasions throughout his interview, he referred to getting a Ph.D. as a lifelong goal. Even after obtaining a Master's degree and experiencing success in his career, he was still not fully satisfied because his goal of doctoral success had not been actualized. When asked what factors he attributed to his success in beginning a doctoral program and subsequently completing it, he replied:

I think one of the factors is, Dr. Steven Covey says "You have to begin with the end in mind" in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. So one of the factors is, you have to begin with the end in mind; what is that end goal?

The end goal for Jonathan was to attain the sociocultural capital required to gain institutionalized cultural capital in the form of doctoral success, which would open the door to career advancement and economic capital, ultimately aiding in Jonathan's transcendence past what he witnessed as possible in his community. As "social capital is only useful in as much as it is convertible to economic capital and should improve career status" (Wenk, 2011, p.13), Jonathan also sought to earn a doctoral degree as a vehicle to achieve his career goals. He articulated that,

I wanted to be a consultant, so not just an internal consultant, but my goal was to become an external consultant, and typically external consultants do have doctoral degrees,

because at that point you do become the subject matter expert. So I knew that I needed that credential to be effective and to be recognized and to be viewed as a subject matter expert. So I thought that in order to effectively be an external consultant I would need those credentials to certify, to substantiate who I wanted to become in terms of being that external consultant. I knew that in order to really hack the industry from an organizational development perspective, from a learning development perspective, and from an executive coaching perspective I would need that [degree] in order to be effective.

Consequently, he directly attributed his career advancement and the sociocultural capital that he has accessed to the conferment of his Ph.D. He explained,

I think that it has just launched me to a path of success, both as an executive coach and as a chief manager in the Division of Administration. I don't think I, perhaps, would have been as effective as I am now had I not had the exposure to the context of my doctoral program. It just placed me on a different playing field, from a knowledge based perspective, from an exposure perspective, from a learning perspective, and then also from an awareness perspective. It was very foundational in that it again allowed me to tap into tools and into resources that I perhaps would have never been exposed to.

Thus, by leveraging the cultural and social capital he has attained throughout his educational journey, Jonathan was able to achieve transcendence through the process of obtaining institutionalized cultural capital and consequently economic capital.

Collectivism. In addition to desiring to achieve transcendence of the familiar, Jonathan's actions also aligned with the collectivist view he held, which attested to his ability to recover and be self-sacrificing. Because Jonathan operated with sense of collectivism, he was able to recover when confronted with obstacles while on his educational quest. A defining moment along his journey was when he chose to drop out of the PWI that he had attended. As recorded within the field notes, Jonathan was very somber when speaking about his year long tenure of not being enrolled in school and he described that time frame as a period in which he was "very unfocused". Even while obtaining the sociocultural capital that fostered by the promoters in his life, Jonathan still had a difficult time emotionally adjusting to the college environment, which is a common explanation to the high attrition rates of first-generation college students. Moreover,



he was enrolled into a PWI after graduating from a majority African American school system, which undoubtedly factored into the difficulty he experienced in adjusting to college. When asked about what motivated him to re-enroll in college, he replied,

What motivated me to go back to school was, I was working at a gas station, a service station, and I knew I had much more potential, not that working in a service station is bad, but I knew that I had more potential to offer the world, and even myself, so I moved forward in my educational pursuit. I really had to shift gears, to think about life and to think about my family and to think about whom I was capable of becoming, and I knew that I had more to offer. So I only worked at the gas station probably 2 or 3 months; it was just not in my course of action. So I shifted gears and I switched focus.

Because he felt obliged to make his grandmother and other family members proud, as well as operate within his full potential, Jonathan decided to re-enroll in school. As he discussed returning to school, his excitement visibly increased and his tone improved. He stated that, “I got my momentum back and transferred to [local HBCU] where I was on the Dean’s List whenever I came back to school. “I was real excited about getting back in school and pursuing my educational goals”. Thus, because he was determined to achieve what the goals set before him, he was able to “rebound” and “get back on track”. The sociocultural capital he gained as a student at that HBCU in contrast to his experience at the PWI he withdrew from supports Palmer and Gasman (2008)’s findings that the existences of HBCUs should be perpetual, as they are institutions are major contributors to the social capital of their students. In addition to supplementing students’ social capital, HBCU’s are considered to provide a more welcoming atmosphere for their African American students, which is often opposite of African Americans students’ experiences on the campuses of PWI (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Strayhorn, 2013).

While in the process of achieving his goals, Jonathan was aware that the level of success that he wanted to achieve called for sacrifice, and thus his actions ultimately followed suit.

Following the year in which he was not enrolled in college, he knew that to achieve his goals he would have to be willing to re-evaluate his current position and take the necessary steps in order to progress past that obstacle to experience success. During his interview, he alluded to another specific instance along his educational journey that required self-sacrifice for the collective good. He cited that while in his doctoral program, prioritizing his time was his biggest challenge and that “finding time between work, between life, raising children, was probably the more theoretical challenge that I had. It was just finding the time to get it all in within the week, within the month, within the year, to be effective”. Because Jonathan was married with three children, there was undoubtedly a heightened desire to attain doctoral achievement so as to further reproduce the valuable cultural and social capital attained from that process that they would collectively benefit from. In addition to fathering three school-aged children and working full time to provide for his family, his wife’s career in education necessitated devotion of time outside of normal work hours which also undoubtedly impacted their household and left little time for leisure. Taking into account the additional time required to navigate the doctoral process as a first-generation student, Jonathan certainly had to make sacrifices in regards to time appropriation in order to maintain stability within his family, career and degree program. He also informed that he was cognizant on the front end that the pursuit of a doctoral degree required stability, commitment and dedication, and that in most cases, sacrifice is mandatory if success is to be achieved. He imparted that:

Nothing that is worth having is often times easy to get, but it comes to those who have that tenacity, that have determination and those that have the ability to stick to whatever goals they need to achieve in life.

The emotional intelligence that Jonathan displayed in the form of resolve allowed him to obtain sociocultural capital that would serve to be collectively impactful despite challenges faced, resulting in obligatory sacrifices.

Generativity. For Jonathan, the responsibility to engage in Generativity, which is the desire to reproduce capital outside of family and give back to subsequent generations, was one that he could not evade. Providing leadership, uplift and role modeling to others was imperative upon his achievement of doctoral success.

As Jonathan made his pilgrimage toward success, he developed an innate knowledge of his aptitudes. Early on, both Jonathan and those who were acquainted with him recognized his ability to lead. His earliest memory of engaging in leadership was when he served as president of his 4-H Club in the fourth grade. This brief taste of leadership proved to have long lasting effects as he continued to seek leadership positions and be placed in them by teachers and mentors. After earning his Master's Degree he recalls that he "went to the workplace and excelled in the workplace as a leader". Currently the sociocultural capital that Jonathan, who described his self as a "a people person" and "leader", attains has equipped him to effectively fulfill a leadership position in upper management for the state government office he works for. As a member of the HBCU graduate faculty that he attended for undergrad, he noted that his leadership expertise affords his students access to "verifiable day to day case studies and exposure that helps the students really be able to learn human capital management, employment law, staffing and performance management, from a real practical perspective, and not just what the book says". Jonathan also made it clear that he sought to use the knowledge he gained along his journey to not only lead, but also to promote generativity by uplifting those around him. Regarding professional uplift he stated:

Not only am I able to be successful, but it allows me to divide the context and the awareness for others to be successful. So now I can pull back and really draw from my academic experience and put that into a real life context and I can help others to be successful in what they do on a daily basis as well.

In addition to being granted an active opportunity to uplift others, Jonathan was also cognizant of the positive impact he would be able to have on others by simply existing as a model of educational success, especially when these models are rare among African American males. He spoke to this in terms of his role as professor, relaying, “Well I think for students that attend an HBCU, being an African American male myself and a first-generation student, I often times run into students who are first-generation students, and specifically males...”. To these first-generation, AAMs he is able to serve as an exemplar of success and achievement and a testament to their capabilities that he was not often times privy to within the educational pipeline. Speaking of his own experience concerning a lack of academic role models while growing up, he shared,

So for me as an African American male, there were certainly academically no role models in my life, after not having my mother, who passed away at thirty years old, when I was seven years old, and my father leaving, and really my grandmother having to raise my two brothers and I, and her not completing school, nor within the context of my immediate family members. None of them had ever gone; well my aunt had attended [University] but did not graduate. [She] did not talk about school that much. She had resolved to being a mom, being a wife, and working in the local school district within the cafeteria, so she had kind of nested in her career and forgot about those academic pursuits. So for me, not seeing anyone from a male perspective ever achieve that ultimate goal of graduating from college, there was some times when I really just didn’t have the role model or anyone to look at or connect with because there was no one there that I could identify with.

Due to the absence role models, Jonathan found that generating success while matriculating through the educational pipeline was “very surreal” because despite being aware of the potential he had to succeed, there was no one in his environment that had first modeled it. Experiencing this deficit fortunately led to a positive outcome in that he discovered and adopted the

characteristics required for success so that he could serve as a role model, especially to AAMs.

He revealed:

Another thing, my educational pursuit taught me stability. As African American men, we've often times not had role models to show us how to be stable, how to have that level of commitment, and have that dedication that is required to be successful.

As a direct result of being stable and consistent through his throughout his academic and professional journey, Jonathan was able to reproduce capital in the lives of others. He superseded what was modeled before him by men in his life in terms of consistency and determination by completing his formal education to attain a terminal degree while simultaneously being an active spouse, father and community member. Because of this stability he is subsequently able to confidently serve as a positive role model to those he encounters. As a success story, Jonathan noted that his purpose is to operate from a sense of generativity as it relates to others, including his employees and students, "to offer them hope, to let them know that if I was capable of doing it, in terms of achieving my academic goals, then they can also achieve their academic goals". Ultimately, a culmination of the social and cultural capital gleaned from his academic and career experiences has placed Jonathan in a position serve as a sociocultural promoter to others along their career and educational journey.

Faith. The fifth theme that was present among Jonathan's lived experiences was Faith which derived from the codes Self-Efficacy and Religious Faith. This faith encompassed a belief in his capability to achieve, as well as a belief that God would sustain him as he sought achievement. It was apparent from his interview that he was ultimately victorious in his pursuit of educational success because he was innately certain of his competence. In the very beginning of the interview, he established the distinct presence of cultural capital in the form of self-efficacy in his life by stating that, "I always knew I had the potential to be somebody great and

do great things from an educational standpoint”. Despite not being afforded the opportunity to attend schools that would be deemed rigorous, or college preparatory, he believed there was still a responsibility in college to “get in the grind and learn it yourself and do it for yourself”.

A sufficient sense of self-efficacy stemming from a culmination of the promotion he had received along his journey, his academic self-confidence, and the academic and professional successes he had experienced aided in his completion of the doctoral process. He communicated that he approached the process “with the determination that I will complete this, I can complete this, I know how to complete this”, and despite being especially challenged for time during the dissertation writing and defense process he recalled “having the trust and the faith in myself that I was able to communicate my dissertation topic and purpose effectively”. He also verbally acknowledged self-efficacy as a vehicle toward his goal of doctoral success being “actualized”.

He also spoke on multiple instances about “coloring outside the lines” as an action that was a direct result of believing in himself which was first instilled in him by his grandmother. He noted that he was able to achieve because he “certainly had the aptitude, certainly had the willingness and determination to excel and color outside the lines”, as coloring outside of the lines requires the tenacity to “do it regardless of if whether or not anyone has done it before”. He prescribed that to color outside of the lines “you start setting your own pace, you start setting your own tone, and you start believing in yourself regardless of whether or not you have a support system believing in you or not” which emphatically summarizes how he was able to transcend encumbrances to earn a doctoral degree. His belief for first-generation AAMs was that “there is nothing ever too hard if you believe in yourself” and acknowledged that the risk factors aforementioned in this study that serve to hinder this population were not a testament to their

capabilities by stating “we have the capacity within ourselves to achieve, the capacity to color outside the lines, and not let our environment determine who we are supposed to be”.

Jonathan also credited his faith in God as a contributor to his successes. When speaking about his personal legacy as a first-generation, AAM who earned a doctoral degree, he revealed that, “I think my legacy is one of determination, one of hope, one of faith, because it takes faith in God and belief in your own self to be able to achieve those academic pursuits and goals”. Jonathan’s determination to succeed as a byproduct of his faith in God and his abilities also represented invaluable cultural capital that contributed to his success as a first-generation student.

### **Case #1 Assertions**

The data Jonathan provided for this study greatly enriched the researcher’s understanding of the role the accumulation of sociocultural capital can play in the lives of first-generation, AAMs. In addition to aligning with theories regarding sociocultural capital, Jonathan’s lived experiences coincide with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which is described as “one’s view of the world and one’s place in it” (Dumais, 2002, p. 45). Habitus has been interpreted to be largely influenced by the system one’ resides in, which in turn impacts their interactions in the world (Horvat & Antonio, 1999) and is developed through familial and educational experiences during primary stages of socialization (Wenk, 2010; Dumais, 2006). Dumais (2006)’s study on parental habitus noted that during childhood, individuals begin to recognize their place within social structures and how that impacts their achievement abilities from their parents and that, “this understanding is based on the social class into which one is born, and has a life-long effect on one’s attitudes, decisions, and actions (p. 85). Jonathan’s grandmother’s parental habitus would not be deemed as a valuable influence on his personal habitus from a dominant culture

standpoint due to educational and cultural status she held, however the cultural capital she transmitted to him through her acts of promotion shaped his own habitus and influenced his academic self-confidence as well as his perception of his capabilities. By encouraging him to seek knowledge outside of what was available within their community, she ultimately influenced his attainment of social capital through the expansion of social networks, as in order for first-generation, AAMs to gain social capital they must often venture outside of conventional networks (Wenk, 2010). Jonathan achieved this by being the first in his family to attend college and pursue graduate studies to eventually attain institutionalized cultural capital in the form of a doctoral degree. This attainment of institutionalized cultural capital was made possible by the sociocultural capital he accessed through the influence of his grandmother and other promoters, his desire to contribute to the collective and transcend beyond what was familiar within his community, his faith and ultimately led to generativity concerning those he encounters. Thus, Jonathan's lived experiences prove that habitus is not rigid nor a predictor of advancement based on one's system, but instead it is fluid and can be developed upon the addition of sociocultural capital (Tierney, 1999; Horvat & Antonio, 1999).

## **Case #2**

David was interviewed via Skype during his office hours, as he is a faculty member at a higher education institution in the southern region of the United States. He was relaxed and easy going during the interview and candidly spoke about the challenges and triumphs he encountered as a first-generation, AAM. The three major themes that arose from the data he provided, as shown in Table 4.2, are presented within this case analysis.

