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Beating the Odds: Perseverance and Its Influence on Male Students' Perceptions in Overcoming Generational Poverty

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Generational Poverty

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ABSTRACT

Beating the Odds: Perseverance and Its Influence on Male Students' Perceptions in Overcoming
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This phenomenological study examined the perceived influences that male graduates from Title I high schools attribute to their success. During the last 30 years the poverty gap has not narrowed and in some cases it has increased. This study hoped to provide evidence of supports needed by looking at males who overcame generational poverty. This study included qualitative data collection from interviews of 15 male participants. Nine themes emerged in the findings of perceived influences by these participants. The nine themes identified where 1) Success has two components; internal and external, 2) School personnel and programs guided success, 3) Change in mindset, 4) Changes in family structure and circumstances, 5) Lack of family financial resources, 6) Parents prioritizing success in school, 7) Being part of an athletic team/peer group, 8) Lack of experience affected college success and understanding, and 9) Credit difficulties from childhood for their success. The analysis of data collected supported the developed themes. Recommendations were made for further study and practice.

DEDICATION

I have been truly blessed to know some amazing people I considered large influences in my life. This study is dedicated to all of my family and friends.

To my wife, Lynn: over the last 30 years you have supported me in every step of my career-from my first classroom you helped me clean and prepared when we were engaged to rereading a dissertation and everything in between. I could not be the educator I am today without your support.

To my parents, Grady and Miriam: thanks, so much for believing in me, when I wanted to drop out of school in second grade you did not let me. You helped me overcome a learning disability and guided me to become the educational leader I am today. Thanks for giving me the love of public education by your example.

To my children, Coleman and Cassie: you truly are the reason I push myself. Thanks for allowing me to follow a dream and supporting me along the way. I am so proud to be your father.

To my former teachers, I feel like I am the successful product of caring educators who would not let a special needs child fall through the cracks.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction

A major predictor of what will make a person successful is gender (Morris, 2012). For many years female students lagged behind their male counterparts due in part to traditional roles. That trend changed around 30 years ago. Female students caught and passed male students in terms of postsecondary education and performance (Patterson, 2009). This discrepancy has been studied by many scholars to try and explain why males are falling behind females so quickly (Currie, 2011; Machin et al., 2013; Morris, 2012; Patterson, 2009). These scholars pointed to changing cultural norms or the restructuring of American Education (Currie, 2011; Peterson 2009). There is probably not one specific reason, instead, a combination of factors has led to the ever-shifting landscape of achievement between gender and poverty.

Public education was seen as the great equalizer in our country for over 100 years (Schmoker, 2016). Many states identified the need for an educated workforce. Public Education took many forms depending on the population being served. In rural areas students were taught the basics of reading and writing in one-room schoolhouses (Currie, 2011). In farming communities, schools were larger and classes in agriculture and home economics were offered. As schools grew so did their ability to teach vocational skills at schools formed to meet the needs of a growing workforce. As mills and factories became the common trend during World War II, Schlechty (2011) noted that America needed a workforce that was capable of doing jobs that required basic skills. During the 1960s and 1970s, schools specialized in producing workers who could follow simple directions for assembling work.

During this time the Poverty Gap in Education was noted (Gorski, 2019). If an individual grew up below the poverty line, they were more likely to drop out of high school (D'Agostino et al.,2019). Title I was created as part of the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act during

the Johnson Administration in the 1960s to help high poverty schools (OECD, 2019). Funding for extra instructional services was provided by Title I for schools with a high percentage of students from a low socioeconomic status (Hecht et al., 2020). Having federal money as an equalizer between high-poverty and wealthy schools seemed to be a great effort on the part of the federal government to help level the playing field.

During this time housing projects were constructed as a way to help raise the minimal standard of living of populations that were trapped in inner cities. Families in these neighborhoods were not mobile and could not provide for their own housing, but they could rely on public transportation to get to minimum-wage service jobs (Currie, 2011). These housing projects became incubators for individuals who were underpaid, underachieving, and under the radar (Tileson & Darling, 2009).

The 7th reauthorization of ESEA was No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This federal mandate made schools accountable for educating every child. Schools would now receive grades to determine if they were meeting the federal standard of preparing our youth for a future (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). The problem with the mandates that are forced upon organizations with little input is that the mandates are left up for interpretation by the individual schools (Schmoker, 2016). Under new pressure schools started teaching towards tests to demonstrate that they were meeting the requirements. Tests that were not connected to a student's learning pulled the focus of the school from serving the child to having the child serve the school by performance (Schlechty, 2011).

At the beginning of the 21st century, an ignored disturbing trend emerged. Males in urban poverty were not performing as high as females in urban poverty. This underperformance of males was noticed in all males who lived in poverty when compared to females from the same

socioeconomic status (Patterson, 2009). Impoverished immigrant males were outperformed by their female counterparts. Males in rural poverty were outperformed by their female counterparts. The gap between male and female performance is almost closed in the 4th and 5th grade years but then widens again during 6-12 education. If females participate in postsecondary education, females from a background of poverty outperform males with a background of poverty in college (Morris, 2012).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south to determine common themes in how some economically disadvantaged males successfully escaped the generational poverty trap. Success was measured by an individual's ability to function as an independent adult in a career or profession. Data were collected through interviews of snowball sampling of male subjects from 23-44 years of age, which spans the range of time that this decline in male performance had been observed in previous studies. These subjects were successful in both secondary education and transition to independent life.

Research Questions

With a goal of creating a framework for a pathway of overcoming generational poverty for male students from Title I schools the following research questions were addressed;

Overarching Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of life experiences of male graduates from Title I high schools that influenced them in adulthood?

2. How do male graduates from Title I high schools perceive their high school experiences?

3. What are the perceived influences in college, career-technical schools, and employment that helped them get to their current level of success?

Significance of Study

Many educators have noted the decline in male academic achievement (Peterson, 2009). Several quantitative studies have data to support the number of male students who did not complete college or a career pathway (Bayrak & Gulati, 2105; D'Agostino et al., 2019; Henkhaus, 2019; Peterson, 2009). When poverty was considered, a male student was nine times less likely than a female student to complete a degree in college after being admitted (Bayrak & Gulati, 2015). Henkhaus (2019) noted that a large percentage of the incarcerated population in the United States were from poverty households. In the years that followed a formal secondary education, a very small percentage of males from poverty make it out of poverty (D'Agostino et al., 2019).

Males who had made it over the poverty level were interviewed in a qualitative study. The study contributed to the general knowledge base in this area and allowed preparation programs in education to create a framework for allowing males to escape poverty, which had implications for all students from low socioeconomic status (SES) regardless of race or gender.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to male subjects who would self-identify as being from generational poverty. Interviews were conducted to determine what their perceptions were as to the factors that enabled them to escape poverty. The purpose of these interviews was to discover the experiences of the participants.

Definitions of Terms

- **Economically disadvantaged:** Students who meet the qualifications to be eligible for the federal free or reduced-price meals program (National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2019).

- **Federal poverty level (FPL):** The FPL for a family of four in 2019 was $21,750, family of three $18,270, and family of two $14,190 (Symaco, 2014).

- **Fixed mindset:** An outlook where a person believes intelligence is unchangeable and his or her intellect is a natural characteristic (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

- **Free or reduced-price meals:** Children from families who meet certain income criteria are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals at school (North Carolina Department of Instruction, 2019).

- **Gender gap:** The gap of differences that exists between men and women, especially as it relates to cultural, economic, political, intellectual, or social attainment or attitudes (Boushey 2002).

- **Generational poverty:** Poverty over a minimum of three generations with some of the following characteristics: grandparents were in poverty, parents have a high school education or less, parents experienced long-term underemployment or unemployment, or first in family to attend college (Taylor, 2017).

- **Grit:** The persistence and desire to reach goals (Duckworth et al., 2014). When working on the theoretical framework for this study, grit was chosen to help determine an individual's success.

- **Growth mindset:** Individuals with a growth mindset value effort and know that their ability and intelligence can be developed, formed, and enlarged over time (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

- **Individual economic success:** A subjective term, the ratio of income to debt (Lott, 2011). A subjective measure is one's satisfaction with one's financial situation (Betson & Michael, 2015).

