Factors for academic success among African-American men: A phenomenological study

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FACTORS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Samuel Rontez Williams, B.S., MAT

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

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We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by Samuel Rontez Williams entitled Factors for Academic Success Among African-American Men: A Phenomenological Study be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

Academic success among African men has increased but many African-American men continue to fall behind the academic achievements of their Caucasian male counterparts. African-American men who achieve academic success have been marginalized in research that primarily focusses on reporting deficit or negative factors that hinder and not promote academic growth. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that were perceived to contribute to the academic success of African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions. The researcher used the Ecological Model of Human Development (EMHD) to identify factors and which systems had the greatest impact on academic achievement. The researcher interviewed ten African-American men who graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution.

All participants were recorded during a semi-structured interview. Each interview was transcribed using the online transcription company Rev. The researcher coded data based on environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to their academic success. Data were further coded based on the systems in the EMHD (i.e. microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem). The researcher identified seven themes that attributed to academic success:

- Family
- Community members and educator support
- Intrinsic motivation
- High school and college teacher support
- College attendance expectations
- Peer influence and motivation
- Financial assistance

Regardless of research that reports a deficit point of view and the lack of academic achievement among African-American men, positive support from parents, family members, high school and college educators, friends, and members of their community, African-American men can achieve academic success. Even though some African-American men may experience many different positive or negative factors in their academic environment, continuous high levels of academic support in high school and college predicted academic success. The microsystem and mesosystem in the EMHD were found to have a greater impact on the academic success among African-American men over all other factors identified within the remaining EMHD systems.
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Author

Date 2/11/17
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to numerous people who have motivated and encouraged me since the beginning of my academic journey and through this dissertation process. I would not have been able to accomplish this goal without their constant support. I am grateful to have you in my life.

To my parents, Sam and Charlene Williams, since kindergarten, you have always supported and encouraged me to follow my dreams. Even when I doubted myself, you motivated me to stay on my path to academic success. The love and support you have provided me were invaluable to my academic success. Thank you, and I love you more than words can express.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The success of African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions has been minimal or nonexistent in situations where environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors have hindered the academic achievement of African-American men. Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013) identified the need for pinpointing challenges in the lives of African-American males. Identifying these challenges was needed to facilitate the construction of a support framework that prevents high school dropouts and encourages post-secondary enrollment. Certain environments African-American men encountered were potentially harmful to their academic success in college, identifying that members of the student body (Ellis, 2002) and faculty members both held negative beliefs about the academic abilities of African-American students (Ellis, 2002; Robertson & Mason, 2008). Ellis (2002) concluded that low expectations of academic performance and historical references of low performing African-American men have continued in American society. However, Kerpelman, Eryigit, and Stephens (2008) indicated obtaining an education was fundamental to the “financial, personal, and social success in American culture” (p. 997).

Scott et al. (2013) posited that some African-American students are taught in secondary institutions that lack the support structure needed to provide a high-quality curriculum that challenged them. African-American male students who were able to
enroll into college were unprepared because of inefficient schooling, financial
difficulties, and other sociocultural disadvantages (Cuyjet, 1997; Owens, Lacey, Rawls,
& Holbert-Quince, 2010). Allen (2015) asserted that teachers developed negative beliefs
about the intellectual and academic abilities of their students, which led to teachers
exhibiting low expectations and failing to provide students with a high-quality
curriculum. He also identified that limited access to schools with supportive learning
environments negatively affected the potential achievement of students. Furthermore,
frequent encounters with institutional disciplinary practices (Allen, 2015; Cokley,
McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010) contributed
to a poorly developed sense of masculinity (Allen, 2015). Thus, teachers who feared and
were intimidated by African-American male behaviors were more inclined to have lower
Finally, institutional limitations restrict the access to high-quality curriculum, which
potentially exacerbates the following beliefs of low expectations.

Anthony, Kritsonis, and Herrington (2007) identified low expectations from
teachers as a major contributor that has plagued “culturally linguistic diverse children,
especially African American males” (p. 4). Therefore, if teachers and counselors
continue to exhibit attitudes of low expectations from their students (Anthony et al.,
2007; Palmer & Maramba, 2011) and students are members of institutions that embrace
low expectations about possible academic achievement outside their families (Delpit,
2006), students were doomed for failure. In order to remove the negative labels placed
on African-American males, post-secondary institutions need teachers who are culturally
diverse. Removal of labels and the integration of culturally diverse teachers contributed
to an increase of the academic competence of students (Anthony et al., 2007).

Conversely, in addition to the lowered academic expectations of African-American men, African-American men’s sense of belonging contributed to their academic success.

Feelings of belonging in a positive academic environment created by counselors and student affairs personnel encouraged higher levels of academic performance (Booker, 2007; Owens et al., 2010). Therefore, a welcoming, comfortable, and considerate environment where teachers were considerate of the well-being of students, allowed for greater school commitment and attachment, which was attributed to academic achievement and positive interactions (Allen, 2015; Booker, 2007; Stewart, 2007).

Unfortunately, if students were not members of a welcoming environment or an environment that promoted positive interactions with their peers and teachers, students felt alienated from positive academic environments which affected their academic goals and graduation (Booker, 2007; Owens et al., 2010). As a result, students exhibited intensified patterns of negative behaviors and increased difficulties with academic achievement (Owens et al., 2010). Whereas a welcoming environment increases the likelihood of improved academic performance, this belief can also be extended to the level of participation parents and communities provide to developing African-American men.

Prager (2011) suggested that change must originate from the community. Communities made schools a place where students felt safe, emphasized the importance of academic achievement, understood that schools were a place of moral growth, and celebrated student achievement (Prager, 2011; Price, 2008). Parents who engaged in the academic life of their children and created nurturing climates positively impacted student
achievement (Prager, 2011; Stewart 2007). Additionally, parents who exposed their children to various life experiences and frequently encouraged them to perform well in school provided a critical framework of future learning and an opportunity to improve their children's knowledge (Prager, 2011; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008).

Nonetheless, although communal and familial involvement in the academic performance of African-American men tends to enhance student achievement, socioeconomic issues tend to worsen it.

Socioeconomic concerns such as privilege and lack of vital resources can cause students to feel less important with respect to society as a whole. Jenkins (2006) indicated African-American men have the ability to view the unattainable wealth of the upper class members of society through many forms of mass media. If African-American men are to gain access to such wealth, African-American men must perceive receiving a college education as a way of gaining access to social and economic opportunities (Owens et al., 2010) and acknowledge the significance of education as an influence and a prerequisite for academic success (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). In addition to the economic opportunities that academic achievement offers, obtaining the necessary financial aid for attending college is equally important for success.

Acquiring the necessary financial assistance to attend post-secondary institutions is another socioeconomic factor which affects academic achievement (Robertson & Mason, 2008). Baker and Vélez (1996) described the unwillingness of African-Americans to borrow money for school because of negative perceptions about the possible economic return on higher education. Also, students believed amassing debt greater than the income of their family negatively affect their borrowing decision. Cuyjet
(1997) revealed financial difficulties of college students potentially distracted them from success. He suggested that student affairs personnel should provide more information about African-American male students, specifically for the purpose of minimizing the financial distraction of acquiring economic support for college. Along with socioeconomic and environmental challenges that limit academic success, some African-American men bear the burden of social issues such as the environment they come from, peer pressure, and negative media portrayals of African-American men, which inhibits their perception of education.

African-American men occasionally originate from environments in which family members and peers are prone to participating in illegal activities which were credited to low academic achievement (Charles, Dinwiddie, & Massey, 2004; Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Peer pressure causes African-American students to disguise their intelligence because of potential ridicule (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Scott et al., 2013; Somers et al., 2008) in order to be considered “black enough” (Booker, 2007). African-American students that are academically successful may be excluded from peer social groups and are deemed as “acting White” (Allen, 2015). As a result, African-American men performed well below their academic potential and were content with unsatisfactory scholastic performance even though they had the potential for high achievement (Stinson, 2010).

Although African-American men must deal with conflicted academic and social expectations within their environment from others, African-American men must also endure negative media representations that often depict them “as deviant, irresponsible, and uneducable” (Allen, 2015, p. 211). Accordingly, negative media portrayals of...
African-Americans and an underrepresentation in post-secondary institutions have contributed to a lack of social advancement, diminished job opportunities, increased poverty, and more violence (Allen, 2015; Cuyjet, 1997). Television and radio outlets create unfavorable environments that mask negative African-American male imagery under the guise of positive racial images (Ellis, 2002), rarely broadcasting positive imagery of African-American men in the media have instead, continued to use their power to perpetuate negative stereotypical beliefs about African-American men (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Ellis (2002) asserted that negative imagery of African-American men has resurfaced in the form of modern day successful criminals and misogynistic members of society. Subsequently, Palmer and Maramba (2011) identified the media as a major contributor to discouraging African-American men from academic achievement.

Garibaldi (1992) stated that more must be done – within communities, by parents, media outlets, and educators – in order to limit the social and psychological pressures African-American men face. These academically minded students must be provided with highly qualified teachers (Allen, 2015) who do not exhibit negative academic expectations of African-American boys (Garibaldi, 1992). More importantly, Allen suggested students felt a greater satisfaction from teachers that challenged them academically in order to prepare them for college. Also, students desired more African-American male mentors within their community (Scott et al., 2013). Having accomplished and dedicated African-American men in academic environments served to enhance academic achievement and social growth when they opposed misogynistic tendencies and a diminished sense of masculinity (Cunningham, 1993; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Holland, 1987; Oliver, 1989).
Statement of the Problem

African-American men are not achieving in secondary and post-secondary institutions at similar rates as Caucasian men. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (SFPE) (2015) reported the national high school graduation rate for African-American males was 59% during the 2012-2013 academic year. Although the graduation rate was smaller than the 80% graduation rate of Caucasian males, it represents an eight percent increase from the 51% graduation rate during the 2010-2011 academic year (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). African-American males that entered college during the 2007 cohort, graduated from college at a rate of 15.7% compared to 37.7% graduation rate for Caucasian males (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Although the data describe a striking contrast in academic achievement for African-American and Caucasian men, Zhang and Smith (2011) found that African-Americans were more likely to exhibit a stronger academic moral belief than Caucasians men and women, but shared similar academic beliefs among African-American and Caucasian men. In contrast to research done by Stinson (2010), despite the broad disparity in graduation rates between Caucasian and African-American men, African-American men had a strong desire to attend college (Palmer et al., 2009), and were driven towards academic success despite being unprepared for college (Prager, 2011).

York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) defined academic success as the inclusion of “academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies” (p. 5), satisfaction with the outcome of obtaining an education, persistence in continuing to attend a post-secondary institution, and success in a career after graduating from college. Both definitions integrate the notion of persistence in the
attempt to achieve success. In order to persist in achieving academic success and increasing graduation rates in secondary and post-secondary institutions, African-American men must continue to persevere towards academic achievement.

There is substantial research about the academic failures and low rate of college enrollment of African-American men. Moreover, research tends to focus on deficit points of view of African-American culture which exacerbates negative perceptions of potential intellect and behaviors necessary for success (Allen, 2015). Therefore, more research is needed that identifies factors attributing to the academic successes of African-American men, i.e. who have successfully navigated through secondary and post-secondary institutions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that are perceived to contribute to the academic success of African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions. Because most research focuses on academic deficits of African-American men, Allen (2015) reported minor attention is given to factors that positively affect academic achievement. This research may provide insight into ways in which parents, educators, administrators, and community members are more able to encourage academic achievement for African-American men. This research contains rich and informative responses from academically successful African-American men that may contribute to the awareness and development of meaningful and effective plans for improving the academic success of African-American men.
Research Question

Creswell (2007) stated the phenomenological study aims to describe common experiences amongst all participants. Therefore, the purpose of the phenomenological approach to research is to document the lived experiences of all research participants in order to describe the central essence of the phenomenon. In this study, the researcher used the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that attributed to the academic success of African-American men. Kafle (2011) described the hermeneutic phenomenology as the inability of the researcher to bracket his or her opinions about the phenomenon. The hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to identify an objective interpretation of the lived experiences of research participants. In order to describe the academic success for African-American men, this study was guided by the following research question:

What environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors contribute to the academic success of African-American men who graduate from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that are perceived to contribute to the academic success of African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions. In order to identify these factors for academic success the researcher focused on the Ecological Model of Human Development (EMHD). The EMHD was used to detail the environmental, social, and socioeconomic connections between participants and factors
contributing to their academic success. As such, the following paragraphs describe the five systems in the EMHD and their connection to the environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contribute to the academic success of African-American men and research that has indicated a need for an ecological approach to achievement of African-American male students.

The EMHD is made of five levels of concentric circles with the individual at the center (see Figure 1): microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macrosystem; and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Xu and Filler (2008) defined the microsystem as complex interactions between persons of significant influence in the life of the individual.

![Figure 1. A Venn-Diagram of the five levels of concentric circles that form the Ecological Model of Human Development.](image-url)
Also, the individual interacts in face-to-face settings with members in his or her family and are a part of various activities within his or her social and interpersonal environment that encourage or prevent their engagement in more complex activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Johnson, 2008; Xu & Filler, 2008). The microsystem may be used to identify family members, teachers, community members, peers, and any other important group of individuals that have contributed to the academic development of the individual. Bronfenbrenner (1994) stated most research has focused on the interactions between the individual and their family rather than incorporating other influences such as schools and classrooms. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the microsystem to identify how African-American families, peers, and members of their academic community affect African-American male academic success. More specifically, the microsystem was used to describe the immediate influence the stated settings affected academic achievement. Interactions in the microsystem were between the individual and their parents, the individual and their peers, and the individual and members of the academic community. In every setting within the microsystem, the individual is a part of the environment.

The mesosystem links more than one microsystem of the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Johnson, 2008) and interconnections outside his or her immediate family (Xu & Filler, 2008). Social interactions individuals had with school and their peers (Xu & Filler, 2008), in school and at home, and within their community and place of employment are examples of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem describes the involvement of the individual in settings that are outside their immediate family structure and aims to
describe how one or more settings in which the developing individual is a part of can affect achievement. The researcher used the mesosystem to understand how the interactions between various settings in the microsystem may influence academic success of African-American men when their family is not the only source of encouragement for achieving academically.

The exosystem embraces indirect interactions with two or more settings, and one of the settings does not include the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and elements in the settings potentially influence the microsystem of the individual (Xu & Filler, 2008). For example, the exosystem connects various environments such as the place of employment of parents with their community, which indirectly influences the developing individual. Although the individual is not an employee at their parent’s job, the developing individual is a part of the community. The individual is indirectly influenced by the actions of their parents at work that contribute to changes in their community. Johnson (2008) stated the exosystem involves the larger social networks that affect the developing individual. Johnson maintained the exosystem “exerts a unidirectional influence that directly or indirectly impacts the developing person” (p. 3). Johnson stated policies, state and federal regulations, and local disasters and economics as examples of exosystem settings that indirectly affect the developing individual.

The macrosystem connects and influences each of the previously stated systems into groups of cultural and subcultural characteristics that influence human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009; Xu & Filler, 2008). The macrosystem emphasizes the importance of shared cultural and subcultural belief
systems, wealth of knowledge, traditions, standards of living, opportunities for social
mobility, threats, and potential advancements in life that are influenced by the previous
systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Johnson, 2008; Tudge et al., 2009). The macrosystem
tends to surpass the racial element that affects development but discovers social and
psychological factors that contribute to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).
Johnson (2008) suggested the macrosystem can be considered as the social blueprint for
any given culture and sub-culture. Johnson argues that although the developing
individual may experience cultural influences within his or her immediate environment,
the macrosystem moves beyond their immediate environment and influences the
individual nationwide. Arnold, Lu, and Armstrong (2012) indicated the macrosystem is
the broadest level in the EMHD, which consists of various cultural and ideological
factors “that shape social structures, opportunities, and individual expectations” (p. 77).

The chronosystem introduces historical events as significant factors in human
development (Tudge et al., 2009) and incorporates significant changes in the
characteristics and environment of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Johnson
(2008) indicated the chronosystem influences all levels of the ecological model. Johnson
suggested the chronosystem describes developmental changes within the individual
during all references of time. The chronosystem maps these changes over days, weeks,
months, and even years. Johnson identified changes within the student body, school
faculty members, and academic choices as factors that can affect achievement over time.
Bronfenbrenner (1994) stated the chronosystem explained the various changes in family
structure, shifts in socioeconomic status, employment, living area, and the ability to cope
with everyday life. The researcher used the chronosystem to discover and identify the
beginning of the academic awareness within the individual and follow their awareness through high school and college.

Each nested circle within the EMHD has the potential to expose factors of academic success among African-American men, which is why Stewart (2007) recommended research that utilized an ecological model approach in order to identify ways of intervention across ecological structures. An ecological approach was viewed as a means of identifying support systems, which were identified as motivating factors that led to academic achievement among African-American male students. Furthermore, Stewart indicated that using an ecological model provides educators with the ability to identify factors within the academic environment that may aid in academic development of African-American students. The author asserted that these changes should be aligned with the goals of the school. He recommended that schools find more effective ways for educators to become more involved in family members awareness of the education progress of their children. In order to accomplish this task, Stewart suggested educators participate in professional development of successful models that focus on increasing African-American students desire to attend school.

Each of the defined systems in the EMHD was used by the researcher to focus on the participant’s lived experiences. The environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to the academic success of African-American men were contextually described within each system of the EMHD. Themes were created based on responses from the central research question, factors for academic success from their secondary and post-secondary environment, reasons for attending college, social environment, and socioeconomic environment across all participants. The researcher
identified keywords and phrases across each participant’s interview that represented common factors attributed to their academic success. Also, the researcher used the EMHD to identify areas that did not strongly support academic success.

Significance of the Study

Allen (2015) suggested a need for more research of African-American men’s academic success in secondary and post-secondary institutions. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that are perceived to contribute to the academic success of African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions. This study may benefit the body of research that identifies factors that attribute to the academic success of African-American men. Identifying academically successful African-American men may further disprove beliefs about the academic potential of these young men (Allen, 2015). Findings from this research have the potential to shed light on previously undiscovered environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that attribute to academic success and provide educators, parents, and community members with factors that increase the academic achievement of African-American men.

This research may contribute to an understanding of lived experiences of African-American men and their journey to academic success. Although many African-American men are confronted with negative life experiences, they show a desire to learn (Jenkins, 2006) and a desire to attend post-secondary institutions (Palmer et al., 2009). Unfortunately, many African-American men are incarcerated at higher rates (Ellis, 2002; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014), are not completing post-secondary degree
programs at similar rates as their African-American female or Caucasian male counterparts (Palmer & Maramba, 2011), and are disproportionately disciplined in relation to their Caucasian male counterparts in school settings (Allen, 2012, 2015; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Lewis et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003). Thus, this research will increase the existing body of research with current identifying factors during the academic career of African-American men that attribute to their academic success.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that each participant was truthful and honest during the interview process. The level of honesty each participant exhibited during interviews aided in the credibility of the collected data. During the data collection period, the researcher assumed that each participant was able to attend all interview sessions. Consistent attendance improved the reliability during the initial and any follow-up interview sessions with participants. Subsequently, it was assumed that participants were willing and able to offer relevant and significant information about their experiences with academic achievement. Also, during each session, the researcher assumed that each participant was able to recall important information about factors attributed with academic achievement. Moreover, participants were able to recount various moments during their lived experiences that were without bias.

Limitations

Due to the limited sample size of ten participants in this study, the findings related to African-American men that have achieved the criteria for academic success are unable
to be generalized. The research will be limited by the unlikelihood of transferability of results to other African-American men within the greater population. The findings from the research will focus on reflections and responses from African-American men that have graduated from both secondary and post-secondary institutions. Consequently, the research was limited by the self-reporting experiences each participant recounts, which may not be characteristic of every African-American man that has graduated from a secondary and a post-secondary institution.

**Delimitations**

The researcher included several delimitations. Each participant must have been an African-American male that has graduated from a secondary and a post-secondary institution. The researcher focused on these potential participants because they represent African-American men that are assumed to value academic achievement. All participants must have been graduates of their respective college or university within a window of two to seven years of earning a post-secondary degree. This delimitation was suggested because of the ability of the participants to effectively recall important information about the research question.

Research participants were selected within a two to seven year window of graduating from a post-secondary institution. The results were delimited by the window of time each participant was selected, which affected the acquisition of relevant information based on their recall ability. The age of each participant delimited the study by potential time related inconsistencies of responses that are not characteristic of a particular age group and cannot be transferred to similar groups. Younger or older
participants may experience similar events in different ways based on the time in which a particular event occurred.

African-American men were selected from North Louisiana. North Louisiana was operationalized only by the selection of African-American men who lived between Alexandria and the border of North Louisiana. The selection of these African-American men was not by the college or university the participants received their degree. Potential participants that received a degree from a college or university outside of Louisiana, below North Louisiana, or reside in North Louisiana were considered eligible for the study. Selecting potential participants from this region increased the probability of similar lived experiences. Their shared experiences aided in identifying factors for academic success that are endemic of African-American men in the northern region of Louisiana. The researcher selected ten participants. The small sample size restricted over saturation of responses from participants but contributed to the rich description of lived experiences.

Definitions

For this study, the following terms will be used. The reader should refer to these terms as needed for clarification when used in this study.

Academic success. The inclusion of “academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance” (York et al., 2015, p. 5); the successful degree completion at a secondary and post-secondary institution.
**Environmental factors.** Any organization or institution that influences the academic performance of African-American men. These factors may consist of policies, rules, and expectations of an organization, institution, or surrounding. As such Rugutt and Chemosit (2005) suggested the learning strategies, quality of education, experiences in college, and the relationship students have with faculty members help predict academic success. Also, lowered expectations by peers and adults, low quality primary and secondary schools, peer pressure to not acknowledge educational advances, and an increasing limited pool of African-American male role models contribute to the environmental factors that affect academic success (Cuyjet, 1997).

**Ideology.** The belief that a student has the capacity to achieve their academic goals in spite of potential negative influences that may limit academic success. Ideology is the positive self-concept that African-American male students have that contribute to a favorable social adjustment into post-secondary institutions and is “shown to be a major determinant of Black male college student success” (Robertson & Mason, 2008, p. 70). Also, ideology is related to the potential of young African-American men having a strong sense of self-efficacy which contributes to higher academic success (Wilson & Allen, 1987).

**Post-secondary institution.** An accredited four-year college, university, or two-year community college. Putman (1981) identified post-secondary institutions as a group of universities, colleges, and any other academic institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Also, he included two-year community and junior colleges, vocational-technical schools, and any other academic institution that offered diplomas or
formal training after high school. For the purpose of this study, the definition will be limited to four-year and two-year post-secondary institutions.

**Social factors.** Interactions with technology, peers, community members, teachers, and family members who may influence the academic achievement of African-American men. These factors are directly related to the microsystem and mesosystem elements that describe both systems. According to Xu and Filler (2008), the immediate family members and siblings impact development through the microsystem. Also, the mesosystem describes the interactions in which peers and school impact development.

**Socioeconomic factors.** Financial concerns that intersect societal dynamics that contributes to the unsuccessful or successful selection and completion of secondary and post-secondary institutions. These factors may include the accessibility of financial assistance for college (Wood & Harrison, 2014), socioeconomic status of an institutions student body (Stewart, 2007), or available employment and career progression opportunities (Cuyjet, 1997; Owens et al., 2010).

**Outline of the Study**

Chapter One introduced research that was relevant to factors that influenced the academic success of African-American men. Included was: (a) the statement of the problem, (b) purpose of the study, (c) method of study, (d) research questions, and (e) theoretical framework. Chapter One also introduced the theoretical framework, which guided the development of the research and consisted of the (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem.
Chapter Two provided a review of literature. This chapter discussed past and present influences for academic success of African-American men. Chapter Three describes the methods and methodology underlying this study. Also, the sample of participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures are discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four introduces each of the ten participants and provides a detailed description of their secondary and post-secondary lived experiences and how those experiences contributed to their academic success. Chapter Four summarizes the environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors each participant felt contributed to their academic success. Participant responses in Chapter Four led to the identification of emerging themes and sub-themes that each participant felt were major factors that led to their academic success.

Chapter Five summarizes the information presented in Chapter Four and discusses the findings as they relate to the themes that emerged from the participant interviews. Chapter Five includes additional limitations identified after the research was concluded and how they may have impacted the findings of the current research. Recommendations for educators and future research are also identified in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following chapter provides accounts of historical events that have contributed to the success and unsuccessful academic gains of African-Americans. Although there are numerous entry points in African-American history of education, the researcher has chosen to begin the review of literature with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The attempt of the government to use legal action to abolish segregation after the separate but equal doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 was a crucial moment in African-American history that attempted to academically integrate equal educational opportunities for minorities. Also, Chapter Two provides a two part discussion of environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that have contributed to the positive and negative academic achievements of African-Americans in secondary and post-secondary institutions.

The End of Legal Segregation

The *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 has been viewed “as the single most important court decision in American educational history” (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005, p. 70) and “one of the greatest achievements of the American judicial system” (Merritt, 2005, p. 51). The landmark decision legally ended the separate but equal clause instituted by the 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Although the
Plessy v. Ferguson decision preceded Brown v. Board of Education, it set the stage for the forthcoming decision to end legal segregation. Prior to Brown v. Board of Education, the Plessy v. Ferguson separate but equal clause was a sweeping decision, originating in Louisiana, that legally separated Caucasians and African-Americans in all aspects of life (Smith, 2005). Smith stated that the ruling was not limited to the legal segregation of the races in education institutions but included the separation of Caucasians and African-Americans at restaurants, courts of law, hospitals, churches, train stations, restrooms, drinking fountains, parks, sporting events, public housing, and many more facilities associated with public use. According to Hoffer (2014), it was understood that all states were able to continue to legally separate Caucasians and African-Americans in public places based on racial categorization. As a result of the decision, the justices declared that although there was separation between the two races, African-Americans were perceived to have equal facilities (Smith, 2005). Unfortunately, facilities provided to African-Americans were inferior to facilities provided to Caucasians (Hoffer, 2014). The result of the decision exacerbated the established Jim Crow system of laws designed to create racial segregation in all public facilities among African-Americans and Caucasians. Hoffer stated that the racial stereotypes of Caucasians being better than African-Americans was publicized in the media, popular writings, and advertisements.

Although the Plessy v. Ferguson decision argued that African-Americans were provided with separate but equal facilities, cases such as Murray v. University of Maryland Law School (1935), Sipuel v. Board of Regents (1948), Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada (1938), Sweatt v. Painter (1950), and McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for
Higher Education (1950) (Greene, 2015; Smith, 2005) proved otherwise. Smith (2005) stated both Oklahoma and Texas built separate law schools for African-American students in order to separate them from the Caucasian student body. Ada Sipuel and Herman Sweatt, students of the University of Oklahoma and the University of Texas respectively, never attended the separate law schools. By refusing to attend, based on their belief that the separate schools built for them were unequal to the established schools, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that the separate schools were not equal and the students were eligible to attend the white colleges. Both cases were key decisions that led to the final decision of the Brown v. Board of Education case (Smith, 2005).

Almost sixty years after the decision of Plessy v. Ferguson, the decision to end legal separation between African-American and Caucasians was achieved by Brown v. Board of Education. Blanchett et al. (2005) stated the Brown decision overturned the separate but equal decision of Plessy and guaranteed African-Americans equal constitutional rights stated within the 14th Amendment. Smith (2005) indicated:

The sentence in the Brown decision stating that “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” makes it unequivocally clear that no matter how good educational facilities and resources are, if they support racial segregation, they are forever unequal – and cannot ever be made equal because they are separate (p. 25).

As a result, African-Americans were no longer legally segregated from schools. Merritt (2005) stated that after the Brown decision, courts began to use the Constitution as a means of affecting social change. Merritt also asserted that the Brown decision sparked the civil rights movement during the 1960s.

Even though the Brown decision ended legal separation between African-Americans and Caucasians, Blanchett et al. (2005) indicated that not all African-
American parents agreed that African-American schools were inherently inferior. Blanchett et al. argued that some parents were against desegregation. Those parents wanted a better distribution of resources and a more inclusive environment for their children with Caucasian children. Also, parents proclaimed that the schools their children attended were staffed with educators who were more than capable of teaching any race and even more so African-American students.

The Brown and Plessy landmark cases were instrumental for providing an opportunity to enhance educational opportunities for African-Americans. Greene (2015) posited that for African-Americans, there were vastly different educational outcomes for children who lived “at the dangerous intersection of race, language, class, employment, housing discrimination, and the criminal justice system” (p. 132). Greene suggested society was unable to effectively analyze the influence race has on achievement based on these factors. Consequently, Greene indicated “race is an imprecise lens through which to focus on educational equality” (p. 132).

Describing the Ecological Approach

Microsystem

Arnold et al. (2012) indicated a rich microsystem increased college readiness among students by exposing them to more complex relationships. Their experiences in their immediate settings – family, peers, and community – could impact their academic success. The authors asserted that their academic success was related to their level of preparation, habits, motivation, ambitions, self-efficacy, and awareness of college expectations. Arnold et al. stated that direct contact with people, social media, and
participation in extracurricular activities were directly related to the previously stated factors that contributed to academic success. The authors identified two areas within the microsystem that affected the academic success of students, in school factors and out of school factors.

Arnold et al. (2012) listed in school factors such as course work, teaching methods, college-going culture, career focus, small learning environments, relationships between teachers and students, and school counselors as vital components to college readiness. The authors stated students who were exposed to more rigorous college related coursework in high school was attributed to college readiness. As a result, Arnold et al. asserted consistent exposure to college level coursework enhanced their knowledge and awareness of college course expectations. The authors suggested that constant contact with rigorous college level coursework corresponded to using the Ecological Model of Human Development (EMHD) when understanding and identifying college readiness. Despite the importance of offering college level classes in high school, schools that lacked the necessary resources affected other microsystem level factor such as teaching methods (Arnold et al., 2012).

According to Arnold et al. (2012), teaching methods were viewed as a means of developing creative and challenging learning environments that provided students an opportunity to learn content knowledge while learning academic strategies (i.e. study skills, set goals, improve social skills, personally accountable for learning, and problem solving skills) that were necessary for academic success in high school and college. As a result, students who were exposed to challenging coursework and effective teaching methods were able to increase their college readiness. Effective teaching methods were
vital factors that helped students increase their knowledge and skills, which in turn fostered an academic “environment of intellectual curiosity and increased student responsibility for their own learning” (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 37).

Arnold et al. (2012) stated the development of a college-going culture and career focused academic environments promote college readiness in the classroom and real world expectations. The authors assert that schools offering more resources about potential college choices were positively linked to African-American and Latino student college enrollment rates. Also, students who were exposed to positive relationships with their teachers were positively linked to academic achievement and career opportunities. Klem and Connell (2004) indicated “students need to feel teachers are involved with them” (p. 262) and know that adults who work at their school know and care about them. As a result, Klem and Connell reported students who were a part of a caring and supportive environment established positive relationships with adults. These relationships contributed to higher levels of educational value, increased levels of school satisfaction, and heightened positive academic attitudes. Arnold et al. (2012) maintained establishing positive relationships with teachers, fostering a college-going culture, and creating career focused environments positively impacted students who had an increased chance of dropping out of school.

Small learning environments, positive relationships with teachers, and school counselors were viewed as microsystem level factors that increased academic engagement, college readiness, and communication with students and parents about college enrollment (Arnold et al., 2012). The authors stated that these micro level factors assisted teachers and mentors who personally knew the student from their community
with creating tailored assignments that increased academic development. Plagens (2011) stated mentoring programs introduced students who did not have positive role models in their life to people who were willing and able to do so. Scott et al. (2013) suggested high schools develop mentoring programs for African-American male students by hiring more African-American male mentors from the surrounding neighborhood. Even if schools were unable to hire mentors within the surrounding neighborhood, Scott et al. indicated using existing African-American male personnel to serve as mentors to the African-American male students. Subsequently, small learning environments were more effective when students received “high-quality instruction, advising, and expectations” (Arnold et al., 2012). Subsequently, Arnold et al. indicated teachers were instrumental in college readiness and students were cognizant of teachers that cared about their academic performance. Additionally, the authors asserted school counselors were helpful in providing students with exposure to college campuses and college enrollment procedures. Also, counselors were instrumental with communicating and informing families about college expectations.

**Mesosystem**

Xu and Filler (2008) indicated that the mesosystem referred to the developing individual experiencing multiple interactions between elements within their microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1994) simply stated that the mesosystem was “a system of microsystems” (p. 40). Johnson (2008) identified parental academic expectations for their children as an example within the mesosystem. Although parental expectations alone would be a microsystem level factor that attributes to academic success, Johnson stated that parental expectations directly and indirectly impacted academic achievement.
within the school environment of their children. As a result of the interactions between the students, parents, and schools, the developing individual moves beyond interactions in the microsystem and toward interactions within the mesosystem. Stewart (2007) suggested the connections between the microsystem and mesosystem resulted in important changes in the academic outcomes of the developing individual.