Advocacy. Advocacy or lack thereof, was a theme that frequently surfaced throughout David's throughout his interview and was developed from his experiences concerning role



modeling, educational support, and mentoring. David grew up in a single parent, low income, working class home with his mother and two older siblings, and recalled it being difficult to survive, as evictions and homelessness were commonplace. From a familial and community standpoint, David felt the absence individuals who could serve as role models in his life. He shared that, “my father was local but not involved in any way, shape or form. He was around the corner which made me angry all the time because he was there” and was “an alcoholic and a marijuana abuser”. Of his mother he said:

My mother was working, she didn’t have time to even...my mother never read to me, I can recall. My mother never asked me about my homework, I don’t recall. She never went to the school, I don’t recall. I got suspended a couple of times, she never came to the school, at all. So, and you know I don’t blame her, she was trying to make ends meet; She was uneducated, working a couple of jobs, so I don’t blame her.

The lack of advocates within David’s household during his primary socialization years resulted in a low stock of sociocultural capital. He further recalled experiencing a void in educational support while growing up, sharing that regarding his community “from 1-14 it was really no African American men or women that I knew who were educated; Not at all”, which, consequently, influenced his academic achievement. In addition to his mother not being able to support him, as she had financial responsibilities and had not graduated from high school herself, he did not receive much support at school, stating that “academically, it wasn’t a priority; nobody was pushing me, so I did what I could and I just moved on”. According to Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, the lack of capital accessible to David within his environment outside of school should have been augmented within the educational system since “young people who face economic and social hardships at home are especially dependent on schools for support and guidance and the development of social capital” (Croninger and Lee, 2001, p. 549). Because school stakeholders are primary benefactors of sociocultural capital, it is vital that they are

willing to transmit that capital to all students, especially those disenfranchised students whose academic success is more than likely contingent upon it. However, “lower class students find the school environment different from their home environment and lack the capital necessary to fit in as well as higher SES students” (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Thus, David could not recall any advocates within the school environment that meaningfully impacted his life within the K-12 pipeline by making the capital they attained accessible to him. In actuality, he relayed one instance in which he sought advice from his school counselor in high school, whose primary role was to serve as an advocate for students by addressing academic, personal/social and career domains (ASCA, 2012). He recounted:

I remember going to my school counselor once my high school career. I don’t recall what was said in that meeting. It might have been about college. And I reached out to her just to ask her some questions about college because I just did not know anything. It was coming to the end of my high school career and I was like “well what do I do now?” I think she told me a couple of things but that’s about it. But it was not instrumental in any way.

Table 4.2 Case # 2 Codes and Themes

Codes	Themes
Role Modeling Educational Support Mentoring	Advocacy
Recover Transcend	Overcoming
Career Decision Faith Generativity Trust the Process	Inherent Calling

David’s experience with his school counselor echoes the concerns expressed by Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) regarding the disbursement of sociocultural

capital in the form of vital college and career readiness knowledge and resources by these essential advocates. They relayed:

...school counselors have been identified, and at times criticized, for their gatekeeping tendencies and disparities in the college access services they render to different groups of students. Specifically, a growing body of research indicates that high school counselors have tremendous influence on the college plans of Black and Latino students; however, these students are least likely to have school counselors, more likely to have less well-trained counselors, and most likely to have counselors who are forced to give up college counseling for other non-counseling-related tasks. (p. 190)

Because David's home and school environments were devoid of advocates, he was deficient in the capital required to make an informed decision concerning his postsecondary options.

Fortunately, he went on to graduate from high school and subsequently decided to attend a local technical school "on a whim" because a friend had already enrolled. With no guidance and a poor academic record, David took advantage of the open enrollment system at the technical institution because he did not want to "work a dead end job" and "didn't have any skills". During the interview he reflected on that time in his life saying, "there was probably plenty of opportunities, I just didn't know them; no one told me and it just, you know, wasn't a priority". David followed in his friend's footsteps and took engineering courses at the school, yet was not engaged in the course material as his friend was. After completing a full year at the community college, he dropped from that institution and began working an unchallenging job. Because he was deeply unsatisfied with his life, he enrolled in a local community college a year later, graduated, and transferred to a four-year college within the state of Connecticut.

David partially attributed his discouraging experiences to the inaccessibility of mentors, especially males, who could contribute social capital to his habitus. He noted:

I mean there really was no guidance at all for me. I had no mentorship, none, none. Had I not played sports, basketball, football, I don't know how many men I would have had access to. You know, not a lot of men in the communities. So the communities are

dominated by African American women and the men are just not there. And I craved, wanted desperately, a relationship with a man.

Despite having access to those men who coached sports within his community, David continued to speak on how intensely he desired male presence in his life, saying:

I craved, craved, craved a relationship with a man, I craved some model, I craved some direction, just was none around, none around, and it affected me academically. I never had a goal in my life, never had a goal growing up, never had any goals growing up.

His reiteration of how much he “craved” a relationship with a man but there were “none around” which resulted in him repeatedly stating throughout the transcript that he “never had a goal growing up” illuminates his desperation for male guidance and leadership and emphatically supports Palmer and Gasman (2008)’s study on mentoring as a critical form of social capital that can greatly enhance the lives of AAM, especially those who are first-generation.

Despite an obtaining an inadequate supply of social capital because of limited access to social networks outside of peer networks, David enrolled into a four-year institution after receiving his Associate’s Degree. It was at this institution that David received his first personal mentors. He found two mentors in college, one of whom offered him a student worker position on campus so that he could earn money. That position led to him receiving the opportunity to work with students on campus within Student Support Services and also afforded him additional mentors. He spoke specifically of the impact of two of his mentors during that time saying:

I remember them to this day. Those two guys, they were the first people of color for the first time, men, that would speak to me. And it wasn’t any big, deep conversations, it was conversations about “what are you gonna do, where are you gonna go, how can I help you”, Just minor stuff. That was really important.

It was during this stage in his life that David was able to begin filling the void he felt growing up because he lacked positive male presence. These mentors contributed to his sociocultural capital supply by helping him to navigate the undergraduate student process while

serving as pillars of knowledge, which consequently strengthened his journey toward success. After graduating from undergrad, he took a position at what he calls his “dream” school and it was at this “first real job” that he continued to gain more mentors. He relayed that he could always find mentors working in student services, but it was much more difficult finding academic mentors. This however was resolved once David graduated with his Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees and enrolled in the doctoral program he graduated from. He sang the praises of the Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) program at the school he attended, saying:

I had a great program. I had some good faculty, had some very diverse faculty, it was incredible. I had a Native American man, I had an African American man, I had a Latino man, had an African American female, had Latina faculty too. So it was very diverse and kind of incredible how diverse it was. I was really excited about that. And that helped a lot in terms of making me feel comfortable.

This had not been his initial experience as a doctoral student, however. Prior to enrolling in the CES doctoral program, he was enrolled in that university’s Higher Education Administration HEA program. His experience in the HEA program was the opposite of his CES program experience. Of his HEA experience he revealed:

I was all alone because I was part time, and I was on campus, so people didn’t engage me. They were like, “oh you work around here”, and they kind of knew me on campus. So I didn’t have the same engagement, so when it came to a time when I needed help, when it came to the time when I was qualifying, I failed, failed terribly because I didn’t have any help, didn’t have any mentorship, didn’t have anything. And I did just not know what I was supposed to do.

Reminiscent of his earlier years spent within the educational pipeline, because David was not afforded access to peer and institutional social networks within his doctoral program, he was unsuccessful in acquiring the sociocultural capital necessary to achieve doctoral success at that time.

Fortunately, despite being ineffective at reaching a key milestone in the doctoral process within the HEA program, he found solace among CES faculty and staff and recalled how

comfortable and well taken care he felt within that environment. Once in the program, he gravitated toward the faculty of color, who became mentors for him and were candid in sharing their experiences. He acknowledged:

I started to figure out very quickly about the Academy, because you had all these people of color. So they would be like, frustrated over the Academe and what happened. If they weren't there, I wouldn't have gotten that end of it 'cause you know it's different for White faculty. So they would have serious conversations with me about tenure, getting involved, and about being the only Black person on a staff, and do you really want to go out to Los Angeles being the only Black person at this little school, with no family, no community, do you really want to do that? They talked to me about real, real talk, about "you better be careful, don't pigeonhole yourself, you have to really understand which journals to publish in, because people don't value some of the African American journals like they do some of the other journals". So I got a real good training from them.

As his professors developed into mentors, they exemplified what David was able to achieve as a minority seeking to join the Academe. They bequeathed invaluable sociocultural capital to him by engaging him and sharing their experiences as faculty members of color.

Overcoming. The capacity to recover after experiencing misfortune and the aspiration to transcend unfavorable circumstances fostered David's ability to overcome adversity. His innate capacity to recover after experiencing failure was a source of cultural capital in itself and significantly contributed to his attainment of a doctoral degree. This resilience ultimately aided David in transcending his marginalized past to persist towards success. At different junctures along his journey he experienced what he deemed as "setbacks" that threatened to hinder his success. However, he was eventually able to recover and move past those obstacles. An example of this is when he enrolled into technical school and soon realized that setting was not a good fit for him. Although he consequently dropped out for a year, he re-enrolled into a community college, as that environment was more befitting for him. That decision led to receiving an Associate's Degree and enrolling into a four-year institution. Despite his previous academic performance, it was during his time at this institution that David relayed

I started hitting my academic stride, because I was never good academically...It started to click a little bit my junior year. I was a little bit older, a couple of years older than the other folks and I figured it out, I figured out how to study, and figured out how to have a good time and study. And I think it was a big deal for me, I was like “alright, I can really do this”. Graduated from there with a 3, maybe a 2.9, 3.0; so that’s good for me, that was good for me”.

As aforementioned, another major setback occurred when David failed his comprehensive exams. During his time in the HEA program he felt generally unsupported but he also felt isolated by his peers. Besides failing his comprehensive exam, he stated that interacting with “privileged” peers was his biggest challenge in that program. He informed:

I was a little bit older, probably about 30, newly married, one kid and maybe another kid on the way, and again when you’re first-generation, you’re always first-generation. So it doesn’t matter if its undergrad, grad or PhD, you’re always first-generation. So even as a PhD student, when I got these degrees, I was still a first-generation student ; I don’t know what to do, how to do it, I don’t have any role models and all these folks knew what they were doing from jump. They were like, “I gotta do this, I gotta do that”. And I had no idea, no idea of what I was doing. They were posturing, and doing all these things that I just didn’t know I was supposed to be doing.

Essentially, failing his comprehensive exams coupled with feeling unfulfilled regarding the HEA placed him at a crossroads. Fortunately, he decided to continue his doctoral journey and he “started all over and started working it” within the CES program which eventually led him to doctoral success. When asked what he ultimately attributed to being able to overcome the roadblocks he encountered on his educational journey he experienced he replied,

There’s no big epiphany, no big goal, no big anything that happened to me. People often ask how I come from my background; I have no idea. I have not really any idea, and I’ve tried to think it through, but I don’t know how I’m Dr. [David].

Though not referred to by David, the culmination of engaging in mentorship and successes experienced, including graduating from community college and hitting his “academic stride” at his four-year institution, added to his sociocultural capital supply. He subsequently graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree was motivated by his mentors to pursue a Master’s Degree, which he

eventually attained. He subsequently decided to further his academic journey by enrolling in the HEA Ph.D. program. Despite being unprosperous in that program he resolved to continue his doctoral journey in another area, as having his own family to whom he must have felt obliged to provide for undoubtedly influenced his decision to seek institutionalized cultural capital in the form of a doctoral degree.

Furthermore, recovering from setbacks allowed David to transcend the dismal situations he was exposed to while growing up. In his interview, he described himself as “angry” and mysterious” as a child because his father was not present. However, instead of allowing those negative characteristics obstruct his accomplishments, he used them to reshape his habitus which eventually motivated toward doctoral success. He imparted that, “all of those things kind of fueled me, it fueled me, my anger, it fueled me academically. It fueled me as a grown up wanting to be a better father”. Not only did his restructured habitus reflect the cultural capital he had accumulated, which served as a vehicle to transcend what his father had modeled, but he also eventually reconciled with his father and maintained a very close relationship with him until he passed away.

Watching his parents struggle as a result of working low wage jobs also fueled David toward career and academic transcendence. After leaving the technical school he had attended, he too worked at what he described as a “dead end” job. After working there for some time, he came to the conclusion that he would not be satisfied with adopting his parents’ lifestyles and decided to take a leap of faith and transfer to a local community college. That decision would propel him to ultimately achieve what he had never seen done within his community, which was earning a doctoral degree.



Inherent Calling. The recognition of his inherent calling by himself and other interest holders in his life also led David toward achieving doctoral success. His innate abilities coupled with guidance from others allowed him to make decisions concerning this career that would ultimately align with his calling. During his undergraduate studies, David decided to pursue a position within his university's Student Support Services. He was hired and mutual respect and appreciation existed between himself and his colleagues and supervisors. Although David had not been goal oriented in the past, he developed a goal of wanting to manage a hotel within a casino in New Jersey, which he believed was a good fit for his degree in economics and finance. Because he lacked the sociocultural capital that accompanies engaging in career readiness efforts throughout the educational pipeline, he went on one interview and realized that he would not be content in that position as it did not align with his career values. Consequently he decided that he would rather return to working in an environment that supported students through college. After reaching out for guidance, his college mentors, who recognized his calling to help others, said to him, "Listen man, you're a counselor, that's who you are". After expressing his concern with that advice since he had obtained a degree in an unrelated field, they further advised him to "just start at zero and keep moving". The social capital his mentors imparted onto him in the form of academic and professional advice propelled David to pursue a position in Student Support Services at his "dream school" where he subsequently earned a Masters in Counseling from.

After his tenure at that university ended, he was hired to continue his work at a university some eighteen hours away. His decision to pursue a PhD there was guided by wanting to lead within the scope of his calling. He informed:

Well I am a student services guy and I loved what I was doing, and I knew I wanted to be Vice President of Student Services, and I needed a PhD. I was the Assistant Dean of Students, I knew to be the Dean of Students, I needed a PhD. so it was more of, in order to get the job I wanted to, I needed a PhD; it was no way around that. So that was it. For

some reason, I don't know what had happened, I became goal oriented, I don't know what it was; I was never goal oriented and then all of a sudden I was once I started working in Student Support Services with low-income, first-generation students.