- **Perseverance:** Overcoming difficulties or the need for instant gratification (Duckworth et al., 2014).

- **Resilience:** Having good outcomes in spite of serious threats to quality of health and life (Apel et al., 2013).

- **Poverty:** A condition that extends beyond lack of financial security, it manifests in feelings of lack of power, humiliation, and a sense of exclusion (Davis & Williams, 2020).

- **School climate:** The part of a school experienced by the students and staff that affects behavior and the perception of the school (Schelechty, 2011).

- **School culture:** Interpersonal interactions between individual teachers, groups of teachers, administrators, and others reflecting collective beliefs, attitudes, and values of school personnel (Schlecthy, 2011).

- **Socioeconomic status:** Household income or personal opportunity based on social and economic factors (National Center of Children in Poverty, 2020).

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the trend of low achievement among impoverished males and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 summarizes a review of literature related to males in poverty, roadblocks they have to willingly overcome to escape, the gender gap, and the relationship of poverty and education. Chapter 3 identifies the methodology used in this study, the participants and how they were selected, the collection of data and its analysis, and the

ethical protocol. Chapter 4 includes a presentation of obtained data. Chapter 5 includes a general

summary of the study, including the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future

research.

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

Extensive literature existed depicting trends in education, employment, and life opportunities affecting low socioeconomic males. A systematic review of current research revealed the barriers that obstruct males' attempts to escape generational poverty. Studies on the income and the level of education of single-parent homes, incarceration and its effects on future employment, perseverance, first-generation college students and first-generation economic sustainability, the developing needs of boys, the effects of grit and mindset, and successful mentoring programs were reviewed.

Condition of the Economy and Effects on Individuals

Automation eliminated jobs that schools were training America's poor to perform (Perkins, 2016). Companies moved factories overseas where labor was cheaper. Low skill, low-income jobs that required a minimal education have become a thing of the past (Hanly et al., 2017). As factories closed, living conditions and communities deteriorated (Perkins, 2016). Once thriving mill towns in rural areas now had a lot of similarity to the desperateness of inner-city housing projects. During the Korean and Vietnam Conflicts, the country went to a military draft to ensure that it could follow through on the world presence it was establishing. Many American citizens started to rethink the American dream. Women were entering the workforce and pushing their daughters to want more than the opportunities they had (Machin et al., 2013). During the 1980s a major shift in family dynamics started to occur; traditional families were starting to be replaced with single-parent homes (Baw, 2018). Family-owned farms were being replaced with cooperative farms. Fewer farms where a farmer was in charge of all the business of lands existed. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, factories were being automated or closed. The factory jobs

that were above minimum wage diminished and became harder to find. Schools did not adjust (Peterson, 2009).

Low-interest rates and the increase in the belief in the American Dream made the 1990s seem like the country was headed in a powerhouse direction. Factory workers with different skill sets were able to find jobs in construction. In 2000, schools were producing students with essential trade training to transition into jobs such as nurses or carpenters and seemed to be adapting to meet the needs of an ever-changing economy. Differences were noted between urban and rural regions due to the lack of mobility in urban areas and the dropout factories that were created by inner-city secondary schools (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

The collapse of the housing market, which closed opportunities for employment that many youths in rural poverty had experienced over their peers in urban poverty, brought about a desperate situation in all parts of America. As the need for housing fell so did many industries that had grown to support the housing boom. Unemployment climbed and many people were struggling with debt. The divide between the income earning potential of noncollege educated people became sharper (Currie, 2011).

Tax revenue declined and many people wanted to ensure the investment in education was being measured and improving. This demand on accountability transitioned schools into a fragmented education system where test scores drive policy. Average test scores of a cohort were measured to determine the school worth (Schlechty, 2011). Educators were quick to tout these test scores as evidence of school growth (Perkins, 2016). Just like the economy, what these scores demonstrated was the top percent of students performing better and little to no change for students who performed lower on tests (Neuman, 2008). Most of the students who underperformed on tests were from the poorest families. Many educators realized that the poor

class was becoming less educated (Perkins, 2016). There was a direct correlation between improving the education of poor people and solving the problems of poverty (Neuman, 2008). In fact, all indications were that American schools were failing students in the poverty class. (Perkins, 2016).

Poverty Gap in Education

Poor children had fewer chances of going to a quality preschool (Gorski, 2019). They often did not have a chance at quality health care or to live in safe places (Shaw & Shelleby, 2014). The social stigma that arose from the discrepancy between an impoverished family's resources and a wealthier family's resources, such as technology, kept poverty-stricken children trapped in areas where they had little chance of success. After looking at this difference in test scores and access to educational resources a startling statistic emerged. The gender gap observed in some areas of education was wider for males in poverty versus their female counterparts (Patterson, 2009). Males from a background of poverty were almost twice as likely as females living in poverty to be identified for exceptional services in schools (Morris, 2012). Most early-childhood academic interventions were due to behavioral issues. The trend over the last 40 years left the majority of the population underachieving and has left them overshadowed by a few high achieving male outliers (Patterson, 2009). Significant gains were recorded in a few areas where creating changes in the family and school life combined helped achievement (Gorski, 2019).

In analysis of early childhood education, Hanly et al. (2017) reported that for the lowest socioeconomic group, the average cognitive scores for children at age 4 were 60% below those of children from more affluent families. Baw (2018) reported that affluent children score almost twice the rate of children who were economically disadvantaged. This comprehensive study for the National Assessment of Educational Progress stated that in spite of decades of focus on

lifting the achievement for all children there were no substantial changes in overall achievement in low income children. In some areas of the country the achievement gap has been widening (Tileson & Darling, 2009).

Little (2017) reported that gaps are present from birth and follow children through most of their lifetime. The average score for a student from a low-socioeconomic status was 75% the score of a more affluent classmate as noted on the Executive Functions Skills test in early preschool students. The difference was noted to start as early as 3 to 4 years of age (Little, 2017). In 2015 the Economic Policy Institute reported that children from different income levels begin school on unequal terms. In the Kindergarten class of 2009 math achievement was 18 % lower for economically disadvantaged students compared to their affluent classmates (Hanly et al., 2017). Hetch et al. (2017) agreed with this statistic in their report on the test score gap narrowing for Title I students. They found that for female Title I students the test score gap was closing but for Title I males it had widened. In the decades that led up to 2010 the gap was starting to narrow due to head start programs and other early intervention strategies (Joo, 2010). Another explanation for this narrowing gap was the reduction in children of economically distressed families in the 1980s and 1990s. The United States dipped from 2.8 children per family to 2.4 (Gorski, 2019). Ladd (2012) reviewed the impact of new policies on the gap. In urban areas the reduction in class size, Head Start programs, magnet schools, and innovative teaching had contributed to narrowing the gap of inner-city youth. During the same time in rural areas, education gaps by socioeconomic status were increasingly noticeable (Currie, 2011). Using the state reported data of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), Ladd (2012) found that the gaps for some cohorts were narrowing but others were widening. The achievement gap between high and low socioeconomic status was greater than the achievement gap due to race or gender.

College Enrollment Gender Gap and Poverty

Females from low-socioeconomic households have outpaced their male counterparts in the last decade. In 2017, 11.7% of low socioeconomic males who were high school sophomores in 2007 had received a bachelor's degree compared to 19.2% of females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Also, in that same year, 24% of Hispanic women had graduated college compared to 17% of men. The common trend on college campuses has been observed in all males from low socioeconomic incomes (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). Bayrak and Michael (2015) suggested that with an unbalanced gender graduation rate that society will suffer due to people pairing with common educational backgrounds and women not being able to find a partner with a postsecondary degree. Fewer males attending college has left fewer educated males to role model this for their sons. Morris (2012) found that males from low socioeconomic homes are at greater risk for developing oppositional attitudes towards education. Long-term gender roles that defined masculinity valued manual labor over a mental education (Bayrak & Michael, 2015). The demands of families with limited income would greatly impact the views of investing in an education as opposed to getting a job to help the family (Joo, 2012). DiPrete and Buchmann (2013) contribute that male students have inferior academic performance, poorer social and behavioral skills, and lower levels of participation in extracurricular activities, which sets the course to disengage from higher education. Male students also display a lack of effort in school and are less likely to apply early for college (Morris, 2012). This apathy results in fewer choices and less likelihood of being matched to a program of interest (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). Besides more opportunities for manual work for a decent wage, male students were more likely to attend vocational school or enter the military (Segal et al., 2018).