Understanding the connections between academic success and the mesosystem and how the mesosystem relates to achievement, Arnold et al. (2012) stated the mesosystem was the sum of “experiences, roles, and settings” (p. 47) of the developing individual. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1994) indicated communication between teachers and parents in academic decision making as a mesosystem level interaction. Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, and Haskins (2010) asserted the level of involvement parents had with the academic decisions of their children has consistently been linked to the achievement levels. Parental involvement was not the only way in which the mesosystem plays a role in academic success among African-American youth. Stewart (2007) indicated the mesosystem also referred to various social interactions. Bronfenbrenner (1994) also suggested social interactions between youth was positively linked to a greater level of social independence and improved academic performance. Arnold et al (2012) maintained the mesosystem was viewed as combined interactions between elements within the microsystem. College readiness was achieved with numerous microsystem interactions, i.e. parents and teachers, students and peers, or students and community members, but each individual interaction within the microsystem was only a small part of academic preparedness. In the end, college readiness involved complex interactions
within the microsystem, which indicated a mesosystem level of interactions between multiple elements within the microsystem.

Arnold et al. (2012) indicated academic intervention within the microsystem was not enough when preparing students for college. The authors stated any intervention must account for interactions across all levels of the microsystem. For example, the authors stated low-income and first generation students were given mixed messages about college expectations, which contributed to a diminished perception about college. Conversely, students who originated from middle-class environments were told messages that pointed to pursuing higher education. The authors indicated cultural capital, social capital, and the perception and integration of college level coursework as mesosystem factors that contributed to academic achievement and college readiness.

Arnold et al. (2012) stated cultural capital pointed “to ways in which informal knowledge, personal tastes, attitudes and values, and styles of self-presentation” (p. 47) as factors that were created within societal power structures. Cultural capital was a vital component to college readiness for low-income minorities, but these individuals were at a disadvantage when it came to his or her formal educational setting. The authors suggested low-income students were subjected to academic expectations and a reward system based on what society believed those students were able to achieve. Cultural capital in the mesosystem was complex interactions the developing individual experienced and was able to effectively navigate in the home and school environment. The authors asserted a major barrier to college access for minority students was not understanding how to bridge the gap between low-income communities implied
knowledge about attending college and any preconceived ideas about post-secondary
expectations.

Arnold et al. (2012) surmised in relation to cultural capital and academic
achievement, their level of college readiness was simultaneously affected by being
members of their families, peer groups, neighborhoods and communities, and schools.
Because students interacted across various social environments within their microsystem
and mesosystem, students were constantly changing their environment when they made
academic decisions. Their decisions created cultural changes between their family
members, teachers, peers, community members, and within their school. These cultural
changes were seen as positive changes within their mesosystem, were instrumental to
their college readiness, and were perceived as cultural strengths when related to
improving learning. In addition to the cultural capital, students were also affected by
their level of social capital, which affected their personal expectations and their desire to
attend college.

Arnold et al. (2012) detailed social capital was how students use their social
resources (i.e. friends, parents, teachers, or community members) to establish their post-
secondary expectations and opportunities. Plagens (2011) stated schools were more than
places where students learn but were considered social environments where students use
their social capital networks to increase academic performance. The author asserted the
social relationships between “students, parents, staff, teachers, and administrators”
(Plagens, 2011, p. 47) truly describes the school community. Arnold et al. (2012) argued
student’s social capital consists of both strong and weak relationships between people
who were considered members of their social network.
Arnold et al. (2012) indicated most research about social capital has been centered on the level of parental involvement in their children’s academic life. This research emphasized parents as essential factors to student’s microsystem, but when they become involved in their child’s academic life, they become factors within their mesosystem. Conversely, students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds had parents who were not consistently involved in their academic life, which limited their progress through school (Arnold et al., 2012; Somers et al., 2008). As a result, Arnold et al. (2012) indicated these students form other social networks (i.e. siblings, teachers, community members, relatives, or counselors) which created new connections within their mesosystem. Ultimately, Plagens (2011) stated a school community with “students who trust their teachers, and teachers who trust their principles” (p. 54) positively impacts students’ academic performance and willingness to become aware and involved in issues that affect their school.

**Exosystem**

The exosystem was defined as the larger social environment that the developing individual was not directly a part of but was indirectly impacted by changes within that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Johnson, 2008). The exosystem involved interactions that did not include the individual but were interactions between community members, peer groups, and family members that may indirectly affected the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994; Xu & Filler, 2008). Arnold et al. (2012) stated the exosystem included school reform efforts, state and governmental agencies, and foundations and nonprofit organizations. The authors indicated school reform efforts were inextricably linked to funding for schools and were tied to the increase in the
implementation of educational standards. These standards were then used to change academic curricula and the assessment of newly established standards. Arnold et al. identified the creation of small schools, career academies, schools offering rigorous college level courses offered to high school students, dual-enrollment programs, and school choice as factors of the exosystem that contributed to the academic trajectory of students into college.

Small schools were created as a solution to the increased student dropout rate in the 1970s because of the “large factory-style high schools” (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 65). They were designed with the purpose of decreasing the number of students attending the large over populated high schools. The goal of small schools was to provide students with a challenging curriculum, increase academic achievement, and create a welcoming academic environment (Arnold, 2012; Bronson, 2013). Bronson (2013) stated small schools were established with the intent of counteracting problems teachers dealt with in large schools such as overcrowded classrooms and lack of effective student support systems. Also, small schools were established for the purpose of creating smaller learning environments that improved teacher student relationships and enriched student’s personal relationships with others.

Arnold et al. (2012) stated that although small schools offered a personalized education for students, they also presented unique challenges to the existing school structure. Arnold et al. (2012) and Bronson (2013) reported many small schools were located on an existing school campus, which generated competition for existing school resources. Bronson (2013) stated school districts were unwilling to build new buildings for the small schools and were not willing to spend money to renovate existing school
buildings “to accommodate the new small school configurations” (p. 7). School districts were prone to using existing school buildings, which many of the small schools existed in older school buildings. In the end, Arnold et al. (2012) reported student graduation rates in small schools have been varied. Some small schools have provided evidence of increased academic achievement and college attendance, but some have had difficulty with improving high school graduation rates.

Arnold et al. (2012) stated career academies were flexible high schools that were designed with the intent of students managing their time for academic learning. Unlike small schools, career academies focused on work-based learning opportunities. Brand (2009) and Fletcher and Cox (2012) reported the success of career academies was because of the academies emphasis on integrating career and technical education curriculum and preparing students for college. Career academies were recognized as an effective way of helping African-American students who were at-risk of dropping out, increasing academic achievement, encouraging academic engagement, and increasing college earned credit while in high school (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Cox, 2012). Arnold et al. (2012) stated career academies allowed teachers to plan academic curricula during a common planning period and implemented a strong college preparatory and planning process. Nevertheless, career academies have presented a positive movement toward increased academic achievement for students, but they have not reported those students completing high school or college.

The implementation of rigorous and college level courses taught by high school teachers with the purpose of offering students an opportunity to experience college level course work has increased within high schools (Arnold et al., 2012). Students have an
opportunity to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses that follow national academic standards for a specified subject area. Both AP and IB courses have been seen as a progressive path toward college. Colleges have valued these courses for their rigorous course work and awarding college credit for them. The college experience through college level course work was also identified in the creation of dual-enrollment programs (Arnold et al., 2012).

Similar to AP and IB courses offered to high school students, dual-enrollment courses provide students with an opportunity to attend high school while simultaneously enrolling in college and receive both high school and college credit (Arnold et al., 2012). Dual-enrollment courses were sponsored by United States policymakers with the purpose of providing high school students with pre-college expectations while enrolled in high school. Kanny (2015) reported high school students who enrolled in dual enrollment classes had the potential to improve their high school grades, increase academic performance in college, and increase the possibility of graduating from college. Also, Arnold et al. (2012) stated that the creation of dual-enrollment courses was designed to increase attendance to post-secondary institutions for low-income and minority students. Although dual-enrollment courses offer high school students the opportunity to enroll into college level courses, dual-enrollment courses were seen as lacking adequate sequencing with current high school courses. Nevertheless, Kanny (2015) found dual enrollment students felt dual enrollment classes offered both positive and negative experiences. Students felt their dual enrolment classes were both “beneficial and detrimental to their academic achievement and personal growth as future college students” (Kanny, 2015, p. 61). Kanny discovered three positive and three negative
themes related to high school student's perception of the positive and negative experiences they had while taking dual enrollment classes. The author identified the three positive themes as exposure to a post-secondary environment, an awareness of hidden skills and practices, and learning how to be academically independent. The three negative themes were identified as students having trouble earning high school credits to graduate, negative experiences with college professors, and inadequate support from high school administrators.

Kanny (2015) indicated students benefited from the early exposure to a college environment. Students felt having an opportunity to experience the college level academic expectations and rigorous course work was important. The author found students became aware of the hidden skills and practices needed to be improve their academic performance in college. Students noted discovering their personal learning styles, talking to their college professors, and maintaining constant contact with their professors were implicit skills and practices needed to be academically successful in college. Kanny discovered dual enrollment students learned how to be academically independent. Although students had a negative experience with more academic independence, they indicated experiencing a more independent academic environment was important to their success in college.

Kanny (2015) learned students who enrolled in dual enrollment classes had trouble earning the needed credits to graduate from high school and their poor grades negatively impacted their high school transcript. The author found students in dual enrollment classes had negative experiences when visiting the college campus. Students felt they were being judged and often had negative interactions with college professors.
As a result, Kanny stated the negative interactions with their college professors led to
discomfort and poor academic performance. Lastly, Arnold et al. (2012) and Kanny
(2015) indicated dual enrollment students did not receive the same level of support in
high school as students attending college. Kanny found that dual enrollment students did
not receive support from high school or college level faculty members with remaining
focused and staying on track. Students recalled minimal interactions between high
school administrators and students enrolled in dual enrollment classes. As a result, dual
enrollment students felt the lack of support had a negative impact on their college
experience.

The final level of school reform cited by Arnold et al. (2012) was identified as
school choice, which was the opportunity for students to leave their current academic
environment in search of a better school environment. The authors stated that school
choice increased the availability of student vouchers and creation of charter schools.
Gooden, Jabbar, and Torres (2016) stated vouchers provided parents an opportunity to
choose a private or parochial school they wanted their children to attend. Parents
redeemed the vouchers from the state or from their local school district. Barden and
Lassmann (2016) stated charter schools could be created by any organization such as
“independent school districts, entrepreneurs, community groups, and educational
organizations” (p. 291). The authors indicated the purpose of charter schools has been to
create new ways of teaching existing curriculum, improving classroom organization, and
refining the existing methods for teaching students. Casey (2015) and Barden and
Lassmann (2016) indicated charter schools were primarily located in urban
neighborhoods. Casey (2015) stated charter schools in Los Angeles and New York were
“deliberately concentrated in communities of color and in neighborhoods with high rates of poverty” (p. 23). Alternatively, Barden and Lassmann (2016) reported charter schools in Texas were “located in more affluent urban areas” (p. 292). As a result of charter schools enrolling students in varying socioeconomic environments, Barden and Lassmann stated charter schools have a very diverse student body.

Arnold et al. (2012) stated charter schools altered the flow of existing school funds away from public schools, which potentially harmed students that were left behind and not able to receive vouchers. Barden and Lassmann (2016) indicated charter schools were not funded the same way as public schools. However, charter schools received money that would normally be spent on public school students. Casey (2015) reported many charter schools received more money from public school funds. The author discovered one of the leading charter school organizations, Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), has received almost $1,800 per student in federal grants. Also, when compared to the combined funding for public and private schools, KIPP receive more than $6,500 per student, which was reported to be fifty-four percent more money per student than students in public schools. In the end, Arnold et al. (2012) stated school funds that were distributed to public schools were transferred to charter schools or private schools, which were exempt from some of the academic requirements imposed on public schools within the school districts throughout the state.

**Macrosystem**

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the macrosystem included patterns developed from the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. Arnold et al. (2012) and Xu and Fuller (2008) stated the macrosystem was the largest system in the environment
that impacted social, cultural, and ideological contexts. Arnold et al. (2012) suggested the macrosystem was responsible for shaping the “social structures, opportunities, and individual expectations” (p. 77) of the developing individual. The macrosystem encompassed various cultural or sub-cultural characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These characteristics were referenced “to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40) of the developing individual. Arnold et al. (2012) maintained that each of these characteristics were impacted by the structure and the constitutional powers of the federal government.

As a result of the impact the federal government has had on these characteristics, Arnold et al. (2012) suggested the federal government has contributed to K-12 schools’ inability to effectively prepare students for post-secondary learning and has contributed to the absence of a nationalized post-secondary learning system. The authors suggested changes in student demographics and changes in higher education have occurred because of scientific advancement, post-industrialization, and globalization, which prompt the need for more higher education. Unfortunately, Arnold et al. indicated a need for more higher education has been met with unequal college readiness for students, but has maintained a need for post-secondary education while being met with structural obstacles.

Arnold et al. (2012) stated society has held a strong belief that acceptance into a post-secondary institution and the accomplishment of receiving a post-secondary degree as major factors attributing to improved their life. The authors suggested that society has maintained a belief that social mobility and economic advancement occurs via personal
initiative and the belief that students and families who invest in higher education will benefit from obtaining a post-secondary degree. Receiving a formal education was viewed as the principle pathway to obtaining a job in the post-graduate work force. Although the belief of receiving a post-secondary education has been positive, the authors indicated “prescribed secondary school curricula, high-stakes testing, and high loan burdens” (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 78) as macrosystem factors that have negatively impacted college readiness and post-secondary enrollment.

Arnold et al. (2012) also attributed the lack of college readiness and enrollment into post-secondary institutions to the change in how college is perceived ideologically and culturally. The authors indicated policy conversations about how post-secondary education shifted “from an emphasis on equity and affirmative action to a focus on excellence and accountability” (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 79). This shift in how post-secondary education was viewed was linked to changes in global economics and labor markets. As a result, these macrosystem events were linked to students not placing a high value on obtaining a post-secondary education, which have shifted the cultural view on education from race to that of socioeconomic status.

**Chronosystem**

Bronfenbrenner (1994) defined the chronosystem as specific changes during the life of the developing individual. He detailed such changes as socioeconomic status, family structure, lifestyle changes, employment, and where people live as elements that were linked to the chronosystem. Arnold et al. (2012) indicated changes within the macrosystem were attributed to the final system of the EMHD. The authors suggested ideological changes during the life of the individual, being a part of important life events,
and moving within or away from their original environment as factors that affect the academic growth of the individual. As such, Arnold et al. (2012) stated “the intersection of an individual life, timing, and sociohistorical context are key determinants of educational outcomes” (p. 83). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) indicated historical changes within the environment as having a profound effect on the development of the individual. They stated such changes during the life of the individual may disrupt the normal timing of important transitions during the life of the developing individual, thus causing the individual to experience an interruption during the normal sequence of learning. Also, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) suggested the interruptions may be viewed as a challenge to become more adaptable to life changing events or making effective adjustments in their learning environment.

Arnold et al. (2012) argued education occurs over time, and students experience their education during chronological events, completion of tasks, and through various stages of their life. Creating strategies that promoted smoother transitions between middle school to high school and from high school to college were instrumental to influencing the decision of students to continue their education. Enrolling into classes during high school that met college admission standards was important for college readiness. Arnold et al. stated high school students should be aware of the importance of (a) taking a gateway course such as Algebra 2, (b) completing financial aid forms, (c) taking college entrance tests, (d) graduating from high school, and (e) completing college applications as essential components linked to college readiness and college retention.

Although Arnold et al. (2012) have suggested that college readiness and retention rates may increase, they maintained the notion that “many economically and
educationally challenged students do not follow an orderly sequence from middle school through high school” (p. 86). Students that were limited by their socioeconomic situations had not decided their college path at similar times as their peers, they were unprepared, and had not completed the necessary tasks for entering college. Also, low-income families perceived college costs and the availability of financial aid as determinants for attending college. Low-income families maintained this belief long before high school, which contributed to every decision made prior and during high school that affected college readiness. Therefore, Arnold et al. (2012) asserted that a smooth transition from high school to college was a chronosystem factor that occurred over time and resulted in fewer college ready and prepared students from low-income households.

Throughout each major event, stage, and period of transition, Arnold et al. (2012) stated “individual and family changes” (p. 88) occurred simultaneously during development as well as during changes within the environment of the individual. As students transitioned through each phase of their education, middle school to high school and high school to college, the level of parental involvement declined. The authors reported a sharper decline of parental involvement from low-income families. As a result of this sharp decline, aspirations of attending college and participating in activities that were seen as essential to college readiness declined from tenth grade all the way to graduation.

With the chronosystem being the final system within the EMHD, Arnold et al. (2012) indicated the chronosystem was a lens in which stakeholders should view college readiness as longitudinal and not solely as a sequential event. Many students that have
endured various environmental challenges have done so during various stages of their life. Therefore, within the context of the EMHD, the authors stated all events happened within the personal, social, and during time sensitive events through their development. In sum, the authors suggested that understanding when these changes occur provides an opportunity for effective intervention strategies that pay close attention to student development and the decisions students make about college.

**Secondary High School Factors**

**Environment**

As African-American males continue to fall behind the academic progression of their Caucasian males and African-American females, Garibaldi (1992) stated the failure of African-American male students starts early in their academic career and has led to their tendency for being uninterested in academics. African-American men have been prone to dropping out of high school before their senior year. As a result, many African-American men have limited their opportunities to attend a post-secondary institution, which has reduced post-secondary enrollment rates for African-American males. Garibaldi (1992) suggested the importance of discovering the academic expectations and interests of African-American males to increase their academic performance, college enrollment rates, and interest in attending school.

In 1987, Garibaldi (1992) chaired a task force of educators and community leaders in the New Orleans Public School System. The committee was asked to review the academic status of African-American males in the New Orleans school system. They examined the retention rates, suspensions, expulsions, academic achievement, grade
attainment, attendance, and student’s participation in scholarly activities. In order to accomplish this task, Garibaldi and the committee members performed a quantitative approach to examine the aforementioned factors they assumed contributed to the down turn of African-American male academic performance in the New Orleans Public School System. They used data from the 1986-1987 academic year along with surveys to perform a comparative analyses between the actual academic achievement of African-American males and survey results.

The survey was used to question educators, parents, and members of the general public. There were more than 2,250 African-American males surveyed from the school district. Also, the committee surveyed 500 teachers and 3,523 parents. Along with the survey, they held four public forums that allowed attendees to discuss what they assumed were the problems that contributed to poor academic achievement of African-American men. The committee worked for a year to determine the results from the surveys and public forums in order to properly compare the collected data from the 1986-1987 academic year (Garibaldi, 1992).

At the time of the research, African-Americans represented 86% of the student population in the New Orleans school district. There were 86,000 students enrolled in the school district during the 1986-1987 academic year. Among those 86,000 students, African-American men represented 43% of the student population. The committee discovered that of those students, African-American men “accounted for 58% of the non-promotions, 65% of the suspensions, 80% of the expulsions, and 45% of the dropouts” (Garibaldi, 1992, p. 5). Although the data represented a bleak reality of poor academic performance of African-American males in the school system, the researcher discovered,
from the survey results, that many of the African-American males had a desire to finish school and desired to be challenged academically (Garibaldi, 1992).

Among the 2,250 surveyed males, 95% of them had expectations to graduate from high school. While these African-American males had seemingly high expectations to graduate from high school, 40% of those surveyed believed their teachers did not set high performing academic goals for them, and 60% of those students recommended "that their teachers should push them harder" (Garibaldi, 1992, p. 7). Among the 500 teachers surveyed in the study, 318 responded to the survey. Unfortunately, of those 318 surveyed, approximately 60% of those teachers assumed that their African-American male students were not capable of going to college. Also, 60% of those teachers who responded to the survey were elementary teachers, 70% of the teachers had at least ten years of experience, and 65% of the surveyed teachers were African-American. The perception of academic achievement from teachers was not congruent to the 95% of African-American males who reported a high expectation of graduating from high school. However, the academic expectations of the parents were more in line with their children. Among the 3,523 surveyed parents, 80% of them maintained that their sons had expectations to attend a post-secondary institution, which was a substantial improvement to the meager 40% of positive expectations from teachers surveyed in the study (Garibaldi, 1992).

Garibaldi (1992) recommended that the quality and amount of effective levels of communication between parents and teachers must increase. Increased effective levels of communication minimized negative perceptions of African-American male's potential and belief to succeed academically. The idea of improving the communication between
parents and teachers has been an issue exacerbated over time, and the continuation of the
lack of communication only worsened the negative perceptions of achievement by
African-American male students. Effective levels of communication must be initiated in
order for students to experience an environment that promotes academic improvement
(Garibaldi, 1992).

Teachers often harbored negative perceptions of the potential academic gains for
and counselors in elementary and secondary institutions were not exempt from having
negative expectations of African-American male academic performance. Teachers and
counselors assisted in the self-fulfilling prophecies of poor academic achievement and
potential for attending post-secondary institutions of African-American men. According
to Garibaldi (1992), parental perceptions of academic expectations were not synonymous
with teachers. Many parents had high expectations and believed their children had post-
secondary opportunities. Although parents of African-American male students exhibited
positive expectations of post-secondary opportunities for their children, the surveyed
parents often did not attend parent teacher meetings. Unfortunately, Garibaldi suggested
the lack of parental involvement influenced teachers to believe parents of African-
American male students were uninterested in their academic performance and were not
concerned with post-secondary opportunities.

Garibaldi (1992) recommended that teachers learn how to effectively
communicate with parents in the process of increasing the academic achievement of
African-American males. The author suggested teachers should expose African-
American male students to college campuses as a means of encouraging them to pursue
post-secondary opportunities. Garibaldi insisted that parents were obligated to (a) inspire their children to perform at higher academic levels, (b) commend them on their academic accomplishments, (c) encourage persistence in doing homework, (d) emphasize the value of an education, and (e) regularly meet with teachers in order to gain an understanding of the current and possible levels of academic performance of their children. Parents that had little to no educational background should be provided with resources that enable them to improve positive academic reinforcements for their children. Garibaldi suggested that community and school affiliates were key in accomplishing the aforementioned parental levels of involvement.

In addition to the stated recommendations by Garibaldi (1992), the author also recommended “African-American male students should be taught values, etiquette, and morality at school and in the home” (p. 9). Teaching African-American male students how to resist peer pressure and why academic success was important was also recommended by the author. With many African-American male students relying on their athleticism as a motivational factor for attending school, Garibaldi recommended African-American male students become involved in extracurricular activities that involved academic and leadership activities. The author suggested these academically minded students be given tangible rewards similar to athletes and band members.

All too often, African-American students have been taught by female teachers of a different race or culture (Anthony et al., 2007) and were only exposed to other African-American male adults that were coaches or janitors (Scott et al., 2013). Scott et al. (2013) asserted that there was a need for hiring more African-American male teachers and mentors. The authors used essays to identify the challenges for African-American
males going to post-secondary institutions. The authors integrated an essay within an existing scholarship application for the 2011 academic year. In order to obtain the resulting information from the essays, the lead author of the study was in constant contact with members of the scholarship organization and the involved students.

The scholarship organization had more than 70 males apply for the scholarship. All those that applied for the scholarship submitted a completed 800 word essay. Applicants were asked to estimate the gross income of their family between six income levels provided within the application. The application did not offer an opportunity to distinguish the racial background of the applicants. The researchers were unable to determine how many of the 70 applicants were African-American. All applicants originated from public urban and suburban school districts. Each of the applicants was provided the option to opt out of the study, which did not affect their chances of receiving the scholarship. Also, each of the 70 students were required to sign waivers in order to participate in the study. Of those original 70 applicants, 68 of them agreed to participate in the study.

Scott et al. (2013) used a naturalistic inquiry technique to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges African-American males had while attending high school. They organized and interpreted the information directly and searched for single occurrences that described unique challenges. They aimed to avoid creating multiple inferences from the initial single occurrence. Once the unique occurrences were identified, they began to look for common themes within the essays in order to fit into two preliminary categories. The first category, not having enough African-American teachers, described the challenges African-American men faced while attending high
school. The second category, pressures from their environment, described challenges African-American men faced outside of school. From the initial categories, the authors discovered nine common thematic codes.

Among the essayed participants, Scott et al. (2013) discovered that having more African-American male educators was a reoccurring theme in the essays. The students did not believe that Caucasian teachers were incapable of effectively teaching them, but having more African-American male teachers was a positive influence on their psyche of potential achievement. A respondent from the study mentioned having more African-American male teachers allowed for more opportunities for mentoring and guidance. Students viewed African-American male teachers as role models. Also, the respondents in the study suggested the lack of males in their households as the reason for needing more African-American male educators. Others in the study expressed similar concerns of not having a male figure in their homes. Students in the study asserted that the lack of a male figure in their home did not prepare them for the role of being a man nor the ability of being able to provide for others. Subsequently, the respondents of the study held a perceived notion of achievement, but they acknowledged the lack of a positive male figure added to their challenges.

Scott et al. (2013) stated that parental expectations were significant factors that contributed to college enrollment for the respondents in the study. Many respondents stated having responsibilities led students to treat education as a nonessential priority. Although students were given these responsibilities, they understood their parents were not intentionally passing on these responsibilities but were troubled with providing for their family. Respondents mentioned the lack of financial funds equal to Caucasians
contributed to a home environment that limited the importance of academic achievement. Fortunately, the respondents believed that regardless of the financial strain placed on their family and academic achievement level of their parents, positive expectations from their parents led to an increased likelihood of African-American males graduating from high school and enrolling into college. Kenyatta (2012) recommended more research should focus on the persistence, resilience, and coping mechanisms of these students. Discovering how these students were able to achieve in school in spite of their harsh environment was seen as a means of providing more insight into how schools could bridge the gap of school culture with the high expectations of African-American students.

Respondents from the study mentioned the need for understanding the stories of their families and members of their community that had academic difficulties. They understood being aware of their difficulties motivated them academically. As a result, Scott et al. (2013) discovered a sub-theme within their research that described the importance of community involvement as a proponent for helping parents and children make better decisions about their education. Although respondents were aware of the benefits of being a part of an environment that was conducive to academic achievement, they acknowledged the various negative factors that limited their achievement. A respondent mentioned African-American males were not interested in academic achievement due to a debilitating environment that was plagued with violence, drugs, and parents with financial problems and minimal education.

Wilson and Allen (1987) recommended that African-American families should seek opportunities that would increase their ability to motivate and become intellectually capable of competing on equal terms with other knowledgeable families. Also, the
African-American community was viewed as an area in which the youth of the community should be constantly reminded of the struggles African-Americans went through in order to receive equal academic opportunities. Additionally, Somers et al. (2008) suggested schools become aware of the negative stereotypes within the African-American culture that limit the academic achievement of African-American students. As such, the authors recommended schools investigate more creative ways of communicating with African-American parents. Implementing strategies of social support was viewed as an important factor in achieving academic success among African-American students.

Scott et al. (2013) indicated with a vast amount of potential environmental problems that originate from teacher perceptions, parental beliefs and educational abilities, and incomplete family structures, African-American students often find a higher rate of underachievement in rural school districts. Many African-American male students that attended non-affluent schools were subjected to schools that lacked the much needed resources in order to prepare students for post-secondary institutions. Respondents mentioned that schools that were poorly maintained or underfunded only worsened the level of mistrust among teachers and their ability for students to acquire the needed education.

Social

African-American male students perceived school as counter to the prevailing African-American culture and placed less emphasis on obtaining an education (Palmer et al., 2009). Palmer et al. (2009) suggested that African-American students devalued education because they perceived it as “acting White”. The concept of “acting White”
was a theory developed by John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham in which African-American students viewed high academic performance as something achieved by White students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). As a result, Fordham and Ogbu stated African-American students and their peers systematically and culturally degraded academically capable students in an effort to culturally segregate them from the norms of the African-American culture. Unfortunately, academically capable students had to create coping mechanisms in order to maintain academic performance and maintain a positive cultural status. 

Booker (2007) recommend future research should pay attention to how African-American peer groups that wanted to learn affected their sense of belonging and the value they placed on school. Also, research was needed on the level of participation these students exhibited during class that led them to academic achievement. 

Allen (2015) suggested further research was needed on seeking the perceptions of African-American men who have successfully completed secondary, post-secondary, and possibly post-graduate level education degree requirements. Allen asserted that this research had the potential to disrupt the negative beliefs about the academic performance of African-American men. The author suggested that research was needed to identify factors such as motivations, expectations, and support systems that contributed to the academic achievements of African-American men. Allen proclaimed that identifying such support systems could serve as models of how to effectively create culturally responsive educators. Additionally, Allen suggested that with various elements that contribute to the academic success of African-American male students, research that emphasized an ecological framework was needed. The author indicated that this research was needed in order to develop microsystem levels of intervention.
Socioeconomic

Financial support was noted to be a major factor in the decision of African-Americans when applying and attending a post-secondary institution (Baker & Vélez, 1996). Baker and Vélez (1996) stated that African-Americans were less likely to accept or apply for loans for higher educational purposes. The authors further posited that these students harbored these feelings based on their low-income families. Moreover, African-American students have been less likely to apply to post-secondary institutions due to a lack of academic preparation for the level of rigor presented in college and often have limited access to information about how to apply to college (Owens et al., 2010). Also, many of these students have been subjected to living in impoverished environments. Owens et al. (2010) suggested that poverty has a negative impact on academic opportunities and potential for academic success. Moreover, socioeconomic standards of African-American students affected their placement into classes that provided challenging content in order to prepare them for a collegiate experience. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate academic preparation affected the potential success in post-secondary institutions.

Post-Secondary Factors

Environment

Ellis (2002) stated African-American men have been confronted with many challenges such as academic preparedness and tough school climates when entering college. He defined academic preparedness as “the degree to which an individual has received educational opportunities prior to entering higher education” (Ellis, 2002, p. 68).
Therefore, in order for students to receive adequate academic preparation, African-American students must attend schools that offered courses that were in line with college level rigor. Perrakis (2008) discovered that regardless of race and gender, academic preparation was more important to students. Perrakis stated students that were well-prepared for college were more likely to be academically successful than their poorly prepared peers. Palmer et al. (2014) suggested poor college based curriculum in secondary institutions, school funding issues, and low quality high school teachers were factors that impede college access for African-American men. As a result of poor preparation, many African-American men entered college unaware of the expectations, which led to higher levels of attrition.

Hagedorn, Maxwell, and Hampton (2001) stated the progression of African-American men through college and their potential academic outcomes were affected by high school preparation, high school Grade Point Average (GPA), and college GPA. Also, the number of enrolled hours were attributed to the retention of African-American students. Hagedorn et al. alleged that full-time college students were more persistent. While African-American men have low college completion rates and high levels of attrition (Owens et al., 2010), those who were able to enter college were affected by being unprepared for the “academic challenges of postsecondary education” (Cuyjet, 1997, p. 6). Moreover, a higher degree of high school preparation for college level expectations may increase retention rates and the awareness of environmental factors that may hinder academic performance.

When African-American men transition from high school to college, they entered environments that were not as welcoming as their home or community environments.
Kerpelman et al. (2008) indicated African-American men who attended college were negatively impacted by their college environment, which did not offer effective levels of academic support. The authors reported African-American men in college "showed a sharp decrease in the strength of the association between GPA and academic self-concept from freshman/sophomore year to junior/senior year" (p. 998). Owens et al. (2010) stated that African-American men persistent to complete college were influenced by their ability to successfully transition from high school to college. Owens et al. recommended that college officials consider the college climate in which African-American men are admitted when improving their sense of belonging, increasing their persistence to complete college, refining the transition period from high school, and dealing with their perceptions of racism in order to improve their adjustment to the new environment. Also, the authors suggested that colleges should consider making campus environments less hostile in relation to the community they come from, which can often mirror their experiences they face in society (Cuyjet, 1997; Owens et al., 2010). In part, harmful college environments affected academic performance among these students that endured cultural factors such as racism, poor academic success, and marginalization (Garibaldi, 1992; Owens et al., 2010). As such, Dancy (2011) indicated that colleges and universities must improve the campus climate by not tolerating "prejudicial thinking and actions" (p. 491) by faculty members.

Robertson and Mason (2008) recommended that colleges offer culturally relevant courses that could be integrated within an existing curriculum for African-American students. The authors asserted that the creation of these courses could promote an atmosphere of care by college faculty toward African-American students. Thus,
potentially altering the negative perception African-American students had about the existing school climate and increase academic achievement.