The opportunity to receive a tuition waiver as an employee also influenced his choice to seek a doctoral degree from that institution. Although David did not continue in the program that he began in or on that career trajectory as his inherent calling superseded those immediate goals, he became familiar with the doctoral process there and he was eventually introduced to the CES program, which supported his calling.

Upon researching David's doctoral institution it was discovered that value of the sociocultural capital transmitted within that the program is recognizable as it has been acknowledged as one of the top ten doctoral programs in the nation for Counselor Education and Supervision for the past 18 years. The institution is clear about their commitment to diversity, which explains the surprisingly diverse faculty he encountered. Furthermore, the program's website displays media supporting David's experience of emphasis on positive faculty and student engagement. He informed that by pursuing his calling of serving others and attaining a doctoral degree in CES at that university, he has greatly benefited from the sociocultural capital that accompanied that decision, and was able to leverage the subsequent institutionalized cultural capital to earn economic capital. Concerning the impact of his doctoral degree on pursuing his calling he stated:

Aw man, it has affected all parts of it. It has allowed it to happen. My degree has allowed me to become a doctor and full-time faculty. It has allowed me to publish and write. It has afforded me the opportunity to make some money by hustling outside. I do a lot of consulting, I do counseling, I'm about to open up my, well I have a business that I've opened up, and I'm about to expand the business. I just got a call yesterday to be a speaker at some Black History event. So that PhD has been very instrumental in everything that I am at this point.

David's strong faith also aided him in discovering his calling through allowing God to guide his academic and professional journey. He recalled during his adolescent years that even though he was not into church, "luckily enough God blessed me that I didn't get in a whole lot of trouble, I got in some trouble but I didn't get caught a lot, didn't get into a whole bunch of trouble". Though he engaged in mischief, he credited God for keeping him from its ramifications, and ultimately out of the prison pipeline, which may have greatly impeded his success.

David also remembered God specifically speaking to him after he failed his comprehensive exams in the HEA doctoral program. He conveyed that he heard God tell him, "I didn't want you in that program anyway; you need to go back to your Masters in Counseling" and that, "I need you over here because what you are is a teacher, what you are is a counselor, so I need to put you in this place". David looked and sounded at peace when he relayed this information within the interview and said although he had a chance to continue in the HEA program, he didn't pursue it because of what God told him. David stated that everything worked out the way that it needed to and said that he had faith that, "God will push you to the place where you need to be". Thus, David's faith in God also contributed to his habitus and positively impacted his perceptions of what he was capable of achieving (Dumais, 2002).

In the process of following his inherent calling, David has also had the opportunity to operate with a sense of generativity by contributing to the success of those he has encountered, including his mother. He proudly shared that his mother decided to continue her education after observing how he benefitted from the sociocultural capital he was able to attain. By impacting her habitus through role modeling, he was able to witness her receive her high school diploma

during the same time that he received his college diploma and commended her for her persistence.

In addition to impacting his mother's life, he also disclosed that the first ten years of his career he specifically worked with first-generation college students out of a sense of generativity. He noted that he treasured this time period because he closely identified with those students and was able to serve as a role model and mentor to them. In his interview he cited on more than occasion that he persisted toward doctoral success because he knew that others looked to him and held him in high regard. He mentioned:

For some reason, I don't know what had happened, I became goal oriented, I don't know what it was; I was never goal oriented and then all of a sudden once I started working in Student Support Services with low-income, first-generation students, I think the thing was "I gotta be a role model, I gotta keep progressing and progressing and progressing. And it was a little pressure, a little stress on me.

He further reiterated:

I don't know what got into me, but I really think it was...I'm going to say it, it was those students, and I was one of those students, I am one of those students. And I was always thinking that, I gotta keep moving because the community needs me, and it's a lot of pressure on me, but the community needs me and I'm gonna do this . So I think that was it. It was kind of this obligation to move forward and to be what people thought I was.

The obligation that David felt to reproduce sociocultural capital among the students he served was reciprocally impacting in that it consequently motivated him to persist toward doctoral attainment in order to be influential within that social network

Finally, David acknowledged that his ability to trust the process despite sociocultural capital inequities eventually led him to the educational and professional success he has experienced. Upon dropping out of the technical school he attended, he disclosed that he felt as if he was "floundering" and had run out of options. When the opportunity to attend a community college instead presented itself, his response was, "Why don't I try this out and see where it

goes”. He stated that although he did not have any goals at that time, he “just kept pushing forward”. Consequently, his advice to first-generation AAMs was to:

Take comfort in that you don’t know what you’re doing and it’s really ok. I’m one of those people who, I’ll just start walking and I’ll be walking the wrong way, but that’s ok with me. It doesn’t really matter, just start walking and I think the world the world will push you to the place you need to be... Just keep walking. I kept walking, I just kept walking, I didn’t know where I was going, it’s ok not to know where you’re going; just start walking and keep walking.

## **Case #2 Assertions**

The doctoral and career success that David was able to achieve despite the disparities present among his lived experiences is nothing short of an anomaly. According to Bourdieu’s social and cultural capital theories, David did not attain the social and cultural capital needed to graduate high school, much less earn a Ph.D. (Wenk, 2011). His habitus was greatly impacted by a lack of advocacy and guidance from his parents and other adults in his life. He lacked the daily supervision and buffering of risks that accompanies parent monitoring, which resulted in him engaging in troublesome behaviors as teenager (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). Despite the fact that school stakeholders are reservoirs of sociocultural capital (Dumais, 2002; Wenk, 2011) these individuals within his school did not actively provide opportunities to build sociocultural capital within David that may have combatted the risk factors he faced. Specifically, when he reached out to his school counselor for postsecondary advice, she did not equip him with the with career and college readiness knowledge needed that may have helped him to bypass roadblocks stemming from postsecondary disinvestment and career dissatisfaction. Fortunately for David, he attended technical school due to having a friend within his social network who encouraged him to enroll. Though he was not successful in his endeavors concerning technical school, the limited sociocultural capital he had attained up to that point factored in his decision to enroll into a traditional community college, which was a turning point in his educational journey. Once he

graduated with an Associate's Degree and transferred to a four year institution, he acquired advocates in the form of mentors who were benefactors of the sociocultural capital that he desperately desired as an adolescent. As a result, he was able to experience academic success in college and receive his Bachelor's Degree. As David chronologically recalled the events that transpired concerning receiving his undergraduate and graduate degrees, it was apparent that his individual habitus began to reflect his accumulation of sociocultural capital. He began to develop goals that aligned with his perceptions of himself based on the advocacy he benefited from and his ability to transcend beyond the challenges he faced. Ultimately, by accepting and pursuing his inherent calling, he was ultimately able to reproduce the sociocultural capital he obtained in the lives of others he encountered.

### **Case #3**

Charles's interview also occurred via Skype while he was in his university office. He became progressively more relaxed throughout the duration of the interview and was very forthright in his responses to the guiding questions. Four themes were found upon analyzing his disclosed experiences, as shown in Table 4.3.

Support. Charles received a magnitude of invaluable support from his family, peers and his spouse throughout his educational journey. Though neither of his parents, who have been married for 35 years, had ever attended college, they served as his first support system and encouraged and assisted him in achieving what they knew he was capable of. He recalled how challenging it was for him and his parents to navigate his first years in college. He explained:

I think the first thing was my parents not understanding all things college. From housing to meal plans to financial aid. Even reading my acceptance letter and understanding how much of it was covered through scholarships, how much was expected for us to pay. I feel like a lot of the basics that students whose parents had gone to college knew, my parents didn't know... there's always the rule, and then the other rules down here that other people are aware of that we might not necessarily be aware of.

A lack of college knowledge, or specifically dominant cultural capital, made the college going process initially “really difficult” for Charles and his parents, but by his junior year, they “got the hang of it”. Charles also mentioned how supported he felt in knowing that he could always count on his parents to celebrate his accomplishments and relay how proud they were of him. Their support of his academic journey, although classified as non-dominant cultural capital, was tremendously influential to his success.

Charles noted that his peers were sources of support during his undergraduate and graduate studies. His hometown friends were very influential in his decision to attend college and vice versa. He stated:

And then I had a core group of friends who I felt like, we all were trying to push each other to be better. I had one good friend who played basketball, one who was really into student theatre, so it was kinda like our charge as a group of friends to “Aye look man, you got a couple of options when you graduate, one is to get a job, the other is to join the military, and the other is to go to college.”

During his interview he also specifically mentioned one of his graduate classmates who was and still is very supportive and always willing to extend a helping hand. Membership in these peer networks contributed to Charles’s goal of degree attainment and helped to enhance his supply of sociocultural capital.

Table 4.3 Case #3 Codes and Themes

Codes	Themes
Familial Support Peer Support Spousal Support	Support
Faculty/Staff Support Professional Support	Institutionalized Sponsorship

(Table 4.3 continued)

Codes	Themes
Campus Leadership Fraternal Influence	Student Involvement
Altruistic Perseverance Generational Impact	Collectivism
Mentoring Racial Uplift	Generativity
Strategic Career Fulfillment Authentic	Accessibility

Throughout his quest towards doctoral success, Charles's wife was especially a valuable source of social capital because she motivated and supported him. Regarding her role he affirmed:

I really did it in conjunction with my fiancée, now wife. So her degree was in Accounting did that for a couple of months and hated it and realized that she wanted to do something in health and wellness and decided to get a doctorate in Physical Therapy. So our timing was really good. We were engaged and had a long engagement and we both went to school full time, and she finished a semester before me.

Because they embarked upon the doctoral process together, they were able to endure challenges by encouraging each other to focus on the goal of degree completion and subsequently starting a family.

**Institutionalized Sponsorship.** The combination of the codes Faculty/Staff Support and Professional Support led to the creation of the theme Institutionalized Sponsorship. While in



undergrad, Charles identified his most significant relationships to be those he developed with faculty and staff at his institution. Upon noticing his proclivity for leadership roles on campus, these individuals assumed the responsibility of not only mentoring Charles, but sponsoring him by investing in his academic and career success. He benefited from their influence as they appointed him to leadership roles on campus, recommended him for professional development opportunities, and provided him with beneficial career advice. He recounted when a Student Affairs professional at his university recognized his passion for campus leadership and “kind of grabbed me and said ‘hey look, you can actually do this as a profession’”. As a result of their invested interest in him, he was comfortable with seeking their guidance and expertise, especially considering his lack of cultural capital as it related to his first generation status. He conveyed that, “If there were any challenges or hardships I could go to the Dean, or I could go to an advisor and feel comfortable having them help me work through it”.

Charles also found helpful faculty within his doctoral program that were eager for him to succeed. When first researching doctoral programs he remembered how helpful the faculty were at one institution in answering his inquiries about the program, which solidified his decision to enroll in that program. When recalling his most valuable relationship as a doctoral student, he relayed,

I think about my advisor when I was working on my PhD. He just was this very arrogant, White guy that I just learned to break those barriers down and we built this really awesome relationship. I would tell him what my goals were and he would say, “*Look, we gotta put something in place to help you get those accomplished*”. So I really appreciate him as an advisor, kinda helping me get through it and being willing to meet with me every Friday for a year, to make sure that I got my stuff done and that when I was trying to interpret some of the data in my study he helped me tease it out, and he had my back in my proposal defense and dissertation defense. So, I would say overall that relationship was the most valuable.

This sponsorship has continued within the workplace. His first post-doctoral position was secured as a result of sponsorship by one of his mentors, who notified him of the open position and consequently recommended him to the hiring manager. In his current position as an Assistant Dean, he sang the praises of the President of the University who provided him “with a great opportunity” when she requested that he report directly to her upon entering office. He further conveyed the extent of the sponsorship he has received from her, noting:

And for the President to value my opinion and to shoot me a text message and ask me what I think. Or she just sent me an email today like, ‘Hey look, I’m working with Paul Stokes, the author of GRIT and he’s going to fly us out for two days to work on developing this study, are you interested?’

Such sponsorship reassured Charles of his capability to succeed as a first-generation AAM and resulted in the building of invaluable sociocultural capital in his life.

Student Involvement. The theme Student Involvement was composed of the codes Campus Leadership and Fraternal Influence. Charles attributed his level of involvement as an undergraduate student to be a significant value-add to his college experience and ultimately his educational success. He was involved in many organizations, both on and off campus, and was asked to sit on a number of student committees. Being a leader on campus afforded him access to networks consisting of faculty, staff, students, other interest holders and ultimately his sponsors, which resulted in the production of sociocultural capital that he would not have normally had access to.

He also communicated in detail about the sociocultural capital he gained during his experience as an undergraduate member of a fraternity existing under the umbrella of the National PanHellenic Council. In addition to campus sponsored organizations, he was also a leader within his campus’s chapter of his fraternity. Speaking to the influence that membership in his fraternity has had in his life, he stated “If I wouldn’t have pledged Alpha at [University]

specifically, half of the things I have accomplished in my life, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish". Between being a leader within his fraternity and other student entities, such as Student Government, Charles recalled that he had essentially become the "overinvolved underachiever" and his grades began to suffer because he had not learned how to balance academic obligations with organizational involvement. Fortunately, his fraternity brothers served as sociocultural capital in the form of accountability partners and encouraged him to get back on track. He informed:

...our chapter is a very, very proud chapter. And there's a legacy there, there's an ego there, so you don't want to be the dude that doesn't get it together. When I got there you had dudes who were, I remember seeing Jason walking across campus with a [law school] sweatshirt. So he had graduated right when I got there and now he was in law school. So you have all these dudes; our city controller is a member of our chapter, a couple of city councilmembers come through our chapter. So you have this huge legacy, and you didn't want to be the sorry dude, you had to hold each other down. So I definitely feel like I had support from the bruhs, like "Hey, come on man, let's get out of here. You don't want to be like B.C. who's been here for 10 years, let's get out". So I feel like they were helpful.

Collectivism. The codes Altruistic, Generational Impact, and Perseverance constituted the theme Collectivism. A sense of obligation to his family was and currently is an essential driving force behind Charles's desire to achieve success. He recalls that having to sit out a semester in undergraduate was a "wakeup call" for him and generated the realization that achieving academically was "so much bigger" than just him. This altruistic desire aided in propelling him toward degree attainment. He first and foremost aspired to make his parents proud, who served as sources of motivation throughout his entire educational journey. As he established a family, they too inspired him to persist toward educational success and consequently serve as a benefactor of reproduced sociocultural capital. He expressed:

I say this all the time, that I didn't get a bachelor's degree for myself, I didn't get a Masters for myself and I didn't get a PhD for myself, I got it for my mom and my dad and then I got it for my family, so for my daughter, for hopefully my son and my other

kids, to be able to pave the way to make things easier for them. I had to get it together and that's what I did.