Prevailing Views of Poverty in Education

Currie (2011) found that the prevailing attitude people in the United States have about people who live in poverty was they only have themselves to blame. This type of thinking gave rise to the notion that the poverty class was responsible for its own improvement (Ladd, 2012). As of 2010 the gap in achievement had not narrowed despite the efforts of No Child Left Behind (Joo, 2010). Students from poor families had many obstacles ahead of them that they had to overcome (Shaw & Shelleby, 2014). These obstacles arose from their homes, from their neighborhoods, and from their schools. If not addressed, these obstacles followed these students for the rest of their lives and made breaking the glass ceiling of poverty almost impossible (Shaw & Shelleby, 2014).

Shim et al. (2009) noted that most of the literature on causes for the female advantage in secondary education seemed to suggest that males with lower education had better income earning potential than females because they were better equipped to perform construction and other similar jobs. Males in poverty performed physical work that earned a wage greater than other members of the family although it remained a low-income job. For this reason, they seldom moved on to higher education, whereas a female without the ability to perform the manual labor job moved on to pursue higher education (Smith, 2015).

Joo (2010) analyzed the long-term effects of Head Start programs on children from neighborhoods of poverty with a study involving 2,000 families. The control group were the students from the same neighborhoods who did not participate in a preschool program. The differences in achievement between boys and girls in early elementary grades were measured using standardized testing. The results were not what was expected, with girls in Head Start having more of an education advantage over girls who were not in a preschool. However, boys in Head Start did not have a significant advantage over boys from the same poverty neighborhoods

who were not in preschool. Joo explained that lower income males may not be ready for the same type of formalized instruction as females.

Shaw and Shelleby (2014) addressed the genetic, socialization, and community factors associated with early-starting conduct problems in their research. Data were measured from control groups that were in poverty with no early programs compared to groups that represent the same poverty rate that have some form of family education program. One program, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), involved placing welfare recipients with children into a training program. Parents received employment training and financial supplements. Incentives helped insure a better home environment for the children in the program. Successful female parent participants found an increase in employment opportunities led to greater family income and a more stable home environment. The children in the families of the treatment group had a greater increase than any other group in their achievement.

Regarding income gaps, two leading studies have offered causes. One view was that the academic achievement gap between children at the top and bottom of socioeconomic class increased in recent decades (D'Agostino et al., 2019). In 2005 this gap grew to 40% larger among children born in the 20th century compared to their older peers. Another approach to the analysis of the gap was to follow the same group of students through their years in formal education. Schmoker (2016) examined student performance from preschool to 12th grade. In an effort to document the effects of literacy instruction, Schmoker (2016) collected reading assessments and determined that the gap was widening again for low socioeconomic students. Studies of cohorts uncovered a disturbing trend in male versus female students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Keels (2013) analyzed freshmen cohort data for gender, socioeconomic status and degree completions. At the end of fall semester there was not a

significant difference in male and female GPA. Six years later only 27% of low socioeconomic males completed a degree compared to 53% of their female counterparts. Schomoker (2016) posited that the gap was not demonstrated immediately upon entering college due to the same GPA fall semester of freshman year but would seem to stem from a lack of perseverance.

The path a low socioeconomic male chose to take to get out of poverty may play a major role in his success (Ellis & Helaire, 2020; Taylor, 2017). If the male student picks a program that does not match his long-term interest, completing a degree becomes less desirable (Taylor, 2017). Ellis and Helaire (2020) compared the percentage of males from poverty who completed a 4-year degree when the program prescribed for them to the percentage who completed when it was not tied to a particular scholarship program. They found that when male students were allowed to pick a major that was not tied to a scholarship program, they were more likely to graduate. Taylor (2017) studied winners of national scholarships that were not for a specific program were more likely to graduate compared to their male counterparts that were in a scholarship program of study.

Socioeconomic Status/Poverty

One in five children under the age of 18 lives in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2020). These 15.5 million children have begun their lives behind their affluent peers (Children's Defense Fund, 2020). The same opportunities and households that the rest of school children have had are not available to them and they will need to be educated on skills that have been ingrained in others (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2014). These 15.5 million children live around 77 million adults in some of the poorest areas and neighborhoods of our country (Children's Defense Fund, 2014). These poor neighborhoods were found to have poor schools (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2014).

Poverty will exert an extreme hindrance on a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Gorski, 2019). Born poor, children are likely to stay poor unless educators are determined to change the predictable trajectory of low achievement (Currie, 2011). D'Agostino et al. (2019) found the following:

Factors that have a negative effect on poor students' achievement but are beyond schools' control include a higher incidence of prenatal adversity, illness and injury, exposure to pollutants, nutritional problems, residential mobility, and a lack of educational activities and materials in the home. (p.1)

In poor neighborhoods there are little to no public libraries with summer reading programs (Joo, 2010). These children lack access to youth sports programs. Children rarely have the resources nor the guidance to leave their neighborhood (Currie, 2011). Poor students are assigned disproportionately to the most inadequately funded schools (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2014). These schools have the largest class sizes and lowest paid teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Teachers in these schools are more likely to be the least experienced with the lowest education of any educators in the profession (OECD, 2018). Poor children are more likely to be bullied than their wealthier peers (Shaw & Shelleby, 2014). Poor children do not have access to the school resources such as funded science labs and school nurses (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012) that children at affluent schools take for granted.

Several researchers have examined generational poverty as it relates to neighborhood quality, placement in exceptional children programs, and persistence of poverty in certain geographical locations (Bird & Higgins, 2010; Leung et al., 2017; Massey, 2020). Lewis (1967) was the first to describe poverty theory as it related to the culture of generational poverty. Generational poverty is a value system of belief and skills that is reinforced by society

but held by the individuals in poverty (Bird & Higgins, 2010; Leung et al., 2017; Lewis, 1967; Massey, 2020). Children raised in the value system that contributes to generational poverty learn a systematic predestination of poverty (Bird & Higgins, 2010; Lewis, 1967). Massy (2020) refuted Lewis's theory and stated that persistent poverty is a culture that is hard to escape due to the learned condition. Leung et al. (2017) used frame analysis to evaluate poverty culture. Throughout frame analysis a collective first-hand account of people in poverty reveals how they perceive themselves. Leung et al. reported a varied set of circumstances that seemed to ensure a person would stay in poverty by using framing based on family history. Common ground of single parent homes, multigenerational homes, and low socioeconomic neighborhoods seemed to be predictors for generational poverty (Leung et al., 2017; Massey, 2020).

The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 gave a parent on government assistance monetary incentives to find employment (Symaco, 2014). Choi and Jackson (2011) examined the results of requiring impoverished mothers to leave the home to work had on the development of children. They noted an increase in behavioral and academic difficulties among children whose mothers took the initiative to leave the home. Implications of this sudden increase in behavioral and academic difficulties would be explained by Leung et al. (2010) to have arisen from a lack of support structure while mother is at work. In other words, when the mom was not at the house to ensure stability because she was at work the behavior of the children and their achievement declined. This same lack of support structure was noted to affect how students in poverty do not have the structure at their home to support learning (Chloi & Jackson, 2011; Massey 2020). Welfare-to-work programs (WPWs) were found to be more successful if the mother was moved to full-time employment over part-time employment (Chloi & Jackson, 2011). Generational poverty can be escaped one person at a time, but the shift has been shown to be

more stable if the primary caregiver of a home improves his or her position with full time employment (Chloi & Jackson, 2011; Massey, 2020).

Parents in Poverty

Parents in low socioeconomic homes may not have the structure and support needed to help raise their male students to understand the importance of an education to improve socioeconomic status. Davis-Kean and Ellis (2005) summarized class parenting differences. Parents of higher income cultivated the learning of their children in a planned or systematic way, while low socioeconomic parents tended to allow nature to take its course. Successful student skills were observed more among the boys who were supported. If the parents had completed higher education, then they were more likely to cultivate their children. Poverty children often attend poverty schools and are grouped with children of similar families (OECD, 2018). Parents have limited opportunities in these neighborhoods to attend PTA and improve cultivating skills (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2014).