In a qualitative study, Dancy (2011) interviewed twenty-four African-American men in four-year colleges and universities. All respondents were traditional upperclassmen students. Dancy performed face-to-face interviews with each participant. Participants suggested that in order for African-American men to successfully transition into college, faculty members should learn more about African-American culture. The participants in the study suggested mandatory sessions of open dialogue between students and faculty members about improving cultural awareness. Although the participants did not believe that these sessions would completely eliminate harsh college climates, they understood that their voices were instrumental in deconstructing oppressive climates. College faculty should not only act in a culturally aware manner, but must intentionally improve their cultural awareness through interactions with African-American men.

Dancy (2011) recommended that colleges and universities should actively seek more African-American faculty members and administrators. Dancy suggested that by hiring more African-American men, African-American male students would potentially improve their self-expectations and the value of their college experience. By doing so, Dancy asserted that hiring more African-American men was vital to reducing racial mistrust towards their Caucasian male counterparts. Once colleges hired more African-American male faculty members, Perrakis (2008) suggested that these faculty members begin to mentor African-American male students and be provided with incentives from colleges and universities. Perrakis indicated the opportunity to mentor African-American male students served as a means for them to become involved in positive relationships
with male faculty members, and as a way of bridging the gap between the academic and the personal life of students. Dancy (2011) also recommended a need for more culturally relevant professional development opportunities for faculty members, as a means of improving the cultural climate for African-American males.

Just as the college climate acts as a factor that contributes to the academic success of African-American men, faculty members that exhibit low expectations can negatively impact success. Ellis (2002) stated that many colleges and universities in the U. S. have low expectations and were racially biased towards African-American male students. Robertson and Mason (2008) indicated that college students thought their university professors assumed educated African-American men were “a threat to the dominant White power structure in American society” (p. 76). As a result, college professors were less likely to interact with African-American male students and were more likely to interact with Caucasian students. Moreover, African-American male students were excluded from meaningful relationships with their professors.

Once African-American men enter college, Perrakis (2008) asserted African-American men were confronted with challenges that limited academic success on all educational levels. Hagedorn et al. (2001) and Perrakis (2008) stated researchers were attempting to identify factors that were attributed to the successful academic attempts of African-American men in post-secondary institutions in order to limit high attrition rates. Once these factors were identified, Hagedorn et al. (2001) indicated they may assist with counteracting the oppositional behavior African-American men exhibited when entering a Predominately White Institution (PWI). Hagedorn et al. posited African-American men enter PWIs under stress. Their stress originated from the idea that resources and
opportunities for social amusement, recreation, or enjoyment that were available to other members of society were not equally offered to them or were unattainable (Ellis, 2002; Hagedorn et al., 2001). As a result, their oppositional behaviors of unequal access to resources and opportunities for social amusement, recreation, or enjoyment (Hagedorn et al., 2001) were attributed to low college completion rates among African-American men (Owens et al., 2010).

African-American men not only face lower expectations from university faculty, but also lack other African-American teachers who can serve as role models. Robertson and Mason (2008) interviewed fifteen African-American men from a university in the south. The researchers used a content analysis and the theory of cumulative discrimination to draw connections from published literature and collected data. They discovered the respondents in the study agreed that there was a “lack of Black faculty, discussion of Black experiences in classes, and the reluctance of White faculty to discuss controversial issues” (Robertson & Mason, 2008, p. 78). As a result, many students felt faculty members were unable to make genuine connections with African-American male students (Robertson & Mason, 2008), which led them to seek support from African-American faculty members who were perceived as supportive (Palmer et al., 2014). African-American men that attended PWIs searched for possible African-American male faculty role models who were perceived to influence positive social adjustment into the campus environment (Cuyjet, 1997; Robertson & Mason, 2008).

Robertson and Mason (2008) indicated a similar sentiment and a similar recommendation as Dancy (2011) that colleges and universities should recruit more African-American faculty members. Robertson and Mason (2008) further posited that
there was a greater need for providing faculty members at PWIs with culturally relevant professional development opportunities. In order to help improve campus engagement and the adjustment into college for African-American men, Cuyjet (1997) and Perrakis (2008) indicated that university faculty should focus their efforts on providing African-American male students with a welcoming environment. Moreover, Perrakis (2008) suggested a need for an outreach program that would increase the level of support for African-American men who were reluctant to seek the aid of college counselors. Perrakis recommended that these programs be offered throughout the day in an effort to benefit all African-American male students regardless of their daily schedule.

Social

Zhang and Smith (2011) indicated African-Americans struggle with transitioning from high school to college due to the lack of membership within social networks. Also, African-American students come from disadvantaged environments that can affect their transition into structurally diverse college environments. Subsequently, Zhang and Smith indicated the lack of vital resources, social networks, and trouble with adjusting to college were further hindered by the dependence on financial assistance to attend college.

Although African-American men have had difficulties transitioning into college, once admitted, African-American men had strong personal goals for helping others, giving back to their community, being leaders in their community, and becoming experts in their field (Dancy, 2011; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Wood and Palmer (2013) stated these factors were integral in African-American men forming intrinsic and extrinsic goals while attending college, which encouraged the formation of meaningful bonds. Subsequently, they were capable of enhancing their “prioritization of leisure time, having
children, helping others, and having meaning and purpose in their lives” (p. 235). Owens et al. (2010) recommended that college personnel recognize and understand the societal experiences of African-American men as they may contribute to improving career readiness and personal development while in college. Owens et al. identified disadvantaged backgrounds, poor college preparation, high school graduation and college retention rates, and increasing unemployment and incarceration rates as factors that required special attention for African-American college students.

As African-American men transition from high school to college, they must endure negative media portrayals and a lack of positive mentors, which can affect their adjustment into a college environment that is vastly different from their originating community. Ellis (2002) recommended African-American men must pay close attention to the socially accepted harmful images and negative cultural representations of glorified images of financial rewards, perceived as harmful to their personal evaluation and development of a positive self-image. As a result, Ellis recommended the creation of “clear academic pursuits, a healthy support network, and sound academic behavior” (p. 20), which was viewed as a means of improving college completion rates. Moreover, many African-American male college students are pressured “to conform to widespread media depictions of African-American men (i.e. rap artists, athletes, criminals) that they believe African American communities value” (Dancy, 2011, p. 489) as a part of becoming a man. As a result, African-American men struggle with developing their real self while attending college.

Dancy (2011) indicated that African-American men were expected to adhere to pretentious hegemonic behaviors which were not their own, but that of other African-
Americans. Ellis (2002) stated historical references about African-American men’s hegemonic behaviors were identified as being lazy, untrustworthy, and simple. Ellis posited that these behaviors of African-American men were currently portrayed as “gangsters and oversexed men fulfilling a multitude of hedonistic desires” (p. 64). Unfortunately, African-American men were not provided with observable examples of successful African-American men in their own community (Dancy, 2011).

**Socioeconomic**

While the enrollment gap between Caucasian and African-American men has narrowed in recent years, Caucasian men continue to enroll into post-secondary institutions at greater rates (Owens et al., 2010; Snyder & Hoffman, 2003). Owens et al. reported that this fact gave Caucasian men an economic advantage because of their academic opportunities. Moreover, Palmer and Maramba (2011) stated African-American men were not able to obtain equal employment and equal financial gains as Caucasian men due to the glass ceiling that makes it impossible for economic growth and occupational advancement. Even when African-American men have similar academic credentials, the glass ceiling misinformed them of the real value of obtaining an education. As a result, Palmer and Maramba indicated African-American men were not willing to engage in rigorous academic challenges in order to achieve academic success, which hindered their ability of obtaining a post-secondary degree.

Obtaining a post-secondary degree potentially provided African-American men an opportunity to gain access to better career advancements, economic wealth (Owens et al., 2010), and meaningful employment, which was considered a “major measure of achievement” (Cuyjet, 1997, p. 6) in the United States. The negative effects of not
obtaining comparable jobs to similar academic achievements of Caucasian men has also been identified as affecting the social status of African-American men. Wood and Palmer (2013) stated that African-American men had a strong desire of obtaining meaningful work, establishing opportunities for financial advancement and stability, becoming leaders within their community, having children, and having time to partake in leisure activities. Unfortunately, Cuyjet (1997) stated that while African-American men have these desires, their chances of obtaining them are further diminished due to African-American men not obtaining post-secondary degrees. As a result, Cuyjet indicated that the lack of educational advancement and economic stability by African-American men has affected potential marriage opportunities to African-American women who have completed post-secondary educational degree programs and have obtained occupational positions that were in line with their academic achievements.

Although there were many challenges that African-American men must meet when confronting the glass ceiling, Robertson and Mason (2008) identified financial assistance as a major factor that impedes African-American men’s social adjustment and academic success at post-secondary institutions. Robertson and Mason indicated that as college tuition increases, it becomes even more difficult for African-American men who come from low income homes to attend college. African-Americans who were fortunate to have families who were financially well off were likely to attend a four year university and were more likely to perform better than African-American students who were from middle to low income households (Baker & Vélez, 1996; Robertson & Mason, 2008). Even though financial difficulties can hinder the academic progression of African-American college students, Baker and Vélez (1996) stated students who received
financial aid such as grants and work studies were more likely to look for more financial and participate in social activities that increased their academic success.

With the aforementioned socioeconomic stressors of African-American men trying to enter college, Palmer et al. (2009) recommended colleges create opportunities that would increase financial support for African-American students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and for first generation students. Palmer et al. (2014) and Robertson and Mason (2008) also indicated a need for colleges to create precollege programs that offer students opportunities to learn study skills, to acquire information on obtaining financial aid, look for support from college counselors, search for faculty mentors, and identify potential jobs. Palmer et al. (2009) asserted that the implementation of said programs had the potential of decreasing the amount of money borrowed from student loan organizations and the amount of hours students worked, which affected academic performance.

Conclusion

Chapter Two provided historical information that has contributed to the academic experiences of African-Americans. The Plessy v. Ferguson and the Brown v. The Board of Education decisions have had extensive repercussions on the academic opportunities and expectations of African-Americans. Also, Chapter Two provided a two dimensional analysis of secondary and post-secondary factors that have contributed to the academic achievement of African-American males. Within these two dimensions of analysis, the researcher described environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that were
attributed to academic achievement during African-Americans’ secondary and post-secondary experiences.

As the researcher used the Ecological Model of Human Development (EMHD) as a theoretical framework, Chapter Two further described the framework and its application into the academic performance of students. Each system in the EMHD was described to understand the level of college preparedness for students. The microsystem was viewed as the vital component to developing college readiness among students. The microsystem encompassed the immediate environmental connections the individual made that contributed to academic achievement. The mesosystem was described as multiple connections between multiple microsystems. Unlike the microsystem and mesosystem in which the individual was directly connected to each environmental setting, the exosystem was described as a setting in which the individual was not immediately a part of, but indirectly impacted academic achievement. The macrosystem was described as the broadest system and involved connections between all other systems. The mesosystem identified cultural, ideological, and socioeconomic factors that impact academic achievement among students. The chronosystem described changes that happened over time that could potentially affect academic achievement. The chronosystem ranged from changes in ideology, environment and major events, and the awareness of how history has affected student’s point of view. Chapter Two has provided a descriptive backdrop to the academic performance over time and current factors that contribute to academic achievement.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that are perceived to contribute to academic success for African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions. Specifically, the researcher wanted to interview African-American men to examine environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that impact academic success that may potentially strengthen the findings of the research. The following research question guided this study:

What environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors contribute to the academic success of African-American men who graduate from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

The researcher used the following central question during each semi-structured interview:

What factors do you attribute to your academic success in graduating from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

In addition to the stated research and central question, the researcher used the following guiding questions to obtain detailed and descriptive information about each participant’s environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to their academic success:

1. What elements within your environment contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?
2. What factors influenced your decision to attend college?

3. What social factors contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?

4. What socioeconomic factors contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?

Each participant had an opportunity to review the guiding questions prior to providing responses.

A phenomenological qualitative research design was used for this study to examine the lived experiences of the research participants. The following topics were discussed in this chapter: research design, population, instrumentation, data collection procedures and analysis, and procedures for verifying trustworthiness.

Research Design

The following study used a phenomenological methodology which examined the lived experiences of several participants in a study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003, 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). The qualitative method of research allowed the researcher to examine the lived experiences through semi-structured interviews with participants and considered their responses as indications for identifying factors for academic success (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Creswell (2007) stated qualitative research was an inquiry research design in which the researcher interpreted what participants “see, hear, and understand” (p. 39) during the study. While interpreting the lived experiences of the research participants, Creswell (2007) suggested the researcher focus on identifying the meaning of the identified problem when collecting data from participants.
In this study, the researcher was deeply connected with the phenomenon and sought to understand and identify the shared meaning of academic success among each participant. Even though Gall et al. (2007) indicated that the researcher is intimately connected to the phenomenon being studied, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Creswell (2003, 2007) suggested the researcher use bracketing to disassociate his or her beliefs about the study in order to glean a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Because the researcher himself is an African-American man who has graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution, the researcher did not use bracketing in the study. The researcher used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for the study, which Kafle (2011) indicated was a rejection to the idea of suspending one’s personal opinions about a phenomenon. The hermeneutic approach called for the researcher’s “interpretive narration to the description” (Kafle, 2011, p. 186) of the phenomenon being studied.

Unlike transcendental phenomenology in which researchers use bracketing to set aside his or her feelings about a particular phenomenon, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses on the lived experiences in which the researcher interprets meanings from dialectical interactions with research participants (Creswell, 2007; Kakkori, 2009). Kafle (2011) posited that the researcher in a hermeneutic approach was not able to bracket personal views about the phenomenon as in the transcendental phenomenology and was then able to subjectively interpret the phenomenon. Holroyd (2007) indicated that interpreting and understanding the meaning of the phenomenon through the lens of hermeneutic research, required the researcher to employ a fore-structure of understanding. The fore-structure of understanding implied
every life experience was grounded by previous life experiences that affected the current understanding of a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) stated that it was necessary to study the relationship between history and the current phenomenon being studied in order to truly understand the lived experiences of the individual. Moustakas maintained hermeneutic studies were dependent on the historical perspectives of research participants in order to understand the lived experiences as a whole. Thus, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach intends to “unveil the world as experienced by the subject through their life world stories” (Kafle, 2011, p. 186).

Population and Sample

African-American men who graduated from an accredited predominately white four year college or university were selected and chosen for this study based on their ability to effectively contribute relevant lived experiences of academic success. Creswell (2007) suggested the researcher search for participants and relevant sites in order to gain access to research participants in order to establish rapport and receive good data. The researcher interviewed twelve participants to achieve saturation from the collected interview transcripts to effectively identify factors of academic success of African-American men who graduated from an accredited predominately white four year college or university. Saturation was achieved when the researcher was no longer able to identify any new information, themes, or coding that differed from the collected interview material (Fusch, & Ness, 2015).

In order to identify factors for academic success, the researcher sampled African-American men using the purposeful sampling and snowball sampling method techniques.
Purposeful sampling was used to select participants that were able to provide informative responses about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). Therefore, the researcher selected African-American men who satisfied the following criteria of being academically successful. York et al. (2015) proposed that academic success had a very complex and broad definition. York et al. identified six components that could be used to indicate academic success: (a) “academic achievement”, (b) “satisfaction”, (c) “acquisition of skills and competencies”, (d) “persistence”, (e) “attainment of learning objectives”, and (f) “career success” (p. 9). The authors posited that obtaining a college degree was an indicator college students had that was an end goal, which was attributed to academic achievement and contributed to academic success. Therefore, based on these six components, African-American men in possession of an undergraduate degree from an accredited predominantly white four-year college or university were able to identify with these components of academic success. Each participant lived in North Louisiana. All participants had graduated from a four-year college or university within two to seven years of completing their degree. Incidentally, gaining access to academically successful participants relied on the ability of the researcher to effectively identify potential research candidates.

Noy (2008) defined snowball sampling as a sampling procedure the researcher uses in order to gain access to research participants from contact information provided to them by current research participants or key informants. The author stated this sampling technique is repetitive in which the researcher is constantly referred to other potential participants by informants or research participants. Gall et al. (2007) indicated snowball sampling involved well-situated individuals that had the ability to recommend potential
candidates for a study. Also, the authors argued that as more and more individuals are recommended to the researcher, some potential participants may be recommended by multiple informants. The authors argued this repetition of recommended participants would create "a highly credible sample" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 185).

Noy (2008) maintained snowball sampling was "the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines across social sciences" (p. 330). The author argued snowball sampling offered a unique type of knowledge to a particular study when it was used in conjunction with studies that were focused on social sciences. The author recommended that the researcher should be careful about using snowball sampling because although it can offer unique knowledge to the study, snowball sampling relinquished "a considerable amount of control over the sampling phase to the informants" (Noy, 2008, p. 332). Therefore, the researcher informed each committed participant of the required criteria to participate in the study and to use said criteria as guidelines for recommending potential candidates. By doing so, the researcher was able to limit the number of potential candidates to those that only met the research requirements.

Gall et al. (2007) stated key informants allow the researcher to collect data from people who are able to gain access to information about research candidates that the researcher would not generally have access. As such, the researcher solicited the aid of key informants who indicated their ability to contact potential African-American men who met the criteria for participating in the study and were graduates from an accredited predominately white four-year college or university. The researcher contacted the Assistant Dean of Student Life at a tier one university in Louisiana in order to obtain an
Excel spreadsheet of African-American men that graduated from Louisiana between the
years of 2009 to 2015. The initial list of potential participants consisted of 141 African-
American men who graduated from a tier one university in Louisiana within the defined
timeframe. The Excel spreadsheet provided the researcher with degree(s) earned,
graduation date(s), last known home telephone number and address, last known town
each potential participant were living in North Louisiana, and the last known email
address of all potential participants.

Of the 141 potential participants, 54 satisfied the criteria of graduating from an
accredited four-year college or university within two to seven years of receiving their
degree from a predominately white institution and currently living in North Louisiana.
The researcher initially contacted each of the 54 potential participants by phone and sent
emails petitioning their participation in the study. Out of the 54 phone calls and emails,
six of the tier one university graduates initially agreed to participate in the study. Of the
six that initially agreed to participate in the study, only three committed to scheduling a
face-to-face interview. The researcher tried to contact more of the potential candidates
from the list after a week had passed via phone calls and emails, but there were no replies
from any potential candidates on the Excel spreadsheet.

In order to gain access to more participants, the researcher contacted the Assistant
Dean of Student Life at the tier one university, and who was able to contact some of the
potential candidates from the list. After the Assistant Dean of Student Life of the tier one
university spoke with some of the potential candidates, the researcher was able to
schedule three additional face-to-face interviews with students who graduated from the
tier one university. Even though the researcher was able to schedule six face-to-face

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interviews with African-American men who graduated from the tier one university, the researcher was not able to acquire the intended ten to fifteen stated research participants from the list of graduates from the tier one university. As a result, the researcher was able to gain access to six more participants from pilot study participants and from participants who were referred by the pilot study participants. The pilot study participants and referred participants were able to provide contact information of African-American men who met the study requirements. Thus, the researcher interviewed a total of twelve African-American men for the study.

Instrumentation

The researcher used in-depth semi-structured interviews for data collection. Creswell (2007) stated in-depth interviews often utilize multiple follow-up interviews with participants. The researcher did not limit interviews to only face-to-face interactions between the researcher and respondent. Creswell (2007) suggested that if participants were able to provide alternative forms of data, those forms of data would help the interpretation process. Although Creswell recommended collecting artifacts such as photos, letters, or items participants assert as important components that impacted their academic success, the researcher did not obtain any of the mentioned items during the semi-structured interviews. The researcher focused only on obtaining detailed verbal descriptions of lived experiences that pertained to the academic success of the research participants. Each research participant provided extensive verbal descriptions of their lived experiences without providing additional artifacts that represented or improved the
quantity and quality of the interviews. As a result, the researcher did not perform follow-up interviews or collect artifacts after the initial interview.

Interviews allowed participants to (a) build trust and rapport between the researcher and participant (Gall et al., 2007), (b) recall historical information related to their academic success, and (c) guide the researcher through the questioning process (Creswell, 2003). The semi-structured interview technique provided the researcher with the ability to ask research participants a structured question while following-up with guiding questions in order to obtain clarification of each participants answers (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Gall et al., 2007). The interview process encouraged openness among the participants, which increased the validity of rich data collected from participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Gall et al. (2007) indicated that unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provided researchers with responses that had a greater depth and were somewhat consistent among research participants. The semi-structured interview process allowed the researcher to probe participants and provided the researcher with the flexibility to authenticate interpretations of responses (Barriball & While, 1994). Additionally, both validity and reliability of the collected data depended on the identical transference of meaning from participant responses and not from the use of duplicate words in the interview questions. As such, the level of comparability relied on equal meaning since the researcher did not use identical words during each interview. Additionally, the researcher identified and collected the respondents (a) age, (b) high school and year graduated, (c) college(s) and year graduated, and (d) degree(s) earned in order to enhance the accuracy of the study.
The researcher used the central research question during each semi-structured interview in order to facilitate an open conversation between the researcher and participant. As there was only one central question asked during each semi-structured interview, the researcher used guiding questions to identify explicit information about environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to academic success. These guiding questions were asked both to identify secondary and to identify post-secondary environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to academic success. In order to further increase the accuracy within the study, the researcher used an Olympus digital voice recorder to document each semi-structured interview for transcriptions.

**Data Collection Procedure**

**Pilot Study**

Before the main research phase was implemented, the researcher conducted a pilot study that consisted of two participants. The pilot study was intended to help the researcher refine the problem statement, research questions (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011), and consider potential locations for conducting interviews (Creswell, 2007; Doody & Noonan, 2013). Glesne (2011) indicated the purpose of the pilot study was to (a) examine data collection procedures, (b) assess participant understanding of research questions, (c) identify potential researcher to participant communication obstacles that hinder the exchange of information, and (d) determine the length of each interview session. Each pilot study participant was asked to read the Human Use Committee Approval (See Appendix A), which briefly described the (a) purpose of the study, (b)
applied procedures for data collection and analysis, (c) instruments used in the study, (d) potential risks or alternative treatments, (e) extra credit, and (f) benefits or compensation.

The researcher found that all participants understood the research question, information detailed in the Human Subjects Consent Form, and were able to provide relevant information about environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to their academic success. There were no identified communication issues between the researcher and participants.

The researcher sampled participants from the surrounding community for the pilot study. The researcher interviewed two people who graduated from an accredited predominately white four year college or university. Both pilot study participants were former acquaintances of the researcher, and the researcher was not in frequent contact with them prior to the pilot study. The first pilot study participant was a former coworker of the researcher and has been employed in another school district. The second pilot study participant was an undergraduate acquaintance. The pilot study allowed the researcher to uncover any assumptions or limitations that were not previously identified. Although the pilot study was intended to uncover any new assumptions or limitations discussed in Chapter One, the researcher did not discover any new assumptions or limitations during the pilot study. Each participant was able to provide relevant information that contributed to their academic success. Participants in the pilot study were informed that they were a part of a pilot study, the purpose of the pilot study, and how the data collected would benefit the main phase of the data collection process of the study.
Pilot study participants were asked to choose a convenient location and meeting time to conduct each interview. Once they established a location and time, the researcher reminded each pilot study participant two days prior to the interview of their commitment to conduct an interview. Each pilot study participant was contacted by phone based on the provided contact information. The first pilot study participant agreed to conduct his interview at his place of employment, after school hours. The interview took place in the classroom of the pilot study participant. The second pilot study participant agreed to conduct his interview at his own business. The interview with the second pilot study participant took place during the weekend, when there were no employees present.

Before both interviews started, pilot study participants were asked to fill out the human use committee approval (See Appendix A) from a tier one university, an information form (See Appendix B), and participation form of consent (See Appendix C). The information form inquired about the age of the pilot study participant, the name of their high school and year graduated, college(s) and the year they earned their degree(s), degree(s) earned, email address, phone number, and alternate contact information. The participant form of consent briefly discussed the purpose of the study, procedures for data collection and analysis, confidentiality agreement, and the researcher’s contact information. All forms were collected by the researcher prior to beginning the interview and asking the central research question. All information and consent forms were locked in a filing cabinet at the home of the researcher.

Also included in the information packet was the semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix D). The researcher allowed pilot study participants to read the guide before each interview began. During each interview, the researcher asked each pilot
study participant the central research question and asked probing questions throughout
the interview. Guiding questions were used to obtain more descriptive data from pilot
study participants about environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that
contributed to their academic success. The questions listed on the interview guide served
to inform each participant of the major areas being explored within the study. Although
those questions were not asked verbatim, the researcher used probing questions to
ascertain additional information about environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors
related to their academic success.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Doody and Noonan (2013) suggested the
researcher should ask research participants if they were willing to be recorded during
their interview session. Barriball and While (1994) stated recording interviews allowed
the researcher to identify nuances within the collected data and enhanced the validity of
the study. Therefore, the researcher asked each pilot study participant if they were
willing to be recorded during their interview. Both pilot study participants agreed to be
recorded during their interview session. The researcher informed each pilot study
participant that their recorded interviews would be transcribed into a Microsoft Word
document. An Olympus digital voice recorder was used to record each pilot study
interview. The researcher performed member checking by emailing the pilot study
participants a copy of their transcripts after each interview was transcribed in order to
“check for perceived accuracy and reactions” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 322) with the
recorded data so to increase the credibility of the study. Interview recordings were
replayed multiple times for careful study and to assist the researcher with tracking
behaviors that were not noticed during the initial interview (Gall et al., 2007).
The data collected from the pilot study were used to determine if there were any needed changes for conducting interviews with research participants in the main phase of the study. The researcher was not able to determine a need to change how the research question and how the guiding questions were asked during each pilot study interview. Each participant was able to provide detailed accounts of their academic success based on their environment, social environment, and socioeconomic environment. The researcher reviewed each transcribed interview and audio recordings in order to determine if the collected data provided sufficient evidence of academic success.

**Main Study Procedures**

**Phase One.** The researcher gained access to an Excel spreadsheet of 141 potential research participants by contacting the Assistant Dean of Student Life at a tier one university in Louisiana. Of those 141 potential candidates, only 54 of those potential research participants met the research requirements. The researcher called each of the 54 potential candidates but only six of the 54 potential candidates agreed to participate in the study. Unfortunately, only three of the six potential research candidates committed to scheduling a face-to-face semi-structured interview. The researcher was able to acquire more research participants by contacting the Assistant Dean of Student Life at a tier one university in Louisiana. The Assistant Dean contacted three additional potential candidates from the Excel spreadsheet. After being contacted, the three potential candidates the Assistant Dean contacted agreed to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview. As a result, the researcher was able to schedule six face-to-face semi-structured interviews, but did not have the intended ten to fifteen research participants described in the study. The researcher waited one week before contacting
more potential research participants from the Excel spreadsheet that did not answer the phone or respond to the message left by the researcher. Also, the researcher sent follow-up emails to those potential participants that did not initially respond, requesting their participation in the study. Unfortunately, there were no additional responses from potential research participants from the researcher delivered emails. The inability of the researcher to acquire the ten to fifteen research participants from a tier one university in Louisiana prompted the researcher to seek other means of acquiring the designated number of research participants.

To gain access to the required number of researcher participants for the study, the researcher used key informants to gain access to potential candidates for the study. The researcher asked the pilot study participants to identify potential research participants within their social network based on the research requirements defined in this study. The first pilot study participant was able to identify four additional African-American men who satisfied the research requirements. Of those four, one of the research participants was able to identify another African-American male who satisfied the researcher requirements. The first pilot study participant and one of his research recommendations both identified the same African-American male who satisfied the research requirements. As a result, the first pilot study participant provided the researcher with five additional research participants who agreed to participate in the study. The second pilot study participant provided the researcher with one additional research participant who agreed to participate in the study. Subsequently, the first and second pilot study participants provided phone numbers and email addresses for six additional research participants. As
a result, the researcher was able to schedule a total of twelve face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

Doody and Noonan (2013) suggested interviews with research participants should be conducted in locations and at times that were convenient, comfortable, safe, and were absent of interruptions. The researcher called each of the research participants to schedule an interview day and time. Also, each participant was offered an opportunity to choose a location they felt was comfortable to conduct their interview, and felt sharing information about their lived experiences was not a problem. The researcher prepared an interview schedule that began on March 8, 2016 and ended on March 27, 2016. The first interview was scheduled during the week of March 6, 2016 in Drew, Louisiana. Five interviews were scheduled during the week of March 13th. These interviews took place in East Lake City and Midway, Louisiana. Five more interviews were scheduled during the week of March 20th. Interviews scheduled during the week of the 20th were held in State Line City, East Lake City, and Midway, Louisiana. The final interview was scheduled during the week of March 27th in East Lake City, Louisiana. One day prior to conducting each interview, the researcher sent text messages informing the participant of their commitment.

Phase Two. The researcher met with interviewees at locations and times suggested by participants. Interviews were conducted at the homes, places of employment, at a tier one university in Louisiana, and at local coffee shops. The researcher arrived at each interview site at least thirty minutes early to prepare documents and test the recording device. Once the research participant arrived, the researcher greeted each participant and ensured that the meeting place was suitable. Before the
interview began, each participant was asked to fill out the (a) Human Subjects Consent Form, (b) information form, and (c) participation consent form. Research participant were asked to read over the semi-structured interview guide and present any questions or concerns about the research question or guiding questions. Also, participants were asked if they were willing to be recorded during the interview and all agreed to be recorded with the researcher’s Olympus digital recorder. Interviewees were informed that their recorded interviews would be transcribed into a Microsoft Word document for analysis. Each face-to-face interview began with the researcher introducing himself, the purpose of the study, interview procedures, how long the session will potentially last, explained the semi-structured interview process, and informed participants that there are no correct or incorrect answers (Creswell, 2007; Doody & Noonan, 2013). Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about the study before engaging in the interview process.

Once the researcher and respondent were acquainted with the procedures, the researcher began each interview by asking the respondent the central research question. Interviewees began with answering the central research question with what they believed was the most important factors that contributed to their academic success. Once they were satisfied with their initial response to the central question, the researcher asked questions from the semi-structured interview guide in order to ascertain detailed descriptions of their lived experiences during their time spent in secondary and post-secondary environments. Although the researcher had intentions of asking specific questions related to factors within each participants environment, social environment, and socioeconomic environment, some of the participants answered these questions after they answered the central question. Therefore, the researcher continued the open dialogue
with each participant by asking conversational questions to guide the interview in a direction that would garner detailed evidence about their academic success. After the interview session ended, the researcher allowed the respondent to ask follow-up questions about the study. Each participant was informed of a possible follow-up interview for clarification of responses. All participants agreed to a potential follow-up interview.

Phase Three. After each interview, audio recordings were uploaded to the online transcription website Rev. According the privacy and security section on the website, the company used a 128-bit encryption to receive and deliver transcriptions (Rev, Certified Translation) back to the researcher. Finished transcriptions were delivered to the researcher within one to two days. Once the researcher obtained the transcription from Rev, the researcher listened to the audio recording and corrected any apparent mistakes in the transcription. After checking each document for mistakes, clarity, and word usage, participants were emailed electronic versions of their interview. Participants were asked to verify the transcription responses for accuracy. This allowed participants to elaborate or clarify prior responses from the initial interview. Providing participants an opportunity to clarify misinterpreted information from interview sessions enhanced the credibility of the research. None of the research participants suggested corrections needed to be made to the interview transcripts that were corrected by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Use of Collected Data

The researcher uploaded all audio recordings to his personal computer before being transcribed. The researcher saved all audio recordings into a folder that was
labeled audio transcriptions. The audio recordings were labeled with the pseudonyms of each research participant. Once each interview recording was uploaded to the computer, it was deleted from the recording device. Also, once each recording was reviewed and transcribed, all audio recordings were transferred to a flash drive. The flash drive was stored in a filing cabinet at the home of the researcher.

Interview data were transcribed by the online transcription company Rev and analyzed with Atlas.ti. The researcher used the online company to accurately transcribe all interviews. As it was stated, the online transcription company used a 128-bit encryption to receive uploaded audio recordings from the researcher and deliver the completed transcriptions back to the researcher (Rev, Certified Translation). All transcribed data were saved onto the personal computer of the researcher. The transcribed data were saved into a folder labeled Microsoft Word transcriptions. Once each Microsoft Word document was reviewed, they were removed from the computer and transferred to the same flash drive that contained the audio recordings.

Although participants were provided the option of selecting a personal pseudonym for confidentiality and anonymity (Glesne, 2011), only three of the twelve participants chose to select a pseudonym. The remaining research participants were given a pseudonym chosen by the researcher. All high schools and colleges the participants attended were given researcher created pseudonyms. Any other identifiers that could potentially affect the confidentiality of the research participants were given researcher created pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were listed in the audit trail research journal. Research participants were informed of the deliberate changes in names in order to protect their confidentiality. These enhanced levels of confidentiality were perceived
as motivational factors for each research participant to willingly respond and speak freely during their interview.