Charles continued to discuss the impact that institutionalized cultural capital in the form of a doctoral degree will ultimately have on his posterity. He communicated his acute awareness of the influence that he and his wife's decisions to pursue academic and career success will have on his daughter's life. He stated:

We try our best and we think about when [our daughter] ....so our daughter is 18 months now, so we think about when she's seven or 8 and we can have some really sit down conversations with her, that mom and dad will be early 40's and hopefully still really cool parents. But the fact that she gets to come to daddy's work and be on a college campus at 18 months is awesome. So I just think about how her life will be different. That she will be immersed in this college going culture. And by no means are we going to place any expectations like, "Oh.., you gotta get a doctorate, or you gotta get a law degree, or you gotta go to medical school", but just for her to see mom and dad, and mom and dad's friends and [her] godfather...But trying to make sure you find the balance of, "Hey, you still gotta remain humble, you wanna be cool, you want to remain grounded because mommy and daddy aren't the only people who have their stuff together, we're not, but all the work we put into it makes things so much easier for you. And that doesn't mean that we're gonna eliminate some of the obstacles and barriers, because I think that builds character, but to help her think through some of the things that were hiccups for mommy and daddy at the onset is just awesome. So I think that's something that you really get excited about. Like man, we're really changing the legacy of the family. So thinking about two or three generations from now, like my daughter's kids, or my daughter's kids, kids and how this whole lineage is changed because of decisions mom and dad made.

Charles's awareness of the collective impact of his academic choices greatly contributed his ability to persist to doctoral success and thus, he was able to persevere when faced with obstacles that could have potentially derailed his journey. In his interview, he discussed two significant roadblocks he encountered while pursuing educational. The first was during his freshman year after transferring to a university closer to his home. As aforementioned, Charles had many commitments as a student leader on campus and had not been educated on how to prioritize his time wisely concerning academic and extracurricular obligations. As a result, he

earned failing grades his first two semesters and was forced to drop from the university for a semester. He recalled:

My freshman year I failed out; one semester I got a 1.9, the other I got a 1.1 and I got put on academic suspension. So I had to sit out a semester and it just so happened that the semester I had to sit out was the summer semester. So at [University] they count the summer session as a long semester.

After initially being disappointed that he would not be enrolled for a semester, he regrouped. He reported that he “petitioned and got back in school and declared my major and then got 3.0s from that point on, 3.0s, 3.5s. I think my last 60 hours, which is important to get in grad school; I got right at a 3.0”. Although Charles experienced a brief moment of failure regarding his academic suspension, he was able to draw from the sociocultural capital generated from his motivation to contribute to the collective good, and thus persevered to re-enroll into school and improve his academic performance.

The second instance in which Charles had to persevere was during his doctoral process. Due to the structure of his Master’s degree curriculum, he was not required to enroll in a substantial amount of statistics courses. This led to him being mandated to take six different quantitative research courses, which was difficult as he deemed himself as “not a math person”. Instead of succumbing to the challenge that statistics presented, he instead recruited one of his classmates who loved math to serve as his tutor, which assisted him in fulfilling those course requirements successfully. Furthermore, Charles expounded upon having to complete a Candidacy Project as a prerequisite to the dissertation process. He disclosed:

I had to do a Candidacy Project, so I basically had to write two dissertations. My Candidacy Project was like a 100 page paper and I had to go through the same process. So I had to come up with a study, propose it, form a committee and propose it in front of a committee, do the research, and defend it and then publish it. So my Candidacy was on factors that influence the persistence of African American college students. And then when I got to the dissertation; so candidacy done, I expanded on that study. So looking at all students, and then I created this model to test some other factors that could influence

persistence and retention. So that part was difficult, just having to do it twice. I wouldn't wish that on anybody.

The doctoral process is already difficult to navigate, without taking into account one's first-generation status. The added challenge of a Candidacy Project undoubtedly required Charles to rely on the sociocultural capital he had amassed up to that point. Because he was perseverant, however, he resolved to "just do it" and was successful in completing both a Candidacy Project and a dissertation regardless of difficulty in order to attain a doctoral degree.

Generativity. Hart, McAdams, Hirsch and Bauer (2001) describe generativity is described as:

an adult's concern for and commitment to the well-being of youth and subsequent generations of human beings, as evidenced in parenting, teaching, mentoring, and other activities and involvements aimed at passing a positive legacy on to the next generation. (p. 208).

As a beneficiary of mentoring throughout all stages of his academic and career journey, Charles was deliberate about bestowing sociocultural capital in the same vein that he has received to willing recipients. He shared that he is "somebody that is always willing to take time to connect with somebody else" and that:

I got a million and one things going on in this job, but I still am involved in our male mentoring program and take a mentee every year. We have this leadership academy at the system [level] and I'm the chair for that program and I take on two folks that I mentor from the system level every year. So I want people to see me as the person who is always willing to extend the hand back.

In terms generativity through role modeling and mentoring, Charles also spoke more specifically to both the obligation and pleasure he experiences as a representative for the African American race. Though he has had mentors, he felt that specifically African American mentors were absent along his journey. He proclaimed:

I will say this, I felt like one of the challenges that I've had in Higher Ed in general is I don't feel like I've had a lot of people that look like me, reach back out and say, "You know what man, you got a lot of potential, let me grab you and walk you through this process". And I'm like damn man, I'm kicking a\*\* over here. I need somebody to see this and help me navigate this process.

His motivation to specifically uplift others that identify as African American stems from a lack of support and guidance from members of his same race during his quest to succeed both academically and professionally. Thus, he declared that, "I don't want anybody that looks like me to have to go through that". He also mentioned having the opportunity to represent "Black Excellence" for his daughter, and others he encounters also motivated him. He indicated:

I get this all the time; so when people ask me what I do, I'll say, "Well I'm a Dean and yadi yadi yadi, I teach classes here and there" ... "Oh great, what'd you get your Masters in". They default to that. "Well I got my Masters in Higher Ed and my PhD in Ed Psych" so..., "Oh really", "Yeah". So you know, that kind of, being able to represent for us, is my motivation as well.

Furthermore, he stated that he would like his life to augment other's sociocultural capital by serving as an illustration to others that success is attainable for all. He declared:

I think ultimately you want people to see that it's possible. And it's not for everybody, you can make mistakes, that you can get it on your own time- there are no age limitations, there are no color restrictions. This is something that we can all achieve if you want to do it.

Accessibility. Strategic, Career Fulfillment and Authentic were the codes that contributed to the emergence of the theme Accessibility. During his interview, Charles made it clear that he was very intentional about the networks he sought membership in and the educational and professional decisions he made in support of the career path he desired access to. Consequently his strategic nature led to opportunities that further fostered the development of sociocultural capital. He described himself as "very calculated" and revealed that, "I love people and I'm also very strategic, so with the StrengthsFinder Strengths Quest, my number one strength is strategic". He noted that being strategic propelled him to foster associations as undergraduate

student with university administrators such as the Vice President of Student Affairs in the event that he needed support in the form of a letter of recommendation, or with the Dean of Judicial Affairs who may have looked favorably on an organization he was a member of because of their relationship.

Once deciding that he wanted to pursue the Student Affairs profession, he joined NASPA, the national sounding board for Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education. Through his undergraduate fellowship in NASPA, he interned at a prominent university which solidified his desire to earn a Master's Degree in Student Affairs. After earning his Masters, Charles resolved that earning a PhD was imperative after strategizing how he would undertake the pursuit of his career goals. He relayed:

So I knew that my ultimate career goal is to be a Chancellor of a system. I want to be a President for a couple of years, a few years, maybe 3-5, and then really run a community college system, and I knew to be able to do that I had to get a doctorate.

Although he was discouraged by his peers from jumping into a PhD without an extensive work history, he decided that he would enroll at the university he already attended because of the specialized degree that was offered there as soon as possible so he could “get it out of the way” and “really start trekking” in his career. He further elaborated on his ultimate career goals, saying:

So I knew that I wanted to get a PhD because I eventually wanted to teach, like I knew I wanted to join the faculty. So my end game was, after I've been a President and a Chancellor, retire as a faculty member. And I wanted to be ok with doing research. So when I was looking for programs, I also told myself I didn't want to get a Masters in the same thing that I got a PhD in.

Charles was even strategic in the doctoral program that he chose because he wanted to pursue a degree that was different from his Masters so that he would have a wider range of options and access to different social networks.



Throughout Charles's interview it was apparent that his innate desire to be fulfilled within his career guided his decision making processes. He indicated that he chose to go to college because he knew that any job he qualified for at that time would not be profitable, and that he did not "want to be the dude you see working at Walmart or at HEB or at Shell station" because he felt "like there's so much more" that he was capable of achieving from an academic and career standpoint outside of working a low-income earning job.

During the five years that it took to earn his Ph.D., Charles worked in the Residential Life department on campus. Because he vehemently vowed to never work in Housing again, as he was not satisfied with that career trajectory, he researched other options upon nearing the end of his program. He disclosed:

I finished up my PhD in December 2012. So it just so happened to work out because I was in Housing and I was like, "there's no way that I'm gonna be an area coordinator, with this PhD. Not that I'm over qualified, but I just can't do this, I gotta do something else". So it really made me start thinking about what's the next step.

After months of searching and feeling desperation because he had not found any positions that were the right fit for him, he finally experienced a career-changing breakthrough. He conveyed that:

It just so happened that there was this faculty position came up, and I applied for it. And I think that in itself was the opportunity that I needed. So prior to that, when I was in housing and I had been teaching the first year experience course, and it was a one credit hour, letter graded course, and I loved it. I loved teaching, I saw myself joining the faculty. Like, "Imma take this doctorate and join a faculty". And the work that I was doing, my research was directly connected to the job so I got a full time assistant professor job teaching the first year experience course which was amazing.

Charles's goal of advancing within his field also served as a driving influence along his educational and career journey. Once securing his first faculty position, he noted that he has been able to "map out the next steps" and subsequently climb the professional ladder. Of his career progression he said:

I had been teaching for a couple of years and was really focusing on my job, so I went from Assistant Professor, to Associate, to Lead Faculty, so like a Department Chair. So I hired, trained all of our Adjunct Faculty members. It was a great experience and I liked that part of the job so, I liked training adjuncts. In addition to that, I was also teaching adjunct in the Higher Ed program. So I started teaching every summer. So I graduated in December 2012 and I taught my first class in the spring of 13, then a summer class, and have been teaching ever since.

While serving as Lead Faculty, a Deanship became available which he was encouraged to apply for by the outgoing Dean, which was a testament to the value of social capital he was able to attain from a professional context. At that same time his institution had appointed a new President and was in the process of restructuring their organizational chart. Upon being hired, the newly appointed President asked Charles to report directly to her which has afforded him with many opportunities for advancement. Charles credited the accessibility he has been privy to from a professional standpoint to his decision to pursue and achieve institutionalized cultural capital through doctoral success. He articulated:

I'm 34, have a huge responsibility at this college; I sit on the President's executive cabinet, so I'm sitting at the table with the President and all the Vice Presidents making decisions. It's kind of awesome to be able to be this young and do that....I would say that the credibility and the opportunity that I have, I don't think I would have gotten it if I wouldn't have had a doctorate. Just to be able to sit at the table and speak confidently about student development theory, or about the research that I've done on the American community college, or anything I've read in the Chronicle, I think it added credibility and trust and the doors have just opened up. Our Executive Director of College Relations left, so now I'm overseeing College Relations, I'm working with our HR office to do a reorg submission to turn my job into a Vice Presidency. It's just some really awesome opportunities... I guarantee that, well let me not say I guarantee, but I think that having this doctorate has given me the opportunity to skip some steps....So going from a faculty member, to a Dean, to reporting directly to the President, to hopefully in the next six months becoming a Vice President; that's awesome to be able to say you've done that in four years...I mean those opportunities wouldn't happen if I didn't have this degree. We just got a 2.5 million dollar Title V grant that I helped write, I mean it's just cool stuff like that happens and I think it's because of the access that you get. The doctorate allows you to apply for jobs that people who've worked for 15 years unfortunately can't if the requirements say "Doctorate required".

Lastly, Charles spoke of the personal obligation he feels to remain genuine and humble despite the accolades and accomplishments he has amassed. In revealing what motivated him to persist toward success, he referred to maintaining his authenticity through accessing his non-dominant cultural capital by conveying:

I just kept thinking about how there's not a lot of us, right? I get the opportunity to really be the example and to not be your stereotypical faculty member, stereotypical person with a doctorate. That I was this 31 year old, young Black guy, who has 18 tattoos and loves Kanye West, and all the things you wouldn't expect from somebody with a doctorate, all the things that makes me, me. Like "aw man, that's awesome". I'm just...down to earth, real cool and I just so happen to also have my stuff together. So I think that was definitely something that attributed to wanting to get done. Just being able to go in the airport and put on a hoodie and some sweat pants and some Chucks and sit next to somebody and have a really intelligent conversation.

### **Case #3 Assertions**

Charles's lived experiences as a first-generation AAM exemplifies why the combined term "sociocultural capital" exists. Both of these theories of capital were prevalent among his journey to success as he leveraged the cultural capital he obtained to gain status and membership into social and professional networks (Bourdieu, 1977). His experiences affirm Dumais and Ward (2010)'s statement that, "while most quantitative studies have operationalized cultural capital as participation in or appreciation of high culture, many qualitative studies have focused on individuals' strategic interactions with important gatekeepers, such as teachers or school administrators" (p.26). In addition to foundational capital built by his parents and peers, the capital he gained from the sponsors he strategically attained as a student leader at his undergraduate university helped him to persevere when confronted with challenges. This persistence further afforded Charles opportunities throughout his educational journey to gain additional capital, contribute to the collective good and operate in the spirit of generativity. Ultimately, Charles's pursuit of doctoral success was motivated by his desire to gain access to

social and professional networks and to reap the benefits of capital built in those capacities, which corroborates Bourdieu's (1979) findings that "educational qualifications [have] come to be seen as a guarantee of the capacity to adopt the aesthetic disposition" (p. 28).

### **Cross Case Analysis Findings**

Following an in-depth analysis of each individual case, the researcher initiated a cross-case analysis to further add richness to the study. In order to efficiently address the research questions, cases were paired to discover similarities as well as differences existing among each pair (Eisenhardt, 1989). Eisenhardt (1989) informs that this approach requires analyzers to search for likenesses and dissimilarities that may be undetectable at first glance. She further notes that, "The juxtaposition of seemingly similar cases by a researcher looking for differences can break simplistic frames. In the same way, the search for similarity in a seemingly different pair also can lead to more sophisticated understanding (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 541).