It has recently been found that the educational level of the mother was the number one factor that relates to persistent poverty (Ladd, 2012). Nearly 30% of all single-mother families in the United States lived under the poverty line and in 2018, 36% of all mothers were unwed (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2019). In the United States 19 million public school students live with a single mother (National Center of Education Statistics, 2020). Around 40% of children in the United States grew up without a father figure in the home. Single mothers are 90% of welfare recipients in the United States (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2019). Lastly, roughly 70% of both gang members and high school dropouts in the United States were from single-mother households in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Many generational poverty parents did not view themselves as successful in education (Ladd, 2012). However, the perception of living in low-socioeconomic status did not affect how they thought their own children could achieve (Betson & Michael, 2015). Low parental education levels were a predictor of family wealth (Fleming, 2012). Around 80% of children in poverty lived with a parent who did not have a high school degree (National Center of Education Statistics, 2020). Only 23% of two-parent families were of low socioeconomic status (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2019). Children of migrants were three times as likely to live in poverty as their public-school classmates (National Center of Education Statistics, 2020).

Studies suggested that boys were affected more than girls by being in a single-parent home (Joo, 2010). Two-parent households outperformed single-parent households in meeting the needs of boys due to having more adults present (Machinet al. 2013). Therefore, it was easy to see on all income levels that the lack of a two-parent home would be more difficult on male children over female children; however, poverty seemed to increase this factor (Shildrick, 2018). Studies have found that in dual-parenting homes mothers spend more parenting time with daughters and fathers with sons (Machin et al., 2013). Single mothers were found to spend less time with their sons than daughters and had a perception of feeling emotionally distant from their sons (Shildrick, 2018). Parents in single-family homes seemed to expect males to take the lead on self-care and responsibility, or they lowered the expectation of it. This change in approach affected a male child's educational goals (Joo, 2012). The literature supported this statement: regardless of family income, when a father is absent, delinquent behavior increased (Shildrick, 2018).

Betson and Michael (2015) suggested that low-work hours of adult caregivers caused children to have an unnatural dependency on the family. The perception of the male children of

poverty parents was that the needs of the family were more important than future goals (Bayrak & Gulati, 2015). A study about the struggles of males with a poverty background in college suggested that many prioritized the needs of the home over the work needed for their education (Gorski, 2019).

Conflict and Lack of Support at Home

The remedies that were studied to help close the achievement gap for low-socioeconomic students focused on the education of the family in how to support their students. They also focused on the education of teachers in the use of effective strategies with students of poverty (Davis-Kean & Ellis, 2019). Instructional strategies were important, but they did not stack up against building relationships with low-income families (Gorski, 2019). These studies shared a common theme; if a student learned the art of reading then he or she became a learner (Schmoker, 2016). Tileston and Darling (2009) agreed with Schmoker and delineated strategies for learning reading that work in closing the achievement gap for poverty students. Neuman (2008) wrote a book about educating children of poverty. Neuman divided instruction into efforts that make a difference and used technology to narrow the gap. There was positive correlation of $(rs(112) = .60$ p $= .012$ between improving the education of poor people and solving the problems of poverty. Lott (2011) developed a method by laying out research to help turn the tide in education reform for students of poverty. Learning how to read and write narrowed the gap for everyone.

The number of hours worked in low-socioeconomic households correlating to student achievement was analyzed in two studies (Apel et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2017). In food-insecure homes conflicts arose daily (Apel et al., 2013). In order to provide food, the caregivers worked extra shifts and were not at home (Yu et al., 2017). Students from these low-socioeconomic

households did not have access to quality food or spaces to work and read (Apel et al., 2013). In contrast to Neuman (2008), the physical needs of the family interrupted a child's development when parents are struggled to put food on the table. This was directly related to the hours a parent worked and the level of education of the primary caregiver (Apel et al., 2013). There was an absence of literature on the long-term effect of growing up in a food-insecure home related to future success.

Trends and Needs of Males in Education

For the first half of the 20th century, male students were more likely than female students to enroll in postsecondary education. The only exception to these were schools of nursing and teaching. This trend continued into the 1970s when college enrollment became even with boys and girls. By the late 1990s the gender gap had reversed with girls more likely to graduate from institutions of higher learning than boys (Bayrak & Gulati, 2015). There was little difference in cognitive skills between boys and girls, meaning that the difference in their achievement had to come from other factors (Machin et al., 2013). Female students possessed noncognitive skills such as organization, persistence, getting clarity on assignments, and paying attention to needed details at a higher rate than male students (Morris, 2012). These skills were critical to success in traditional schools. Girls were rewarded and see returns in the form of grades and complements in education because of their noncognitive skills (Bayrak & Gulati, 2015).

In a study in England, it was found the gender gap narrows for low economic males compared to females for the first 6 years of formal education but widens for the last 6 years of their K- 12 education (Machin et al., 2013). This study reported the average gender differences in math and reading for students in 1969, 1980, 1996, and 2003. Traditionally, in mathematics there was a small gender gap in favor of the boys. This gap remained around 2.71% over the first 3

time periods but had narrowed to .71% by 2003. The gender gap for reading significantly favored the girls. What started out as a slight advantage the females had in 1969 of .53% has grown to 6.79% by 2003 (Machin et al., 2013). By the time male students in poverty start their secondary education, many are behind their female counterparts and are not prepared for postsecondary education upon graduation (Morris, 2012). Machin et al. (2013) found the gender gap had evolved at age 16 by recording the number of A to C grades on final averages of high school course work. This method was chosen because there had been a variety of high school accountability models during the years of the study. Over time the pattern at the high school level was favoring the girls. In 1969 and 1980 there was negligible difference between the number of male and female students who had five or more grades in the A to C range. By 1990 female students were 5.7% above male students and by 2003 it had grown to a 9.8% difference. With regard to math only, the gender differential favored the male students in 1974 by 3% and 1986 by 6.8 percentage points. In 1998 the gap favored the female students by 1%. By 2003 this had risen to 1.7%. In English, which favored females historically, in 1968 and 1980 respectively, the gaps were 6.4% and 7.5%. By 1998, the gap had risen to 16.1%. It was slightly higher in 2003, at 18.4% (Machin et al., 2013).

Another significant difference between male and female students in early grades was the number of each who were served in the exceptional children program in public schools under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Statistically, in 2018-2019 female students made up half of the enrolled students in public education in the United States, but out of 14% of public school students that are served with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) only 10% of female students had an IEP compared to 18% of male students (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2020). Common sex-linked traits only accounted for 3% of this difference. In 2018-

2019, 73% of students served by IDEA graduated with a regular high school diploma and 10% received an alternative certificate of study (National Center Educational Statistics, 2020). Of the students receiving special educational services, 52% came from low socioeconomic households (Currie, 2011.) Female students through their socialization found the roles and skills needed to be a successful student easier to navigate than male students do (Machin et al., 2013). Male students found themselves at an educational disadvantage enhanced by schools' sanctions for nonconforming behavior (Patterson, 2009). Male students were more than eight times as likely as female students to be suspended for discipline in public schools (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2020).

Morris (2012) suggested that we were losing male students due to a lack of male role models who value reading in their homes. In the United States 40% of children grew up without a father figure in the home (National Center of Education Statistics, 2020). His research focused on poor rural males and their lack of preparation for school and single-parent households. Test score data trends were tracked for this cohort. In the rural areas of the Midwest that use standardized testing, he found that the gap between males and females of poverty narrows until 5th grade with females still having the advantage. From 5th to 12th grade the gap widened to about 3 times what it was in the 5th grade (Morris, 2012). At this point the causes behind the failure of low socioeconomic males to escape the poverty trap had yet to be determined. Tolen et. al. (2013) believed that the low socioeconomic male is not exposed to guidance and leadership and this contributes to his ability to persist. Mitchell (2011) suggested males from generational poverty's lack of male leadership in the early years of their life had left them unable to handle life's struggles. Males from generational poverty continued to experience job insecurity and lack of completing advanced education higher than any other subset (Tolan et al., 2013). In 2016 male

students with a 0-family contribution on the FASFA had a college graduation rate of only 18.4%. Only 1.3% obtained a master's degree. (U. S. Department of Commerce, 2019). Several mentoring programs that ranged from a big brother model to a committed community mentor were reviewed and found to have a positive correlation with breaking generational poverty. Personal and professional skills could be improved by the use of a mentor (Murphy, 2012). Mitchell (2011) studied the value of mentoring. Programs were rated for having a clear vision with specific learning objectives. Programs had to be replicable. The success of the program's studies was significant. Mentoring programs by nature come with certain risks (Murphy, 2012). Mentoring in early stages in life changed the direction of a child's achievement (Mitchell, 2011). Most leadership development courses had some form of mentoring from someone who was already proven to be a successful member of society (Schmoker, 2016).