Once these data were transcribed by Rev and downloaded into Microsoft Word, the researcher reviewed each interview for incongruences between the supplied transcriptions from Rev and the Microsoft Word document provided by the transcription company. All transcriptions were carefully reviewed while listening to the audio recordings. The researcher used the audio editing and recording software Audacity to replay interview recordings. This program allowed the researcher to identify any overlooked words or phrases the online transcription company was not able to identify. After carefully reviewing the Microsoft Word transcriptions, the researcher uploaded the transcriptions to Atlas.ti for coding and the discovery of descriptive and pattern codes for identifying common themes throughout the interviews.

Although the researcher interviewed twelve potential participants for the study, the researcher only used ten of the twelve interview transcripts during the data analysis and coding process. Upon the review of the interview transcript of the first scheduled interviewee, the researcher was unable to effectively identify information that related to the research question and guiding questions. The interviewee briefly discussed his lived experiences in high school and was unable to identify factors he believed affected his academic success while high school. While trying to ascertain factors that contributed to his academic success in college, the participant only referred to his current negative experiences with faculty members in his graduate degree program and the grievances he endured with his ex-wife after moving to Louisiana. Although the researcher repeatedly tried to refocus the interview session back to the research question and guiding questions,
the participant was unable to stay focused on answering the questions that described his experiences in high school and college.

The second to last interview participant was also unable to provide relevant and substantial evidence to his academic success in high school and college. The participant was unable to identify factors that were related to his academic success in high school and did not have a post-secondary experience at a predominately white institution that allowed him to recall experiences that contributed to his academic success. Although the participant attended a post-secondary institution, the institution was an online university focused on educating members of the armed services. The participant indicated he joined the military after high school and earned his college degrees online while being an active member of the military.

Coding Procedures

Creswell (2007) as well as, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicated the data analysis process in qualitative research was a systematic process in which the researcher prepared and organized interview transcripts in order to reduce the collected information into themes. Therefore, the researcher used the descriptive coding technique during the initial coding phase of the study. Saldaña (2009) described descriptive coding as the ability of the researcher to summarize “in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 70). The researcher was able to use descriptive coding by grouping and identifying key words or phrases within the interview data. These key words or phrases were used to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to the academic success of the research participants. Along with identifying the environmental, social, and socioeconomic
factors, the researcher identified ideological views and historical references that
influenced academic success in order to support the aforementioned factors. As a result,
the coding procedures allowed the researcher to identify common and uncommon views
between participants.

As it was discussed in Chapter One, the researcher used the EMHD as a
theoretical framework to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that
contributed to the academic success of African-American. In order to identify key
environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to the academic
success of research participants, the researcher identified and coded the collected
interview data based on each system within the EMHD. The researcher used Atlas.ti to
code all interview data after each research participant was emailed and notified of the
corrections made by the researcher. The researcher identified words, passages, or phrases
that were perceived as factors within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem,
macrosystem, and chronosystem of each research participant that contributed to their
academic success.

Once the descriptive coding phase was completed, the researcher used pattern
coding to identify emerging themes from the interview data that illustrated and described
academic success among the African-American men interviewed for this study. Saldaña
(2009) stated pattern coding can be used to identify emerging themes, configurations, or
explanations of collected data. Pattern coding allowed the researcher to condense the
descriptive codes from the initial coding phase into themes that illustrated an overall
synthesis of shared lived experiences among each research participant. Therefore, the
researcher analyzed the words and phrases from the descriptive codes in Atlas.ti that were
related to each system within the EMHD and used them to identify patterns which were
developed into the following themes (listed in **bold**) and sub-themes:

- **Family support** – Parental encouragement and motivation; maternal support and academic influence.
- **Community members and educator support** – Commitment to kids in community; community drug dealer support; educator communication.
- **Intrinsic motivation** – Experiences in life.
- **High school and college teacher support** – Positive academic expectations.
- **College attendance expectations** – Social and socioeconomic advancement.
- **Peer influence and motivation** – High school and college organization influence.
- **Financial assistance** – academic resources; socioeconomic hardship motivation; post-secondary tuition assistance opportunities.

As a result, the pattern codes allowed the researcher to group descriptive codes into
similar categories from the interview data that described the academic success of each
research participant. The pattern coding technique assisted with identifying explanations
and common themes African-American men identified as contributing factors for their
academic success.

The researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews and the interpretations of
responses from each participant in order to identify specific factors that contributed to the
academic success of African-American men. These factors revealed environmental,
social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to the academic success of each
participant. These factors were further coded based on which system in the EMHD
contributed to the academic success of the African-American men interviewed for this
study.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher used member-checking in order to improve the credibility of the study. Credibility refers to the ability of the researcher to conduct research in a manner
that is believable by readers (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013) in which the researcher is able to present factual views and interpretations from the responses of participants (Cope, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) and Creswell (2007) stated member-checking procedures provide research participants an opportunity to review summarized data the researcher has analyzed and has created summative interpretations of collected data. Therefore, the researcher transcribed each interview and completed an analysis of the data, participants were allowed to review summative findings of their interview. Participants were allowed to provide feedback for accurate interpretations by the researcher. Participants were emailed their responses and asked to provide feedback. All research participants were satisfied with the changes made by the researcher.

The researcher performed an audit trail in order to increase the confirmability and dependability of the study. The audit trail represents a collection of notes the researcher developed during the study that identified the decisions, problems, activities, development of instruments, and assumptions made by the researcher (Cope, 2014; Gall et al., 2007). Cope (2014) stated dependability referred to the studies reliability to be replicated under similar conditions. Cope defined confirmability as the unbiased and accurate interpretations of the responses the participants contributed to the study. Therefore, the researcher (a) documented and described accurate interpretations of responses, (b) provided an outline of procedures taken during the study, and (c) identified congruent and inaccurate interpretations that may contribute to preferred interpretations of the researcher by maintaining a research journal. Accurate documentation of procedures was taken to ensure dependability and confirmability, which led to enhanced transferability of the research findings.
Transferability referred to the ability of the researcher to present findings in a manner that can be confirmed by others that share similar experiences (Cope, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) stated transferability was accomplished when the researcher effectively described the lived experiences of participants through thick descriptions. Thick descriptions allowed the reader to enter the context of the study to be able to experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 2011). Therefore, the researcher provided (a) study methods, (b) detailed descriptions of participants and locations, (c) transcribed interviews, and (d) coding categories to enhance the transferability of the research. Creswell (2007) suggested the ability for other researchers to transfer the results of the current study to other settings depended on the ability of the researcher to provide an accurate thick description of the research findings.

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the research design that the researcher will implement during the study. The researcher identified the hermeneutic phenomenological research design he used to identify factors of academic success among African-American men. Semi-structured interviews were determined to be an appropriate method for ascertaining the answer to the research question. Chapter Three identified the number of participants that were chosen for the pilot study and for the main study. Also, the current chapter described the thematic data analysis technique which the researcher used to develop coding categories. Furthermore, Chapter Three identified procedures the researcher utilized in order to maintain trustworthiness.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that were perceived to contribute to the academic success of African-American men who graduated from secondary and post-secondary institutions. The researcher interviewed African-American men to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that were perceived to impact their academic success. A qualitative research design was utilized for this study. More specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenological examination of participants’ lived experiences.

In this chapter, the results from each interview are presented. Information in this chapter begins with background information about each participant. Following the demographic information, the researcher provides each participant’s response to the central research question, secondary and post-secondary factors for academic success, reasons for attending college, social factors for academic success, and socioeconomic factors for academic success. Each participant response is used to describe their lived experiences and factors they perceived to contribute to their academic success. Within and after all responses are presented, the researcher identified common themes discovered within the collected interview responses and provided a table that illustrates an overall synthesis of factors that each participant identified as factors that contributed
to their academic success. The researcher created themes and sub-themes to describe the common factors that contributed to the academic success of African-American men in this study.

**Participant Responses**

**Participant 1: John Harris**

John Harris was a thirty-five year old administrator at East Side High School. Mr. Harris and the researcher met after school, in his office, on March 21, 2016 to conduct a face-to-face semi-structured interview. John is a 1998 graduate of East Side High School. Mr. Harris has earned three college degrees from Central City University. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Science with a concentration in biology in 2003. In 2007, Mr. Harris received a Master of Arts in Teaching content, and in 2012, he received his Master of Education in Educational Leadership. The interview with Mr. Harris lasted approximately an hour and thirty minutes.

**Participant 2: Trey Clark**

Trey Clark was a thirty-nine year old African-American man who graduated from East Side High School in 1995. Trey was a student at South Lake Elementary School and now holds the position as principal at his former elementary school. Trey has earned four college degrees since graduating from East Side High School. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from South East City University in 1999 and a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in 2007. After he began teaching, he returned to graduate school at Central City University and earned a Master’s degree in Educational Leadership in 2009. Five years later, Trey earned his Doctorate in Educational Leadership in 2014.
from Central City University. Trey agreed to have his interview in his office at South Lake Elementary School. The interview with Trey lasted approximately one hour and forty minutes.

**Participant 3: Lafayette**

Mr. Lafayette was a thirty-six year old African-American male who graduated from Dwali High School in 1997. He currently resides in North Louisiana and is an administrator at South Lake High School. Lafayette received his Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education with a concentration in social studies at South Central University in 2003. In 2014, Lafayette graduated from Central City University with a Master’s degree in Education Leadership. The interview with Lafayette was held at a local Starbucks in East Lake City. The interview with Lafayette lasted approximately fifty minutes.

**Participant 4: Scott**

Scott was a twenty-seven year old African-American male who graduated from Scotlandville High School in 2006. Scott earned both a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Master of Arts in Teaching at Central City University. Scott received his Bachelor’s degree in 2012 and received his Master’s degree in 2014. Scott agreed to be interviewed at the local Starbucks in East Lake City. His interview lasted approximately one hour and forty minutes.

**Participant 5: Jet**

Jet was a twenty-four year old African-American male who graduated from Bakersville High School in 2010. After graduating from high school, Jet enrolled into Midway University and received a Bachelor’s degree in Computer Information Systems
in 2014. Jet agreed to be interviewed at the local Starbucks in Midway. His interview was approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

**Participant 6: Coach J.**

Coach J. was a thirty-four year old African-American male who graduated from East Side High School in 1999. He currently lives in East Lake City. Coach J. obtained his undergraduate degree in Kinesiology in 2009 from Central City University. He graduated from Midway University in 2014 with a Master of Arts in Teaching to teach secondary education. The interview with Coach J. lasted approximately thirty-five minutes. Coach J. agreed to do his interview at the local Starbucks in East Lake City.

**Participant 7: DJ**

DJ was a thirty-nine year old African-American male who graduated from West Lake High School in 1994. DJ earned both his Bachelor’s and Master’s at Central City University. DJ earned his Bachelor of Business and Administration in 1999 and earned his Master of Arts in Teaching in 2013. DJ agreed to be interviewed at the local Starbucks in East Lake City. His interview lasted approximately fifty minutes.

**Participant 8: Esau Jenkins**

Esau was a twenty-six year old African-American male who graduated from North Central City High School in 2009. Esau earned two degrees from Midway University. He received a Bachelor’s and a Master’s degree in English. He graduated with his Bachelor’s degree in 2013 and graduated with his Master’s degree in 2015. Esau agreed to be interviewed at the Starbucks in Midway. His interview was approximately forty-five minutes.
**Participant 9: Big Cali**

Big Cali was a forty-seven year old African-American male who graduated from high school in 1985. Big Cali attended Star University after graduating from high school but did not earn a degree from the university. He transferred to California Community College and graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in General Studies with a concentration in Business Administration and Psychology. After a twenty-three year absence from any post-secondary institution, Big Cali enrolled into State Line College and earned two degrees; a Master’s in Counseling and Guidance with a concentration in Human Services in 2012 and a Master’s degree in Industrial Organizational Psychology in 2014. Big Cali agreed to be interviewed at his office in State Line City. The interview lasted approximately two hours.

**Participant 10: E. Trane**

E. Trane was a twenty-six year old African-American male who graduated from Midway High School in 2007. E. Trane earned two degrees from Midway University. He received his Associates in Nursing in 2012 and received his Bachelor of Science in Biology in 2014. In 2016, E. Trane earned a Master of Information Technology with a concentration in cybersecurity from the Florida Institute of Technology. The interview with E. Trane was held at a local Starbucks and lasted approximately one hour.

**Central Research Question:** What factors do you attribute to your academic success in graduating from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

**John Harris.** Mr. Harris indicated he was “intrinsically” motivated to be academically successful. Even though Mr. Harris was raised in a single parent home, he
had friends who lived with both their parents, and he used their family structure to influence his decision to aspire to have a better life for himself. He acknowledged his mother was always a major factor in obtaining his education. Mr. Harris witnessed events in his community that motivated him to do better in school and to be mindful of his academic progress.

When he attended West Lake Elementary, he recalled getting in some trouble. “I was on the verge of getting kicked out of school but my gifted teacher, she vouched for me.” His gifted teacher introduced him to Fred Sanders, someone who became a mentor and someone he regarded as financially successful. Mr. Sanders introduced him to Dr. Walters, and Mr. Harris became really good friends with Dr. Walters’ younger brother Brandon. Mr. Harris suggested being familiar with Brandon’s family had a positive impact on his outlook on success. Mr. Harris stated:

Having all of those people around proved to be good examples, not just directly but also indirectly. Even if I was just observing their behaviors and how they interacted with each other, that atmosphere kind of influenced me to want to get to a stable point in my life.

Even though Mr. Harris was surrounded and introduced to people who positively impacted his academic decisions, there were negative elements in his life and in his community that he attributed to his academic success. Mr. Harris recalled he and his friend were told by a drug dealer in his neighborhood to not do what he was doing. “The dealer would actually motivate us.” He recalled the drug dealers and others from his neighborhood compensating him for his athleticism and for him to stay away from them while they sold drugs. After witnessing older people from his neighborhood purchasing drugs from neighborhood kids, he decided to never allow that to happen to him. Having people in his community who supported him and “looked out” for him had a positive
impact on his success. Although there were people doing bad things in his neighborhood, "they always instilled positivity" throughout his life. "Just growing up in my neighborhood, I saw some things that motivated me to go the opposite direction than what I was actually seeing." Individuals within his neighborhood recognized the opportunities that were being offered to him and encouraged him to take advantage of those opportunities.

Mr. Harris acknowledged when his mother returned to college to pursue her degree, her actions motivated his academic decisions. When his mother decided to go back to school, her decision was a major factor for him to stay in school. Mr. Harris said:

When I saw her doing certain things, it was kind of like I unconsciously mimicked it. For instance, having certain values such as making sure I went to church or making sure education was important. Even though I was an athlete and felt like football was going to take me where or was going to pay for school, which it eventually did, she wasn't trying to see that. She would say, "You can get hurt. Plus, you too small," and all those types of things which kept me grounded and she made sure I had multiple options.

In the end, Mr. Harris maintained his mother “did a good job of balancing out how she pushed and motivated” him to be academically successful in high school. She did not over influence him in his academics, but she took her time motivating him, which he believed helped him out the most in school.

Trey Clark. Trey indicated his parents were major motivating factors who contributed to his academic success in high school and college. Both his mother and father had “advanced degrees.” “Education was very important in my family from day one.” Trey was raised in a family that supported a strong admiration towards education. Trey asserted:

Everything was school related in my house. We played school. We always talked about school, school, and more school. Education was your means of taking your
life to the next level. No matter what was going on at home, we always found a way to talk about education.

Frequent discussions about education increased his desire to attend college. Many of his aunts and cousins were college graduates. “We understood that there was no doubt that you will graduate from college.” Obtaining a bachelor’s degree was considered to be the “minimum level of success” within his family.

During his first semester in college, he did not perform well academically. His father told him he had one semester to improve his grades or return home and attend a local university. His father emphasized his only responsibility was to obtain an education. “So faced with the possibility of having to come back here was my motivation to make sure I did everything I had to do in order to stay.” Nonetheless, both of his parents strongly supported his academic achievement, but his father understood the importance of exposing him to various life experiences that could enhance his academic achievement. His father always found an opportunity to engage him and his brother in educational experiences that expanded their academic “horizons.” Trey recalled going on vacations that exposed him to different cultural experiences outside of his immediate community. His father made sure he and his brother participated in summer enrichment programs. Trey stated:

We'd go to the libraries and there'd be summer reading programs for us to go to. There was always something we had to do. My parents made sure that we were always focused on our education.

As a result, Trey indicated his father had a greater impact on his educational decisions than his mother. Trey said:

My dad was the enforcer. When my mom would try to love you into doing things, my dad was like, you will do it. Being a young man, my dad was like a superhero to me. Everything he did, I wanted to do.
Although his father contributed more to his academic success than his mother, Trey emphasized both of his parents had a positive impact on his school performance and college readiness.

While in high school, his father used his background in education to make the most appropriate academic decisions for Trey and enrolled him into college preparatory courses. All throughout high school, his parents were involved in his academic life, and he "had books and encyclopedias everywhere" to enhance his academic performance. In addition to these resources, Trey lived in a community of well-educated people who impacted his academic decisions.

There were various people and teachers who lived in his community who influenced his education. "They were the ones who made sure kids would come to summer enrichment programs." The teachers and people in his community always felt he could always learn more, and they encouraged him and other students to perform better academically. Trey said:

The standard was already set, it wasn't the kind of environment where you grew up in the lower class neighborhood, where education was pretty much something that you heard about, and you didn't see it. Well, in this community you saw it every day. Everybody that lived in this community had a degree.

Kids from his community followed similar academic paths of those elderly community members.

Although Trey was a member of a community that promoted and encouraged academic success, there were negative elements within his community that had a positive effect on his academic performance. Trey stated:

A lot of times, back then, older guys would see you and they knew that you weren't supposed to be a part of that kind of stuff. They may come and say, Look,
little man, I don't want you around here. You all go play over there. Don't come play over here where we are. They'd be out there smoking weed, throwing horse shoes, and drinking.

Trey was aware of these things that were happening in and around his community but he "made a choice" to stay away from them. In the end, Trey had parents who were knowledgeable about the academic process, and he associated himself with people who aspired to attend college.

Lafayette. Lafayette indicated his parents were the primary factor he attributed to his academic success. "They set me out at an early age with understanding the importance of having an education." They encouraged him to always do his best. "They pushed me to be better even though our socioeconomic status wasn't the best, but they still always found a way to make sure that I knew that school was important." When he was in high school, his parents restricted his extracurricular activities until he finished his school assignments. While playing for his high school basketball team, his parents told him he would not be able to play basketball unless his grades were satisfactory. "That was motivation enough for me to get my grades right in order for me to keep playing basketball." Lafayette recalled, his parents being active in his academic life and kept him focused on his school work. As he became older, his academic motivation became "more of an intrinsic desire" to do his best.

His intrinsic motivation followed him into college. "This was especially true in college, which is when I really started to understand my inner sense of motivation."

Lafayette stated:

I can remember one specific example when I was a junior taking upper-level classes in secondary social studies, and I was the only black person in the class. To me, it was more of an intrinsic desire to want to succeed and be the best.
Nevertheless, his intrinsic motivation was tested when he enrolled into an upper-level class. Lafayette remembered when he arrived to the class, the students and teacher stopped and stared at him as if he was in the wrong place. Lafayette felt the teacher and students did not anticipate an African-American enrolling into the course. Encountering that environment increased Lafayette’s desire to succeed in college. “All of that motivated me to want to do better.” In the end, Lafayette indicated his “parents, teachers/professors, fraternity, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors” all contributed to his academic success.

Scott. “Mainly my momma because that’s where the pride, the sincerity, actually wanting to do it, and just to make her happy originated.” There were quite a few things that contributed to his academic success, but growing up in his neighborhood and making his mother happy was his primary goal. Scott recalled living in the “hood,” which did not grant all students in the community the ability to overcome their environmental obstacles. He was cognizant at a very early age he had the potential to do well in school. Scott stated:

I understood that I had a responsibility at an early age to be different, and somewhere in between those two things and having a mom who was going to stay on you, you were going to do what you got to do.

Scott suffered many consequences if he did not do well in school. As a result, he remained focused on achieving academic success even if there was a small chance of succeeding. Even though his mother was his primary academic supporter, his older brother had a very different impact on his academic success.

While growing up, he and his brother were never close. “We didn't even like each other. The first twelve years of my life, my brother and I probably, out of 365 days, we
probably fought 360 of those days.” However, Scott learned a lot from his brother. When his brother sold drugs and associated with people who also sold drugs, Scott stated, “I learned from his mistakes.” Although he was aware of the consequences of what would happen if he became involved in the same activities as his brother, he wanted to sell drugs. Fortunately, his brother had enough influence with other drug dealers, which allowed his brother to keep Scott from becoming involved in the same activities. As a result, his brother compensated him with things he needed or wanted in order to keep him from selling drugs and remaining focused on his academic opportunities. In addition to learning from his brother’s mistakes, Scott learned how to adapt and be a man from the men in his community.

Because he did not have a father at home, Scott “learned from the men that were around” him in his neighborhood. Without being able to differentiate between good and bad characteristics and not having a male figure to guide him, Scott acquired both positive and negative “characteristics” from the men around him. He indicated he was trying to figure out how to become a man. The men from his neighborhood sheltered him from becoming involved in activities that would keep him away from doing well in school. Scott said:

The men who were around me, they kind of protected me. Because if you were from the hood, people knew you were smart, and you had potential, they would shelter you away from it. The people who were good athletes in the hood, they wouldn’t let them smoke. They would say, Man, you don't need to do that. So, if they end up actually doing it, it's because they really wanted to.

The men in his community corrected his mistakes and disciplined him when he needed support. “Correction or discipline come from people who actually care about you.” Even when Scott was in the presence of events that may have led him away from his school
work, the men in his community directed him away from becoming involved. His academic success was encouraged and strengthened by the men in his community who felt accountable for ensuring the young African-American men from his community had an opportunity to become academically and athletically successful. Beyond these men who helped Scott understand how important it was that he obtained his education, he indicated his mother often supported him in his academic life.

When he was in high school, his mother was involved in everything he did at school. He never understood how she was able to attend, accomplish, and support him in all of his school activities and functions. She attended school Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings and his band performances. She was also a member of the booster club. Because his mother was actively engaged in his school life, his teachers knew how important his education was to his mother. His mother’s commitment to his school life, the support from the men in his community, and the support from his older brother, Scott maintained his academic success in high school and in college.

Jet. Constantly being around and “growing up” with his mother and grandmother was a major factor to his academic success. His mother and grandmother provided a strong foundation for Jet to be academically minded when he entered high school. They were adamant about him completing his school work before becoming involved in any activities that were not school related. Completing his school work first was essential to his success in high school. “That came in handy in high school because basically since like late middle school I developed a more or less workaholic attitude towards things.” Having a strong work ethic and being self-motivated was important to his success in high school and in college.
When Jet was in middle school, his mother remarried. Jet had to adjust to his new family environment. He admitted it took some time adjusting to the change in his new family structure. Having a male figure provided Jet with an opportunity to learn how to adjust to new changes in his life. “You go so long with just your mom and your grandma, you kind of get used to it.” Having a step-father had a subliminal effect on his ability to accept change in his life. Jet felt his step-father taught him how to adapt to changes in his life. For example, having a step-father helped him adjust to numerous changes in his living conditions at college. Throughout his college career, Jet indicated having many different roommates and his experience with having a step-father allowed him to become more adaptable to his college surroundings. As such, Jet used the changes in his life and the strong support from his mother and grandmother to maintain academic success.

Coach J. “First of all, I pretty much have to say my grandparents. They were a big influence in my life.” Although many of his grandparent’s grandkids did not attend college, some of his aunts and uncles were college graduates. Knowing that many of the grandkids in his family were not college graduates motivated him to pursue a college degree. Coach J. asserted he “grew up in an educated family,” and the majority of his “aunts and uncles were educated or worked in education.” He became the first of his grandparent’s grandkids to graduate from college. He is “still the first and only person to graduate” from college, which he maintained “was the main factor” that led him to attend college. “My family laid a strong foundation for graduating from high school, being academically minded, and being successful in high school.” Being a member of a family who encouraged academic success motivated him through high school and.
While he was in high school, he lived with his grandparents. When he was a senior in high school, his grandfather passed away. Three years later his grandmother passed away when he was a sophomore in college. The death of his grandparents caused him to drop out of college. He eventually returned to Central City University because he understood in order to become a coach like many of his uncles, he had to graduate from college. He emphasized the coaches in his family motivated him to return to college and earn a degree.

Coach J. stated the neighborhood he was raised in did not have much violence, but there were members of the community who were involved in drug activity. Although he did not use drugs, he had friends and family members who did. Staying away from drugs was not easy for him. Knowing that some of his friends and family members were using drugs motivated him to refrain from doing the same. He asserted:

Recognizing that was also a motivating factor of knowing to stay away from those types of activities. Also, being aware of which route my friends took with drugs, seeing how they looked, and recognizing the kind of outcome drugs had on them were motivating factors.

In the end, Coach J. successfully navigated his environment to achieve his academic goal of becoming the first African-American male in his immediate family to graduate from college.

DJ. “I think some of the factors that I can put my finger on would be relationships with some of my teachers and coaches.” His teachers knew he could be academically successful even if he did not share the same belief. “They pushed me to reach out and go to college.” He maintained strong relationships and lines of communication with his high school teachers throughout college, which he asserted allowed him to be more successful in college. DJ felt his teachers mentored him to a
point where he could be self-motivated and academically successful. Along with his coaches and teachers who positively impacted his academic decisions, DJ asserted his mother also contributed to his academic success.

When DJ was growing up, he stated, “I came from a single parent home.” DJ was inspired by the importance his mother placed on obtaining an education. “Believe it or not, she stopped going to college in ’89 and actually went back seventeen years later.” Two years after his mother graduated with an undergraduate degree, she returned to school and graduated with a master’s degree. “Seeing her go back to school and seeing her in school was influential as well.” DJ recalled his mother being a part of his academic life, but when he entered the tenth and eleventh grade, his mother limited her involvement in some of his school activities.

His mother always found time to attend his football games. “Once I got in maybe about the tenth or eleventh grade, my mom would come to football games and support me in that aspect.” She was aware of what subjects he was struggling with and provided him with the extra academic support he needed to improve his understanding and comprehension. As he progressed in high school, she stopped providing him with the extra support because she did not want him to become overly dependent on her involvement in his academic life. DJ remained focused on his academics with the support from his teachers, coaches, and his mother. His academic success was also influenced by teachers who lived within his community.

DJ lived in a community in which his high school teachers were also members of his community. “We had that kind of community where four or five of your teachers lived somewhere in the neighborhood.” When it came to being disciplined, those
teachers called his mother and reported his behavior before he arrived home. "If you acted a fool or decided you weren't going to do anything today in school, before you even got home your parent knew about it." DJ emphasized the difficulty of being able to do what he wanted because of the close connection his teachers had with the community, and "the community and the teachers were almost the same." DJ attributed the presence of educators living in his community to making a big difference with how he was raised. In the end, the relationships he built with his teachers, coaches, and mother influenced him to remain vigilant in his academic achievement.

**Esau Jenkins.** "I think for me, the biggest factor was my upbringing." Growing up in a single parent home, his mother was his "biggest motivator to finish high school and college." His mother taught him to treat his college environment just like his high school environment if wanted to be successful. Mr. Jenkins said having "that foundation is really the thing that did it for me." His mother motivated him to do well in school even though she did not have an opportunity to finish her college degree. "Education was always important to her." If he wanted to be successful, financially stable, and happy, his mother emphasized he needed to obtain an education. He was raised in a single parent home, his mother supplied all his needs. "I never felt like I lacked because I didn't have a father in my life." Nevertheless, Mr. Jenkins maintained a strong drive to become academically successful.

**Big Cali.** Big Cali attributed his academic success to the numerous "life experiences" he endured. "It got me to a point where it made that really important and necessary, because I went back to school later in life to finish my bachelor's degree, and then I continued to get my master's." Even through the difficult experiences Big Cali
endured, going back to school was not difficult for him. “All the things that I lived and experienced, it was not hard to study, it was not hard to focus, it was not hard.” Even though Big Cali emphasized the ease of college later in his life, it was not without managing some very difficult circumstances in his life.

When Big Cali was growing up in the “hood,” his “plan was to always go to college.” “We were raised that way. You didn’t need to be told that. You were raised with that in your mind.” The environment he lived in was full of people who exhibited academic success, but he had family members who were involved in illegal activities. “My mother was a registered nurse, my aunties were nurses, but at the same time I had uncles who were gangsters.” He had family members who “went to college, finished college, and later got PhDs.” However, he had family members who were in prison for life. With a wide variety of influences in his family, Big Cali was presented with the challenge of being academically successful or becoming involved in similar illegal activities.

Even though Big Cali felt he was supposed to go to college, he said his family’s high expectations were the reason why he “didn’t do so well when” he entered college “right out of high school.” He felt college was something he had to do only to gain an opportunity to play professional football. Big Cali did not initially view college as an opportunity to advance himself academically. “Really, in the back of my mind, it didn’t matter if I graduated.” Although his mother and father were separated, they supported his participation in sports and made sure he knew the importance of obtaining an education if he wanted to play professional football. Even if Big Cali did not share the same
expectations his family members held for his education, earning good grades was never a problem for Big Cali when he was in high school.

When he first enrolled into college, he was on his own for the first time in his life and was not “self-disciplined” enough to be successful in college. Being in a college environment provided Big Cali with more freedom than he had ever experienced. Unfortunately, he did not take his first attempt at attending college seriously and as a result, his poor academic performance forced him to attend summer school to remain eligible to play football. Even though Big Cali was raised in a positive academic environment, he felt there were things he wanted to experience while going to college. He wanted to live life in the moment, which took the place of his academic responsibilities. “I felt like there were things I could do now. I’ve got to make money now. I had a real problem with immediate gratification, and it was really hard to see that.” When his girlfriend became pregnant, he moved to California to attend California Community College. Even though he was awarded a football scholarship, he started selling drugs, which caused his life to take a dramatic turn for the worse.

Before enrolling into California Community College, Big Cali had some trouble with the law. “I got into some trouble because I went back to California and got involved with my people, and I was hustling and doing all type’ of stuff.” Big Cali maintained the same mentality of only doing enough to get by and to stay eligible to play football. His lack of effort in college was abruptly halted when he was sentenced to twelve years in a federal penitentiary. While in prison, Big Cali used his time to gain a new found admiration about the benefits of obtaining an education. “I have always liked to learn. I have always liked knowing something.” Although some of the things he learned were
detrimental to his academic career and his freedom, he still wanted to learn. Big Cali understood in the end and said, “As long as you desire to know then you can learn.”

**E. Trane.** “I think factors that have attributed to my academic success, first of all, were probably being around my parents.” Living with his mother and father allowed him to be a part of a family rooted in high academic expectations and individuals who understood the benefits of academic achievement. E. Trane said:

School was always very important in my household. A’s were fantastic. That's what was expected. B’s were accepted. Then C’s were like, "All right. What's wrong?" Then anything below a C, that was like punishment, which resulted in having things taken away.

E. Trane remembered having conversations with his father late at night, where they talked about science, astronomy, technology, and various other topics. E. Trane stated his father was a brilliant man who educated him about African-American culture. “I really had an appreciation for a lot of things because of my father.” He stated:

My father would tell us about Black history month and African-American culture long before I learned it in school. He was telling us all about those things already. He would say, “Look, you need to learn this to know the reason you are the way you are, how you arrived to where you are, and who came before us.”

E. Trane indicated having his father as a positive role model who helped him navigate through life and who was very influential to his academic success. His parents came to trust his academic decisions and knew he would be successful. In the end, E. Trane emphasized the positive impact his parents had on his academic success and “having them around was as a major influence.”
Summary of Central Research Question

The researcher identified several factors each participant felt contributed to their academic success when they graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution. All participants indicated being raised by parents, grandparents, and family members who exposed them to the benefits of obtaining an education and who held high academic expectations as major factors to their academic success. Their parents established a strong academic foundation, motivated them to do their best in school, and offered continual academic support.

Academic success was defined as the successful degree completion from a secondary and post-secondary institution. This definition was further defined by others as the inclusion of “academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance” (York et al., 2015, p. 5). The participant’s in this study exhibited both definitions of academic success.