#### **Case #1 vs. Case #2**

Despite their closeness in age, at first glance it appeared that Jonathan and David were the most dissimilar pair among the three cases, which was why cross case analysis was vital. After further examination, considerable commonalities were found amongst the two cases. During their interviews, they both revealed that they endured a lack of role models and mentors within their communities, especially those identifying as African American male. They were both reared in single parent households that were absent of paternal influence while the matriarchs of their families did not obtain high school diplomas. Because of the deficiency they experienced, Jonathan and David actively serve as mentors in the workplace and to the graduate students they teach. Though they disclosed that they did not feel as academically prepared as they should have been upon graduating high school, they both proceeded to enroll into

postsecondary realms. Subsequently, both participants made the decision to drop out of college and ended up working in unsatisfactory jobs; a year later however, they re-enrolled at different higher education institutions. As they graduated from their undergraduate institutions, they were driven to eventually pursue advanced degrees by their desires to advance within their career callings. Additionally, they both credit the wealth of opportunities they have received to their decision to pursue and attain doctoral achievement. Finally, both participants indicated that their relationship with God has helped them to overcome numerous challenges in order to experience success as a first-generation, AAM.

Regarding dissimilarities, Jonathan and David experienced contrasting upbringings, which impacted their journeys differently. Jonathan received a healthy amount of support throughout his educational journey from his family although he would eventually become the first among them to receive a Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degree. His grandmother, who provided him with a stable household despite the death of his mother and absence of his father, was his number one advocate and instilled into him the academic confidence he needed to succeed. In contrast, although David lived with his mother and knew his father, he did not experience the stability and familial support that Jonathan did. He recalled that he lacked guidance up until he gained mentors during the latter portion of his college years. The academic confidence and support Jonathan attained fostered the development of goals that he strongly desired to achieve. Conversely, because David's father was not involved in his early years and his mother was engrossed in working multiple jobs in order to scrape by, he lacked positive educational influence, which he concluded to be one of the reasons why he did not have any goals until college. While Jonathan was intentional about the steps he took on the path toward

success, David's personal approach was to trust the process and eventually the desired arrival would occur.

Despite not receiving encouragement to attend college by anyone in his environment, David began his postsecondary education within a technical school and then transferred to a community college before graduating and transferring to a 4-year university, while Jonathan immediately enrolled in a 4-year institution. Jonathan enrolled in graduate school soon after receiving his undergraduate degree while David entered the workforce after graduating from college for a few years before pursuing his Master's degree. However, once Jonathan completed graduate school, he spent seventeen years advancing within his career before embarking upon the doctoral process, whereas David enrolled within a year and a half of earning his Masters. Once deciding to pursue a Ph.D., Jonathan was very intentional in selecting his doctoral institution and program. David's decision, however, stemmed from the efficiency of being currently employed at the institution at that time, and already serving in a position that directly correlated to the degree program he had initially chosen. David eventually left that doctoral program to pursue a different doctoral program within that same institution that better suited his calling, which was the counseling profession, while Jonathan seamlessly matriculated through his doctoral program, which was directly aligned with his realized purpose of engaging in human capital leadership.

### **Case #2 vs. Case #3**

Both David and Charles were raised in environments in which they knew their mother and father. Both noted that they did not feel knowledgeable about college while matriculating through K-12 and lacked sufficient career and college advising within their schools. They both were aware of the limited postsecondary options available to them as first-generation students and fortunately, each participant had friends who motivated them to pursue higher education.

Without initial guidance, however, they both sat out of college for a semester and upon re-enrolling chose degrees that did not align with their innate inclinations. Both had mentors on their college campuses that helped them to identify their passions and pursue graduate degrees within those realms. Both participants pursued Student Affairs positions after graduating with their Master's Degrees and within the workplace they received support from colleagues that greatly supplemented their journeys. Furthermore, David and Charles chose to attend doctoral programs that were located at the universities that served as their places of employment. This pair respectively noted that their reasoning for persevering to achieve doctoral success was to uplift others through mentoring and role modeling. Additionally, both participants indicated that obtaining the doctoral degree served as a catalyst to professional success. Both currently serve as faculty at respective universities among other professional roles they hold.

David and Charles also experienced opposing experiences as first generation, AAM on their journey toward doctoral success. Charles's household consisted of him and his mother and father whom were married for over 30 years. Though his parents did not attend college, they were supportive of his academic journey. Along with Charles's mother, his father was an active participant in his life and has served as a constant role model to him. David however, was not a beneficiary of the familial support that Charles received, nor was his father initially involved in his life. Though lacking the socioemotional preparation for higher education arenas, Charles confirmed that he felt academically prepared for college, while David emphatically disclosed that he had not been equipped throughout his primary and secondary schooling to be academically successful within postsecondary institutions. Because Charles's household was more financially stable, he was able to engage in campus activities, student organizations, and internship opportunities; David conversely was employed throughout his educational journey in

order provide for himself, which explains the sufficient support he gained from his work colleagues that served to augment the familial support he lacked. His employment status, however, may have left little time for extracurricular involvement. Charles made the strategic decision to serve in a student leader capacity on his college campus because he was aware of the opportunity that would be provided to develop beneficiary relationships with vital stakeholders on campus, which would ultimately prove to enhance the academic and professional success he experienced. Charles however, noted that he did not become goal oriented until he realized his desire to serve as an academic and professional role model for the first generation students he had been serving on college campuses.

As a result of this realization, Charles eventually enrolled in a Higher Education Administration doctoral program which aligned with the Assistant Deanship he held at the university he was employed with at that time. After an unsuccessful experience with that program, which he partially attributed to a lack of faculty and peer support, he transferred to the Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program. His experience within the latter program proved to be more favorable, as his decision to transfer to the program was a spiritual one and it ultimately supported his true calling as a counselor and faculty member. Charles, however, felt certainly supported within the Educational Psychology doctoral program that he strategically chose which led him to be successful throughout each stage of the doctoral process despite obstacles faced. Charles also placed emphasis on the spousal support he received and his desire to generationally impact his family and uplift his race as a motivational factor to succeed. Furthermore, during his interview, Charles did not specifically mention spirituality as an influential factor contributing to his success as David did. Professionally, David and Charles are on differing tracts despite their commonality as student affairs professionals. Currently Charles



serves as an Assistant Dean at a community college, with aspirations to eventually lead that college system. Charles is no longer an Assistant Dean of Students, but is currently experiencing success as an Associate Professor in a Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program, in addition to owning an expanding counseling practice.

### **Case #1 vs. Case #3**

The largest age gap among participants existed between Jonathan and Charles, with Jonathan being the eldest. Nevertheless, these two cases proved to have the most congruent experiences among pairs analyzed. Jonathan and Charles originated from supportive and stable household, which likely reduced some socioemotional challenges. Both expressed a love for people and a desire to make their families proud and made the necessary sacrifices to do so. The participants exhibited self-efficacy and academic confidence throughout their educational journeys, which led to an early development of academic and professional goals. Being goal orientated and realizing their proclivity for leadership provoked them to be very deliberate in the academic and career decisions they made. Although Jonathan and Charles dropped out of college, both were acutely aware of their potential and capability of achieving more than their present conditions provided at that time. Because engaging in rewarding careers was of great importance, they re-enrolled into college and successfully earned their Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Furthermore, Jonathan and Charles sought doctoral degrees and were very strategic in their respective program selection, as they desired to enhance their academic and professional success. Upon achieving doctoral success, both serve as and mentors and role models within the workplace and classroom, as well as within their communities.

Charles stable environment included himself and his parents whom were married, while Jonathan lived with his grandmother and his two brothers. Whereas Charles was confident in his

academic preparation for college, Jonathan believed that there was room for improvement within his school system in regards to rigorous coursework. After experiencing the period of time in which he was not enrolled in school, Jonathan transferred to an HBCU, where he excelled. Charles, however, appealed to return back to the PWI he attended after being forced to sit out for a semester. Charles spoke significantly of his involvement in student organizations in undergrad, while Jonathan did not mention engagement in extracurricular activities on campus. Jonathan also lacked the relationships with university administrators that Charles had, but he did mention significant relationships with professors along his journey. After graduating undergrad, Jonathan returned to that HBCU to earn a Master's Degree while Jonathan attended an out of state university for graduate school. Not long after graduating with his Master's Degree, Charles enrolled in his doctoral program despite being advised to first expand his work history, while Jonathan spent seventeen years building his career before embarking upon the doctoral process. In addition to self-efficacy, Jonathan attributed his doctoral success and subsequent professional success to having faith in God. Charles, however, mentioned that his desire to add value to his family and community contributed to the obligation he felt to persevere to attain a Ph.D.

### **Overarching Themes**

In an effort to address the research questions posed, the researcher illuminated the overarching themes that were identified across cases. The first theme discovered among all of the cases was Support. Though received from different sources, each participant noted the influential support received along their educational journey. Jonathan's foundational support originated from his grandmother and family, while David felt most supported by his colleagues. Charles credited his mother and father, university faculty and staff and his wife for their essential role in his success. Participants also spoke to the invaluable experience of engaging in mentoring, which

is a more formal approach to providing support. Their mentors endorsed them and imparted vital resources that served to enhance their experiences as first-generation AAMs eventually achieving doctoral success. The ability to Recover also permeated throughout each case. In addition to the intersection of their race, gender and first generation status qualifying them to be deemed “at-risk”, each participant encountered significant challenges on their quest to doctoral success. Jonathan lost his mother at the age of 7 and his father was not present in his life, so his grandmother stepped into the role of caregiver. David grew up in a financially unstable, single parent household that was plagued by eviction and homelessness. Though Charles’s household was secure, his parents lacked college knowledge which made it difficult for him to navigate higher education institutions as a first generation student. Additionally, the failing health of his father during his freshman year as an out-of-state student caused him to have to return home and reassess his collegiate plans. After surmounting these challenges to become the first in their families to attend college, each participant experienced a period of time in which they were not enrolled in school due to dropping out, whether by force or choice. Instead of allowing these hindrances to foil their achievements they were able to traverse obstacles and eventually experience the success they desired. Engagement in Generativity was also prominent among the cases. Each participant voiced the opportunities in which they took advantage of to actively serve others. All three mentor individuals within their communities and workplaces, and also serve as mentors to the students they instruct within the classroom. The participants of this study notified that they purposely engaged in generativity because they desired to supplement the lives of others in a capacity not always afforded to them along their educational and professional journeys. Lastly the desire for Advancement motivated the participants to achieve doctoral success. Each participant sought career paths that they knew could only be attained by earning a

doctoral degree. Once obtaining a Ph.D., the participants equally emphasized how the decision to do so has generated numerous opportunities and has served as a catalyst to their successes and advancement as professionals.

### **I-Poem Analysis**

Creating I-poems using I-statements from raw data from each case served as an additional analysis method in this study. Keigleemann (2007) alluded to the significance of observing I-statements by notifying that, “how a person speaks about herself or himself provides information about confidence or unfinished processes of understanding, and shows how interviewees take a personal stance” (p. 76). Each participant’s I-statements were gleaned from their transcripts and structured to resemble a poem. Additionally the researcher formatted the I-poem so that special attention would be paid to the significant words following the letter “I” (Balan, 2005). The selection of significant words within the sentences containing I-statements was subjective and the sequence of the stanzas in the I-poem followed the sequential order of I-statements found within corresponding transcripts (Balan, 2005; Edwards & Weller, 2012). By creating I-Poems, it was the researcher’s aim to add richness to the analysis by illuminating the powerful personal associations created by the participants when recalling their lived experiences.

#### **Case #1 I-Poem**

I grew up with my grandmother who had only an eighth grade education  
I always knew I had the potential to be somebody great and do great things  
I always wanted to get a Ph.D.; it was a lifelong dream of mine  
I quit school for a year, I just got very unfocused  
I knew that I had more potential to offer the world, and even myself,  
I think that had I gone to a college prep type school, I would have been even more prepared  
I think my school system lacked some of the exposure  
I think all throughout my college experience my grandmother was a support system  
I’m the first in my family to ever earn a college degree  
I knew I had that strong support system with them  
I had mentors in terms of college professors that saw my ability to lead

I think sometimes it was very surreal to see within my context that I have this potential to do  
this;  
I didn't see it modeled for me  
I needed that credential to be effective  
I was truthful to myself  
I don't think I, perhaps, would have been as effective as I am  
I am able to offer them hope,  
I think my legacy is one of determination, one of hope, one of faith.  
I believe that we have the capacity within ourselves to achieve  
I knew I had to be stable, I knew I had to be committed, I knew I had to be dedicated

## **Case #2 I-Poem**

I hate saying poor, but it is what it is,  
I underachieved academically  
I had no idea, no guidance  
I was as there for about 2 semesters, and I dropped out  
I am a TRIO guy  
I had no mentorship, none, none.  
I was really sad, I was really feeling rejection.  
I craved, craved, craved a relationship with a man, I craved some model,  
I never had a goal in my life, never had a goal growing up  
I wanted to work with young people in college.  
I had a mentor in college  
I underachieved a lot because I think I was angry  
I don't blame her, she was trying to make ends meet;  
I was floundering,  
I said, why don't I try this out and see where it goes  
I think it was a big deal for me; I was like alright, I can really do this  
I felt supported  
I think that's what I craved my whole entire life, is just to be around men, particularly men who  
are doing something, anything positive  
I think back, there were no men in my life,  
I became goal oriented  
"I gotta be a role model, I gotta keep progressing and progressing and progressing  
I met Leon and he was the first person that I knew, black boy that I knew, that had a mom and a  
dad in the house that was married.  
I was a little bit older  
I don't have any role models and all these folks knew what they were doing from jump  
I had no idea, no idea of what I was doing.  
I think people think that you're only first generation when get to undergrad,

I had some setbacks  
I was all alone  
I didn't have the same engagement  
I failed, failed terribly  
I could have reapplied but I'm a Christian  
I was one of those students, I am one of those students.  
I think the world the world will push you  
I kept walking, I just kept walking

### Case #3 I-Poem

I failed out  
I was really involved  
I was really involved in Alpha;  
I was the overinvolved underachiever  
I just put my classes on the backburner and it came back to bite me  
I got put on academic suspension and I think that was the wakeup call  
I didn't get a bachelor's degree for myself, I didn't get a Masters for myself and I didn't get a  
PhD for myself, I got it for my mom and my dad and then I got it for my family,  
I had to get it together and that's what I did  
I feel like a lot of the basics that students whose parents had gone to college knew, my parents  
didn't know  
I love people and I'm also very strategic  
I'm very calculated  
I don't want to be the dude you see working at Walmart or at HEB or at Shell station, I feel like  
there's so much more  
I had a core group of friends  
I definitely had support  
I say this all the time when I talk to people, if I wouldn't have pledged Alpha at [University]  
specifically, half of the things I have accomplished in my life, I wouldn't have been able to  
accomplish  
I definitely feel like I had support  
I just kept thinking about when I got to the fifth year,  
I knew that my ultimate career goal is to be a Chancellor  
I knew to be able to do that I had to get a doctorate  
I wanted to get it out the way  
I just kept thinking about how there's not a lot of *us*, right?  
I get the opportunity to really be the example  
I was this 31 year old, young Black guy, who has 18 tattoos and loves Kanye West, and all the  
things you wouldn't expect from somebody with a doctorate  
I feel like I really get a chance to make things easier for my daughter

I loved teaching, I saw myself joining the faculty  
I went from Assistant Professor, to Associate, to Lead Faculty, so like a Department Chair  
I would say that the credibility and the opportunity that I have, I don't think I would have gotten  
it if I wouldn't have had a doctorate  
I think that having this doctorate has given me the opportunity to skip some steps  
I still am involved in our male mentoring program  
I want people to see me as the person who is always willing to extend the hand back,  
I don't feel like I've had a lot of people that look like me, reach back out"  
I need somebody to see this and help me navigate this process.  
I don't want anybody that looks like me to have to go through that  
I want people to know I take my craft very seriously,  
I think ultimately you want people to see that it's possible  
I just want people to see me as this approachable, down to earth dude that's got his s\*\*\* together

The I-Poems presented for each case provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of each participant and reveal the alignment of the raw data provided by the participants to the data analysis presented within this chapter. The powerful personal associations that each participant made using I-statements highlights their educational journeys and illuminates the impact of sociocultural capital in the lives of first-generation AAMs.