Existing research examined the effectiveness of programs designed to help students from a poverty background enroll in higher education (Ellis & Helaire, 2018). One study evaluated the impact of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) on college readiness outcomes (Jindra, 2018). The GEAR UP program was designed to prepare low-income students to succeed in postsecondary education. This program was reviewed due to it being a federal funded grant program with years of studies. From 2010-2017, cohort data were collected to compare GEAR UP students to students of similar socioeconomic demographics. The program focused on college entrance exams, college exposure, and college readiness. After years of implementation, the program was noted to improve college readiness. Due to the expense of the GEAR UP program, a few quantitative studies have tried to measure its long-term impacts. Jindra (2018) tracked GEAR UP students for 5 years after they graduated to determine what percentage of GEAR UP college graduates had entered a career of their major. Graduate

students who were working in the field of their undergraduate studies were counted along with professionals. Only 26 % of GEAR UP students who graduated were working in fields connected to their major (Jindra, 2018). GEAR UP students have been monitored for transition onto college campuses, starting on track to graduate, and the need for counseling (Ellis & Helaire, 2020; Luciford et. al., 2017). There was a lack of literature that focused on students from low socioeconomic status perception of the success of this program

Incarceration and Poverty

One in 10 American males was incarcerated at some point in their lifetime in 2018 (Cox, 2019). For males from low socioeconomic status, that statistic changed to one in four. In the United States 78% of all incarcerated males in the United States were from households of poverty (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). Factors that contributed to their incarceration were lack of a father figure, single-parent home, and growing up in a poor neighborhood where there was more of a chance of engaging in crime (Davison et al., 2019).

Incarceration led to a lack of income earning potential due to reduced chance of employment once time is served. Cox (2019) suggested that mass incarceration has caused an increase in poverty for the United States of 2.8%. A few studies have found that poverty is both a cause and an effect of incarceration (Cox, 2019; Davison et al., 2019). Incarceration of more than a year reduced the lifetime earnings of a male by 24% (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). For males in generational poverty, being incarcerated increased the likelihood of future incarcerations by 81% (Cox, 2019). Font and Maguire-Jack (2020) reported that 60% of people remained unemployed a year after their release from a long-term prison. One in three adults in poverty had a criminal record that appeared on a routine background check (Davison et al., 2019). Cox (2019) determined, with identical resumes except for a criminal charge, employers did not offer

the former incarcerated candidate the job. In a review of hiring practices for most companies, human resources officers said they were less likely to hire someone who had broken the law into a position (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020).

Many low socioeconomic families lost income from a primary caregiver as well as increased childcare cost due to other members entering the workforce (Nichols, 2017). Depending on the situation, this came at a time of increased expenses due to legal fees and court costs (Lundberg et al., 2010). Depending on the criminal offence, many previously incarcerated persons discovered that assistance programs such as food stamps and housing were unobtainable (Nichols, 2017). Lower income neighborhoods with a high percentage of adults with recorded incarceration affected opportunity and led to homelessness and repeat offenses (Lundberg et al., 2010).

Grit, Resilience, Growth Mindset, and Success

Grit was explained as the persistence and desire to reach goals (Duckworth et al., 2014). Resilience was being able to resist environmental stress to maintain a good outcome (Rutter, 2012). When working on the theoretical framework for this study, grit was chosen to help determine an individual's success. Duckworth et al. (2014) suggested grit was something all successful people have in common. Duckworth (2016) studied West Point Whole Candidate scores, a combination of physical fitness, leadership recommendations, and SAT/GPA achievement, to see if there was any correlation to their completing the program. The study found that there was no relationship between the score and whether or not a cadet dropped out of the program. This Whole Candidate Score did not reliably predict who would finish, and students with a high score were just as likely to drop out as those with lower scores. Rutter (2012) would attribute this difference to their resilience or the steeling effect. According to Rutter the steeling

effect was an individual's use of previous stressful situations to make them prepared to handle future adversity. Walsh (2015) stated that a person's resilience comes from having bad experiences and not avoiding them.

Success seemed dependent on passion and not talent. Success was studied in several fields and a grit scale was developed to try and measure passion and perseverance. The scale was tested and was able to predict based on grit if subjects would graduate or stay employed. According to Duckworth (2016) the grit score predicted the success of an individual. In general, for most people, their passion score was less than their perseverance score. People with grit knew that hardships might be temporary and kept focused on the bigger picture (Duckworth, 2016). In addition to Duckworth's study, other studies found positive correlations between grit and performance in other areas (Jachimowicz et al., 2019; Williams, 2017).

Another factor that was researched in success is mindset. For people who have a growth mindset there have been links between learning how to break negative reactions and learning positive coping (Jachimowicz, 2019; Rutters, 2012). Claro et al. (2016) described mindset as the ability to cope and adjust to failure. Perseverance was added when the brain was able to change and adjust by the "growth" mindset (Park et al., 2020). If people had a growth mindset then they knew that they could change and develop an ability they lacked (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). If a person believed that intelligence and ability could never be changed, then he or she had a fixed mindset and had a harder time adapting to hardships (Park et al., 2020). Wright (2017) noted that students' mindset has implications on their achievement in school and how they approached their studies. A pair of studies that related mindset to intelligence in determining achievement or underachievement were conducted and found a positive correlation (Claro et al., 2016).

No articles have been found that related the growth mindset to people who had escaped generational poverty.

Summary

Theories and research on low socioeconomic status and the gender gap identified a variety of experiences that contribute to the trend of males struggling to make it out of generational poverty, as well as explained some of the inadequacy of life experiences that make this a difficult task. Mentoring programs and mindset were reviewed to determine any framework that could be present to add success. However, no research was found examining the common experience as to the small percentage of males that escaped generational poverty. The Project GEAR UP mentoring program was examined but it limited the study to focus on college readiness and graduation (Ellis & Helaire, 2020). The work of Duckworth (2016) and Claro et al. (2016) helped to understand the concepts of grit and mindset that helped predict the success of someone who has the perseverance and the resilience to keep improving. In this study this information was used to provide context for the questions and to help code responses. The goal was to better understand what contributed to the success for some males from a background of generational poverty to navigate their way out of poverty. Studying the phenomenon of previously low socioeconomic class males including the perceived importance of mindset, education, mentors, job security, and social networking versus salary, family structure, and community culture in successful males might provide insight to individuals that are trying to assist this population.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

A phenomenological research design was used to explore the mindset and perceived influences that some socioeconomic disadvantaged males attribute to their determination and persistence in becoming financially independent (Giorgi, 2019). In this type of research study, the methodology is set in realism or experience (Cohen et al., 2011). Whereas quantitative research statistically examines data to validate a hypothesis, qualitative research provides a framework for the researcher to look beyond the numbers and find answers to value-laden questions (Creswell, 2008). Phenomenological research allows for an individual to express self-reflections on experience that enables a researcher to get perceptions from someone who lived the experience being studied (Cohen et al., 2011).

The decision to do a phenomenological study was informed by the need for a complementary point of view (Giorgi, 2011). Phenomenological research requires the researchers to bracket their own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to understand it through the voices of the informants (Creswell, 2009). The focus was thus on the meaning of experiencing poverty for individuals and what factors they contributed to enable them to improve their socioeconomic status (Creswell, 2010). The aim was to obtain comprehensive data that would provide the basis for individuals who work with students from poverty backgrounds to learn what common theme and practices have helped others sever the ties to poverty.