Although each participant identified different people within their environment who encouraged or motivated them to be academically successful, all ten participants felt the constant academic support from their parents and family members as an important factor that contributed to their academic success. Their parents expressed the importance of obtaining an education and held high expectations for their academic future. This admission from the interview information coincided with recommendations made within prior research. Even though Garibaldi (1992) expressed many of the high academic expectations parents held were not synonymous to teachers expectations, parents often had high academic expectations of their children and believed they had the ability to
attend a post-secondary institution. Garibaldi indicated parents were obligated to encourage and motivate their children to excel academically, congratulate their academic successes, emphasize the worth of obtaining and education, and inquire to their teachers about material they struggled with. The participants recalled having parents who often encouraged and motivated them to be cognizant of the importance of obtaining an education and expected them to perform their best in school. This common sentiment did not deviate from participants who lived with both mother and father, with only their mother or siblings, or with their grandparents.

Three participants who lived with both mother and father indicated their parents were major motivating factors toward their academic success. Trey Clark indicated obtaining an education was an important accomplishment in his family. His parents expected him to attend college, and they constantly motivated and encouraged him to pursue a post-secondary degree. Lafayette’s parents also emphasized the importance of obtaining an education and encouraged him to do his best in school. They pushed him in spite of their socioeconomic hardships. Research by Scott et al. (2013) also emphasized that even though some African-American families had financial difficulties, their socioeconomic hardships did not hinder the importance placed on obtaining an education. Positive academic expectations from their parents led to an increased desire for African-American men to graduate from high school and attend college. Even though Lafayette was a member of his high school basketball team, his parents motivated him to finish his school work before he participated in any athletic events. E. Trane expressed the conversations with his father and his parents’ high academic expectations were factors to his academic success.
Four participants who lived with only their mother indicated she was an important factor to their academic success. John Harris indicated the support from his mother and witnessing her reenroll into college motivated him to go to college. Her decision to attend college confirmed the importance she had for obtaining an education and for DJ obtaining an education. When he was in high school, his mother was always aware of his academic performance and supported his academic and athletic involvement. She provided additional assignments in subject areas he had difficulty with to improve his understanding of the material. Esau expressed his upbringing in a single parent home was a factor that contributed to his academic success. His mother was the most important motivational factor for him to graduate from high school and attend college. She provided him with a strong academic foundation and motivated him to do well in school. Although Big Cali lived primarily with his mother, he received support from both his mother and father. His parents made him aware of the benefits of obtaining an education. Big Cali was raised with an outlook of attending college and surrounded by people in his family who were academically successful. His family members held high academic expectations for him and expected him to attend college. Similar to DJ, Big Cali was encouraged to acknowledge the importance of obtaining an education in spite of his athletic abilities.

Three participants who lived with their mother and brother, mother and grandparents, or only with their grandparents were encouraged and motivated to be academically successful. Scott indicated wanting to make his mother proud of his academic achievements was his primary goal. Knowing that his mother was involved in his academic life, expected him to do his best in school, and acknowledging the
consequences if he did not, motivated his academic success. Scott expressed that he learned from the mistakes his brother made while selling drugs. Although he wished to become involved in similar activities, his brother kept him away from doing so. Scott's brother supplied him with things he wanted or needed in order to keep him focused on his academic achievement. Jet maintained his mother and grandmother provided him with a strong academic foundation when he was growing up. Even when his mother married his step-father, Jet expressed feelings of how difficult it was adjusting to having another male figure around, but as he adapted to the new environment, Jet attributed his willingness to accept change in his college environment to his step-father. While Coach J. was living with his grandparents, he expressed knowing he was the only one of his grandparents' grandkids to graduate from college motivated him. He was surrounded by aunts and uncles who influenced, motivated, and encouraged a positive perception about academic success. He expressed his desire of wanting to be like his uncles who were high school coaches and being influenced by his aunts who were college graduates.

Although there was strong evidence which supported the impact family members had on the academic success of the research participants, participants also expressed having community members and educators who positively impacted their academic success. Six participants indicated community members or teachers who lived in their community encouraged and motivated their academic success. John Harris identified drug dealers within his community as people who kept him away from becoming involved in similar activities. They were aware of his athletic talents and financially compensated him for his performance at sporting events. Lafayette also recalled drug dealers in his community deterred him from becoming involved in similar activities.
Community members encouraged him to do well in school and made sure he did not become involved in activities that may have had a negative effect on his academic success.

Scott maintained the men in his community protected him from any and all negative elements which would have negatively impacted his academic success. The men in his community corrected him when he did wrong, promoted academic success, and felt accountable for his and other kids in the community academic success. Scott indicated he learned from the men in his community who positively impacted his personal belief of becoming academically successful. Although DJ, Trey, and Coach J. were not as descriptive or detailed as Scott or John, Trey remembered his community environment as one that promoted academic success; DJ maintained his community was also involved with ensuring he became academically successful; and Coach J. expressed his unwillingness to become involved with doing drugs in his community.

Four participants indicated educators were important factors with them achieving academic success. John Harris recalled his gifted teacher was someone who positively impacted his academic decisions and his perception of the importance of obtaining an education. Lafayette’s college law professor motivated him to be successful. Scott recalled the relationship his mother had with his high school teachers kept him focused on his academics. His teachers were in continuous contact with his parents about his academic performance. DJ expressed the relationships he had with his high school teachers motivated his academic success. His high school teachers encouraged him to pursue a post-secondary degree. DJ indicated his teachers took the time to mentor him to
become academically self-motivated. The strong relationships he established during high
school continued throughout his college career.

Eight participants were self-motivated or intrinsically motivated to being
academically successful. John and Lafayette felt their intrinsic motivation in high school
and college led to their academic success. Lafayette felt his parents also contributed to
his ability to be intrinsically motivated. Scott maintained a personal belief to perform
well in school, and Jet attributed his strong work ethic in high school and college as
factors to his academic success. DJ remembered the influence his teachers had on him in
high school allowed him to become self-motivated to be academically successful when he
entered college.

Jet identified changes in his life and the amount of positive support as factors that
influenced his academic success. Big Cali expressed the numerous life experiences he
endured were attributed to his academic success. Although he was aware of his athletic
abilities in high school and those abilities awarded him an opportunity to attend college
with a full athletic scholarship, he knew he needed an education if he wanted to become a
professional football player. Unfortunately, Big Cali was not able to accomplish his
professional athletic dreams because of his twelve year incarceration. He emphasized
going to prison increased his appreciation for education and motivated him to reenroll
into college after his release.

E. Trane indicated the high school organizations he was a member of motivated
him because those organizations had members who shared a common goal of becoming
academically successful. Even though Coach J. dropped out of college when he was
dealing with the loss of his grandparents, he was determined to return to college to
become a coach. He also recognized the negative impact drugs had on friends from his community, which motivated him to remain in school. The participants were surrounded by people who actively supported their academic achievement and continued to encourage their academic journey. The participants were also able to overcome many negative environmental factors and valued their lived experiences to obtain an education.

Three themes emerged from participant interviews. Along with the three themes, the researcher has included subthemes that highlight more specific contributing factors of academic success. The three themes (listed in bold) and sub themes were identified as:

- **Family support** – parental encouragement and motivation; maternal academic influence.

- **Community members and educator support** – commitment to kids in community; drug dealer academic encouragement; educator and parent communication.

- **Intrinsic motivation** – experiences in life.

The first and second theme represented environmental factors that contributed to the academic success for the research participants. Intrinsic motivation was a byproduct of the increased amount of encouragement, motivation, and influence the participant’s parents, community members, and educators had on their academic success. Intrinsic motivation was a characteristic each participant developed over time that continued to influence their academic decisions in high school and college.
Table 1 provides an illustration of the factors within each of the participants’ environment they felt contributed to their academic success.

Table 1. Central Research Question Factors for Academic Success

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Single Parent</th>
<th>Both Parents</th>
<th>Other Family Structure</th>
<th>Community Members</th>
<th>Intrinsic Motivation</th>
<th>HS or College Educators</th>
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*Note. Other Family Structure = mother and sibling, mother and grandparent, or grandparents; HS = High School*

According to the findings, the researcher identified the following factors that attributed to the academic success of each participant and their relationship to the Ecological Model of Human Development (EMHD). Participants asserted their parents, grandparents, teachers and people in their community, and relatives were people who contributed to their academic success. These individuals were considered to be a part of each participant’s immediate environment and had a direct impact on the participant’s academic development. Each participant recalled having multiple interactions during high school or college with these individuals who motivated, encouraged, and supported them to become academically successful. These people were a part of each participant’s microsystem within the EMHD, which accounted for the main source of academic inspiration and motivation for each participant to become academically successful. As a
result, individuals in each participant’s microsystem revealed factors such as parental support, community member support, and educator support, which were the product of the consistent and sustained academic support from people in their microsystem.

In addition to the microsystem factors, three participants were motivated through the exosystem of the EMHD. These participants indicated being academically motivated when their mother or relatives attended college and earned a degree. Although the participants were not a part of their family member’s college environment, their attendance created a positive impression about obtaining an education. As a result of the indirect relationship the participants had with their family member’s college environment, the information revealed the following factor of academic modeling. The participants were academically motivated by their family’s college attendance.

Secondary and Post-Secondary Factors for Academic Success

John Harris. “I had plenty of teachers I think who helped me out along the way; teachers that got on to me when I was doing wrong.” When he was in high school, Mr. Harris was in the gifted and talented program and maintained honor roll status throughout high school. Even though he did not enjoy reading in high school, he recalled having teachers who helped him understand the importance of being educated. Mr. Harris appreciated the teachers who disciplined him when he was doing wrong. He identified his gifted math teacher, Mr. Wallace, and his high school geometry teacher, Ms. Fletcher, as two teachers in high school who motivated him academically. He said Ms. Fletcher was an amazing teacher, and “she genuinely cared about you.” “She stayed on you and didn't uphold you in your wrong.” Along with his high school math teachers, his English teacher, Ms. Leonard, was someone who taught him about the benefits of reading. “Ms.
Leonard once told me, Even though you're smart, you're not going be able to just know everything. You're going to have to read to learn some things, and she stayed on me about that.” As a result of the positive influence his teachers had on him, Mr. Harris was motivated to attend college and learn about tuition assistance opportunities. He did not want to introduce any financial burden on his mother by paying for college or acquiring a student loan. In the end, he indicated “having teachers who challenged you, who allowed you to be creative and be yourself, and who supported your strengths,” impacted his academics.

When he was growing up and living with his mother, “barely making ends meet and watching my father selling drugs,” he knew he did not want to live that type of lifestyle. He decided that he wanted to do the opposite of what his father did and live better than his mother. Mr. Harris indicated intrinsic motivation was a key component in his decision to stay academically minded. He said:

When you look at somebody internally, identify those intrinsic characteristics that they have, and you look at each individual, you can identify what makes them successful. Also, take away how much money their parents make, how educated their parents are, where they live, and social economics, you can determine why they are successful. If you take those things out, look at a person intrinsically, and see what drives him or her, then you are going to be able to tell why he or she is or is not successful.

He surmised although some kids were raised in environments that had a negative impact on their perception of education; he overcame those negative environmental factors, maintained good grades in high school, and enrolled into college.

While in college, he knew a few of his college professors personally and had an opportunity to establish lasting relationships with them. He indicated his college professors had a positive impact on his perception of academic success. “I think my
biggest influence was my chemistry professor, Dr. Adams. He actually taught and took pride in knowing each kid his class and knowing them by name.” Dr. Adams’ class influenced Mr. Harris the most because Dr. Adams expected every student to complete his or her assignments and perform at a high academic level. Mr. Harris indicated having a teacher who was “willing to help you and was not just giving you anything” had a positive impact on his academic state of mind. In the end, Mr. Harris knew if he was going to be successful in college, he had to do the work his professors expected.

*Trey Clark.* When Trey was in high school, he was in the gifted and talented program. “When you came into class, pretty much from the time you came in to the time you left, you were doing something.” While in school, he enrolled in college level classes and earned college credit during his senior year. The classes were frequently taught by local professors at Central City University. Trey indicated taking those classes “was a bonus of being at East Side High School at that time.” In addition to being in the gifted program, Trey also attributed his academic success to some of his high school teachers.

While in high school, Trey recalled some of his teachers encouraging him to do well in class. Trey credited his high school English teacher, Miss Wilson, as someone who encouraged him to do better with his writing and to always do his best. “She was probably harder than most of my college professors. She made us work.” Trey identified several African-American teachers who had a positive impact on his academic success. Trey’s physics teacher, Reverend Parker, was someone who affected his academic decisions and “was big on teaching you how to be a man and how to carry yourself.” “He was the type of teacher that didn't take random work, you couldn't just throw
anything together and turn it in to him." Trey had to put effort in his work for Reverend Parker’s class.

Trey indicated a friend of his grandparents, Miss Walker, checked on his school performance every day. During his senior year, Trey was the student body president, and Miss Walker reminded him that being the president was a serious and important responsibility as an African-American male. Even after he graduated from high school, Miss Walker continued to be a positive figure throughout his life. When Trey obtained his job as principal, he recalled Miss Walker speaking about him during a reception honoring his new position. “That little pucklehead boy, he was something else. Nevertheless, I knew he had greatness in him. He was always a leader on campus, he did things all the time.”

Coach Mathews informed Trey that his position as a football player should not be abused. Trey indicated:

Coach Mathews, he was another guy that was at East Side High School at that time. He made sure that we understand no matter where you were, if you were an athlete, you don't get any special privileges. Because people will have you believe that you get special privileges. They will give you privileges and a lot of times, you will get caught up in that.

Having Reverend Parker, Coach Mathews, and Miss Walker in his life, Trey was willing to be challenged academically and became a more responsible student athlete. He said:

I had people around me that would tell me Look, this is just a small part of your life. You need to go ahead and keep working, keep doing your work. Not doing my work or shutting down after football season wasn't even a thought for me. I knew my parents wouldn't accept it, so that never even crossed my mind. Those were people that really had an impact in my life. Definitely, those people are still impacting me now.

The relationships Trey created were lasting reminders of his efforts to become academically successful. The African-American educators he had in high school brought
African-American culture to the forefront of his experience at East Side High School. Those educators continued to remind him of his purpose in school, which was to understand his surroundings and obtain an education so he could attend college. Trey stated:

We had people in high school that made you understand that this is about assimilation. You figure out what's going on and do what you have to do. As a result, you are able to understand what your purpose is. My job was to go to school, get everything I could get out of high school, so I could go on to the next level.

As a result of the influential educators during his high school years, Trey asserted the positive relationships with some of his former educators had a positive effect on his academic success.

Lafayette. When Lafayette was growing up, he said, "The biggest things in the community were the drug dealers and the gang bangers." However, they knew he was not someone who could be coerced into becoming involved with them. The drug dealers did not allow him to "hang around them." Lafayette felt they expected him to pursue his dream of becoming an NBA player, which prompted them to keep him away from activities that could limit his academic and athletic opportunities.

Although Lafayette had both parents at home influencing his academic decisions, he indicated his mother was more influential than his father when he was in high school. "I think my mom was the one who was really there for me, and she was that guiding force the entire time all throughout school." "I think it's probably because she knew that I had the potential to do what I'm doing now. She saw it in me at an early age, and she kept pushing me towards being successful in school." His parents did not pressure him to
perform at high academic levels when he was in high school but were “a little bit more laid back” when he was in high school and in college. Lafayette stated:

When I got to high school it became more of an intrinsic motivation type of thing where I would think to myself and say, all right. I got to do this for me because I want to go to college. I really want to do this, or I really want to do that. I started to take ownership in my education probably my sophomore year in high school. It started to be more about me and less about my parents. At that point, my parents didn’t really have to tell me about doing my homework and keeping my grades up.

As a result, he enrolled in classes that “pushed” him “to do better in high school.” “I think being in that kind of environment and taking challenging classes played a role in my academic success.”

His parents were actively engaged in many school related events when he was in high school. “Any time we had open house at school, my parents would always come and meet the teachers, introduce themselves, and let them know that if they had any problems that they could call any time.” With their active support and participation in school related functions, he learned at an early age not to “play around in school.” He knew his parents held very high academic expectations for him when he was in high school.

Lafayette recalled most of his high school teachers being very encouraging. “I would say teachers are probably, outside of parents, the most important factor in a child’s education because they see a child on an everyday basis.” His high school teachers encouraged him to enroll in honors classes because they were aware of his academic potential. He said:

Even though I didn’t take any honors classes, the teachers still motivated me. They were the ones who nominated me for Boys State. They got in touch with the guidance counselors and told them, “Hey, he needs to go to Boys State.”
Lafayette maintained the experiences he had in high school were influential in his success in high school and in college.

When he was in college, Lafayette remembered a college professor who had a positive impact on his perception about education. He stated:

He was more of a professor/mentor. Our class wasn't very big. I took his class during my senior year. He would talk to us about the emotional effect of teaching and how big of an emotional impact we have on the students.

Being in that positive environment allowed Lafayette to enjoy and learn a lot from the class. Lafayette indicated:

After being in a class that had a positive environment, and compared with all the other stuff that happened in my life, I feel like being in that class put me where I needed to be to graduate. The things he said to us helped tremendously.

Lafayette surmised he had many professors who had a positive impact on his academic success and motivated him to finish college.

Scott. Even though Scott was unable to attend the local gifted high school in his neighborhood, he did attend Scotlandville Magnet School. He was recognized as a student who was good in athletics as well as in his studies. While there, he was in the gifted and talented program and a member of many different high school organizations. As a member of the Young Leaders Academy, the organization improved his communication skills, and considered him to be a leader within the organization. “It pulled out some skills and talents that I had that separated me at an early age.” Scott stated the academy groomed him for taking on various leadership roles within the academy. The sponsors of the academy recognized his ability to be an effective communicator, organizer, and student leader. “It was just one of those, I guess, where older people or adults saw something in me that I really didn't see in myself at the time,
but it helped develop those skills that I already had.” He indicated the academy had a positive impact on his ability to learn and converse with people within his environment.

While in high school, Scott recalled the school curriculum focused on preparing students for choosing college majors that pertained to engineering professions. He considered the student body as people who were just like him and were just as smart. Even among students that had similar academic abilities, Scott graduated at the top of his class and was self-motivated to do well in school. “I was heavy into math and science, and I went to a high school for engineering professions, so it kept me interested in school.” Scott understood his academic responsibilities and did not allow his athletic talents overshadow his academic abilities. “It grounded me so that I wouldn't get so far into athletics as I did into academics. I always remained a student first, and so my coaches and my teachers always kept me on track.” As a result, his responsibility as a student and not a student athlete “became a driving force” for him in school, which he maintained when he entered college.

While Scott was in college, he identified his pathogenic bacteriology teacher, Dr. Pathogen, as someone who was very straight forward with him about his academic intentions. They often discussed his academic performance in class and had conversations that led Dr. Pathogen to become personally engaged in the promotion of Scott’s academic abilities to other professors. While attending Central City University, he enrolled in an online class at North State University. However, the professor at North State University did not want him to take the course because he felt Scott would not be able to pass the class. Nevertheless, Dr. Pathogen spoke to the professor and informed him that Scott was advised to enroll into the course and he was capable of completing the
course. Scott indicated Dr. Pathogen made it a priority with assisting him with his problems when he was in college.

During his senior in college, while taking twenty-three hours and working for the university, his girlfriend became pregnant. Scott created a mission statement that motivated him to graduate. “I wanted to graduate college before I had a kid.” He said even though he was about to be a father, he did not allow it to deter him graduating “When I didn't have anything else to lose, I used it to push me.” He emphasized he did not know anyone who went to college who could motivate him to continue in spite of what was going on in his life. Even though his mother supported his academic dreams, she was unable to offer solutions to his problems. He surmised that he “used what most people would call negative factors” to motivate him to graduate from college.

Jet. “Ultimately, just constant motivation from my parents, and I kept feeling the goal was wanting to succeed and put most of what I'm learning to use to learn more about what I've learned.” In addition to his parents, Jet recalled being encouraged by his middle school teachers to enroll in AP courses when he entered high school. As a result, he enrolled in honors level courses and AP courses in high school. When Jet was in high school, he indicated his teachers taught with a hands-on approach. “They were very proactive in the classes, which helped a lot.” Even when Jet encountered difficult material, his high school teachers provided him with the help he needed in order to gain a better understanding. He recalled having a “great” English teacher who kept him and “everybody motivated” in high school. However, Jet indicated not all his college professors held the same expectations of their students.
When Jet was in college, he indicated some of his college professors were proactive with providing students with an opportunity to learn and understand challenging material. Unfortunately, there were professors who “were more passionate about the subject than actually teaching it.” Even though Jet had professors who were easily distracted when students asked questions that deviated from the lesson, Jet asserted his experience in those classes were interesting and that his college professors “were very helpful.” Jet stated:

If I couldn't quite get to speak to the professor immediately after class, I'd have to swing by their office before four or five. They would sit down and explain the basics of what I missed to a point where I could kind of work from there.

Jet identified Derrick Edwards, the Information Technology Supervisor of the business building, as someone he looked up to. Derrick Edwards had the job he wanted when he graduated from college and indicated, “Just to see someone doing what you’re aspiring to do” motivated him. Derrick was an African-American man who Jet felt was motivation for him to continue doing well in school and to be successful. “Honestly I hadn't seen, because you don't see too many African-Americans in jobs like that. To see that and say, hey, he made it. I can make it, too.” In the end, his college professors, parents, and an employee at Midway University had a positive influence on his academic success.

Coach J. When Coach J. attended East Side High School, he felt he was a part of a good academic environment. He recalled having great teachers, and remembered having a few influential African-American math teachers - Ms. Fletcher, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Bower. Although he felt they were influential teachers, he indicated they did not motivate him to do well in school. However, he recognized some of his teachers for
supporting him at his basketball games. Nevertheless, he was aware of his teacher’s support even though the support may not have been acknowledged when he was in class.

When he attended college, Coach J. asserted college was “an okay environment,” and he “felt like you were a little bit more independent.” Coach J. recalled taking a class with Dr. Carter at Central City University. “Dr. Carter was straight across the board. He didn’t cut any favors for anyone, which are the type of teachers I like.” As a result, Coach J. fashioned his teaching style around his experiences with Dr. Carter. Coach J. suggested:

Whether you were an athlete, whether you were Black, whether you were White, whether you were a female, or whether you were a male, it didn't matter to Dr. Carter. He was straight across the board, and that's pretty much how I think he was.

Coach J. sated, “Dr. Carter was one of the teachers that stood out to me.” In the end, Coach J. remembered his high school teachers and one college professor who had a positive impact on his academic success.

**DJ.** When DJ was in high school, he felt personally accountable for being educated and self-educating himself in and out of school. His mother encouraged him to take responsibility with self-educating himself even when he was not in school. “She knew what she was talking about so I respected that.” As a result, he developed an intrinsic motivation to succeed starting in elementary school which followed him into high school. He stated:

I can go back as far back as first grade, all the way through school. I set the bar myself. Sometimes you hear a parent or somebody say, "Well since you've done this I don't expect less of you." Coming through high school when I turned in work, it was always the best. It was as if they couldn't accept anything else.
Even with the pressure of constantly performing at high academic levels, he recalled there were times where he did not want to. Fortunately, his teachers were aware of his ability to do well in school. Those teachers would often return poor work with the expectations of him resubmitting a higher quality of work. He created strong academic relationships with his high school teachers, which motivated him through high school and in college. His commitment to building influential relationships with his teachers continued through high school and as he entered college.

DJ carried his academic expectations into his college classes, and his college professors were observant of his academic expectations. Dr. Berry Williams was a professor who DJ indicated had a positive impact on his academic success. Even after DJ graduated from college, he and Dr. Williams have maintained their relationship. “He was very influential in a lot of the decisions I made as I got closer to graduation because he was a professor and he was also a sports fan.” Moreover, DJ emphasized his high school teachers, Dr. Williams, and other college professors were aware of the academic goals he set for himself and continued to motivate him to succeed academically.

Esau Jenkins. Before Esau went to high school, he was a victim of bullying. Although the bullying stopped when he entered high school, being bullied had a negative effect on his confidence to do well in school. Esau stated:

I was bullied a lot during that time in my education. I hated school. I actually didn't realize that I was smart, and I could do well in school until I got to eighth grade because I associated school with the people who bullied me and beat you up on the playground and stuff.

Being bullied effected his perception of his academic abilities, and the verbal and physical abuse stayed with him. He applied the abuse to his academic confidence and acknowledged in order to overcome those bullying experiences, he had to prove to
himself that he could be academically successful. “If you have been told negative things, you begin to think I'm not smart, I'm not this, or I'm not that. Not until you prove it to yourself do you start to believe otherwise.” Even though he was bullied in school, Esau developed a passion for learning, specifically a passion for English literature.

When he was growing up, he and his mother read to each other bedtime stories. “That was always my foundation - reading and literature.” His high school teachers encouraged and nurtured his passion for literature. One of his first high school English teachers was an African-American woman who motivated him to complete his assignments when he would procrastinate. Esau said:

Whenever she noticed me doing that, she was always the one who pulled me aside. She was like, “You need to do this. You know you could do it. Why aren't you studying?”

Esau also identified his high school librarian as someone who motivated him. His mother was friends with the librarian, which Esau indicated being a part of a small town meant teachers and parents knew each other. The relationship between his mother and teachers created an added pressure to perform academically. When his teachers noticed him not performing at a certain level of academic expectations, they called his mother and informed her that he was not performing at his best.

His mother maintained a strong connection with his school environment. She attended parent teacher meetings whenever the opportunity presented itself. He was always aware of his mother’s dedication to his academic progress. Esau said:

As far as my grades, it was never ... One thing I noticed was that a lot of kids, it seemed like they didn't have to tell their parents about what they made on their test or on their report card, but that was always the thing. She knew when report cards came out, and I had to have it there and show it to her. Progress reports too.
His mother’s constant involvement in his progress at school was an additional push to be successful in school. As a result, he understood he was responsible for continuing to make good grades in high school. He knew he had someone expecting the best from him, which made him more accountable for his academic performance. When he enrolled into college, he continued to be responsible and accountable for his academic performance.

While in college, he was a member of various organizations. His involvement with the Association of Student Mentors motivated him to stay committed to his academic performance. As a member of the association, he had an opportunity to encourage other students to do well in school, which he felt increased his academic performance. When Esau was a counselor with LA Gear Up, he tutored high school students in English and science. Those positive experiences improved his academic confidence and created a desire to become an educator. His college environment continued to be a positive influence on his academics. Esau indicated there were a few college professors who had a positive impact on his perception of academic success.

Esau recalled two professors who positively impacted his academic performance. Mr. Sanders was an African-American professor who taught creative writing, held him accountable for his work, and expected the best from him. Esau stated:

For me, the best teachers are the ones that don't just make you do what you're supposed to do, like you do the requirements and that's it. They're the ones that push you to go beyond that, and if you're going to write a short story for class, it's not just a general story. You make it good. You make it like you actually want to publish it.

As a result, Mr. Sanders became one of his favorite teachers. He attributed his writing proficiency and desire to become a professional writer with his English teacher who became his biggest influence because she was a published author. Esau recalled his
teacher critiquing the editing on a writing assignments and felt he could do better if
would not procrastinate on his assignments. “It became a challenge to outdo myself
because based on what she was going to give me grade-wise. She definitely influenced
me a lot.” Esau experienced many positive environments in college that affected his
academic performance. Those experiences motivated him to remain academically
minded to graduate from college.

Big Cali. Although “school was never hard” for him, Big Cali admitted he was
primarily driven by his desire to play football. Even though Big Cali admitted to
“goofing off” when his teachers engaged him, his teachers were observant of his
academic abilities but were also aware of his inability to apply himself in his studies. Big
Cali said:

I was always that kid in high school, everything was so easy. It didn’t require any
effort, and if it don’t require effort, then you don’t develop that drive to achieve,
or that drive to exceed what you can do.

Although high school did not provide Big Cali with much of an academic challenge, he
had a few high school teachers who had a positive impact on his perception of the
importance of receiving an education.

Big Cali remembered his high school civics teacher Mr. Reynolds was someone
who informed his students of their responsibility and need to receive an education. Big
Cali stated:

I really understood a lot about presidential politics, and then he was also one of
those teachers that was real about life saying, “When you all get out there, you
don't understand you black boy. When you get out there, they don’t care about
you. You better get your education, you better focus, you better do this, and you
better do that.”
Big Cali admitted many of his teachers encouraged their students to attend school and receive a formal education, but Mr. Reynolds presented the importance of receiving an education from a cultural perspective. As a result, Big Cali emphasized Mr. Reynolds had a profound impact on his academic point of view.

Big Cali’s high school English teacher did not allow him to turn in work that was not his best. Big Cali remembered when Mrs. Gordon forced him to redo his assignments or receive a failing grade. She threatened him with not being able to play in the football game if he did not redo the assignment. “That helped me in learning how to buckle down and do something for real, because I hated English.” Even if Big Cali did not have an innate appreciation for learning when he was in high school, he was surrounded by teachers that recognized his academic potential. However, his perspective of how easy high school was to him had a negative impact on his perception of college.

When Big Cali attended Star University after high school, he maintained the same attitude of school being easy. “I went to college with the same attitude out of high school.” As a result, his freshman year at Star University was not a success. His only concern was being eligible to continue to play football. When he returned to Star University the following fall semester, he was motivated to do better because he was receiving a football scholarship. Big Cali understood he needed to work harder in order to be successful in college. His responsibilities toward completing his college degree changed when he discovered his girlfriend was pregnant. As a result, he moved back to California and enrolled into a community college.

While at California Community College, his economics professor always challenged him to do better. Big Cali stated being at the community college was very
similar to his high school experience. Even though as he stated, "I was able to coast on my own intelligence again without much effort", the economics class was much harder than he anticipated. The economics teacher always called Big Cali’s bluff and did not allow him to underperform on his assignments. Nevertheless, Big Cali earned the highest grades out of all his classes from his economics professor. However, he was not thinking of his future and potential socioeconomic advancement. It was during this time Big Cali became more involved in illegal activities. As a result, Big Cali served twelve years in jail for selling drugs before he appreciated obtaining an education. He admitted he was not mature enough when he attended college the first time.

Big Cali admitted it took him much longer than he had hoped to appreciate and realize the importance of receiving an education. When he was younger, he felt he did not need an education, but when he received his sentence, he knew he had to obtain an education once he was released from prison. Receiving an education was the only way he could be able to overcome his criminal record. Big Cali stated:

When I got busted, my mind immediately went to, okay, I know what I got to do. I got to finish school. I got to do this because now I'm going to have this record, so I got to have something to kind of give me a little leverage ... Kind of give something against that to battle that, that was mindset. I had twelve years to get ready for it.

He regretted not taking advantage of his initial opportunity to attend college with football scholarships. While in prison, he tried to read at least fifty books every year and attributed his passion for reading in prison to his success in college. Big Cali emphasized the extensive reading he did when he was in prison increased his ability to retain vast amounts of information in college. Big Cali asserted after being released from prison, he
had a reservoir of knowledge that he did not have when he was younger. Big Cali said the extensive reading made college a lot easier for him.

When he went to State Line College, he was a very different person. Big Cali asserted he became self-disciplined after being released and was ready to do whatever it took for him to become successful. Big Cali stated:

> It was like I could do it or I could not do it. It was that attitude you have when you're eighteen or nineteen, which is different. I didn't have that. I was like this got to be done, because I have to do this to get to where I want to be and who I need to be. It was much different and school was much easier to me, I mean, because all of my life experiences, and all the things that I've learnt from just living.

He gained an appreciation for learning and asserted he had a strong desire to learn new information. He indicated State Line College offered a non-traditional approach to educating students that had responsibilities during the day time. Big Cali attributed his academic success to being able to take advantage of the non-traditional program at State Line College. He indicated there was a higher level of expectations for completing assignments on his own time. Nevertheless, he was able to “work during the day” to care for his adult needs and attending night classes was his “sacrifice” for wanting to obtain an education. He maintained the non-traditional program was a major factor for his academic success and “especially for African-Americans being able to go back” to school and obtain a formal education.

**E. Trane.** Although his peers alleged they hated high school, would never return, or high school was terrible, E. Trane maintained his high school experience was amazing. “High school was where he found I found my niche.” While in high school, E. Trane enrolled into a computer architecture course, learned how to fix school computers, and was considered a computer technician for the school. His computer architecture teacher
was an African-American female who increased his interest in computers and influenced his decision to obtain a degree in Information Technology. E. Trane stated:

I can see where she influenced me because she wouldn't just spoon-feed us a lot of the information. It was almost like she would force you to think for yourself and think outside of the box because sometimes there was hardware that everyone else might not have seen.

E. Trane maintained many of his high school teachers were very passionate about teaching, and their teaching style contributed to his academic success. "They would teach you other things outside of standardized testing material, and I felt they helped you learn and helped you think for yourself."