### **External Coder Analysis**

An external coder was utilized in order to supplement the establishment of credibility within this study, as well as to augment to the analysis of data by providing thematic coding that was free from researcher bias. Before being provided with participant transcripts, the coder was required to sign an external coder agreement form created by the researcher, which is included in Appendix D of this document. This form outlined the role of the external coder as it relates to this study as well as the requirement of confidentiality upon reviewing participant data. Table 4.4 presents the thematic coding that emerged from data analysis conducted by the coder.

Table 4.4 External Coder Analysis

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Self-Efficacy/Tenacity Spirituality	Faith
Structure/Discipline Life Balance Life Challenges	Strategy
Legitimacy High Regards Upward Mobility	Advancement
Educational Stigma Lack of Guidance/Role Models	Lack of Preparedness
Peer Relationships Mentors	Support
Impartation Reaching Back	Transmission

According to personal correspondence from the external coder regarding the thematic coding process:

Respondent's transcripts were initially individually analyzed and coded. A master list of all identified codes was developed; then a cross-comparison of codes found among all subjects was completed to eliminate any codes that were not reoccurring. All codes were then summarized and grouped by theme.

Upon observation, the themes Faith, Strategy, Advancement, Lack of Preparation, Support and Transmission that emerged from the external coder analysis were found to be congruent with themes presented in the within-case analysis of the study and specifically with the themes Support, Recover, Generativity and Advancement found by the researcher upon conducting a cross-case analysis. The alignment of the thematic coding produced by the external coder to the data analysis conducted by the researcher further augments the effort to establish credibility within this study



## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the data collected for this study as well as the methods used by the researcher to comprehensively analyze the data. The researcher conducted a within-case analysis for each case by reviewing the multiple sources of data collected to create codes deriving from patterns and association discovered within the data. After codes were organized into themes, as found in Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, participant data was presented to substantiate the identification of themes specific to that case. For cross case analysis, each case was paired to the other two cases to highlight the similarities and differences found amongst the pairs. Furthermore, cross case analysis uncovered the overarching themes Support, Recover, Generativity, and Advancement that were present among all cases. Additionally, the researcher used the I-Poem analysis method to display I-statements relayed by participants during interviews. Thematic coding was also conducted by an external coder to add to the credibility of the study, as presented in Table 4.4. Throughout this chapter researcher used thick descriptions to illuminate the findings respective to each analysis method utilized.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

*“Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”  
-Nigerian Proverb*

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of three first-generation AAMs with the intent to uncover the resilience and persistence factors that can be attributed to the completion of their journeys toward doctoral success. This study differed from the majority of research conducted on AAMs achieving doctoral success because it addressed the holistic lived experiences of AAMs throughout the education pipeline, versus explicitly focusing on collegiate or doctoral success.

### Summary of Findings

Because homogeneity cannot be assumed when addressing the lived experiences of first-generation, AAMs (Harper & Nichols, 2008), it was imperative to qualitatively investigate what factors attributed to the attainment of doctoral success by participants identifying with this population that is viewed by society as “at-risk” (Cuyjet, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Harper, 2007a; Howard, 2008; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010; Harper & Davis, 2012; Bonner, 2014). Two research questions concerned with fulfilling the purpose of this study guided the investigation.

### Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was, “How do first-generation African American males perceive their educational experiences toward doctoral success?” This question was addressed by conducting qualitative interviews guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. Participants relayed their lived experiences from the context of their first-generation status. Both Jonathan and Charles grew up in stable households with parents who expressed their desire to witness them be the first in their families to attend college. David’s experiences were opposite of

Jonathan and Charles. He attributed his volatile living conditions to the disinvestment of both him and his mother in his education journey. His mother was preoccupied with trying to earn enough money to survive, which left little time for supervision. His father lived nearby but was not active in his life, which also contributed to his disinvestment in school. Each participant in this study shared that they were acutely aware of the deficiency of role models within their households and communities whom they could identify with and who embodied the success that they desired to achieve. With the exception of a few teachers Jonathan encountered, they largely lacked champions within their school environments that were invested in their career and college success. Because their parents were not equipped with transferrable knowledge concerning college success, the participants experienced difficulty in adjusting to the college environment. Consequently, they withdrew their enrollments from those institutions within their first year of attendance.

For example, Charles was forced to withdraw as a result of poor academic performance. He felt that although he was adequately prepared to be academically successful in college, he found it difficult to adjust to the socioemotional demands, as his high school did not impart that knowledge on to him. Jonathan and David both made the decision to discontinue their enrollment because they were both disinvested in those respective atmospheres. Each participant explicitly discussed their decision making process surrounding their enrollment efforts. Charles had to petition the university to allow him to re-enroll. Once his request was granted, he chose a major that he knew he would be academically successful in and spent the remainder of his time in undergrad raising his GPA and serving as a campus leader. Both Jonathan and David chose to re-enroll in a different institution that would provide a fresh perspective. Jonathan chose to attend an HBCU that was closer to his support system at home and was particularly excited at the

second chance to pursue his education. He noted that his new found motivation landed him on the Dean's list for his academic performance, which he maintained up to graduation. Charles re-enrolled into a community college which a better was fit for than the technical school he withdrew from. He graduated with an Associate's Degree and transferred to a university to complete his Bachelor's Degree in finance. While at this university his disposition about educational attainment began to change as he became acquainted with men, especially black men, obtaining the success he had not witnessed within his community. Knowing that he had the support of these men made the university atmosphere less intimidating. Consequently, he was able to focus his efforts on learning how be academically successful in his own right while engaging in the student experience. He also was afforded a job opportunity by one of his mentors involving working with first generation students which was a population he thoroughly enjoyed working with, and continued to work with for a large portion of his career. This experience solidified for him the value of education as a means to leverage career opportunities he desired.

All three participants worked in an area related to their Masters degrees while enrolled in their graduate degrees which provided them with valuable, experiential understanding concerning their chosen fields. After graduating from their respective Master's programs, both David and Charles pursued jobs at other universities. Shortly after, they decided to pursue doctoral degrees for advancement purposes from those institutions because they provided doctoral programs that were of interest and because they would receive tuition reimbursement based on their employment statuses. Charles specifically noted that he did not even search for doctoral programs outside of that institution because of the promise of free tuition. Jonathan focused on establishing himself in his career field before pursuing doctoral success and felt that

doctoral attainment was the missing piece concerning his sense of academic and professional fulfilment.

The participants experienced instances during their doctoral journey in which they felt intimidated by the demanding nature of the doctoral process, which they attributed to their first-generation status. However, they perceived the benefits accompanying a Ph.D. to be greater than the challenges they encountered. The decision to obtain a doctoral degree was life-changing for Jonathan, David, and Charles, and positively impacted their career trajectories in terms of the successes they have been able to experience.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question asked what resilience and persistence factors do first generation African American Males attribute to their doctoral success? Though it was the position of the researcher not to view the lived experiences of the participants as homogenous, common themes that could be perceived as resilience and persistence factors present among all participants was sought upon analyzing data across cases. The categorization of which themes constituted resilience and persistence factors were subjective. It is not uncommon to see resilience and persistence used interchangeably (Greene, 1999); however, for this study they are observed as separate concepts, as resilience is abstractly defined as the, “ability to cope with adversity, stress and depravation” (Begun, 1993, p. 28-29), whereas persistence compels an individual to continue an action despite challenges encountered (Rovai, 2003). This study highlights the resilience and persistence factors found among the three individual cases as well as across cases.

The resilience factors discovered within Case #1 consisted of the themes Promotion and Faith. The promoters in Jonathan’s life, consisting of his family members, peers, and instructors, encouraged him to seek educational opportunities, beyond what had been attained in his

household and community, by earning a college degree. Due to their encouragement, he was able to overcome adversity that others might have been encumbered by, including being motherless and fatherless by the age of seven, and having a less than ideal first-year experience in college, which resulted in him dropping out. Additionally, Jonathan's faith in God and belief in his own capabilities served as constant reminders that he was equipped to be successful in whatever endeavors he embarked upon, including pursuing doctoral success, regardless of the obstacles faced along the journey.

Persistence factors that were present among Jonathan's relayed experiences included Transcendence, Collectivism, and Generativity. His determination to transcend beyond what he was exposed to as a first-generation student growing up in a rural community fueled his progression throughout the educational pipeline. The academic self-confidence he obtained as a byproduct of the promotion he was privy to served to cultivate the development of his educational and career goals. Jonathan knew that the achievement of these goals would result in experiencing success that no one in his immediate environment had experienced. Keeping these goals at the forefront of his focus motivated him to maintain persistence.

Because Jonathan aspired to honor the efforts of his promoters, he did not allow failure to impede his success. His desire to make those who had sown seeds of encouragement in his life proud influenced him to approach his educational journey from a collective perspective. Because he considered the collective effect of his decisions, Jonathan was able to recover from his loss of focus as it pertained to the first year of his undergraduate studies. He was cognizant of the fact that his decision to drop out of school would impact his family structure at the present time, as well as the family he would one day lead, if it were not reversed. Thus he yielded to the necessity

of sacrificing whatever was required so that his actions would lead to collective success resulting from the persistence that he exhibited.

Lastly, Jonathan's educational and professional successes afforded him the opportunity to promote generativity through opportunities to lead, uplift and serve as a role model to others. At a young age he and his promoters became aware of his innate ability to lead others; thus the desire to operate in a leadership capacity became a career value for him. Dumais (2002) noted that "having high occupational expectations contributes to a student receiving high grades" (p.59) which explains how Jonathan's desire to serve others through leadership propelled him to excel throughout his education and contributed to his persistence in achieving doctoral success despite obstacles he encountered. By achieving his goal of becoming an expert through the attainment of a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership and the career opportunities that have accompanied that degree, Jonathan has been provided the opportunity to augment the lives of others by actively imparting his expertise and by serving as a reminder to others, specifically first-generation AAMs, that success is possible.

The resilience factors that emerged from David's lived experience were Advocacy and Overcoming. Although a sense of advocacy for his educational success was absent within David's household and he lacked advocates in the form of role models, mentors, and school stakeholders during his formative years, he was able to gain access to those individuals once he was engaged within a higher education institution. Knowing that he had built relationships with individuals who were advocates of his success allowed him to endure disappointments, including those related to career dissatisfaction, along his educational journey. Furthermore, David's ability to overcome emerged from his innate ability to withstand adversity and subsequently recover from it. Because he obtained coping skills he was able to survive financial instability,

homelessness, an absent father, a lack of advocates during his adolescent years and academic underachievement and did not let these risk factors halt his educational success.

David's desire to transcend beyond what was modeled in his environment growing up also aroused his determination to overcome and persist within educational spaces. After withdrawing from the technical school he had attended, he concluded that reinvesting in his education was the only solution to avoiding the low-wage jobs that his mother and father worked. He specifically noted that because he wanted to be better man than his father was at that time, he was motivated to persevere so as to not subject his posterity to the anguish he experienced growing up without an emotionally or financially supportive father in the household. The acknowledgement and pursuit of David's Inherent Calling further enabled him to persist along the education pipeline to experience academic and career success. As aforementioned, David experienced times of career dissatisfaction along his journey because the careers that he pursued possessed values that did not align with his inherent calling. This served as one of the reasons why he did not perform well in his first doctoral program. His ability to have faith in God and the direction he felt God was leading him in motivated him to transfer to a doctoral program focusing on the counseling profession, which was more suitable for him. David continued to persist throughout the doctoral program because he felt he had a responsibility to succeed from a generativity perspective, as he knew his accomplishments would positively impact the students he worked with, as well as his family and community. Finally, David's personal belief that one's goals and desires will eventually come to fruition if they keep "pushing forward" and trust the process, supported his persistence efforts.

The resilience factor observable among the analysis of data concerning Charles was *Support*. Charles was highly supported by his parents along his educational journey. Though



neither of his parents had continued their education beyond high school they were both willing and active in helping him to navigate the college going process. In addition to playing an active role in his educational quest, because his parents were married he was able to weather unfavorable conditions that emerged along his educational journey knowing that they were in his corner as a united presence. Along with the foundational resilience built within Charles as a result of the continual support of his parents, his peers also influenced him to attend college. They held each other accountable to their higher education goals and assisted each other as needed in achieving those goals. In his Master's program he also encountered supportive classmates who were willing to assist him academically. When Charles decided to embark upon the doctoral process, the support he received from his wife, whom he was engaged to be married to at the time, also contributed to his resilience. They both made the decision to pursue terminal degrees simultaneously, albeit in different content areas; however, her ability to relate to the difficulties that are common among doctoral processes both comforted him and assured him that he could overcome whatever predicaments surfaced.