The three conceptual frameworks studied were grit, resilience, and mindset. Grit was explained as the persistence and desire to reach goals (Duckworth et al., 2014). When working on the theoretical framework for this study, grit was chosen to help determine an individual's

success. Duckworth et al. (2014) suggested grit was something all successful people have in common. People with grit knew that hardships might be temporary and kept focused on the bigger picture (Duckworth, 2016). In addition to Duckworth's study, other studies found positive correlations between grit and performance in other areas (Jachimowicz et al., 2019; Williams, 2017).

The definition of independence used was that participants will have established themselves or their household above the federal poverty line. Participants were recommended for this study by having graduated from a Title I school. Subjects were found by their involvement in a secondary mentoring program, a postsecondary success program, or by self-identifying as a male who had overcome generational poverty. Subjects were interviewed and data collected from these interviews were analyzed. The responses of these subjects offered an inside look at what factors helped set them on a path of overcoming poverty.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south. This phenomenological study may contribute to the general knowledge base in this area and inform the creation of a framework for addressing needs of male students from Title I schools, which had implications for all students regardless of race or gender from low socioeconomic status (SES).

Research Questions

To explore perceptions of male graduates from Title I high schools the following questions were posed:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of life experiences of male graduates from Title I high schools that influenced them in adulthood?

Research Question 2: How do male graduates from Title I high schools perceive their high school experiences?

Research Question 3: What are the perceived influences in college, career-technical, and employment that helped male graduates from Title I high school get to their current level of success?

Researcher's Role

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south. Fifteen graduates of Title I high schools were interviewed by the researcher. After the interviews, transcripts were presented to the participants to verify their responses were recorded correctly. The transcripts of the interviews were coded and analyzed. The data from the interviews was used to determine perceptions of male graduates from Title I high school relating to overcoming generational poverty. Snowball sampling was used to contact potential participants. The researcher has worked as an educator and mentor for this population. Open-ended questions were used to try and prevent any bias the researcher might have from his experience with this population.

Site Selection

The sites used were private locations convenient to the participants. Due to the current pandemic, zoom conferences were used with private code and passwords as an interview platform. The site selection varied due to the nature of this study.

Population and Sampling

Fifteen male graduates from Title I high schools between the ages of 22 and 46 were chosen for this study. Snowball sampling was used with participants identifying other

participants for this study (Crewsell, 2013). The invitations were sent after names were provided by individuals who knew that the participant identified himself as overcoming generational poverty. Due to the nature of this study, purposive sampling was used. Participants were chosen based on recommendations from individuals who work in programs that have a wide range of socioeconomic entry level employees. The goal was to interview 15 males between the ages of 22-46 who were in the cohort of the decline of income and education of the male population relative to the female population from the same socioeconomic status over the last few decades.

The participants voluntarily agreed by a consent form before the interview. They were notified that they had the right to stop the interview at any time and not answer all the questions. They were also given the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview and could edit or change any collected information if they were not comfortable with it.

Interviews

Interviews of 15 male graduates of Title I schools was the data source for this research. The researcher used the interview protocol (Appendix A) for this study. Participants reflected on their perceptions on perseverance and its influence on overcoming generational poverty. In a phenomenological interview, questions were open ended allowing the participant to lead the discussion (Creswell, 2011).

Data Collection

Each participant was notified about the subject of the interview and a consent form was provided that explained how personal information would be secure and protected. The consent form also informed the participant that the session would be recorded in audio and video format and that a transcript would be made of each interview. The participants were informed that a

pseudonym would be used and all references to any identifiable information would be removed from the transcripts. The researcher interviewed each participant via Zoom under a secure password format. These interviews were scheduled at times convenient to the participant. They were conducted in private settings so that no one could hear the responses and the participant would feel secure when being interviewed. The participants were informed that they could stop the interview and request that their answers not be included in the study. An interview protocol was used to guide the interview in which the purpose of the interview was shared, and the participant was explained the procedure and the rights to verify the collected data. This guide insured that the researcher would address the same questions with each participant and allow for the participant to share his different experiences for analysis. The approach allowed the researcher to let the participant direct the direction of the interview so as not to lead it to any predetermined conclusion. One of the important details in this type of study was to allow the interview to be flexible so as to capture each individual's experiences and perceptions. Some follow-up questions were used to insure a full understanding of the participants' responses. The transcribed interview was returned to the participants for approval and editing if needed. Participants were told they could delete or clarify any of the transcript.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were presented to the participants for member checking. Because of the pandemic Zoom was used for the face-to-face interview that Creswell (2011) said was crucial to this research design. Interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were presented to the participants for member checking. After the participants approved the transcripts, the transcripts were coding for patterns and emergent themes were

identified. The coding was done by the researcher and repeated by a peer to help ensure the themes were present in the data.

After the participants approved the transcripts from the interviews, the researcher reviewed the responses to gain better insight. A thematic analysis approach was used to code the data from the interviews. Phenomenological Analysis is a qualitative research procedure that helps determine how a participant perceives a topic (Creswell, 2013). The data led to themes in the responses relative to the research questions. It is important to note that these themes are not predetermined but are grounded in the data. An independent second coding of the data was conducted by an independent reviewer trained in phenomenological study. This was done to validate the coding process. The findings are presented in Chapter 4 by the main and secondary themes verified in the coding. Codes and themes looking for similarities and differences are compared between the participants.

Assessment of Quality and Rigor

Credibility refers to the truth of the data or the participants views (Polit & Beck, 2012). In order to assure the data were a true representation of the participants views, the participants were allowed to review the transcripts for accuracy and were allowed access to the final product. The researcher presented all relevant information about each participant including if any were known to the researcher prior to the study. To address credibility, the research was coded by two people independently of each other. The results of these separate coding's were compared and only themes that appeared to both readers were included in the results.

Transferability refers to the ability of the research findings to be applied to other groups (Creswell, 2011). In order for outside individuals to determine transferability, a highly detailed description of how the participants were chosen, what questions were asked, and how the

responses were recorded and verified was provided. Readers can relate their own experiences if they grew up in generational poverty or they can relate if they work with people who grew up in generational poverty.

Dependability is the consistence of data over similar conditions or if the study could be replicated (Koch, 2006). In order to ensure dependability, the same interview protocol (Appendix B) was used for each participant including reading and getting verbal consent (Appendix A) that informed the participants the purpose of the study and how their information would be used, secured, and stored. Descriptive information on each participant was also provided so that the information from this study can be included in further research. The data were coded by two differently trained qualitative researchers to ensure the themes were present to both.

Confirmability refers to the ability to demonstrate that the data is free of biases from the researcher (Creswell, 2011). Efforts are made to ensure that the analysis is based on the perceptions of the participants and not the bias of the researcher. The researcher acknowledged that two of the participants knew the researcher prior to the interview but would not have identified the researcher as a mentor.

Ethical Protocol

I have worked with the population being studied for 30 years and will strive to be unbiased in my writing and approach to this subject. Before any participants were recruited for this study, professional approval was obtained from the dissertation committee in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department of East Tennessee State University. After the research proposal was approved, the researcher requested approval from the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation in this study was

completely voluntary and no names or any identifiable information of participants were to be used in the published findings. Signed informed consent was obtained from each participant. Interviews were conducted over zoom or in person in private settings. Under IRB regulations, the researcher will protect the anonymity of participants, their location, and their employment in order to reduce any identifiers. All transcripts and digital recordings will remain in a password protected file for 6 years as required by IRB regulations.

Summary

In Chapter 3 the researcher described the research questions, design of the study, how the subjects were identified, the interview process, an explanation of how the data were collected, categorized, and analyzed. The findings of the research are presented in Chapter 4. The recommendations based on the findings are presented in chapter 5. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south as they have overcome generational poverty.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south. Many educators have noted the decline in male achievement. Several quantitative studies have data to support the number of male students who did not complete college or a career pathway (Bayrak & Gulati, 2105; D'Agostino et al., 2019; Henkhaus, 2019; Peterson 2009). When poverty was considered, a male student was nine times less likely to complete a degree in college after being admitted than students that were not from poverty backgrounds (Bayrak & Gulati, 2015). Henkhaus (2019) noted that a large percentage of the incarcerated population in the United States were from poverty households. In the years that followed a formal secondary education, a very small percentage of males from poverty make it out of poverty (D'Agostino et al., 2019). Data were collected through interviews of male subjects from 22-46 years of age, which spans the range of time that this decline in male performance had been observed in previous studies. These subjects were successful in both secondary education and transition to independent life.