E. Trane indicated his parents supported him through their constant participation in school related events. Even when he had to be disciplined at school, his parents were involved. "If I ever got in trouble, they would talk to my teachers." However, E. Trane said, "By that point, I really saw the value in education.” Nevertheless, when he had to be disciplined, he said, “The whooping’s were bad, and I didn't want those.” “That's why I would do well in school.” Avoiding being disciplined by his father motivated him to do well in school. "Then seeing my parents, both of them, be proud of how I performed academically, that became my new motivation.” As a result of his parent’s involvement in his academic life, he never got into much trouble, and maintained good grades. “That was probably the biggest factor and seeing my parents be proud of me.”

When he entered college, he emphasized his college environment was similar to his high school environment. He continued to be very passionate about music and loved martial arts. E. Trane began practicing many forms of martial arts in high school and continued practicing during college. E. Trane indicated being a part of these various organizations contributed to his ability of being focused, staying on task, and learning
teamwork. "One of the biggest things I think I learned from being a part of those organizations was being able to work with different personalities and being able to use teamwork to accomplish a common goal." In addition to being a part of those organizations, E. Trane emphasized his college professors were caring and were willing to "go the extra mile for" for their students. E. Trane recalled his freshman biology teacher knew every one of his students by their name. "What I've been told, you go to college, no one knows your name, and you are not even that important." In the end, E. Trane felt his high school and college experiences provided him with an opportunity to learn from educators who "cared about their students" and wanted them "to do well."

Summary of Secondary and Post-Secondary Factors for Academic Success

The researcher identified several environmental factors participants felt contributed to their academic success in high school and in college. Participants indicated being surrounded by influential high school teachers, college professors, and parents as people who encouraged and motivated them to be academically successful. Their high school teachers taught them the benefits of obtaining a high school diploma and obtaining a college degree. Their high school teachers challenged them academically, supported their extracurricular activities, and created effective lines of communication with their parents. Participants expounded on their relationships they had with high school teachers, college professors, parents who were involved in their academic life, high school organizations, and various other people within their environment who contributed to their academic success.
All ten participants identified their interactions with high school teachers, African-American teachers, coaches, and their affiliation with high school organizations as factors that attributed to their academic success. John Harris indicated his high school teachers motivated him to remain focused on his academics and informed him of the potential benefits of obtaining an education. His teachers recognized his academic potential, encouraged him to do his best, challenged him, and allowed him to be creative. John wanted to live better than his parents and in order to do so, he understood obtaining an education was how he was going to accomplish his goal. When he entered college, he was motivated to do well because his college professors took pride in knowing him by name and expected him to do his best.

Trey Clark recalled his high school teachers made him work and expected his best work. His teachers checked on his academic progress every day. Since Trey was the president of his high school SGA, he remembered his African-American teachers teaching him the importance of holding such a position. Those teachers taught him to always present himself at his best and educated him about his role as an African-American man in society. They emphasized the importance of learning about African-American culture and how it related to his progression in society. Trey indicated being surrounded by people who motivated him academically and beyond his athletic talents. Lafayette remembered having very encouraging teachers and being intrinsically motivated to do well in high school. He remembered the racial make-up of his high school pushed him to do better. Although he recalled there being more White students than Black, he was motivated to do his best. While in college, he recalled having a
college professor who mentored him and encouraged him to remain focused on his academics.

Scott indicated his high school teachers recognized his athletic talents and academic abilities. His teachers and coaches reminded him his academic talents were more important than his athletic abilities. He understood he had a greater responsibility of being a student before being an athlete. He expressed his involvement in various high school organizations reinforced his communication skills, and the math and science curriculum kept him interested in learning. When he was in college, he recalled having a college professor who taught him the importance of choosing a major that would make him happy. He also remembered a professor who defended his academic abilities when other professors did not believe he could perform at a high academic level. Before graduating from college, his girlfriend became pregnant, which prompted him to create a personal mission statement to help motivate him to graduate. He recalled using various negative life experiences to help him remain focused on graduating from college.

Jet indicated his high school teachers were motivational and proactive educators. He recalled having teachers who recognized his academic potential. During college, his professors motivated him to learn and were willing to help him when he did not completely understand class material. He recalled meeting a college employee who inspired him to pursue his academic dream. Jet indicated the employee was an African-American man who he identified as someone who worked in a position he eventually wanted. Jet became inspired when he met someone of the same race working in his desired field of work.
Although Coach J. did not offer an equally detailed synopsis of his high school environment as other participants, he recalled having teachers who supported him when he played sports. He was aware of their attendance at the school’s sporting events. Coach J. remembered having a good experience in high school and having strong African-American teachers who motivated him. Incidentally, the teachers he referred to were African-American female teachers who were his elementary school teachers. Even though the scope of the study centered on secondary experiences, Coach J. recalled elementary school teachers who encouraged and motivated his academic success.

DJ emphasized the relationships he established with his high school teachers motivated him to stay in school. He recalled being expected to do his best in school by his mother, teachers, and grandparents. His mother often encouraged him to become academically responsible. DJ felt she was aware of his academic potential and was comfortable with the decision she made about his academic progression through school. As a result of his mother’s influence, he set personal academic expectations and became self-motivated while in college. The same high academic expectations he had for himself in high school were carried into college. He recalled having college professors who acknowledged the high academic expectations he had for himself and expected him to do his best.

Before Esau was aware of his academic potential, he indicated being bullied was an experience that affected his academic confidence. He felt he had to prove to himself that he was capable of being academically successful. When he was in high school, he identified his high school teachers as people who encouraged him to obtain an education. He indicated his mother and teachers had a relationship that added to the pressure of
being academically successful. He recalled his teachers and mother frequently communicated about his progress. He identified his mother as someone who was actively involved in his academic life, which motivated him to do well in school. He felt he was accountable for obtaining an education because of his mother’s expectations. Just as in high school, he identified his college professors as people who motivated him to obtain an education. His professors challenged him to do his best and held him accountable for his own education. He also identified being a member of various organizations while in college motivated his academic success.

Big Cali identified his high school teachers as people who expected him to always do his best, held him accountable for earning his education, and recognized his academic potential. Big Cali recalled having African-American high school teachers who emphasized the importance for African-American men to obtain an education. During his first time in college, he remembered his poor academic performance during his freshman year motivated him to improve his grades to remain eligible to play football. When he transferred to a community college, he recalled a professor who challenged and expected him to do his best. When he was in prison, he felt being in jail made him realize the importance of obtaining an education. After being released, he indicated being in prison made him more self-disciplined when he was in college. Big Cali felt as an African-American man, attending the non-traditional program at State Line College allowed him to benefit from attending classes based on his work schedule and responsibilities.

E. Trane indicated his high school teachers influenced his choice of majors when he entered college. He felt high school teachers took the time to teach him outside of the
normal mandated curriculum requirements. When he entered college, he recalled having professors who worked hard with ensuring their students received an education. His professors cared about their students and personally knew their students. E. Trane remembered being a member of various organizations in high school and college, which he felt contributed to his academic success. He felt being a member of those organizations developed his social skills and helped him accomplish his academic goals.

After reviewing the collected interview data, the researcher identified one emerging theme that contributed to the academic success of the research participants. Along with the theme, the researcher has included a sub-theme that further emphasizes the participants’ academic success. The theme (listed in **bold**) and sub theme were identified as:

- **High school and college teacher support** – positive academic expectations.

According to the information gathered from each of the research participants, the continual positive interactions and academic expectations from their high school teachers and college professors had a positive impact on their academic success. Even though only one participant indicated not having a college professor who motivated or influenced his academic success while in college, the remaining participants represented 90% of the responses that attributed college professors to their academic success.
Table 2 provides an illustration of the factors within each of the participants’ secondary and post-secondary environment they felt contributed to their academic success.

Table 2. Secondary and Post-Secondary Factors for Academic Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HS Educators</th>
<th>College Professors</th>
<th>HS Organizations</th>
<th>African-American Teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Harris</td>
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<td>Trey Clark</td>
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<td>Lafayette</td>
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<td>Scott</td>
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<td>Jet</td>
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<td>Coach J.</td>
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<td>DJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esau Jenkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Cali</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Trane</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. HS = High School

The microsystem and mesosystem of the EMHD played an important role in the academic success of each participant. Since the microsystem emphasized the importance of the immediate interactions between people within the environment of the developing individual, all participants described complex interactions between teachers, professors, parents, community members, and family members who contributed to their academic success in high school and college. The interactions between multiple microsystems within the environment of the individual underlined the connection the mesosystem had with each participant and multiple individuals in their microsystem. Mesosystem level factors were identified as (a) teacher and parent communication about the academic progress of the participants, (b) parental and family involvement in the academic life of their children, (c) membership in school related academic organizations, and (d) positive academic relationships with high school and college educators.
The interactions with people who educated the participants on the cultural importance of obtaining an education underscores the macrosystem within the EMHD. The macrosystem focused the cultural and subcultural values that impact the developing individual and encompasses all the lower systems. This point of view was emphasized when the participants understood and acknowledged the historical and the cultural importance of obtaining an education from same race individuals. Participants who identified African-American teachers who taught them the importance of obtaining an education, having a father who taught them about African-American culture, or recognizing other African-American men in occupational positions as factors that contributed to their academic success. Those people in their microsystem influenced the academic or occupational decisions of each participant. Not only did these influential educators positively impact cultural relationships in each participants’ macrosystem, they affected their microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem.

Reasons for Attending College

John Harris. “I went to the dentist office, I saw the bill, and my mamma looked at the bill with me. I said to myself, Golly, I want to be a dentist.” To do so, “I have to go to college.” As a result, he said, “I've just had that drive ever since.” In addition to being driven to major in dentistry, acquiring a football scholarship during his senior year of high school was another major factor that attributed to his decision to attend college. While in high school, he surrounded himself with people who wanted to attend college. Graduating from high school and college was important to him because he was the only one of his mother’s children to “graduate from high school,” and he was “the only kid to
go to college and to graduate from college.” In the end, he just wanted to make his mother proud, and he said, “Those things are what drove me to be successful.”

Trey Clark. “When I was in high school, I can remember people saying, I'm probably not going to school. But that never crossed my mind.” Trey Clark was raised in an environment where many of his family members were college graduates. Even though some of his high school friends were undecided on attending college, Trey did not “want to be a burden” on his parents. His primary goal was to obtain his undergraduate degree and begin working so he could take care of himself. Trey remembered his decision to attend South East City University was because all the previous generation of men in his family attended the same school. He recalled his father telling someone that he Trey knew he was going to college “when he was five years old.” As a result of the early exposure to a college environment, Trey was well aware of his college aspirations before attending college.

Lafayette. Lafayette said there was “a combination of a lot of stuff” that attributed to his decision to attend college but his parents were the “primary” reason. “They told me from day one, you going to college.” In addition to his parents, receiving scholarships, a grant, and a state issued scholarship were all contributing factors that helped him decide to enroll into college. As a result of his parent’s encouragement and the financial aid assistance, Lafayette successfully graduated from high school and college.

Scott. Scott indicated he “had to go to college” because college was his “ticket” to academic success. Going to college was important because no one in his “family had ever graduated from college.” He and his mother created a system of learning that Scott
felt established a belief that he would attend college. "I got my homework done before I did anything else." He said his mother “made school an important point” in his life and “preached” to him about his opportunity to attend college. Scott received numerous letters offering engineering scholarships to various universities throughout the state, but he “turned them down.” Instead of accepting an engineering scholarship, he attended “Central City University on an academic scholarship” and received a state-issued scholarship. As a result, Scott became the first person in his family to graduate from a post-secondary institution.

Jet. Jet remembered being influenced to attend an in-state college during high school college fairs. He said the attending colleges “always pushed you to go in-state just because most out-of-state tuitions were just ridiculous.” Visiting with the in-state colleges and the opportunity to receive a state-issued scholarship had a positive impact on his decision to attend a college in Louisiana. However, Jet indicated his parents, who “both went to college,” also impacted his decision to attend college. As a result of being exposed to various colleges at his high school and having parents who had post-secondary experience, Jet successfully graduated from high school and enrolled into college.

Coach J. “College was always something I wanted to do.” Because he played basketball in high school, he said, “I actually wanted to play college basketball.” Although he did not get the opportunity to play college basketball, he understood that if he was not going to be able to play college basketball, he wanted to be a coach. “I knew I had to have a college degree in order for me to be a high school coach, so that’s what motivated me to want to get a degree in Kinesiology.” Subsequently, many of the men in
his family were coaches, which also motivated him to earn a degree in Kinesiology. As a result, Coach J. graduated from high school and earned his college degree.

DJ. “I really enjoyed playing football and I knew that I could continue football by going to college.” In addition to, DJ indicated the opportunity to obtain a “career” once he earned a degree motivated him to attend college. DJ used his opportunity to play football in college with an athletic scholarship to pay for school and earned a degree in business.

Esau Jenkins. “Part of it was wanting to get away from where I was from.” Attending college for Esau was a decision made in part by living a sheltered life. His mother wanted him to attend a local college because “it was closer” to her. However, he understood obtaining a college degree was important to his future. “I had to get a degree in order to get a job, in order to be successful and happy.” Besides leaving home, becoming successful, and being happy, he said “just the experience” motivated him to attend college.

When he graduated with his undergraduate degree, he “didn’t feel ready to go and get a job yet.” “I felt like I had a lot more developing to do.” As a result, his desire to experience more in college was “a big reason why I decided to stay and get a Master’s.” In the end, Esau graduated from high school and had an opportunity to experience the college environment away from his sheltered home life.

Big Cali. My “wake up moment came” when I was in jail for doing “stupid stuff.” He realized getting his college degree was essential to his success once he was released. He said he was “counting the years, trying to figuring out” what could he do to be successful. He was aware of how old he would be once he was released and the
trouble he would have searching for a job. As a result he said, “I’ve got no choice, no
hope, but to go and get my degree.”

Even though he was in jail, he maintained his dream of starting his “own
business.” After being released, he had job paying minimum wage to which he said, “I
got to do something where I will be making more than $7.25 per hour.” Attending
college and obtaining a degree provided him a chance to participate in interviews, which
he felt would provide him with an opportunity to discuss his felony face-to-face with
potential employers. In the end, Big Cali enrolled back into college after serving his
sentence because he felt attending college was how he would be able to counteract his
felony charges to obtain a job and accomplish his dream of owning his own business. “I
always knew I would go back to get my degree. I just didn’t know it was going to be
after going through all that.”

E. Trane. E. Trane said “having educated parents” and grandparents contributed
to his enrollment into college. He recalled being influenced by his grandmother who
“was the first Black woman” to attend and earn an undergraduate degree in music from
the university she attended. His mother was a teacher and his father was a nurse. E.
Tranc was motivated to attend college because he was surrounded by family members
who were knowledgeable of the academic requirements needed to be successful in
college and who also had college degrees.

**Summary of Reasons for Attending College**

Based on the information provided by each participant, the researcher discovered
two major reasons why they attended college: (a) family and friends who influenced and
encouraged a college going attitude; and (b) an ideological point of view that college was a means of socioeconomic and social advancement. Ideology was operationally defined as the belief that a student has the capacity to achieve their academic goals in spite of potential negative influences that may limit their academic success. Also, Wilson and Allen (1987) expressed ideology was related to the potential of young African-American men having a strong sense of self-efficacy which contributed to higher levels of academic success.

Seven participants indicated being surrounded by people who wanted to go to college, having family members who were college graduates, or having parents who held high academic expectations as reasons why they attended college. John Harris indicated being around people in high school who wanted to attend college motivated him to attend college. Trey Clark, Jet, and E. Trane indicated having parents who were college graduates motivated them to attend a post-secondary institution. E. Trane and Coach J. indicated being surrounded by family members who graduated from college motivated them to attend college. Lafayette indicated his parents were the primary reason why he decided to attend college. Scott identified his mother as someone who made school important and informed him of the benefits of obtaining a post-secondary education. She reminded him that his academic environment was more important than his athletic talents.

Seven participants expressed ideological reasoning’s contributed to their decision to attend a post-secondary institution. John Harris indicated a desire to become a dentist, and a desire to make his mother proud contributed to him attending college. Trey Clark emphasized not wanting to become a burden on his parents after they provided him with
many academic advantages when he was in high school contributed to his decision to attend college. Trey Clark, DJ, Esau, Big Cali, and Coach J. indicated attending a post-secondary institution was essential to identifying a career in which they would be able to secure a job to become financially stable. Scott expressed being the first person in his family to obtain a college degree was instrumental to his decision to attend college. Also, when he was in high school, his mother created a system for him that enforced completing his school work before becoming involved in extracurricular activities, which he emphasized engendered a belief that he had the potential to attend college.

Because he was not able to experience a strong social environment in high school, Esau indicated attending college was a decision made in part of wanting to get away from home and experience a college environment. With his unfortunate incarceration, Big Cali emphasized obtaining a degree was essential to his successful assimilation back into society after being released from prison. Obtaining a post-secondary degree was vital to his dream of starting his own business and having a chance to go on job interviews in spite of his history for selling drugs. Coach J. indicated even though he initially wanted to attend college to play basketball, he acknowledged in order to become a coach, he had to obtain a college degree.

After reviewing the interview information gathered from each participant about factors and reasons that led them to attend college, the researcher identified the following theme (listed in bold) and sub-theme:

- **College attendance expectations** – social and socioeconomic advancement.

Based on the information gathered from each research participant, each of them were motivated to attend college due to their desire to seek social and socioeconomic
opportunities. The research participants were intrinsically motivated and surrounded by people who encouraged them to attend college.

Table 3 illustrates factors the research participants indicated that led to their decision to attend college and to become academically successful.

Table 3. Reasons for Attending College

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>College Going Environment</th>
<th>Personal Reasons</th>
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According to the EMHD, the close association with people and family members and interactions between these individuals who influenced their academic decisions were factors described by the microsystem and mesosystem. Participants indicated relationships and interactions between parents, family members, and people around them influenced their decision to attend college. The mesosystem linked two or more microsystems which affected the developing individual. Interactions with friends during high school who shared common goals of attending college, parents who were engaged in the academic life of the participants, and wanting to continue playing sports while attending college were factors linked to the mesosystem in the EMHD. The influence their college going family members had on the participants was linked to the exosystem in the EMHD. The exosystem described the indirect relationship the developing individual had with environments they were not immediately in contact with. This
relationship was evident when participants did not attend college with their family members, but their attendance had a positive impact on their decision to attend college.

Social Factors for Academic Success

John Harris. “Yeah, because all my friends were talking about going to college.” When he was in high school, he indicated there were “more Black than White” students in his graduating class who were in the gifted program. “We always were challenging each other. We wanted to make the highest grade. We wanted to do better than the next person.” Mr. Harris indicated being educated when he was in high school was not “really a drawback” compared to how he has perceived it when he was teaching. “When I was teaching, the kids were scared to answer.” Although his students knew “the answer in their head,” they were afraid “to answer because they didn't want somebody to start laughing at them or think that they were too smart.” He reminded his students when he was in school, he and his classmates were competitive in every activity. “Having friends who wanted to go to college and surrounding myself with people who wanted to seek higher education, I think that influence me more than anything.”

While attending South Rock University, he recalled not having much of a social life, and used his free time to become more studious. When he transferred to Central City University, Mr. Harris joined the African-American Greek organization Kappa Alpha Psi, the self-identified football organization Me Phi, and was active in study groups that related to his major. While majoring in biology, Mr. Harris was surrounded by people who shared a common goal of becoming academically successful. “If you surround yourself with people that share some of the same common goals and the same type of drive, the chances are you're going to be successful.” In addition to his network of
friends, he found a social environment within his fraternity that continued to motivate him academically.

Mr. Harris identified two members of his fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, who impacted his academic decisions, Mr. Anthony Hall and Coach Fox. Mr. Anthony Hall was his elementary school principal, and Coach Fox was his high school coach. When he attended East Side High School, he looked up to Coach Fox. Mr. Harris indicated:

Coach Fox would get on us, tell us how to dress. "Keep your pants up. Wear your belt. Belt matches your shoes." All those type of things, those lessons, that I was learning and at the time I didn't know I was learning. As I got older and matured and started to understand, Coach Fox used to tell this stuff all the time. People that I looked up to, they ended up playing a major role because they were Kappa's.

He admired the fraternity for what it stood for and identified with the principles the fraternity was founded on. "I'm pretty sure all African American fraternities are built upon basically the same principles, which are related to success and achievement." He said:

One of our biggest things is achievement in every field of human endeavor, and when you think about it, everything you do you want to achieve in it. You want to have some type of success even if it's something as simple as driving from work to your home.

Being a member of his fraternity was an important factor in his academic success because when he was "learning the history of the fraternity and the things that the founders and people before you had to go through” those things became a blueprint for him to be successful in college. In the end, Mr. Harris maintained strong relationships with people and friends who supported and shared a common goal of academic success.

Trey Clark. "I was in gifted classes, so I didn't spend a lot of my class time with my friends, per se.” Even though he did not take classes with many of his friends, Trey
took classes with a core group of students who were around him “all the time.” While in high school, Trey was in the gifted program, but he wanted to attend Werner High School because he had cousins playing football and an uncle coaching the football team. Although he never had the opportunity to attend Werner High School he said:

That decision of staying at East Side High School, what that decision has done for me has paid for itself a thousand times over. Had I not gone to East Side High School, I wouldn't have built the relationships with the people who are making the decisions for Lake Parish school system now.

He emphasized how important it was for him to build positive relationships with people he met while in high school. “You don't think about those connections that you're making. You don't know where they're going to take you later on.” He continued to develop those meaningful relationships and strong social networks when he was a member of the Student Government Association (SGA) at East Side High School.

“Being in the SGA taught me how to bridge social gaps, and it taught me how to deal with people on different levels.” After graduating from high school, he went to college and became a member of university SGA and met more academically minded people.

When Trey enrolled into South East City University, he became “a justice on the student court” on the university SGA committee. During that time, Trey attended the honors college and lived in the honors dorm. “I had friends that were academics because they had an honors dorm at that time, Benson Hall.” The students who lived in the dorm were allegedly the smartest students from around the state and the “core group of guys” he associated with. The friends he had in college were like-minded people, and they all brought “different experiences to the table.” He made friends with people who wanted to be academically successful like him. “Most of the guys that I ran with during that time, we all had an understanding that we had to get out of school.” As a result of being
surrounded by friends who shared a common academic goal, Trey was a part of a social environment that was conducive to learning and emphasized academic success.

**Lafayette.** He said there were “maybe two or three guys that didn’t finish high school, but the majority of guys that” he went to school with graduated. Lafayette said a few “of them went on to college.” Nonetheless, Lafayette’s college friends had a greater impact on his decision to stay in college even though many of them did not graduate.

“When I got to college, it motivated me even more because I saw guys that I started college with that didn’t finish.” He recalled a guy that lived next door to him in his dorm “that dropped out after his first semester.” His roommate “dropped out after the first year,” and three guys who graduated from his former high school a year before he did, dropped out. When they dropped out of college, Lafayette said, "Hey! I'm not going to quit. I'm going to finish. I started this. I'm going to go ahead and finish it." Even after watching many of his friends drop out of school, he admitted after being in school for four and a half years, he thought about quitting. Lafayette felt if he had quit, he would have wasted four years. “I think all of that played a role in me staying in it and finishing.”

When he was in college, he said, “It was a party city.” “I guess combining all the parties I attended with the freedom of being out of my parent's house, I think all of that played a role with me becoming a little bit lax on my studies.” His relaxed attitude towards his academic performance caused him to lose some of his financial aid because he became a member of the African-American Greek organization Kappa Alpha Psi. However, being a member of Kappa Alpha Psi helped him stay focused on graduating from college. He said:
Yeah! Definitely, because first, of course, you had to have the grade point average to pledge. Second, a lot of the older brothers would come around and say, “Hey man, how much longer until you graduate? What your grades look like?” They were always checking up on us just to make sure we were on track to graduate.

Being in that situation was beneficial to him because he recognized other undergraduate African-American fraternal organizations did not have older members who returned and encouraged them to graduate. “It's cool to have those older successful guys who had graduated around you constantly pushing you.” The men who pledged with him also motivated him to finish school. “When you have line brothers, when they graduate, you want to graduate too.” He did not want to be the only person “on the line to not graduate.” “All of those things together, I guess they all worked together to help me remain focused on graduating.

Scott. When he was in high school, Scott went “to school half a day,” and worked for a major oil and gas company the remaining of the day. He socialized with his friends during class or at lunch, but his social environment changed when he went to work. “Within the turn of an hour, I'm in a room with nothing but engineers and people with degrees, and I got to, turn it on and turn it off.” He indicated, the way he spoke around his friends was much different than how he spoke when he was at work. He indicated learning how to speak among his friends helped him while in different social environments, transitioning between social groups, and during high school and college. His speaking skills allowed him to work in the student life department at Central City University as the only African-American male. As he was transitioning between high school and college and between different social groups, Scott decided to pledge Omega Psi Phi.
Before pledging Omega Psi Phi in college, he was motivated to join the collegiate chapter of the organization by the affiliated youth fraternity with the same name in high school. The sponsors of the youth organization made Scott aware of the necessary academic requirements needed to join when he entered college. "He knew he "had to have a certain GPA in college in order to pledge." "I knew when I got there I wanted to pledge, and knew what it would take, such as attending interest meetings and stuff like that." As a result, Scott said, "When I went to college, I was focused." Being a member of a fraternity allowed Scott to meet individuals who influenced him to make academic decisions that were focused on choosing a major he wanted to pursue.

Jet. "I wasn't the most talkative in high school. I mostly kept to some of the friends that I had in middle school and elementary school. I had my own little group of friends." All of his friends were members of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) or the high school bowling team. As a result, he had the same core group of friends all four years of high school. Being involved in school organizations allowed Jet to become more sociable, and he continued to explore his social environment when he went to college.

When Jet enrolled into Midway University, he used the social skills he learned in high school to help become more sociable in college. Jet said, those skills from high school "definitely helped with being more sociable" and "being more willing to open up." He found it "easier to approach people," which he said his social skills "improved my own approachability in a sense." As a result, Jet asserted the experiences he had in high school definitely helped him to "be more open" to different social environments in college.
During his time at Midway University, he interned for the university's TV station. When working there, he established new friendships “across the entire campus.” Working with the university TV station provided him the chance to film the football games and he said he “had an opportunity to work alongside the photographer and all others that were on the football field.” Jet established connections with other students on campus and created new friends within his social environment. In the end, Jet benefited from becoming actively involved in his social environments.

Even though he had successfully assimilated into his new environment, he said being in college was “different for everybody.” “Some can feel a need to be somewhere, and some just don’t see the point in it.” He remembered a former high school friend who eventually dropped out. During that time, his high school friend was his neighbor in his dorm. Occasionally Jet saw his friend studying, but he said, “Eventually I stopped seeing him.” Jet remembered approaching his friend a few years later and asked him about college. Even though his friend dropped out, reconnecting with his friend provided him with a new perspective on how important attending college was to him. “It was like a mixed bag of just seeing them succeed and then dropping off for one reason or another.” As a result, he indicated the social experiences he had in college kept him “humble more than anything” and willing to finish college.

Coach J. When he was in high school, his friend Ben was someone from his childhood who he said “probably impacted me the most.” Although he “was around him a lot growing up,” Coach J. stated, “He probably doesn’t even know this, but he was someone I looked up to.” Coach J. recalled his friend’s “family were a little bit better off than my family.” Being aware of the differences between his family and Ben’s family,
Coach J. said, “I just strived.” He wanted “that type of lifestyle when” he became older.

Coach J. explained:

His mom was a librarian at the school we attended. His dad was successful in the local police department. His father had his own office in the police department. Ben always knew he was going to be successful. I was around that kind of positive environment a lot. I went to church with him. I went to school with him from elementary, to junior high, and to high school. I wanted that family. There’s nothing against my family, I just wanted that kind of family. His family was a little better.

Visiting with Ben’s family allowed him to want to achieve more in his life.

When Coach J. was in college, he did not attend local night clubs, parties, or other social events. “I’m more of a secluded person, and I like to hang with a small group of people that I trust, people that I grew up with.” Although he was not socially active in college, his friends “did the opposite of focusing on academics,” which motivated him to remain focused in college. “I didn’t want to go that route, so yeah, they actually motivated me to stay academically minded.” He realized and said to himself, “No, that’s not what I want to do. I want to be the one supporting my mom if I’m able to.” Therefore, he said his friends “were a motivating factor for me to do better.”

DJ. “I tell a lot of the kids that I teach now to pick your friends wisely because I didn’t accept just hanging with anybody.” He said, “Most of the people that I hung with, friends and even girls I dated, they were all somewhat over achievers to some degree.” He did not associate with people to be accepted. “The social factors influenced my academics a lot because, it was almost natural.” DJ chose his friends based on the kind of grades they earned in school. “If you were a D or F high school kid, we were good friends, cool,” but he said, “As far as hanging out with you or coming by the house, it didn’t happen.” Unfortunately, he was not as fortunate to find similar academically
minded people within his neighborhood. “To tell you the truth, I grew up in the hood. You think about growing up in the hood per say, it's hard to find people who are like you.” Fortunately, he established friendships with people in high school and in college who focused on academic achievement. DJ indicated:

I think it was just a mentality that we were going to do right. We were going to do the best we can, with what we got. It just trickled over in academics. It trickled over into the community citizenship. Just being around the right kind of people was a big influence in my academics.

After he graduated from high school and enrolled into Central City University, his social environment changed.

DJ’s social environment “changed a little bit” when he went to college. Since he played football for Central City University, he said, “You are with these guys a lot, especially during the season.” Even though many of the football players he met were from other states, he said, “You build relationships with guys that may be a little ‘rouge-ish’ and some a little smart.” There were “some football player’s that were straight nerds.” Although his social environment had expanded, he maintained positive academic relationships with players on the football team.

Esau Jenkins. “I didn't really have very much of a social life. I think that was kind of the downside. My mother was very strict.” His mother did not allow him to attend high school sporting events, “prom,” “high school dances,” and other school related functions. My social life was very much at home, and that was it for me until college started.” He felt missing those events affected his social development. While not in school, he was only allowed to talk or text his friends on a phone after school. Even though he did not have the opportunity to interact with his friends outside of school, he maintained a positive outlook on the relationships he had with his friends.
Esau did not feel as though he had a poor connection between his friends. However, he argued his social skills and self-confidence were delayed because of his socially restrictive home environment. As a result, he felt his lack of social skills and self-confidence created hesitation and doubt about his academic decisions. “I think that even in school, you sort of start to compare yourself to other students, and the students who can speak up more in class and discuss more in class.” Even though he did not create the kind of relationships he had hoped for in high school, he went to college with a desire to improve his social environment.

When Esau enrolled into Midway University, he exclaimed, “Oh yeah! In college I came out of my shell a lot.” Esau recalled being nervous when talking to large groups of people but over time, his nervousness went away because of his improved social networking in college. His social environment flourished while he was in college. “That's when I started to really make friends, and really build connections. That's when I felt like I started to discover myself and what I really wanted to do.” However, he struggled in the beginning to create the kind of social environment he desired and though about leaving the university. Fortunately, he became involved with a few study groups, and met most of his friends when he lived in the aviation dorm. Although the residents were aviation majors, Esau and the future pilots were his friends during undergraduate and graduate school. “That was a big part of what made me start to do a lot more in college and started to join a lot more things.”

Big Cali. “The main force was my older cousin Derrick. He used to take me with him to classes.” When Big Cali was in high school, his cousin Derick was someone who exposed him to numerous college experiences that impacted his perception about college.
His cousin took him to school festivals and was the person who explained the importance of attending college. “He probably was the main influence in me understanding college more.” Derrick served as a role model to him and as a possibility that he could be academically successful. Nevertheless, going to college was not very important to him when he was in high school and during his initial college experience.

After attending Start University, California Community College, and serving twelve years in prison, his wife was the most important social factor he attributed to attending college. Even though he always wanted to go to college, his wife encouraged him to dedicate himself to graduating with a college degree. Big Cali said:

She was a huge help in guidance and direction, and she had a wealth of information that I needed. Because it probably would be ... Well it would have been much more difficult for me to succeed and achieve what I have without her guidance and direction, if she hadn’t directed me to State Line College, if she hadn’t known about the Dantes program, those things like that, I didn’t know about that.

After being in jail, all his goals solidified around his wife. In the end, his wife constantly encouraged him to pursue his degree in counseling, and he viewed her as someone who had a positive impact on his academic success.

E. Trane. E. Trane was a member of “a bunch of different organizations in high school.” “The kind of people that those organizations pull in, everyone is high-achieving and goal-driven. They want to succeed in everything they do.” As a result, e and his friends “all had the same goals” and “wanted to be successful.”

When he was in college, his social environment expanded because he was a member of the university band and was an orientation leader. Being an orientation leader allowed him to meet many people. “I think my social environment was great because at that stage, I was able to meet tons of different people from all different backgrounds, and
people whose parents were rich.” Just like in high school, E. Trane surrounded himself with people in college who were goal oriented, kept him focused on his academics, and encouraged him to stay in college. Being around friends who shared similar academic goals increased his competitive spirit to succeed academically. “I've always been a competitive person, and so I feel like that was something else that helped, which was being in class with them. We all kind of competed with each other.” In the end, E. Trane maintained his high school and college social environment had a positive impact on his academic success.