Institutionalized Sponsorship, Student Involvement, Collectivism, Generativity and Accessibility all served as persistence factors for Charles during his pursuit of doctoral success. While attending the undergraduate institution that he graduated from, Charles was sponsored by interest holders within the institution that recognized his ability to lead in a way that was supportive of the college environment. These individuals used their influence to cultivate his potential through endorsement. They provided him with career advice that he had not previously received in high school, which ultimately led him to pursue a career in Student Affairs, which aligned to his career goals. They also appointed him to positions that further developed his leadership skills and provided opportunities for experiential learning as it related to the Student

Affairs profession. Furthermore, Charles's sponsors recommended him for prominent student fellowships which encouraged him to continue to persist academically. Subsequently, their sponsorship led to the attainment of Charles's first job upon completing the doctoral process, where he gained additional sponsors. He quickly progressed up the organizational chart within the community college where he is currently employed. Endorsement from the College President as a result of his persistence has further advanced his career to current obtainment of a Deanship and Interim Executive Director position, as well as a potential Vice Presidency in the near future.

This sponsorship both derived from, and further propelled, Charles's decision to engage in student organizations during his time in college. He was involved in many student organizations and was seen as a leader on campus. In addition to campus sponsored organizations, Charles's membership in his fraternity eventually encouraged his persistence to obtain collegiate and, ultimately, doctoral success. Though his grades initially suffered from his involvement within his fraternity, coupled with his obligations to other student organizations, it was the accountability he felt to his campus chapter to be a worthy representative, and the encouragement of his fraternity brothers, that motivated him to improve his academic performance. Furthermore, his engagement in these student organizations fostered a sense of belonging within Charles that contributed to his persistence efforts along his educational journey.

The collective impact degree attainment would have on those associated with him also prompted Charles to be persistent. Throughout his interview he communicated several times that one of the most influential factors that contributed to his successful degree attainment was his desire to make his parents proud. He further noted that though he was not interested in participating in his doctoral graduation, he did so because he knew how important it was for his mother to witness her only child receive a Ph.D. The idea of establishing a family also played a

role in Charles's persistence. Specifically, Charles cited that both he and his wife desired to finish their degrees in a timely fashion so that they could proceed in starting a family. Once they were married and had a daughter, he revealed that her existence further motivated him to persist to achieve his career goals and serve as a personal example to her of what she is capable of achieving as an African American. Thus, when situations arose that required Charles to be perseverant, such as the need to petition his re-enrollment while pursuing an undergraduate degree after being placed on academic suspension, he accepted those challenges knowing that persistence would have a favorable collective impact.

For Charles, the responsibility he feels to serve as a role model also extends to others, especially those that identify as African American. In his interview he shared that he has always felt a responsibility to his race to be successful and occupy spaces that are not commonly inhabited by African Americans, which also was a driving force regarding his persistence. Furthermore, despite his busy schedule as college administrator, Charles takes every available opportunity to mentor students and employees; he particularly enjoys mentoring young AAM professionals working in Higher Education and Student Affairs careers and augmenting their persistence, as he recalled having no one that he could identify with willing to engage him in mentorship as a young professional.

The desire to gain accessibility into spaces that he perceived would be beneficial was also influential to Charles's persistence toward academic success, which he leveraged to obtain career success. While pursuing his undergraduate degree, Charles revealed that he was very strategic in the relationships he fostered. He knew that those individuals, who would eventually become his sponsors, obtained the influence and college knowledge that he needed to be successful as a first-generation AAM at a PWI. After deciding his career path with the help of one of his sponsors, he

developed academic and career goals that fostered persistence and aligned with the level of success he wanted to attain. He was very selective of the Masters and Doctoral programs he earned graduate degrees from because he knew that they would afford him the career diversity he desired. Furthermore, he was strategic regarding his first career position after achieving doctoral success, which resulted in his ability to advance rather quickly. Charles also desired to maintain authenticity despite the accolades and promotions that he has received. His ability to remain genuine is something that he is proud of and directly credits to his persistence.

## **Resilience**

The resilience factors found among the three participants were Support and the ability to Recover. Each participant came in contact with individuals who supported their journeys in some capacity. Jonathan's support emerged in the form of promotion from his grandmother and other family members, competent instructors, peers and mentors. While in his capacity as a student worker pursuing his undergraduate degree, David's supervisors and colleagues served as his first advocates who provided the mentoring he "craved". In his doctoral program he gained access to minority professors who were genuinely concerned with his success. David's advocates supported his journey by engaging him, offering him opportunities and providing him with valuable information that was beneficial to his success. Charles's support came from his parents, friends and spouse. Throughout his journey he noted that his parents actively supported his decision to attend college and assisted him figuring out how to do so successfully. His high school and graduate school friends also supported his endeavors by holding him accountable to his goals and aiding him in achieving academic success. Additionally, his wife served as his sounding board and provided him with emotional support, as she was able to relate to his doctoral experiences since she was concurrently pursuing doctoral success. The presence of these

interest holders in the lives of the participants provided them with the support needed to confront obstacles. The ability to recover also contributed to the resilience these men obtained. Each participant experienced adversity at different stages in their life but were able to overcome those difficulties, which fostered resilience that benefited them later on in their doctoral journeys.

### **Persistence**

The persistence factors that were prevalent among cases were Generativity and Advancement. The desire to supplement the lives of others, especially those whose identifying factors were similar to their own motivated the participants of this study to persist to doctoral success. This persistence stemmed from the absence of academic role models in their own lives, which cultivated the responsibility they felt to future generations who would be positively impacted by their educational and career achievements. The potential for advancement also served as a persistence factor for these men. All were motivated to pursue and achieve doctoral success due to the potential for academic, career and economic advancement that accompanies a doctoral degree. Because they desired to see their goals related to advancement actualized, they remained on the path to doctoral success despite challenges that arose.

### **Impact of Theoretical Lens**

Data used within this study was observed and analyzed through a Social and Cultural Capital theoretical lens. Though Bourdieu (1973) is criticized for the ambiguity surrounding the definition and interpretation of his theory, the findings of this study affirm the Bourdieuan belief that it is highly improbable that individuals have the ability to achieve educational success and consequently career success without obtaining some degree of social and cultural capital, also termed as sociocultural capital. Nonetheless, this study also exposes the gaps in the theory as it relates to the belief that the attainment social and cultural capital that is categorized as dominant is the sole predictor of one's success. The participants of this study lacked the sociocultural

capital that Bourdieu (1973) considered dominant, as it is usually attained by those members of dominant culture. This dominant sociocultural capital includes extensive social networks and cultural capital such as exposure to “highbrow” cultural tastes that are socially reproduced by parents to students during their formative years (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 568). Bourdieu (1973) believed that this lack of dominant capital caused the individual habitus’ of these students to be rigid and inhibiting of upward social mobility. However, Bourdieu’s theories did not account for the value of non-dominant sociocultural capital. This capital, such as personal motivation, collectivism and generativity supplements the lives of African Americans, and specific to this study, first-generation AAMs, and makes educational success attainable as confirmed by other researchers’ studies (Carter, 2003; Yosso, 2005, Strayhorn, 2010). Strayhorn (2010) further confirms the value of non-dominant cultural capital, stating that:

Minority students bring with them various forms of culture that may be decidedly different from the “culture” privileged in schooling contexts. However, minority students’ social and cultural capital reservoirs are nonetheless important in terms of educational outcomes. (p. 309)

Regarding Jonathan, the sociocultural capital gleaned first from his grandmother, who according to Bourdieuan standards, did not attain the social and cultural capital that was valuable for reproduction, and from others who served as promoters to his success was foundational. Combining those experiences with his faith in God and in his abilities contributed to his habitus and developed the resilience that allowed him to overcome obstacles and persist to gain institutional cultural capital on a doctoral level. Henceforth he is able to collectively impact and contribute sociocultural capital to his family, employees and students.

Although David was the most deficient of sociocultural capital during his formative years, including in what is classified as non-dominant capital, his high level of resilience stemming from overcoming adversity was the capital needed to sustain him until he could gain

sociocultural capital in the form of advocates and mentors. These advocates also fostered the building of resilience in David by further providing opportunities to generate capital in his life. This resilience was still needed as he matriculated throughout the education pipeline, but fortunately the sociocultural capital he had accumulated coupled with the heightened desire to persist after discovering his inherent calling resulted in David becoming the first person from his community to earn a doctoral degree.

Charles could be deemed as the most fortunate of the three participants in terms of the reproduction of sociocultural capital, as he was reared by both of his parents, who are married, in a supportive household. Though serving as important contributors to his capacity to be resilient, they still did not obtain the dominant cultural capital, as they had not continued their education past high school. Fortunately for Charles, the non-dominant cultural capital he obtained from his parents, as well as his peers in the form of resilience served him well when he needed it the most after being placed on academic suspension during his first year at the college he would obtain a Bachelor's Degree from. Upon being reinstated by the university, Charles continued to build strategic relationships with individuals that would sponsor him and supplement his social and cultural capital supply. Through capital built as a result of his experiences as an engaged student in college, his desire to succeed from a collective and generative perspective coupled with aspirations to gain accessibility to the benefits that accompanied institutionalized cultural capital in the form of a Ph.D., developed the persistence needed to achieve his academic and career goals.

The findings of this study suggest that success can be achieved outside of the constructs of Bourdieu's Social and Cultural capital theories as it relates to its narrow focus on dominant capital. The non-dominant forms of sociocultural capital obtained by the first-generation AAMs

who participated in this study largely attributed their educational success. This non-dominant sociocultural capital led to building of resilience in these men, which helped them to overcome adversity so that college success was possible, despite their first-generation status. Once they were established in at their respective universities, they accumulated both non-dominant and dominant sociocultural capital that greatly contributed to their ability to persist. For this reason the researcher agrees with Wenk (2011)'s statement framed by Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital that, "the goal then should be to keep working class students in school for as long as possible so that they might attain compensatory, scholastic based, cultural capital" (p.25). The longer the participants stayed within the educational pipeline, the more social and cultural capital was accessible to them which led to the achievement of doctoral success and ultimately career success.

### **Recommendations for P-12 Interest Holders**

Firstly, it is necessary that schools that educate P-12 first-generation AAM students are accountable to their duty to function as spaces where vital sociocultural capital is built. Schools the staff members who are work in them must be culturally competent and value non-dominant social capital that students might obtain, while simultaneously providing dominant cultural capital building opportunities as "there is no theoretical reason why schools cannot provide dominant cultural capital to its working class students" (Wenk, 2011, p.24). There is a dire need for highly qualified teachers in schools that first-generation AAMs attend, as the findings of this study revealed that competent instruction served as a resilience factor and form of cultural capital for one of the participants. Teachers must attain their own social capital in order to reproduce among students (Wenk, 2011) and be invested in providing rigorous culturally responsive pedagogy, as culturally responsive pedagogy can combat academic disengagement, and foster



the development of self-efficacy by building on the cultural capital that AAMs already obtain (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers can also build self-efficacy in AAMs by planning opportunities for small successes and consequently rewarding those successes (Curry & Milson, 2013). Schools can also partner with teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to effectively engage AAMs.

In addition to teachers, school counselors must also be culturally competent and assume their role as advocates for their students. Based on the findings of this study, all of the participants lacked adequate career and college readiness throughout their tenure in P-12 schools which ultimately prolonged their educational journey toward doctoral success. School counselors should begin these efforts as early as Prekindergarten so that career circumscription and compromise will not drastically reduce their Zone of Acceptable Alternatives (Gottfredson, 1981; Curry & Milson, 2013) for AAMs. Career and college readiness should continue in schools throughout every grade. To achieve this, school counselors should create guidance curriculum that fosters career and college exploration through experiential activities such as college and career fairs, that are developmentally appropriate for students at every grade level. School counselors could also collaborate with teachers, administrators and other interest holders to in order to foster a college-going environment within schools.

Participants of this study noted feeling unprepared for college from an either an academic or social standpoint, or both. To address this, school counselors can advocate for AAMs students to be engaged in rigorous coursework that prepares them both academically and socioemotionally for college. Also taking AAMs on college tours or providing students with resources concerning programs that allow students to experience the college experience are vital for AAMS, especially those that are first-generation as it provides them with the opportunity to

experience the college environment which may have been foreign to them. Additionally, school counselors or other interest holders can facilitate mentoring relationships, such as those between AAMs in P-12 and AAM college students, which may also aid in the building of their self-efficacy through role modeling, while simultaneously expanding their social networks.

Lastly, in an effort to continue to build on the resilience already obtained by AAMs in P-12, schools must increase communication efforts with parents. Because parents often serve as the first generators of social capital within students, it is imperative that schools leverage parents in an effort to ensure that AAMs are successful throughout the education pipeline. Schools can engage parents by providing weekly correspondence at the least, encouraging parents to serve as volunteers during school activities and providing programming at flexible times that are considerate of parents work schedules. Programming, such as college and career night or financial aid night can provide vital career and college readiness resources to parents of first-generation AAMs who may not obtain knowledge of the important role these constructs play in the lives of their students. Furthermore, this programming may prompt parents to engage in conversations with their student that center around career and college readiness which Strayhorn (2010) and Tramonte and Willms (2010) found to contribute to cultural capital.

### **Recommendations for Higher Education Interest Holders**

Regardless of whether AAMs have developed cultural capital during their formative years, once they enter postsecondary education, it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to remain actively engaged in this work. Despite their primary and secondary preparation, academic achievement in college is highly influenced by the social and cultural capital they gain while enrolled (Strayhorn, 2010). Because cultural capital takes different forms in the lives of AAMs, higher education institutions must find ways to support students through

the building of social and cultural capital, if college success for these men is to be observed. This could be accomplished in a number of ways, including supporting students through specialized recruitment efforts for AAMs, promoting student organizational involvement and engagement, and facilitating mentoring relationships.

In order for higher education establishments to ensure that AAMs are equipped to succeed within higher education arenas, efforts to recruit these students should be tailored to their sociocultural capital needs. These efforts include utilizing the capital they presently attain while simultaneously assessing their needs and committing to facilitate their success once they arrive on campus. One primary goal to be met in tailoring college recruitment strategies for AAMs is the provision of college knowledge to students and parents with, which serves as a form of capital that may not have been inherited. African American students are overrepresented among first generation college students (Engle, 2007) which may suggest that their parents lack information on the college process. This is troubling since Strayhorn (2010) and other scholars cited that AAMs who had college conversations with their parents were more likely to display higher academic achievement through earned grades than those who did not. Strayhorn (2010) informed that this occurrence could be possibly attributed to a realistic outlook on college stemming from these conversations, which better equips students to manage the social and cultural transition to college. A recruiting tactic that may encourage college discussion between parents and their students consists of employing college recruiters to visit the homes of AAMs in an effort to engage in conversation with parents and potential students. Additionally, institutions could disperse resources that supply parents with college information as well as talking points to consider when having college discussions with their students.