This phenomenological study may contribute to the general knowledge base in this area and inform the creation of a framework for addressing needs of male students from Title I schools, which had implications for all students regardless of race or gender from low socioeconomic status (SES).

Description of Participants

The 15 male participants who graduated from a Title I high school in this study met at least two of the following three criteria: first generation college students, formerly on free and reduced lunch/zero family contribution on FASFA, or self-identified as growing up in a low-income family. Out of the 15 participants, one was Native American, two are Hispanic, five are

Black, and seven are Caucasian. Two of the male participants immigrated from Hispanic speaking countries between the ages of 10-15. Five come from homes with the biological father and mother are still present, five were raised by a single mother, four were raised by both parents and stepparents, and one was adopted. Three are teachers, three work in health care, three are in the military, one works as a state translator, one works in law enforcement, two work as engineers, and two are business owners. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, the interviews were in a random order and their final number for this report was drawn to insure confidentiality. Table 1 is a summary of participant demographic information.

Table 1

Participants Demographic Information

All Participants Are from Title I High Schools in the Rural South

Participant	(H)ispanic (B)lack (C)acasion (N)ative American	(B)oth Parents (M)other only (S)hared Custody (A)dopted	(S)elf- Identified as Low-Income	First Generation (C)ollege Parents did not Graduate (H)igh School	(Z)ero on FASFA or Qualified for (F)ree and Reduced Lunch K-12	Occupationat time of interview
1	C	M	S	C	Z,F	Chemical Engineer
2	C	B		C	Z	Military Officer
3	B	B	S	C	Z,F	Policeman
4	B	M	S	C,H	Z,F	Teacher
5	N	S	S	C,H	Z,F	Teacher
6	H	B	S	C,H	Z,F	Legal Translator
7	B	M	S	C,H	Z,F	Business Owner
8	B	A	S	C,H	Z,F	Military Officer
9	C	S		C	Z,F	Emergency Flight Nurse
10	H	B	S	C,H	Z,F	Business Owner
11	C	M	S	C	Z,F	Physical Therapy Assistant
12	C	M	S	C	Z,F	Mechanical Engineer
13	C	S		C	Z	Military Officer/ Pilot
14	C	S		C	Z	ER Nurse
15	B	B	S	C	Z,F	Teacher

Analysis of Data

The main question of this study was: What perceptions do male graduates from Title I high schools have as to the factors that contributed to their success in overcoming generational poverty? In order to address this question, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews with 15 male graduates from Title I high schools using an interview guide. The interview guide was based on the following three guiding research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of life experiences of male graduates from Title I high schools that influenced them in adulthood?

Research Question 2: How do male graduates from Title I high schools perceive their high school experiences?

Research Question 3: What are the perceived influences in college, career-technical, and employment that helped male graduates from Title I high school get to their current level of success?

The main body of Chapter 4 consists of the participants perceptions as to the factors that had the greatest influence on their success as recorded through their responses from the interview guide that was based on the research questions.

Perceptions of Male Graduates of Title I Schools

The researcher explained the purpose to the study to each participant and began each interview with the open-ended question "Tell me about yourself". Many jumped right in and went into their life story. Through the next open-ended questions on family, education, and success, nine themes began to emerge in their responses. The nine themes identified were 1) Success has two components; internal and external, 2) School personnel and programs guided

success, 3) Change in mindset, 4) Changes in family structure and circumstances, 5) Lack of family financial resources, 6) Parents prioritizing success in school, 7) Being part of an athletic team/peer group, 8) Lack of experience effected college success and understanding, and 9) Credit difficulties from childhood for their success.

Success Has Two Components; Internal and External

In order to get a non-biased view of success, participants were asked to define success and if they felt like they have or have not achieved success. Many of the participants hesitated on answering before they broke into what they viewed as success. Fourteen of 15 participants indicated that there are two factors when asked to define success, personal happiness and being able to provide security or support for your family. Many stated that they have food in the house, and they have a secure place to live. A few others mentioned that they have quality time with their children, and they enjoy their job. Most reflected on being happy with their life. Thirteen of 15 believed they have reached personal success. Of the two participants that did not feel they had reached personal success, one stated that he was just not satisfied and was still on the journey the other just had a sudden career change due to COVID-19. He stated that he was going back and resetting his direction and knew it was going to work out. Nine of 15 stated that success might not look the same for everyone and it has to do with where you started. Of these nine many viewed their success with not having to live the way they grew up or in the neighborhood and the conditions of their youth.

Success Has Two Factors The two factors of success seem to stem from wanting financial security and wanting to have time to enjoy life and find personal satisfaction. It was noted that in many responses, success came from being in a position to help others. One

participant reflected on taking a job with less money but finding it more rewarding because of the service he was able to provide to those who needed it.

Participant One stated:

>Success is enjoying your job. You know that's the main thing you don't mind getting up going to work. It makes it a lot easier. It's kind of hard not to define success on a professional career without having a decent salary, so having a decent salary is another success factor. I guess I'm more of a personal side of it. I mean, as long as you're happy, you have your friends and family around you, and there's nothing too bad going on, other than the normal daily stresses of life, that's also success.

Participant Four added:

>Success to me is when you can reach your full potential. When you're reaching your potential it's not how much money you make, and it is not what other people think of you. To me, for me, success is that I've achieved. I just do what brings me peace. It doesn't mean that I'm not learning. I'm still learning, but maybe I don't want to go to school anymore. I just want to learn on my own. My relationships with people that's success. I'm a teacher now, so how I interact with my students, the fact that they know I care, that's success to me.

Participant Five added:

>I would define success; I think everybody is just trying to find their own way in life. I think there's an internal well-being and an external well-being, you know, you can say, mental, emotional you know, there's like a base of pyramid of social needs. You can just

put in two categories of an internal well-being an external well-being. I think success is a balance of internal and external well-being. And I feel like my external was taken care of quite a bit and I worked on my internal.

Participant Six added:

> Well, I think that everyone defines success differently according to what they want. Success for me, success is being in a position where I feel like I've given everything I can. I've come to realize that in order for me to be happy, I need to feel like I am being productive and contributing to others. For me, success is being in a place where I am not only able to take care of myself but able to take care of the people that I care about. And as I grow older, I think that success has become more about what difference do I make in the life of others.

Participant Seven added:

> How to define success is just two things. If you are financially in a place that you can be happy, you know, at least in that moment and a little down the road. Also a place that you can be, I'm not going to say worry free because nobody's ever worried free, but just in a in a place where you can get up and you can you can just breathe, you know, take a moment to relax and actually enjoy your life instead of just going to work or going to school. You know, I think you should have a life that you are financially at a place that you're happy and you can enjoy your life and do things that you want. It just can be somewhere that you are right now so that you can figure out where your next steps are, you know, that's what that is.

Participant Eight added:

Success is knowing that there were many opportunities to fail in or give up but you don't. One form of success could have been getting over a hurdle that allows you to stay on the path to get to your goal. So a lot of people think that success means I'm a millionaire. I don't have any debt, etc. It's not necessarily true. That's fairy tale for the most part, success is making out a plan, understanding that that plan may not work out the way you draw it out. So, everybody has their own you know they say perception is reality. I could still be at home doing what all of my former friends are doing. But I think it's the success that I'm not there. That's what I think success is.

Participant Nine added:

I would define success as what the individual views as success. Success for me is about family and enjoying what you do for a living, Okay, family first, then your job, but you have to enjoy what you do, you have to have some gratification from what you do. And to me that's success if you come home happy from work and you come home happy to be with your family. That's success.

Participant Twelve added:

Let's see. I guess just number one, paying bills on time. That's just something that I didn't see a lot growing up. There's always, you know, bills being paid late and stress from that. No lights, heat or having to move due to not paying rent. So that's one thing but also just having the ability to pursue your passions and not having stress about simple things like bills and where your next meal is coming from. Being able to pursue things that are

extracurricular and making sure that you're taking care of in other ways other than just basic necessities.