Summary of Social Factors for Academic Success

Several social factors emerged as themes from participant interviews. All but one of the participants indicated being surrounded by people, friends, relatives, a significant other, or members of their fraternity during high school or college as factors that contributed to their academic success. The people in each participant’s life, while growing up, motivated them to remain focused on achieving their goals of graduating from high school and college. Even friends who dropped out of high school motivated them to be academically minded. Their high school peers challenged them to be academically successful, taught them how to bridge social gaps within school organizations, exposed them to post-secondary opportunities, and shared similar goals. Those positive relationships were established in high school and continued during college.

The researcher defined social factors as the individual’s interactions with technology, peers, community members, teachers, and family members who may
influence the academic achievement of African-American men. Xu and Filler (2008) further emphasized and expressed the impact siblings and family members had on the developing individual. The authors suggested both microsystem and mesosystem in the EMHD described the development of the individual by way of these complex interactions between people who potentially motivated or encouraged the individual.

Nine participants indicated their association with their friends, their family members, and their membership into high school organizations motivated their academic success. John Harris expressed while in high school, he surrounded himself with friends who wanted to go to college and be successful. His friends challenged each other and were academically competitive. He indicated he wanted to do better than his friends, and when he was in high school, he felt obtaining an education held positive implications. Trey Clark established relationships with people in high school who taught him how to bridge social gaps and manage his relationships with people on various social levels. Scott shared a similar experience as Trey when he described his ability to navigate various social groups while in high school. He pointed to learning how to use different forms of speech when around his high school friends and changing it when working with coworkers. He felt learning how to change the way he spoke around his peers taught him how to navigate between various social groups, which he attributed to his successful transition between high school to college. Lafayette remembered witnessing his friends drop out of high school motivated him to stay in school.

Jet expressed his membership in various high school organizations allowed him to become more social. He indicated the social skills he learned while in high school helped him improve his social environment and helped him become more open to different
social environments. DJ indicated when he was in high school, he remembered associating himself with people who wanted to be successful and who influenced his academic success. He recalled not settling for creating relationships with people who were not academically motivated. He chose his friends based on their academic performance and emphasized his friends and female companions were over overachievers.

Big Cali and Coach J. indicated having someone who they looked to for guidance and motivated them to be receptive to the benefits of obtaining an education. Big Cali identified his cousin Derick as someone who exposed him to college after high school. His cousin was a major influence toward him understanding the purpose of obtaining an education and attending college. Coach J. identified his childhood friend, Ben, as someone he looked up to when he was in high school. Coach J. indicated being around his friend’s family motivated him to want to do better for himself and become successful.

E. Trane remembered his high school friends as people who shared the same academic goals as he did. Many of his friends wanted to be academically successful and attend college. His high school friends motivated him to be academically minded. E. Trane emphasized he loved his high school social experiences and having friends who shared similar aspirations intensified his high school experience.

Although many participants emphasized positive interactions with people within their social environment, one of the participants had no high school social life. Esau felt his inability to participate in high school social events, due to his mother’s strict discipline practices, deprived him of developing his social skills. As a result, he lacked self-confidence and had doubts about his academic abilities.
When the participants entered college, they continued to interact with social
groups that promoted academic success and were goal driven towards graduating from
college. Trey indicated when he went to college, he established friendships with people
who wanted to be academically successful. All of his friends wanted to graduate from
college.

Coach J. was motivated to stay in college when he noticed his friends not trying to
do their best. Since some of his friends were not concerned about their academic
performance, their lack of performance motivated him. E. Trane surrounded himself with
friends who were goal oriented and wanted to be academically successful. He identified
his friends as people who were academically competitive. Their competitive spirit
increased E. Trane’s academic success while he was in college.

When DJ was in college, he established friendships with people who seemed
unlikely to be smart even though they were football players. He learned how to broaden
his perception about the academic abilities of people he associated with in college.
Although Esau was not able to establish friendships with people in high school who
contributed to his academic success, when he went to college, his college social
environment allowed him to explore new social experiences. Even though much of Jet’s
social environment consisted of him working alongside fellow coworkers at the
university TV station, he indicated being motivated by his friends who dropped out of
college. As they dropped out, he recognized the importance of obtaining an education,
which increased his desire to be academically successful.

Big Cali expressed his wife was his major support system while attending college.
She supported his second attempt at attending college after being released from prison.
She constantly encouraged him to pursue his college degree in spite of his criminal record. She shared information about how he could benefit from attending a non-traditional post-secondary program while maintaining a full time job. Big Cali indicated his wife always encouraged him to dedicate the time he spent in school to graduating from college and trying to achieve his goals.

John Harris, Lafayette, and Scott identified their African-American fraternal organizations as major social factors that motivated them while in college. John Harris became a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, which he felt influenced his academic success. He felt the history of the fraternity promoted academic success in the values the fraternity upheld. He maintained the fraternity promoted the expansion of African-American culture beyond common cultural norms. He recalled his high school coach, who was an African-American male, as someone who influenced his perception about joining the fraternity when he went to college. John remembered being around people who were in the same organization when he was growing up, who influenced his decision to attend college.

Lafayette was also a member of the same Greek organization as John and indicated members of his organization helped him stay focused on graduating from college. He recalled elder members of his fraternity returning to school to encourage him to graduate. Scott indicated his fraternal brothers of Omega Psi Phi allowed him to meet people who influenced his academic decisions while in college. Before he became a member of the organization, he recalled being a member of the youth affiliated organization with the same name in high school. The organization sponsors motivated
him to pursue a college degree and informed him of the academic requirements needed in order to join the collegiate chapter.

Upon reviewing the interview information gathered from each participant about the social factors that were attributed to their academic success, the researcher identified the following theme (listed in bold) and sub-theme:

- **Peer influence and motivation** – high school and college organization influence.

According to the responses from each participant, each of them were surrounded by friends and peers in high school or college who influenced, encouraged, and motivated them to become academically successful. Their friends in high school and college challenged and supported their academic endeavors.

Table 4 provides an illustration of the factors that the research participants identified as what led them to their academic success in high school and college.

### Table 4. Social Factors for Academic Success

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*Note. HS = High school*

Each participant’s social environment included individuals who supported, encouraged, motivated, and influenced their academic success and decisions, which contributed to them successfully graduating from high school and college. Participants
were surrounded by their peers, friends, fraternity members, and a significant other who were members in each participant’s microsystem who positively impacted their academic success. Seemingly, the participants’ connections and interactions with each of the aforementioned individuals crossed into each participants’ mesosystem. Each participant had multiple academic interactions with individuals within their microsystem, which took place in high school, college, or within their community. The multiple interactions each participant had with their peers, friends, fraternity members, and a significant other revealed the following factor, peer support and motivation, which contributed to each participant’s academic success.

**Socioeconomic Factors for Academic Success**

John Harris. “What's so crazy was I didn't want for anything and I really didn't know about our financial situation. I just know I asked and sometimes I'd get it, sometimes I didn't.” He felt he was fortunate to have people in his life who supported him financially. Mr. Sanders gave him “one hundred dollars” for every one hundred yards he ran during football games, and his barbers gave him “fifty dollars” for every “hundred yards he ran. “As a high school kid, I was getting at least a hundred and fifty dollars a week, and mamma didn't know where that money was coming from.” When Mr. Harris was in the twelfth grade, his former gifted teacher, Ms. Charlotte introduced him to the superintendent who provided him with his fist job in high school. Mr. Harris stated Ms. Charlotte was his “first true example of a White person caring about an African-American kid.” As a result, the financial support he received in high school allowed him to “survive and be able to purchase certain things and go places” he would not have had the opportunity to without people supporting him.
While in college at South Rock University, Mr. Harris received a partial scholarship athletic scholarship and a federal Pell Grant. He received a refund amount of three hundred dollars each semester. Any additional college expenses, his mother mailed “cash money in the mail,” and sent him phone cards. Mr. Harris acknowledged while he was at South Rock University, he was putting his mother “through some financial strains.” After his first year at South Rock University, he was provided with an opportunity to attend a local university with a full athletic scholarship. He indicated, “All the money I received from my Pell Grant came to me.” While attending the local university did not have any financial problems. In addition to the scholarship and Pell Grant, members of the football team were given a tax free “five hundred dollar clothing allowance” every semester from a local clothing company. Nevertheless, with the extensive financial support in high school and college, Mr. Harris maintained a strong financial support system that aided in his academic success.

Trey Clark. “We weren't rich by any means, but we had whatever we needed. I don't ever recall looking in the cabinets, looking in the cupboards and not having what we needed, or whenever something was broken.” Trey self-identified his parents as a middle class family. Although his parents supported him financially, he indicated, “I was always taught to work.” Trey worked summer jobs refereeing basketball, little league football, and T-ball games. Trey credited his parents for providing him with a financial support system that opened doors for him to be academically and financially successful. Trey stated:

My parents always provided us with resources at home. There was never a time when I was without the things I needed to be successful. I was never without anything and it made a difference. When you start talking about financial commitments, being committed to education, that was their commitment. My
parents always invested in our education. It was never a question as to where their priorities were.

In the end, Trey was fortunate to have parents that were able to financially support his academic aspirations.

When Trey was in college, he initially wanted to play football, but he decided against playing sports and used the money from his academic scholarship to pay for his undergraduate degree. While studying for his undergraduate degree, he indicated there “wasn’t a whole lot going on” in South Lake City. In order to earn extra money, he and a few college acquaintances hosted parties. Along with hosting parties, Trey supported himself by working at the local Block Buster video rental store. As a result, Trey was able to support himself financially without the assistance of his parents.

Lafayette. When he lived in the “hood”, his mother always worked two jobs. His mother had to work two jobs because his father “was in and out of jobs.” Nevertheless, his “parents always pushed education” on him. His mother not only verbally encouraged him, she led by example. His mother graduated from college and became a teacher’s assistant. As a result of growing up in socioeconomic unstable conditions, he was unable to acquire many of the things he wanted, but his parents always provided him with the things he needed. “I never felt like I was extremely poor.” Although his parents shielded him from their economic disparity in order to keep him focused on his academics, when he was around his peers, he became cognizant of how poor his family really was during that time. “Even though I knew that, I never felt that. My parents never let me feel it.” The poor socioeconomic environment did not hinder his academic achievement. Lafayette maintained high academic marks in high school and persevered through the negative factors that could have affected his academic performance.
Before attending college, Lafayette obtained a scholarship from his church, the African-American fraternal organization Phi Beta Sigma, a state issued scholarship, and a federal Pell Grant. Receiving those funds was a compelling reason for him to attend college. Lafayette received a refund until he lost his state issued scholarship after joining Kappa Alpha Psi. As a result, he became employed to supplement the loss of money needed to pay for school. “That put a little more strain on me because I didn't want to put the financial strain on my parents.” With the added responsibility of paying for school and an apartment, he felt those responsibilities factors in to him “thinking about quitting” college. Fortunately, he motivated himself to stay in school. Lafayette stated:

Being able to receive scholarships, multiple scholarships, all of that of course helped. I couldn’t have imagined having the responsibility of going to school during my first three years and having to pay for all of that. I don't think I would have made it if that had been the case. I think by having the grades in high school, which opened up the scholarship opportunities helped a lot. All of that played a big role in propelling me to finish school.

In the end and in spite of his socioeconomic struggles in high school, Lafayette obtained the necessary financial assistance which allowed him to graduate from college.

Scott. When Scott was growing up, his mother was the sole financial provider for their family and was very active with ensuring she had jobs to support her family. “My mom would sell fish plates, do hair, own a daycare, and work at a school.” His mother provided transportation services for the “elderly” members within the community. “His mother devoted much of her time working random jobs in order to support him and his older brother. When she felt what she was doing was not beneficial for her family, she sought out new opportunities for earning money for her family. Due to their financial circumstances, Scott, his mother, and brother were forced to live in a two bedroom house with ten other family members “for a couple of years.” His mother carried the
responsibility of providing for him, his brother, and for some of the other family members. Nonetheless, when they were in high school, she provided him and his brother with things they wanted, as long as they made good grades. As a result, he and his brother maintained an appearance of financial stability even though he was aware of the financial struggle he lived in.

When his mother found herself struggling with earning money for her family, his older brother provided financial support. “My mom was in a bind and money would just show up. It kind of made it a strain on their relationship because she didn't want him to go down the same path that she went down.” His older brother was involved in similar illegal activities as his mother prior to returning to Louisiana. Even though Scott wanted to sell drugs like his brother, his brother steered the drug dealers away from potentially pulling him into that environment. Instead of allowing Scott to sell drugs, his brother financially compensated him for not becoming involved. As a result, his brother supplied him with whatever he needed in order to keep him away from selling drugs and the people who could have a negative impact on his academic success and his ability to attend college.

Before going to college, Scott said, “I got offered so many scholarships for engineering, but I turned them down.” He enrolled into “Central City University on an academic scholarship” and was awarded a state issued scholarship. While pursuing his undergraduate degree, he worked “forty hours a week” at the local mall to earn money. Scott indicated having to work and attend school “wasn’t a bad thing because” he knew he had financially support himself. He said:

Because it wasn't like I had anybody at home to send me money or anything like that. There wasn't anybody taking care of me. There, wasn't anybody that I could
call. Some people are like, "Ma, I don’t have any gas money." And the gas money coming. Or like, "Ma, I don’t have any food," you know.

Although Scott successfully managed his academic responsibilities and employment status, he stated, “I kind of got my hustle from my mom.” Acquiring his mother’s work ethic allowed him endure even when he knew he would not receive financial support from home. In the end, the financial support he received from his mother, brother, and tuition assistance contributed to his academic success.

Jet. When Jet was in high school, he described his financial environment as a sustainable but “fluctuating financial environment.” In the beginning, his mother and grandmother supported the family financially, but his grandmother was forced to quit working because of medical problems. As a result, his mother became the primary financial provider for the family. However, when his mother married his step-father, he said, “He definitely took some of the burden off my mom.” Jet felt it was “nice to see” some of the financial stress shared with his step-father, which “definitely helped her out.” Eventually, Jet obtained a job and removed some of the financial burden from his parents. Having a job allowed him to purchase items that his parents would normally acquire for him. Jet emphasized having a job “helped give them a break” and provided him with a "little bit of independence."

Jet continued working while in college. He received tuition assistance from a state issued scholarship, student loans, and a scholarship from his job. Although the restaurant he worked at closed, he continued to work because he “wanted something to do.” Jet spent time working for the university TV station, the university bookstore, and the local video game store. Even though Jet was raised in a sustainable financial
environment, he maintained financial independence during high school and throughout his college career.

Coach J. "We got what we needed. I got some of my wants, but for the most part, the needs were taken care of." Coach J. described his socioeconomic environment was that of a lower middle class and did not experience any financial hardships when he was growing up. While living with his grandparents, both grandparents had jobs to financially support Coach J. Even though his grandfather died during his senior year of high school, Coach J. remained focused in order to enroll into college.

"My parents weren't able to afford college for me, so I was able to obtain a Pell grant to help pay for college." Even with the Pell Grant, he had obtained loans to offset the difference in college fees. Coach J. "had the grades" but he "didn't have the ACT score" to obtain a state issued scholarship. While attending college, Coach J. worked at National Bank to "support" himself through college. "Eventually I started working full time, which was another reason why I had to drop out of school." The increased work load and death of his grandmother had a negative impact on him. He stated:

That is why I stopped going to school during that period. I worked at National Bank for five years. I was making decent income. I wasn't married or anything like that. At that time, I did have a child, so having a child was another factor that I considered when I started working more. I had to support my son.

Nevertheless, Coach J. decided to reenroll into college. However, he indicated "being laid off motivated" him "to go back to school" even though he "had already started going back to college and taking some classes." In the end, Coach J. continued to attend school while supporting himself financially, losing his grandparents, and caring for his son.

DJ. DJ was raised by his mother and grandmother and indicated that there were "definitely some socioeconomic problems" at home. "During school, there were a lot of
challenges because there wasn't any extra money to really do anything else.” Having those problems helped DJ with making the decision to attend college. DJ said:

As a matter of fact, I think that was sort of the influence as far as me going to school, which was knowing that if I didn't either get loans or even apply for any kind of federal aid, it was definitely going to be a challenge going to school.

Even though he had financial problems at home, the relationships he had with his high school teachers and coaches motivated him to stay in school even when the financial strain affected his academic determination. His teachers and coaches reminded him of how close he was to graduating and that he was going to receive an athletic “scholarship.” As a result, DJ continued to focus on his academic and athletic opportunities in high school and enrolled into college.

DJ recalled having a few financial challenges. His first year was paid for with student loans and a Pell Grant. Once he was eligible to receive his full athletic scholarship, he stopped receiving student loans, and he was refunded the excess money from the Pell Grant and scholarship. DJ used the additional money from the Pell Grant to help support his child. “That's why that Pell Grant was important, because I was able to take a little bit of that money and help with that particular responsibility.” After attending school for a year and a half, his financial problems were further minimized when he was able to live on campus and obtain a full athletic scholarship. The extra Pell Grant money allowed DJ to pay for additional personal expenses. During this time, his aunt provided him with a car as long as he stayed in school. He indicates his mobility “took a lot of pressure off” him with financially supporting his child and attending school. DJ emphasized if it was not for receiving the aforementioned benefits, “it could have been a real tight situation going through college because there wasn't any money.
coming from the house.” In the end, DJ remained focus throughout his socioeconomic adversities and maintained good academic standings in order to graduate from college.

**Esau Jenkins.** Esau recalled his mother managing all the financial concerns for his family. “Looking back, she definitely did all of that by herself.” His mother worked many jobs to maintain financial stability for their family. Esau indicated the fragile financial stability of his family made it difficult for his mother to “make ends meet.” “She did the best she could and we, my sister and I, who is six years younger than me, always had everything we needed.” Esau understood his mother had a huge financial responsibility, and to overcome his financial problems at home, he would need to attend college. “I would definitely say that helped motivate me to, not only go to college, but to finish college and to then look for a pretty decent job.”

When he enrolled into Midway University, he was awarded a state issued scholarship, a few grants, and a couple of scholarships from the English department at Midway University. After he graduated with his undergraduate degree, he enrolled into graduate school. Esau won a scholarship from the Midway University English department to help pay for graduate school. However, the scholarship was not enough to cover the tuition and various expenses. As a result, he used a student loan to supplement the remaining tuition balance and university fees. He also worked as a resident assistant (RA) to pay for his housing expenses. Working was a means of removing any financial burden from his mother when he was in college. “If I didn't have jobs, it would've been her sending me money when she could, which wouldn't have been often.” Working was how he supported himself financially and reduced the financial strain on his family while attending college.
Big Cali. Big Cali indicated he lived in a working class family to which his father “made good money” working at a “major car manufacturer” and his “mother was a nurse”. Although his mother and father were separated, they financially support him. Even though his mother was a nurse, she chose to live in a low income neighborhood. “I lived amongst the lower social economic class, but I wasn't necessarily at the same level as them, which also caused conflict.” Her decision had a negative impact on his personal life within the community. Big Cali remembered fighting with family members because his father picked him up in a new car. Those family members believed he thought he was better than they were because his mother and father were able to show visible signs of their financial stability and support for Big Cali.

After graduating from high school, Big Cali attended Star University on a full athletic scholarship. Once his wife became pregnant, he left Star University to attend California Community College. At first, the community college offered him a full athletic scholarship, a job for his wife, and a place to live, but he said, “I got in trouble right before I was supposed to transfer to the four year school and messed that up.” Unfortunately, the community college retracted their offer once they learned of his legal problems. The community college changed their initial offer to wanting him to pay for his first. Although Big Cali did not agree to the new offer, he found a way to attend the community college but became involved with selling drugs, which led to his incarceration.

After attending California Community College, he moved to Electric City and became heavily involved in selling drugs. Before being incarcerated, he earned money by hosting comedy events with an associate and selling drugs. Selling drugs was more
appealing to Big Cali even though he wanted to find a legal way to make a living. While
on the run, he spent a lot of time reading “about businesses” and thought about
businesses. When he received his twelve year sentence, he said, “I was focusing on
things, and all types of stuff opened up.” Big Cali “learned about real estate investing”
while “on the run” and wondered why he never thought about investments when he “had
boxes of money stacked up.” “I wanted to go to school while I was there but they
canceled the program, they cut out Pell Grants for inmates, which was part of the Crime
Bill Clinton singed right when I got locked up.” Fortunately, when he was released
“George Bush changed Bill Clinton’s Crime Bill” which allowed Big Cali to receive
financial aid.

Upon his release, he worked at a retail store and remembered wanting to finish his
“degree in business” and “was supposed to get a promotion” after obtaining his degree.
Even though he was employed, his wife encouraged him to return to college and purse a
degree in counseling. Before receiving a Pell Grant, State Line College reviewed his
college transcript prior to prison. Because of his poor academic performance after
attending Star University and California Community College, he had to pay his “first year
out of pocket just to get eligible again to receive financial aid.” The day he graduated, he
obtained “a job at a counseling agency making thirteen dollars an hour.” Although he
was employed, he and his wife’s goal was to always own their own counseling agency,
which prompted him to return to State Line College. In the end, Big Cali said having a
master’s degree provided him with “a much better opportunity” with this criminal
record.”
E. Trane. When E. Trane was growing up, he stated their “financial situation at home was good” and described it as that of an average middle class family. His parents made sure he and his sister had food to eat and clothes to wear. “They were great at providing the things we needed and great at helping with getting your homework done.” While he was in school, his parents financially supported him in all his school related and various other activities. “They knew a lot, coaching you through things, always a lot of extracurricular activities, and they always found money for that.” E. Trane recalled his participation in multiple school activities introduced an unwelcoming financial challenge. When he “made the debate team in high school,” he was told first year debate team members could participate in an on campus debate camp for two hundred dollars, which his mother was willing to pay for. However, those who continued after the first year had to attend a preferred off campus camp for $3,000. Even though his mother was unwilling to pay for the second camp, E. Trane became cognizant of the financial capabilities and limitations of his family. He asserted his parents knew when to limit his participation in school activities.

After graduating from high school, E. Trane lived at home with his parents while attending college. As a result, his financial responsibilities were not equal to students who were forced to live on or off campus. He saved money that many students needed to pay for housing and other miscellaneous college expenses. He received a state issued scholarship, which paid for his tuition, but the state issued scholarship was not enough to pay for his books and other college expenses. “I had like small student loans, maybe like $500 a quarter just to pay for books and stuff.” While in college, E. Trane worked because he enjoyed having his “own money to buy things.” E. Trane was financially
independent and never asked his parents for money. Even though his parents were willing to help support him financially in high school and college, E. Trane felt it was more important to financially support himself while attending college. In the end, E. Trane utilized various socioeconomic support systems to achieve academic success.

Summary of Socioeconomic Factors for Academic Success

Several socioeconomic factors emerged as themes from participant interviews. According to the interview data, the research participants were provided with various forms of socioeconomic assistance while in high school and college. Even though not every participant had strong financial support prior to attending college, each participant received some form of financial assistance in order to further their academic endeavors. Some participants also found jobs during high school and college to financially support themselves. The majority of the participants received financial support from family members who felt they were investing in the academic success of each participant.

The researcher defined socioeconomic factors as financial concerns that intersect societal dynamics that contribute to the unsuccessful or successful selection and completion of secondary and post-secondary institutions. These factors may include the accessibility of financial assistance for college (Wood & Harrison, 2014), socioeconomic status of an institution's student body (Stewart, 2007), or available employment and career progression opportunities (Cuyjet, 1997; Owens et al., 2010). Participants in this study shared information that identified their financial adversities or privileges while attending high school, their opportunities to obtain the necessary financial assistance for attending a
post-secondary institution, their desire to work while attending college in order to gain financial independence, or to lessen the financial burden on their parents.

Nine participants identified family members, members of their community, or educators as people who financially supported their academic success. John Harris indicated being fortunate to have people in his life who financially supported him in high school. He recalled his local barbers paying him for his performance at football games. Even though they stopped paying him after seeing how good he was on the field, their support motivated him to maintain his academic success in high school.

Trey Clark expressed his parents taught him to always work for what he wanted and they provided a financial support system that positively impacted his academic success. Trey recalled his parents making sure he had all the necessary academic resources at home while in high school. When his friends were forced to visit the local library to use encyclopedias, Trey's parents purchased a set for him and his brother to use when they needed. Trey indicated his parents ensured he and his brother were always supported financially to keep their academics first and their athletic talents second.

Lafayette and Scott recalled their mother’s having multiple jobs to financially support their family. Lafayette indicated his mother frequently worked two jobs and his father would work when he could find a job. Even though Lafayette acknowledged having financial hardships while in high school, his parents always encouraged him to do well in school in spite of their financial difficulties. His parents never allowed him to feel as though they were poor while providing him with the things he needed. Scott’s mother was the sole financial provider for his family. She recalled his mother working various jobs within their community. As a result of the extensive hard work his mother
did in order to financially support her family, Scott and his brother went to school dressed in clothes that appeared as though his family was financially stable. Scott also recalled his brother financially supporting his family with money he obtained from selling drugs.

Jet’s mother and grandmother provided him with the necessary financial support while he was in high school. When his grandmother was forced to stop working, his mother became the family’s sole financial provider until she married his step-father. Jet indicated his step-father relieved some of the financial burden his mother had to endure. Somewhat similar circumstance to Jet, Coach J. recalled his grandparents financially supporting him when he was in school. They provided the financial support Coach J. needed until they passed away.

Even though DJ was not able to receive any financial support from his mother, he recalled being motivated by his financial hardships. The problems he dealt with inspired him to attend college. He remembered his high school teachers and coaches motivating him to look beyond his financial hardships and recognize the opportunities he had. Like Scott’s and Lafayette’s mother, Esau Jenkin’s mother also worked multiple jobs in order to provide financial support. She was the only person who financially supported him. Esau recognized that in order for him to overcome some of the financial hardships he experienced, he needed to go to college.

Big Cali and E. Trane had parents who financially supported their high school academics. Although Big Cali’s parents were separated, his mother and father maintained financial responsibility for supporting his academics. Even though his mother chose to live in a low income environment, she chose to do so to take advantage of paying a reduced amount of rent in their housing complex. Unlike Big Cali, E. Trane
lived with both of his parents when he was in high school. His mother and father
provided him with the necessary financial support in order for him to participate in many
high school extracurricular activities. He indicated his parents were aware of their
financial limitations and did well with what they had.

When each of the participants entered college, all ten participants received
academic or athletic scholarships, a state issued scholarship, student loans, Pell Grants, or
paid their tuition until they were able to receive financial assistance. John Harris
received an athletic scholarship and federal Pell Grant. He recalled his mother sending
him cash in the mail when he needed. Because he was a football player, a local clothing
company provided him with a clothing allowance every semester. Trey Clark received an
academic scholarship to attend college. He worked at a local movie store and hosted
parties for extra money. Lafayette obtained a scholarship from his church, Phi Beta
Sigma fraternity, a state issued scholarship, and a Pell Grant. Even though he lost his
state issued scholarship after three years of attending college, he supplemented the loss of
funds by working while attending school. Scott accepted an academic scholarship and
receive a state issued scholarship when he went to college. He worked at the local mall
in order to gain financial independence. He indicated he obtained his willingness to work
during school from witnessing his mother work hard when he was growing up. Jet
received a state issued scholarship, student loans, and a scholarship from his employer
when he was in college. Even with a state issued scholarship and student loans, he was
employed throughout his college career.

Coach J. obtained a federal Pell Grant and student loans to pay for college.
During the time he spent in college, he worked at National Bank. The death of his
grandparents, working full-time, and having a child led to him dropping out of college. He became motivated to reenroll into college when he was laid off from work. DJ was fortunate to receive an athletic scholarship to attend college. He received a student loan and a federal Pell Grant to pay for his college tuition. Esau obtained a state issued scholarship, a university academic scholarship, student loans, and a Pell Grant. He also worked during his time spent in college. He felt having job reduced his mother’s financial burden. He felt attending college provided him with an opportunity to increase his potential of becoming financially successful when he reminded himself of the financial difficulties he endured when he was in high school.

When Big Cali graduated from high school, he received a full athletic scholarship to Star University. When he transferred to California Community College, he was forced to pay for his first year with his own money. After attending the community college and while he was in prison, he wanted to earn his college degree. He indicated the Bill Clinton Crime Bill did not allow him to attend college while he was in prison. After he was released, he was able to receive a federal Pell Grant after he paid for his first year of college out of prison. During this time, he maintained a job while attending school. When E. Trane attended college, he only received a state issued scholarship and worked for the university. He felt he was able to be financial independent form his mother and father and d never asked his parents for money.

After reviewing the interview information gathered from each participant about the perceived socioeconomic factors that contributed to their academic success, the researcher identified the following theme (listed in bold) and sub-themes:

- **Financial assistance** – academic resources, socioeconomic hardship motivation, and college tuition assistance opportunities.
Each participant had an opportunity to receive various forms of financial assistance after graduating from high school. Participants received multiple forms of financial assistance that included (a) family financial support, (b) athletic or academic scholarships, (c) a state issued scholarship, (d) a Pell Grant, or (e) student loans. Many participants worked while in high school and college to become financially independent and relieve any financial burden from their parents.

Table 5 illustrates the factors the research participants attributed to their academic success in high school and college.

Table 5. Socioeconomic Factors for Academic Success

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<th></th>
<th>Family Financial Support</th>
<th>Athletic or Academic Scholarship</th>
<th>State Issued Scholarship</th>
<th>Pell Grant</th>
<th>Student Loans</th>
<th>Work</th>
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Although the participants did not attend their parents, grandparents, or contributing individual’s place of employment, their employment status affected each participants’ exosystem. Because the exosystem described the indirect association each participant had with other systems in which the participant was not included, the employment status of the individuals in the participant’s support system impacted their perceptions of the financial importance and contributions to their academics. However,
even if each participant did not go to work with parents, grandparents, or other contributing individuals within their support system, these individuals represent members in their microsystem who collectively had an impact on their academic decisions and success.

As some parents worked multiple jobs or had difficulties finding employment, their employment status affected their ability to effectively support the participants. When parents had stable jobs to support their children, they provided academic resources that motivated academic success among the research participants. Those external environments that did not include the research participants impacted their academic success and decisions. As a result, the people who made up each participant’s microsystem and who contributed to the indirect relationship each participant had with their jobs revealed the following factor of family financial support that contributed to their academic success in high school and college. The connection between people in each participants’ microsystem was connected through the mesosystem, which involves the multiple interactions between various microsystems that impacted each participant.

As each participant entered college, they obtained multiple forms of financial assistance to further their education. Participants identified receiving (a) an athletic or academic scholarship, (b) a state issued scholarship, (c) Pell Grants, (d) student loans, or (e) working while in college as primary sources of financial assistance. Even though each participant was directly affected by funds awarded to them to attend college, the financial organizations that provided the tuition assistance or money to each participant represented elements within their exosystem. For example, each participant had no direct association between the various tuition assistance organizations. However, the money
they received had a direct impact on multiple microsystems within each participant’s academic environment.

The tuition assistance programs reduced the potential parental and family financial burden of assisting with paying for college and allowed each participant to remain focused on becoming academically successful while attending college. As these organizations positively impacted the participant’s family financial responsibility with assisting with paying for college, the mesosystem linked the tuition assistance providing organizations to the families within the individual’s microsystem. In addition to receiving tuition assistance from various organizations, some participants secured jobs during high school and college to lessen their family’s financial responsibility. The research participants’ employment status and their attendance in school emphasized interactions between multiple microsystems and demonstrated the effects the mesosystem had on each participant. Those participants who were employed in high school and college maintained good academic grades while financially providing for themselves.

The participants took advantage of their opportunities work during college and receive tuition assistance to attend college. They were motivated to attend college with the hopes of reducing any self-imposed financial hardships on their family. As a result of identifying exosystem, microsystem, and mesosystem contributions to each participants’ academic success, the findings revealed the following socioeconomic factors for academic success: (a) family financial support, (b) college tuition assistance opportunities, (c) family employment status, (d) personal employment status.
Conclusion

Chapter Four provided detailed descriptions and an in-depth look into the lived experiences of ten African-American men who successfully graduated from a secondary and a post-secondary institution. Even though one of the criteria for participating in this study was to have at least one post-secondary degree, many of the African-American men earned more than one post-secondary degree. Participants recounted elaborate lived experiences that highlighted environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to their academic success.