Partnering with high schools as an outreach method is another way in which recruitment efforts can be tailored for AAMs in order to build cultural capital and foster college success. Studies show that students who are engaged in pre-college programs such as federally funded TRIO programs, and activities including as additional instruction for specific content areas and career and college planning, earned higher grades in college than those who were not engaged (Strayhorn, 2010). Additionally, colleges could host a recruiting day at high schools specifically catered to AAMs and also invite those students to campuses in an effort to provide beneficial knowledge as well as reduce stigmas associated with the transition from high school to college.

Once AAMs have arrived on campus, social and cultural capital should continue to be built through engagement and involvement in student organizations. Students who are involved on campus tend to feel more connected to their university and are at less risk for dropping out (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Engle, 2007; Strayhorn, 2010). While engaged in these organizations, students obtain leadership skills, learn how to engage with a diverse body of peers and ultimately experience higher academic achievement, which are all representative of social and cultural capital (Harper, 2007b; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Bonner 2010). Student involvement is especially critical for AAMs who attend PWIs. It is through these organizations that AAM are able to establish their presence on campuses that may have seeming few allies for them. In this way these students are able to feel a sense of belonging despite the “chilly” climate of PWIs (Strayhorn, 2008a, p.515).

In addition to encouraging AAMs to get involved, engaging in culturally sound career and academic advising is also imperative, especially for first generation AAMs who may not have been engaged in adequate career and college readiness throughout P-12. If students have discovered a career path that aligns with their skills, abilities and career values, academic buy-in

is likely to commence, resulting in academic success (Jackson, 2015) and ultimately persistence and college success.

Engaging in the mentoring process is one of the most valuable ways that AAMs can build sociocultural capital (Ahn, 2010; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Mentors obtain knowledge and expertise that could potentially augment the lives their mentees. When paired with mentors, AAMs perform higher academically and are more likely to be retained, which is essential to educational success. AAMs additionally benefit from mentors that they can identify with on the basis of race and gender. When this occurs, self-efficacy increases, as their mentors serve as a present reminder of the success that they too are capable of achieving (Zirkel, 2005, Gasman & Palmer, 2008). Mentoring should continue throughout one's educational journey, including as they engage in graduate studies and begin their career trajectories. Unfortunately however, "minority graduate students often experience more isolation and less access to mentors and role models than their nonminority peers (Girves et al., 2005, as cited in Thomas, Willis & Davis, 2007, p. 178). In order to increase the number of AAMs receiving bachelor's degrees, and subsequent masters and doctoral degrees, engagement in mentoring relationships is vital. This serves as a prime reason why equitable recruitment of AAM faculty is essential. Just as the AAMs that participated in this study have done, AAM faculty can serve as mentors to AAM students and assist in grooming them to achieve college and post-college success. A byproduct of this mentoring relationship is that AAM mentees may come to desire faculty positions, which subsequently increases the number of AAMs who hold doctoral degrees. This potential cycle of success propels this nation toward the ultimate goal of degree attainment for all.

One commonality among all three participants in this study was that they were not enrolled for a period of time after beginning college. This is not surprising considering the

attrition and graduation rates of AAMs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014; Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). It is extraordinary, however, that all three of these men re-enrolled into college and eventually achieved doctoral success as first-generation students. Thus, it is imperative that colleges implement a system that tracks AAMs who are impacted by factors that place them at risk of dropping out. These students should be top priority to departments on campus that offer advising services, including student financial advising, and should also be matched with faculty and staff mentors. If these students are first generation, they should be strongly encouraged to utilize resources provided by their Student Support Services department on campus.

Additionally, intuitions could address retention issues by providing an exit interview or satisfaction survey to AAMs who have chosen to leave the university. Furthermore, universities could outreach to AAMS who have withdrawn from the university and encourage their re-enrollment. If re-enrollment does occur, the issues that caused AAMs to leave the university should be addressed and provided with intense advisement. Also a peer support group for students being re-introduced to the college environment could be formed to encourage persistence.

As David noted during his interview, first-generation students experience risk factors associated with being first-generation (Engle, 2007) regardless of the level of the degree they are pursuing. Graduate programs should commit and be accountable to fostering diversity both within student populations and among faculty. Navigating the doctoral process is difficult for students whose parents obtain institutionalized cultural capital, thus first-generation AAMs should be mentored and sponsored by faculty during this process to combat feelings of isolation and helplessness. Also, AAMs should be encouraged to participate in professional development

opportunities related to their doctoral focus that could expand their professional and social networks.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As stated earlier in this study, this research served as a call to action for other scholars to continue to investigate the lived experiences of first generation AAMs who have achieved doctoral success. Their experiences may provide education interest holders with insight into how to keep first-generation AAMs engaged along the pipeline so that educational success including doctoral success is achievable, if so desired.

Coincidentally, all three participants in this study were enrolled in doctoral programs at PWI institutions. Future research could investigate the experiences of first-generation AAMs who have achieved doctoral success from HBCUs to compare their resilience and persistence and factors as well as sociocultural capital obtained to the findings within this study.

Additionally, this study utilized participants who identified as at least a third-generation American citizen in order to draw contrast to the disparity of degrees attained among AAMs in comparison to males identifying with dominant culture, despite the years that have transpired since the Second Morrill Act of 1890 which allowed for federally funded HBCUs to emerge. Future research could investigate the lived experiences of male students who identify as Black and have parents or grandparents who are immigrants and explore the resilience and persistence factors they identify.

While conducting this research, the researcher observed the absence of studies concerning the career experiences of first-generation AAMs after the doctoral degree has been obtained. A study in this vein could be conducted to address Wenk (2011)'s proclamation that

“the higher the level of school attained, the less pronounced difference in cultural capital” (p. 25), especially concerning those who are considered minorities within their work environment.

Lastly, all of the participants of this study noted that they lacked role models along their educational journey, yet did not view the supportive and encouraging women in their lives as such. This aligns with Palmer and Gasman (2008)’s findings that African American male role models and mentors are more influential and impactful to the lives of AAMs who esteem them. Future research could address this issue by investigating the experiences of AAMs who identify African American women as role models/mentors while focusing on the sociocultural capital accumulated by AAMs from those relationships.

### **Conclusions**

Of undergraduates in the U.S., AAMs account for less than 5% (Strayhorn, 2010). Furthermore, in 2013 only 1.5% those obtaining doctoral degrees in the U.S. were AAMs (National Science Foundation, 2014). This statistical disparity exposes the fact that AAMs are being left behind in education, and attention must be paid to this phenomenon if the United States is to ever reclaim its status as a global leader in higher education. Statistics concerning the educational attainment of AAMs at all levels is reflective of the concerted effort put forth by educational interest holders in P-12 and higher education institutions, which consequently leaves much to be desired. Regarding the participants of this study, there were numerous opportunities for educational interest holders at the P-12 and higher education level to continue building on the sociocultural capital that these first-generation AAMs obtained while providing opportunities for the development of new capital, which would have concurrently served to combat risk factors associated with them. Because this did not occur, participants were confronted with obstacles that could have been avoided, yet prolonged their journey toward collegiate and doctoral success. Had these participants not obtained the social and cultural capital that built on their resilience,



their educational success would have been halted by the adversity they experienced.

Furthermore, they would not have had access to the sociocultural capital that contributed to their persistence in their undergraduate and graduate studies which ultimately led to doctoral success and career advancement. Subsequently they would have not had the opportunity to reproduce valuable capital in the lives of others, including their children, which may have served to perpetuate a cycle of underachievement.

It is the responsibility of P-12 interest holders to provide equitable experiences that develop sociocultural capital in AAMs regardless of their backgrounds. These interest holders should be culturally competent and promote a college going environment among students, regardless of their grade level. Teachers should implement rigorous, culturally responsive pedagogy that fosters the building of self-efficacy and cultural capital and ultimately contributes to resilience and persistence. School counselors should assume their roles as advocates for AAMs and provide career and college readiness for students at every grade level. This includes ensuring that AAMs have the opportunity to engage in rigorous, college preparatory coursework, facilitating college and career fairs, promoting college tours and initiating mentoring relationships for these students. P-12 schools should also open lines of communications with parents who are foundational contributors to cultural capital and resilience.

If postsecondary institutions are to be accountable for the utilization of the terms “equity” and “diversity” as a means of recruiting students and the funds accompanying their minority status, ensuring that AAMs not only receive a bachelor’s degree, but are provided the opportunity to pursue and achieve doctoral success if so chosen, is imperative. This can be accomplished only if colleges and educational interest holders make it their mission to invest social and cultural capital into these students and build on the capital they already obtain.

Through tailored recruiting efforts, promoting student involvement, providing culturally sound advising, facilitating mentoring relationships, implementing specialized retention efforts and providing supportive environments throughout the higher educational pipeline, AAMs are positioned to accrue capital and achieve academically, which serves in leveling the playing field between AAMs students and their dominant counterparts (Strayhorn, 2010, Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

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## **APPENDIX A: INITIAL EMAIL CONTACT**

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

My name is D’Jalon Jackson and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration doctoral program at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I received your contact information from \_\_\_\_\_ in reference to serving as a potential candidate for my dissertation research. My dissertation is entitled “From the Valley to the Mountaintop: A Case Study of Resilience and Persistence among First Generation African American Males Who Have Achieved Doctoral Success”.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the resilience and persistence factors that first generation African American males who have earned doctoral degrees attribute to their educational success. It is my hope that this study will highlight the persistence and resilience factors that aided the participants of my study in achieving success, and also illuminate the need for more research of this manner on first- generation African American males in an effort to bring attention to their success and to ultimately reduce the educational disparities that exist concerning them. A approximately 60 minute audio taped interview will be conducted either in person or via Skype with each participant to gain insight on the lived experiences of generation first African American men as it relates to their educational journey to doctoral success

Participants in this study must identify as: (1) an African American Male, (2) at least a third generation American citizen, (3) a first generation student whose parents/guardians did not attend college, (4) an obtainer of a doctoral degree (Ph.D, Ed.D, etc.).

If you are willing to participate in the study, please let me know via email at [djack18@lsu.edu](mailto:djack18@lsu.edu). You will then be emailed a consent form to be signed, scanned, and emailed back, a participant demographic form to be completed and the interview protocol. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

D’Jalon Jackson, Ed.S.

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

*Title:* From the Valley to the Mountaintop: A Case Study of Resilience and Persistence Among First Generation African American Males Achieving Doctoral Success

*Description:* There is a deficit in the literature on the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who persist to attain a doctoral degree. Your participation in this study is requested in an effort to learn about the resilience and persistence factors that this population may attain that ultimately may lead to the achievement of doctoral success. To meet the participant criteria for this study, you must obtain a doctoral degree (i.e. Ph.D. or Ed.D.), classify as a first generation student (parents'/guardians' educational attainment level does not exceed a high school diploma) and identify as an African American male and at least a third generation American citizen.

*Risks and Benefits:* Benefits of the study include supplementing literature that reframes the current narrative surrounding African American men to focuses on success as well as calling for more research on first generation African American males who achieve doctoral success. There are no anticipated risks concerning participation in the study

*Voluntary Participation:* Participation in this research is completely voluntary. There will be one audio taped semi structured interview held. Interviews will be transcribed and quotations from the interviews may be included in the dissertation, however no identifying information will be included. Interviews will take place either in person (as travel permits) or over skype. Copies of doctoral diplomas will also be requested.

*Confidentiality:* Questions asked in the interview may be sensitive and personal. To maintain your confidentiality, you will be assigned new name and any other identifying information you share will be replaced with pseudonyms. Your name will only appear on this consent form and will not be linked to your responses. Interviews will be recorded in private and the recordings will not be shared. Your responses will be transcribed anonymously and all information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Your responses will serve as data for this study

*Right to Withdraw:* Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. At any time during the study you are free to withdraw your participation. There will be no ramifications if you choose to withdraw.

*Informed Consent:* I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print), have read in full the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigator. The investigator has answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature

below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this experimental study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

---

Signature

---

Date

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact D’Jalon Jackson at (225) 485-2310 or by email at [djack18@lsu.edu](mailto:djack18@lsu.edu), or Dr. Jennifer Curry at (225) 578-1437 or by email at [jcurry@lsu.edu](mailto:jcurry@lsu.edu). For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803 at (225) 578-8692 or [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu).



## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Name:

Age:

Marital Status:

Hometown:

Current occupation:

Institution Attended for Undergraduate Degree:

Undergraduate degree received:

Age at beginning of undergraduate degree:

Number of years taken to complete undergraduate degree:

Institution Attended for Master's Degree:

Age at beginning of Master's Degree:

Number of years taken to complete Master's Degree:

Institution Attended for Doctoral Degree:

Doctoral Degree Received:

Age at beginning of doctoral degree:

Number of years taken to complete doctoral degree:

## **APPENDIX D: EXTERNAL CODER FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to serve as the external coder for the research study being conducted by D’Jalon Jackson. I agree to evaluate the impact of researcher bias and to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected by reviewing transcripts and coding data into themes. I also agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to transcripts.

External Coder \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL



### ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

**TO:** D'Jalon Jackson  
Education

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** January 11, 2016

**RE:** IRB# E9710

**TITLE:** From the Valley to the Mountaintop: A Case Study of Resilience and Persistence among African American Males Who have Achieved Doctoral Success

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** New Protocol

**Review Date:** 1/4/2016

**Approved**     X     **Disapproved**           

**Approval Date:** 1/8/2016      **Approval Expiration Date:** 1/7/2019

**Exemption Category/Paragraph:** 1; 2a

**Signed Consent Waived?:** No

**Re-review frequency:** (three years unless otherwise stated)

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable):

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable)

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –

#### Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.**

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

## **VITA**

D’Jalon J. Jackson is a native of Zachary, Louisiana. D’Jalon received a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology in 2009 from Louisiana State University (LSU). She continued her education at LSU by earning a Master’s Degree in Counselor Education with a focus on Mental Health Counseling in 2012. In 2013, D’Jalon made the decision to pursue an Education Specialist Certificate (Ed.S.) focusing on School Counseling and a doctorate in Higher Education Administration from LSU simultaneously. She earned her Ed.S. in May of 2013. Upon graduating from LSU with her doctorate, D’Jalon hopes to help underrepresented students achieve educational success through career and college readiness efforts.