Although participants ranged between twenty-four to forty-seven years of age, each participant recalled very descriptive events in their lives that impacted their academic decisions. Each participant asserted there were numerous family members who had a positive impact on their academic success. Research participants identified their parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives who encouraged, motivated, and inspired them to do well in school. The participants were positively impacted by an effective support system within their home, school, and community. They identified coaches and educators as people who supported their academic endeavors when they were at school or in their community. Participants recalled witnessing and being aware of negative factors that had the potential to lead them away from their athletic or academic opportunities. In the end, the research participants remained vigilant and resilient against the limiting negative factors that were in their environment.

Participants identified having a social environment that was made up of people who were like minded individuals and shared a common goal of being academically successful. They recalled friends who positively impacted their academic decisions while
in high school and in college. The participants learned from the mistakes their friends made to overcome and avoid negative factors in their community. Albeit, one participant endured twelve years of prison to understand the importance of having someone, his wife, who encouraged and motivated him to reenter college. In the end, participants surrounded themselves with people who wanted to be academically, socially, and financially successful.

Attending college was an expectation for each participant. Participants were told at very early ages how important it was to graduate from high school and attend college. The research participants understood they had a responsibility to be academically successful even when at times it was difficult to understand the importance of obtaining an education. Each participant knew they were going to college before applying to any university.

Their socioeconomic environment ranged from low to middle. Some participants were aware and understood the financial hardships their parents endured. As a result, those participants became motivated to overcome their socioeconomic conditions. They understood if they wanted to live better than their parents, they needed to obtain a post-secondary education. Obtaining a college education provided them with opportunities for financial stability. Alternatively, participants who did not experience financial hardships indicated their parents were cognizant of their financial choices. Although their parents were capable of affording and providing more for the participants, their parents limited their spending to encourage financial independence. Participants used Pell Grants, student loans, a state issued scholarship, and scholarships to pay for their college tuition and expenses. With the financial support from various tuition assistance programs, the
participants were able to attend and graduate from college. Whether they considered themselves low socioeconomic or middle class, the participants were motivated to become more financially stable than the socioeconomic environment they were raised.

In all cases, the chronosystem represented the passage of time for each participant and how changes in their environment impacted their academic success. From the central question, factors within the chronosystem were determined by the continuous support from family members, community members, and community educators. The support each participant received consistently and effectively aided in each participant with becoming academically successful. As a result, research participant’s level of intrinsic motivation to be academically successful increased as they progressed through high school and on into college.

The experiences each participant had with high school teachers, college professors, friends and peers, and socioeconomic opportunities to advance their academic career was consistent throughout high school and college. For that reason, the positive influential relationships they developed over time with these individuals in their microsystem had a positive effect on their academic success and further implicates the relationship the chronosystem has on each participant. Each participant maintained or developed positive academic relationships with academically likeminded individuals in high school and continued to establish similar relationships in college. Participants recalled having positive experiences with educators in high school which continued in college. Although not all participants received family financial support in high school, many of the participants recalled having parents who financially supported them all throughout high school. Those individuals who were not fortunate to receive similar
financial academic support continued to be motivated in high school to pursue higher academic goals after they graduated. As a result, all participants were motivated by their financial hardships or privileges to become academically successful during high school and college.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that were perceived to contribute to the academic success of African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to obtain detailed information from ten African-American men who graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution. The current study was guided by the following research question:

What environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors contribute to the academic success of African-American men who graduate from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

The researcher used the following central question during each semi-structured interview:

What factors do you attribute to your academic success in graduating from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

Additionally, the researcher used the following guiding questions to identify detailed and descriptive information that pertained to the environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors which contributed to the academic success of the ten African-American men interviewed for this study.
1. What elements within your environment contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?

2. What factors influenced your decision to attend college?

3. What social factors contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?

4. What socioeconomic factors contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?

Each of the ten participants agreed to be recorded and have their interview recordings transcribed using the online transcription company Rev. Before each interview started, they were provided time to complete the (a) Human Use Committee Approval (See Appendix A), (b) Information Form (See Appendix B), and (c) Participant Form of Consent (See Appendix C). To ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of each participant, they either selected or were provided a pseudonym by the researcher. Upon the conclusion and transcription of each interview, the researcher coded all collected data according to the five systems within the Ecological Model of Human Development (EMHD) and sub-grouped into environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to their academic success.

Summary

The semi-structured interviews explored and investigated the follow areas of concern for academically successful African-American men: (a) their environment, (b) secondary and post-secondary environment, (c) reasons for attending college, (d) their social environment, and (e) their socioeconomic environment. Findings from this study
resulted in identifying the following seven themes, which revealed factors that contributed to the academic success of African-American men in this study: (a) family support, (b) community member and community educator support, (c) intrinsic motivation, (d) high school and college educator support, (e) college attendance expectations, (f) peer influence and motivation, and (g) financial assistance.

Family Support

Stewart (2007) indicated that a student’s “family is the basic institution through which children learn who they are, where they fit into society, and what kinds of futures they are likely to experience” (p. 20). All research participants indicated their parents and family members were major factors they felt attributed to their academic success. Whether they grew up in a single parent home with their mother, grandparents, step-father, siblings, or with both parents, all research participants acknowledged the constant encouragement to do well in school and to seek additional academic opportunities in high school as motivational factors. This finding supported previous research done by Palmer and Maramba (2011) which suggested parents were responsible for creating an environment that is conducive to learning and an environment that informs African-American children that obtaining an education is a means of creating more opportunities.

Participants indicated having parents and family members who held high academic expectations for them to graduate from high school and attend college as factors contributing to their academic success. Even though some participants did not experience the traditional family structure of having both mother and father, all participants remained focused and motivated to accomplishing their academic goals while living in different family environments. However, those participants who lived with their
mother indicated being inspired to do their best in high school to one day be able to lessen the financial burden they had on their family. The family structure did not limit the academic aspirations of the research participants but rather increased their level of intrinsic motivation to become academically successful. Their parents constantly reminded them of how important it was for them to graduate from high school and seek post-secondary academic opportunities. This finding supported previous research that suggested high expectations and encouragement to obtain an education and a desire to seek post-secondary academic opportunities were indicators to academic success (Allen, 2015; Scott et al., 2013; Somers et al., 2008; Wilson & Allen, 1987).

The participant responses centered on the academic influences their parents and family members had on them while in high school and college. The participants also maintained having family members who were college graduates motivated and influenced their academic success. Research participants were encouraged to do well in school and attend college when their parents and family members created an environment that promoted academic achievement.

The participants indicated having parents who were engaged and involved at school and created a positive learning environment as factors that contributed to their academic success. Participants recalled having parents who attended various high school related events as visible signs of interest toward their academic success. Those participants who played sports in high school and college were constantly reminded that their athletic talents should never overshadow their academic responsibilities. Participants indicated being motivated to do well in school while participating in high school and college athletic programs as well as being members of high school and college
academic organizations. This finding supported previous research that suggested parental involvement has a positive impact on the academic achievement and an increased desire for students to become involved in academic related events (Nichols et al., 2010; Stewart, 2007). Each participant was provided with a strong foundation and felt they were given the necessary academic support to become successful in high school and college.

Community Member and Community Educator Support

Although much of the interactions the participants had with educators occurred at school, some of the participants recalled being academically motivated and encouraged by educators who lived in their community. Some participants recalled a time when the teachers lived in the community with the students they taught. Participants who recalled teachers in their neighborhood were motivated and encouraged to attend summer enrichment programs to further their academic opportunities. Those community educators were actively involved in their academic and family lives. The participants recalled teachers being in constant communication with their parents and informing their parents when they did not academically perform at their best. Having those neighborhood educators increased their motivation and was an added pressure to be academically successful.

Participants indicated members of their community or neighborhood had a positive impact on their academic success. Some participants recalled neighborhood drug dealers who motivated and encouraged them to be academically successful. The participants all agreed that although there were negative factors within their community that may have had a negative impact on their academic success, the drug dealers were
cognizant of their opportunities the research participants had and wanted to see them be successful.

The participants recalled having various male figures in their community who had a positive impact on their academic success. The men in their community and local barbers motivated and mentored them to remain focused on their academic decisions. Those men looked out for them and never allowed them to become involved in activities that may have limited their academic performance. The participants felt they were a part of a community that had men who promoted academic achievement and encouraged them to leave their environment and find greater successes. These findings supported previous research that emphasized how essential positive encouragement and motivation from families and members of the African-American community has had on improving the academic success of African-American men (Wilson & Allen, 1987). The community these African-American men came from influenced their academic decisions and provided them with a positive supportive environment. It is important to note that even though these African-American men were surrounded by people who were involved in illegal activities, those individuals found a way to motivate and encourage students in their community to do well in school.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

Many of the participant responses identified being intrinsically motivated to become academically successful. The research participants attributed their academic success to the effective and continuous academic support from their parents, family members, and educators throughout their attendance in secondary and post-secondary institutions. They asserted being intrinsically motivated, believing in their academic
abilities, having various life experiences, adapting to changes in their environment, or even dropping out of college only to return later as factors to their academic success. This finding was supported by previous research that emphasized African-American students who were intrinsically motivated and held high levels of self-efficacy were more likely to set high academic goals (Kerpelman et al., 2007; Wilson & Allen, 1987; Wood & Palmer, 2013). The participants overcame many negative environmental factors and valued their lived experiences to obtain an education.

**High School and College Educator Support**

Participants recalled having educators in high school or college who encouraged and motivated them to be academically successful. The participants felt their teachers, coaches, and college professors provided them with the necessary academic support to graduate from high school and college. Many of the research participants provided detailed accounts of specific educators who positively impacted them throughout their academic journey. Even though the current study primarily focused on participants secondary and post-secondary academic experiences, some participants recalled primary school educators who had a positive impact on their academic success. Their teachers in high school and college never allowed them to perform below their academic abilities and challenged them to do their best. These findings supported previous research reported by Stewart (2007) who underscored the importance of African-American students be a part of a positive academic environment. The author suggested that not only should African-American students be encouraged and academically motivated by their teachers, but also by school administrators who work to provide these students with a supportive, caring, and fair environment.
Some participants identified having both African-American and Caucasian educators who had a positive impact on their academic success. Those participants who identified having African-American educators were seen as role models and mentors. They influenced their cultural perception about the importance of obtaining an education as an African-American man. Whether it was during high school or college, those participants who indicated having African-American educators had a positive impact on their awareness of how important it was for them to graduate from high school and seek post-secondary academic opportunities. All participants shared a common belief that both African-American and Caucasian educators in high school and college motivated them to be academically successful and continue their education. Their educators cared about their academic progress and worked hard to encourage them to be accountable for their academic performance. These findings supported previous research that identified the importance of African-American male students having positive academic relationships with teachers who accept, provide meaningful academic environments, and have clear academic expectations for their students (Delpit, 2006; Kenyatta, 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Stewart, 2007). Each participant acknowledged their high school teachers and college professors as people who recognized their academic or athletic abilities and held them responsible for their academic progress.

**College Attendance Expectations**

Participant responses centered on two factors that led them to attended college: (a) family and friends who influenced and encouraged a college going attitude; and (b) an ideological point of view that college was a means of socioeconomic and social
advancement. Participants recalled being encouraged to pursue post-secondary opportunities and take advantage of their options of attending school. They were motivated to attend college by their friends who also shared common academic aspirations in high school and college. Participants who were members of family’s who had people who graduated from college created an environment that expected members of their family to attend college. Also, parents who held degrees emphasized the importance of attending college in order to socially and socioeconomically advance their opportunities during and after college. Each participant had the capacity to achieve their academic goals in spite of potential negative influences that may limit their academic success. Wilson and Allen (1987) expressed ideology was related to the potential of young African-American men having a strong sense of self-efficacy which contributed to higher levels of academic success.

Peer Influence and Motivation

Research participants discussed the relationships they established in high school or college and indicated they were surrounded by friends and peers who shared a common goal of becoming academically successful. The participants recalled being members of social groups that promoted and challenged their academic performance. Their membership in high school organizations allowed them to meet and befriend individuals who encouraged them to do their best and seek post-secondary opportunities. Although many of the participants recalled positive peer relationships that effected their academic performance, some of the participants identified friends who dropped out of high school and college as a factor that motivated them to continue pursuing their education. Even the experience of being bullied was as a life changing event that
encouraged one participant to look beyond his negative experiences and use that experience to motivate him to discover his true potential to be academically successful. Also, the wife of one participant was a major source of inspiration to his academic success.

Some participants indicated being members of an African-American Greek organization motivated their academic performance. Those participants recalled having fraternity "brothers" who encouraged and motivated them throughout their college experience. They recalled meeting members of their fraternity before attending college which allowed them to become aware of the academic requirements needed to be a member and to be academically successful. Also, one participant indicated being aware of the fraternity’s history and emphasis it placed on academic achievement for African-American men as a factor that motivated his academic performance. Each participant established positive relationships with friends and peers in high school and continued to do the same while attending college. Being a part of a social environment that actively engaged in high levels of academic achievement and motivated those within it, led the African-American men in this study to academic success. These findings were supported by previous research which emphasized the importance of African-American students who were engaged in positive peer relationships that provided academic support had a positive impact on academic success (Booker, 2007; Somers et al., 2008; Stewart, 2007).

Financial Assistance

Even though some participants did not experience the traditional family structure of having both mother and father, all participants indicated they were provided with the things they needed to be successful in school. The socioeconomic status for the
participant’s family ranged between poor to self-defined middle class. The participants who indicated growing up poor or remembered not having an abundance of financial wealth, acknowledged their academic success was motivated by the lack of money their family had. They were inspired to do better than their parents and be able to financially support themselves. One participant indicated his parents encouraged him to do his best in school in spite of their financial hardships. The participants understood that if they wanted to live a better financial life than the one they were raised in, they had to be successful in high school and college to earn an opportunity for them to be more financially stable than their parents.

The participants who self-defined their family socioeconomic environment as middle class maintained their parents provided them with academic resources and experiences they felt contributed to their academic success. Parents purchased various academic resources such as encyclopedias, provided opportunities to attend summer enrichment programs and culturally rich vacations outside of their community, and remained financially committed to supporting the academic endeavors of each participant. Their parents were aware of their financial strengths and weakness. They supported each participant during high school and when they were able to during college.

Even though many participants indicated they were a part of a socioeconomic environment that supported their academic success, some participants recalled living in a single parent or dual parent environment that suffered from significant financial strain as they grew up. Some participants recalled their mother’s having multiple jobs to support their family, and one participant recalled his mother working multiple jobs even when his father was able to work. Their financial hardships at home did not take away from the
importance their families placed on obtaining an education or from their own aspirations of becoming academically successful. These findings supported previous research that discussed how the socioeconomic status of African-American students was not a profound predictor of academic success (Baker & Vélez, 1996; Klem & Connell, 2004). African-American male students were less concerned with their socioeconomic status but were more concerned with feelings of belonging in an academic environment (Perrakis, 2008). Nonetheless, many participants received financial support from family members who felt they were investing in the academic success of each participant.

The participants received financial assistance in the form of academic or athletic scholarships, a state issued scholarship, Pell Grants, or student loans to pay for college. Even though one participant lost his stated issued scholarship and another was had to pay for his first year of college after prison, they remained focused on continuing their education. They took out loans or obtained a Pell Grant to further their education. One participant recalled being a member of the university football team provided him with a tax free clothing allowance courtesy of a local clothing store. Obtaining the financial aid assistance allowed each participant to attend college without placing any additional financial burden on their parents. The ability for African-American men to receive adequate financial aid to attend college was supported by previous research reported by Cuyjet (1997) who indicated the need for relieving African-American men from the distraction of obtaining aid. Cuyjet alleged the worry of obtaining adequate financial aid may affect African-American male student’s grades. In addition to receiving tuition assistance to attend college, some participants were employed during college.
Although the participants obtained many forms of financial assistance in college, some participants worked to help pay for things they needed. The participants worked to obtain a sense of financial independence. They did not want to burden their parents with needing more money to attend college. Even though working in college caused one participant drop out, he later returned to complete his degree. Being laid off motivated him to go back to school. Participants who worked at various retail and movie stores, hosted parties, worked for the university, or at a local bank. They maintained working while in college was a way to financially provide for themselves.

**Limitations**

Conducting any form of research presents limitations that may positively or negatively impact the results of any study, and this study also had its limitations. During the pilot study, the researcher selected individuals who were a former co-worker and a former college acquaintance. These individuals were assumed to be interested in providing relevant information which pertained to the research question. The selected pilot study participants may have purposely provided the researcher with information that was ideal to the research. Selecting pilot study participants who were not a former co-worker or former acquaintance may have limited the potential bias of provided interview information.

All participants selected for this study were African-American men who successfully graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution. These individuals provided detailed accounts of their lived experiences of being an African-American man perusing a secondary and post-secondary education. Their experiences
may not represent the views or similar experiences of other African-American men who were not residents of North Louisiana. If this research had chosen to select African-American men outside of North Louisiana, the results may have included more diverse experiences from high schools and colleges from around the country. Had the researcher included the lived experiences of Caucasian men who were academically successful, the research may have revealed similar shared experiences or provided more evidence to the education gap between African-American men and Caucasian men.

As the researcher selected participants who were academically successful, the findings of this study were limited by only investigating the lived experiences of said individuals. Had the researcher included African-American men who had not achieved similar levels of academic success, the research may have provided areas of contrast that may have offered additional insight into environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that may lead to academic success or failure. Findings from such research that include both successful and unsuccessful African-American men may have offered different experiences. Also, African-American men who attend secondary and post-secondary institutions that are characterized as predominately Black may have offered differing lived experiences for African-American men who were academically successful.

Even though Creswell (2007) indicated if research participants were able to offer additional artifacts such as letters, photos, or items that may impact the findings, the researcher did not collect any additional artifacts. The researcher only collected interview information that described the lived experiences of academically successful African-American men. Had the researcher collected artifacts in this study, those artifacts may have positively or negatively impacted the results from this study.
Although Creswell suggested research participants should be interviewed multiple times in a phenomenological study, the researcher only interviewed each participant once. The researcher obtained the necessary information for this study in one interview. However, conducting a follow-up interview with each research participant to confirm or verify their responses may have offered additional insight into each participants offered perception about their academic success.

Although the researcher has detailed the aforementioned limitations within this study, some limitations could not be identified due to the scope of the researcher defined parameters for the selection of participants. Such limitations may include the investigation of academically successful individuals who are of a different race or gender not previously identified as limitations within this study (e.g. Caucasian women, African-American women, Asian men or women, etc.). These unidentified limitations offer an opportunity for future research to investigate levels of academic success among these individuals. With the use of a semi-structured interview process, other methods of data collection such as surveys, focus groups, or questionnaires may have offered additional information about what environmental, social, or socioeconomic factors that lead to academic success or failure.

Regardless of the limitations identified in this study, findings from this study were consistent with literature (Allen, 2015; Somers et al., 2008) that educators need to examine more diverse means of encouraging parental involvement of African-American men and a need for identifying academic motivations, expectations, and support systems that contribute to the academic achievement of African-American men. Also, these findings were consistent with prior research (Stewart, 2007) that indicated a need to not
only use the EMHD but other ecological models to identify support systems that contribute to the academic success of African-American men. This research has provided an in-depth interpretation into the lived experiences of academically successful African-American men who successfully graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Educators**

According to the data received from each participant about the impact high school and college educators had on their academic success, the researcher has established the following recommendations for secondary and post-secondary educators. According to the responses gathered from the research participants, educators were instrumental with each participant achieving academic success. Whether they were taught, mentored, or were just aware of the support they offered, had a positive impact on the participant’s academic success.

1. **Become cognizant of the familial and non-familial family dynamics in order to identify factors that may contribute to the academic success of African-American men and what role they have with influencing their academic decisions.**

   Garibaldi (1992) expressed similar sentiment when it came to African-American men being taught at school by educators and at home the values of obtaining an education. Garibaldi emphasized the importance of African-American men be taught by educators to resist peer pressure and why success was an important aspect of being in school. The African-American men from this study actively sought out and were associated with individuals who shared similar goals of becoming academically
successful. Even those participants who indicated being surrounded by people within their community who sold drugs, avoided or were encouraged to not become involved in similar activities. Garibaldi indicated teachers should encourage African-American youth as early as possible in their academic career to pursue post-secondary opportunities. Many of the interviewed African-American men indicated their coaches or high school teachers encouraging, motivating, and inspiring them to become academically engaged in order to further their education after high school. As a result, all participants entered a post-secondary institution with the intent of obtaining and furthering their education with the support of their high school teachers and coaches.

2. Explore the possibility of creating more effective means of communicating with family and non-family members who may influence the academic success of African-American men.

Somers et al. (2008) suggested schools investigate more creative ways of talking to parents of African-American students. With this in mind, secondary educators should explore and extend numerous invitations for parents to become involved in the academic life of young African-American male students. Although research done by Garibaldi (1992) suggested teachers perceived low parental involvement was the cause for teachers to believe the parents of African-American students were uninterested in the academic performance of their children. Based on the findings from this study, parents of African-American men were interested in the academic performance of their children. Even though there may be some parents who exhibit a lack of initiative with supporting their children, educators should not be discouraged by those who show little to no signs of interest in the academic performance of their children. Somers et al. (2008) emphasized
the social support from educators was perceived as a vital factor which contributed to the academic success of African-American students.

3. Post-secondary educators should actively investigate ways in which the university and its faculty can understand the students’ academic abilities and reasons for attending that particular university to provide effective academic support from university faculty.

To accomplish this task, Cuyjet (1997) and Perrakis (2008) emphasized the importance of the university and its faculty to provide a welcoming campus environment for African-American men. Perrakis (2008) indicated university administrators and faculty members should consider the needs of its African-American male student body. The author suggested African-American men do not seek proper support from university counselors, which suggests a need for more direct outreach programs for male students. Accessing prior knowledge about these students may benefit their academic progress when university administrators and faculty members provide an effective university support system. Robertson and Mason (2008) suggested universities can accomplish such tasks by offering classes that can be integrated into the established college curriculum. Allowing African-American men to enroll in such classes may increase their perception, self-esteem, and academic achievement.

4. Secondary and post-secondary educators should be educated on the cultural and historical relationship and perception African-American men have about obtaining and education.

Somers et al. (2008) suggested schools become cognizant of the negative stereotypes within African-American culture that may hinder the academic success of African-American students. To accomplish this, Palmer and Maramba (2001) and Dancy (2011) suggested a need for offering additional professional development opportunities that focus on culturally relevant teaching for faculty members. Providing both secondary
and post-secondary educators this opportunity may positively impact and limit any preconceived notions of poor academic performance by their African-American male students. Creating an opportunity for educators to discuss and adjust their current beliefs and understanding of African-American culture and how it relates to academic success may shift the current deficit point of view of academic success for African-American men to a surplus of academic achievement.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher offers the following suggestions for further qualitative research pertaining to African-American male academic success. The suggested recommendations may provide additional information for researchers who seek to understand what additional factors may cause African-American men to become academically successful. These recommendations may provide a means of culturally and historically understanding or identifying barriers to which African-American men misidentify the benefits of academic success in order to advance themselves within their current culture.

1. Future research may examine the role intrinsic motivation has on the academic success for African-American men who graduate from high school and maintain an effective level of intrinsic motivation in college.

Allen (2015) indicated a need for academic professionals to identify contributing factors such as support systems that motivate and expect African-American men to be academically successful. For that purpose, new research may gain a better understanding of how to stimulate and sustain high levels of intrinsic motivation among African-American men to appreciate the value in obtaining an education. As some of the interviewed participants indicated, their desire to be successful in school began at a very early age and continued throughout their academic career. Future research should
investigate the genesis of academic intrinsic motivation of academically successful African-American men. Even though participants indicated having a desire to be academically successful at an early age, implying that all African-American men share similar desires would be premature. Future research that seeks to understand how intrinsic motivation plays a role in academic success should not be limited by a speculated time in which the researcher believes to have occurred.

2. Future research may identify which system of the EMHD has the greatest or least amount of effect on the academic success of African-American men and how this knowledge may be able to isolate areas of concern and interest in the academic success of African-American men.

Stewart (2007) suggested research should be used to examine how the ecological model may allow educators to identify factors within an academic institution that may in the academic development of its students. The researcher proposes such research be limited to identifying systems that hold the greatest or least potential for discovering noteworthy factors that contribute to the academic success of African-American men. Future research may examine how to narrow the scope of the EMHD in a way that allows future research to focus on fewer systems in order to identify more specific factors that contribute to the academic success of African-American men. Although the current research was designed to identify various factors across all systems of the EMHD, future research may learn how to identify strengths within a particular system that may influence and create a better opportunity for African-American men to become academically successful.

3. Future research may examine the current perception African-American men have about obtaining an education and how does that perception compare to that of African-American men after the Brown v. The Board of Education decision.
Cokley et al. (2011) suggested qualitative research should be done with fewer individuals to gain a more detailed understanding of their perceptions about academic success. For that reason, future research may examine how current African-American men perceive and value obtaining an education versus African-American men who were the product of the Brown v. The Board of Education decision. Acknowledging how important and instrumental the decision was for African-Americans who fought for an opportunity to be equally educated and the value they placed on obtaining an education may lead to understanding how the passing of time since then has shifted to one in which current research focuses on the deficit beliefs of African-American male academic performance. To that end, future research should examine and identify more African-American men who have successfully graduated from a secondary and post-secondary institution. This research may identify incongruences between value those African-American men placed on obtaining an education to current African-American men who do not share similar values of earning an education.

4. Future research may investigate academic success of African-American men who attend a Historically Black College or University and how their academic success compares to African-American men who attend a predominately white institution.

Because the researcher only interviewed African-American men who graduated from a secondary and a predominately white post-secondary institution, further inquiry into the lived experiences and reasons why some African-American men find success in obtaining an education is still needed. Future research may examine African-American men who attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). With this in mind, data collected from these African-American men may offer an important element of comparison that may underscore different or similar perceptions of academic success for
those African-American men who attend such universities. Future research in this area may identify common factors of academic success that can be seen as universal contributions to academic success among African-American men who attend either a predominately white institution or an HBCU.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN USE COMMITTEE APPROVAL
TO: Dr. John Harrison, Dr. Dawn Basinger, Dr. Randy Parker and Dr. Latoya Pierce
FROM: Dr. Stan Napper, Vice President Research & Development
SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW
DATE: February 1, 2016

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been done for your proposed study entitled:

"Factors for Academic Success among African-American Men: A Phenomenological Study"

HUC 1394

The proposed study’s revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined.

Projects should be renewed annually. This approval was finalized on February 1, 2016 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project, including data analysis, continues beyond February 1, 2017. Any discrepancies in procedure or changes that have been made including approved changes should be noted in the review application. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of University Research.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Research or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Dr. Mary Livingston at 257-2292 or 257-5066.
The following is a brief summary of the project in which you are asked to participate. Please read this information before signing the statement below.

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Factors For Academic Success Among African-American Men: A Phenomenological Study

**PURPOSE OF STUDY/PROJECT:** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors that are perceived to contribute to academic success for African-American men in secondary and post-secondary institutions.

**PROCEDURE:** Approximately ten to fifteen self-identified African-American men will be interviewed for this study. All interviews with each participant will take approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. Each participant must reside in North Louisiana for convenience of sampling. The age of each participant will not be considered a factor in the selection process. The potential variation of age groups will allow for possible similar lived experiences but in different ways. The researcher will perform a semi-structured interview with each participant and a follow-up interview with each participant if necessary. Participants will be asked the central open-ended research question of: What factors do you attribute to your academic success in graduating from secondary and post-secondary institutions? Follow-up questions will be used to gain additional information during each semi-structured interview (see Appendix D). Once each participant has consented to take part in the study, they will be asked to provide additional demographic information including their name, age, high school and college(s) attended, degree(s) earned, and contact information. This information will be used to ensure that each participant meets the requirements of the study, effective identification of participants during transcription of interview notes based on participant pseudonyms, and an accurate description of each participant in the study. An Olympus digital voice recorder will be used to record each semi-structured interview and each follow-up interview. Each interview will be transcribed using Microsoft Word and analyzed with Atlas.ti. All transcripts will be rendered anonymous through the use of participant chosen pseudonyms (instead of the participants’ names) and researcher given pseudonyms for locations, post-secondary institutions, or other sensitive information. Audio recordings will be destroyed from the digital voice recorder and the personal computer of the researcher.

In order to identify the factors for academic success of each participant, the researcher will use horizontalization to identify important phrases within each participant’s interview transcripts (Creswell, 2007). Once these phrases have been identified, the researcher will develop clusters of meanings into themes in which to categorize each important factor for academic success. Initial coding of data will be based on broad themes, which will be coded into smaller themes for a richer interpretation of academic success factors of African-American men. The phrases and themes will be used to create textual descriptions of what each participant experienced (Creswell, 2007). As a result of
completing the aforementioned data analysis techniques, the researcher will present the findings of shared experiences among each participant in the final chapter. Once data has been transcribed and analyzed, the researcher will use member checking at the end of each interview to increase credibility of the study. Also, the researcher will use a journal to (a) document and describe interpretations of responses, (b) outline study procedures, and (c) identify inaccurate interpretations that may contribute to misaligned interpretations of the researcher.


**INSTRUMENTS:** Each participant will choose a pseudonym for the collection of data, coding purposes, and the protection of participant anonymity. All audio recordings and transcribed information will be labeled with the individuals chosen pseudonym within the password protected computer of the primary researcher. All data collected from each participant will be held confidential and only viewed by the researcher. Once all files have been transferred to the computer, the researcher will delete the files from the Olympus digital voice recorder, and shred all information forms. Once the study has ended, the researcher will delete all audio recordings and transcripts from the computer. The researcher will ensure that all traces of collected data will be removed from the password protected computer.

**RISKS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:** The participant understands that Louisiana Tech is not able to offer financial compensation nor to absorb the costs of medical treatment should you be injured as a result of participating in this research.

The following disclosure applies to all participants using online survey tools: This server may collect information and your IP address indirectly and automatically via “cookies”.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** If extra credit is offered to students participating in research, an alternative extra credit that requires a similar investment of time and energy will also be offered to those students who do not choose to volunteer as research subjects.

**BENEFITS/COMPENSATION:** None

____________________, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the following description of the study, "Factors For Academic Success Among African-American Men: A Phenomenological Study", and its purposes and methods. I understand that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary and my participation or refusal to participate in this study will not affect my relationship with Louisiana Tech University or my grades in any way. Further, I understand that I may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the results of my interview will be confidential, accessible only to the principal investigators, myself, or a legally appointed representative. I have not
been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

______________________________       ________________
Signature of Participant or Guardian   Date
APPENDIX B

INFORMATION FORM
Information Form (Please Print)

First Name: ____________________       MI: _______       Last Name: ____________________

Age: ______

High School: ________________________________ Year Graduated: ______

College(s): ___________________________________ Year Graduated: ______

___________________________________ Year Graduated: ______

___________________________________ Year Graduated: ______

___________________________________ Year Graduated: ______

Identify Degree(s) Earned:

Bachelor(s): ____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Masters(s): _____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Doctorate: _____________________________________________________

E – Mail Address: ________________________________________________

Phone Number: _________________________________________________

Alternate Contact: ______________________________________________
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT FORM OF CONSENT
Hello,

I am Samuel Williams, and I am a graduate student at Louisiana Tech University. I am conducting a study on academic success factors of African-American men that have graduated from high school and an accredited four-year college or university.

You are being asked to participate in this study in order to investigate how various environmental, social, and socioeconomic factors contributed to your academic success. Therefore, I would like to use a semi-structured interview process to ascertain detailed descriptions of your lived experiences that pertain to those factors. The information that you will provide will be used to identify success factors that can be used and further studied in an effort to improve the academic successes of African-American men. This study is important to me because it will provide an opportunity to investigate academic success factors of African-American men that have graduated from high school and college. Also, interviewing successful African-American men will offer first-hand interpretations of experiences that can aid in supporting and encouraging more African-American men in academic endeavors.

Each interview session will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Your responses will be recorded with the intent of effectively transcribing the data. Your recordings will be locked away in a filing cabinet at my home. Also, your transcribed interview session will be password protected within my computer. As there will be more than one participant in this study, any information you provide will not be shared among other participants. At any time during the study, you have the right to stop participating. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and all information gathered during your involvement will be shredded and not used in the study. If you wish to stop participating in the study. Please feel free to contact me as soon as possible.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or this consent form, please contact me at (318) 450-1360 or email me at rontez.teach@gmail.com.

If you consent to participate in this study, please sign your name at the bottom of this form and fill out the Information Form enclosed in this folder.

Participant Name (Print): ________________________________

Signature of Participant: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE
Central Research Question:

What factors do you attribute to your academic success in graduating from a secondary and a post-secondary institution?

Guiding Interview Questions:

1. What elements within your environment contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?
2. What factors in high school were attributed to your successful entrance into college and completion of your college degree?
3. What social factors contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?
4. What socioeconomic factors contributed to your academic success in high school and in college?
REFERENCES


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