Participant Fourteen added:

I would say success is something like this. I think a lot of people would say this would be money. But I think it is happiness. For example, it has only been a handful of months that I've been at my rural hospital, I don't get paid necessarily what I would by other hospitals, I get paid fairly well. I think just being around the people and knowing that in a smaller community hospital, the people I serve, they get good care. I would take that any day over a $3 pay raise. My success would be, I mean, doing exactly what you what you want in life and finding your calling and being able to do those things that make you happy. Every day I don't I don't ever think I leave work and think I hate what I do, no I love it I think I'm exactly where I need to be now.

Achieving Personal Success When asked if they consider themselves successful many participants hesitated to answer. A few expressed that they did not want to sound conceited. Most reflected on that they feel successful based on where they started from. A recurring theme that participants described was their feeling successful because they had reached some of their goals, but they feel that they are able to continue to reach for more if needed.

Participant Five added:

I wouldn't be considered by some to be extremely successful. I do have a job that pays me what I what I need and what I want. You know, like lots of people would want more, but I think that depends on your internal well-being again. I feel like I am a relative

success. Because like the 18 years growing up my parents did not have a way to pay for what we needed. I can now so that makes me happy and happiness is why I feel successful. I may even one day own a home, that would be cool. Yeah, let's say I'm pretty successful and I'm grateful. I'm in a place that I can become more and more successful.

Participant Six added:

For me success was being a first-generation college student and graduating. I accomplished that despite my situation and the lack of resources and of course all the challenges that were in front of me. So in a way, yes. I was successful with the goals that I had years ago. I want to keep going and follow the goals and dreams that I have at the moment, and I hope that I am successful in the future. But once I get there, I will probably still be chasing something else, but at least it keeps life interesting

Participant Seven added

I think I'm pretty successful, but I think I'm never satisfied. You know, I think I've always been like that. I've never really been someone who's always like been like, that's enough. You know, that's it. I'm done. I'm always somebody who gives too much and I need to step away and look at it and be like, all right, that's the best I can do with that. When I, at the moment, if it's the best I can do is, it's probably because somebody pulled me away. So I think I'm successful but I'm just not satisfied.

Participant Nine added:

> I love what I do for a living. There's great gratification. I come home 99% of days very
> happy with how the day went. I am not one who avoids time with the family. I like being
> with my family. So I see myself as very successful.

Participant Ten added:

> I would say yes on success, I have achieved different steps through my life. I am
> grateful, I should say, I am now I'm part of our company. I'm managing different people
> under me. Two more things I want to do but to be in a position to try with a family that
> supports me, my wife and kids and to be a citizen of the USA is great.

Participant Eleven added:

> I do because of where I came from to where I am today. As the youngest of four children
> and never thought I would go to college, made it the college, graduated college, and
> went back to college after that. I'm a Physical Therapist Assistant and have been one for
> 15 years. I have a wife, two children and doing well, we own our own home and my kids
> do not have to worry about needing shoes, coats, or school supplies. When I come home
> there is food in my house and is warm when I want it or cold when I want it to be.

Participant Fifteen added:

> I think I live in a comfortable lifestyle for myself again with my job. I may not make the
> most money, but I'm happy. I make a living. I consistently hear my parents and even
> other family members, tell me that they're proud. Same thing with my brother and me,
> we constantly compete with each other. We have each other's back and we definitely

always tell each other we're proud of what each of us is doing. I mean, we give each other a hard time but it's all love. So that's why I would think I'm successful.

School Personnel and Programs Guided Success

Thirteen of the 15 Participants perceived that school mentors in the form or coaches, teachers, and guidance counselors molded their education experience and help them achieve success. Many participants mentioned wanting to do well in school to please their parents but not connecting the need to take advanced classes or having a plan until someone at school explained it to them. Two mentioned wishes that this conversation had happened before high school. Three mentioned that this mentoring from school personal is why they themselves pursued an educational career so that they can give to others. Twelve of 15 mentioned school programs that helped give them opportunities that they did not have otherwise. One even reflected on how being selected in elementary school put him on a different path because he felt special and felt he had to live up to his potential. He also credited these programs for showing him there was more to life than what he knew.

Participant Two stated:

Until high school, you didn't really have people talking to you about goal setting but certainly when you get to high school and you start to have more mentorship. I definitely had my fair share of coaches and teachers that were mentors. Having that mentorship from coaches and teachers guided me and helped me succeed in my high school career, as well as, you know, university and postgraduate. I was able to have a strong mentor in high school who is able to equip me with the tools that I needed. He also mentored me through college, since I was majoring in education it was a natural fit. A student spends a

lot of with their peers and their teachers. A large part of those that are doing the molding are teachers. That's a huge contributing factor in having teachers that are the way I've described, which allow kids to fail. They need to fail and learn how to handle that failure and teach them how to set goals realistic goals.

Participant Four added:

At some point, during my school that early school years I was picked to be part of a something the counseling department did, and it had to do with I think building self-esteem or something like that. I just remembered the experience because of feeling special. This was a pullout situation where they had some students they pulled out and we went to this counseling experience. It was more like a group. We talked as much as we were just doing activities together and exploring things, so I see I remember that as a positive thing.

In high school I was picked to participate in a science summer camp at East Carolina University. I spent a week at ECU doing science. That was a big deal because again it was taking me out of my home environment. Show me exposure to something besides our one-room efficiency apartment.

Participant Five added:

I never really thought about what education was for a while I was doing it. I just did it. I remember when I got with the school counselor and the school counselor asked, what's your major going to be or whatever it's called, your focus. I said, what do you mean? No teacher before ever really told me, like, hey, you need to think about what you want to

do in college. My brother moved out when he was in 11th grade. I decided I wanted to do that too because the person he lived with was a teacher. I want to do that because he told me that he could get me into college. I had the drive and the motivation, and he's got the knowledge so let's figure this out. Let's do it. I went to go live with him and his family. I was going to change my life. You know, there was a lot of assurance and safety with someone who had done it before.

Participant Seven added:

I had had a few teachers like maybe like three or four teachers really sit me down and be like you're a smart kid., but you need to focus on these things. I didn't really understand why just kind of did it. And having the people, my senior year, show me what fields to really focus on to try to get into college helped.

Participant Eight added:

A mentor, I'd like to call them. I ran track my sophomore, junior, and senior years in high school and at some point, during that year, I believe it was maybe junior, senior year I had a conversation with a gentleman who is a coach at the time. He told me there's going to come a time your life where the people that are to the left to the right of you, they're going to disappear, either on their own accord, or by the decision that you made. It's completely up to you how those people get from around you or how you get from around them, but at some point, you're going to have to decide what's best for you. And at that time, I really didn't have a plan because only thing I saw was, ultimately, my education. I had the mental capacity to further my education by that conversation. Hey,

you got to make a decision at some point in time, and it's either stay here or go abroad to broaden your horizons, basically. And that's ultimately what led me to my path of education.

I had an honors English III teacher who was just a heart-warming individual. I would sit there and quote Macbeth, Act One, Scene one, to her. Some people will take that time to draw that connection. I couldn't go to my family and be like hey guys Act One Scene One of Macbeth really speaks to me they wouldn't understand it because, like I say we grew up differently. you know.

Having to bury my biological mom in 2012 or something that I never thought would have happened. I met my biological mom, maybe twice my entire life. But here I was, again, reaching out to a former educator who was like hey you know I lost my parent at a young age. A lot of my success to be able to look back at my surroundings, seeing the avenues that I didn't want to go down picking the right path, but a lot of educators actually helped me on the right path. At some point, something's gotta give reached out to an educator. Hey, is there any way that you can help me. Sure, stay after school help with this club help with that club, it will alleviate some take your take your mind off of it. So I think a lot of credit is to a lot of my success also to the educators that will place there for whatever reason they chose the school to teach at that I just so happened to be it got me got me pretty far. So I'm grateful for that. I'm very grateful for that.

Participant Nine added:

> I came up through a wonderful school. I had great teachers, some that took the extra time that was needed to bring us out of our shell. I guess you could say everybody knew everybody. So that was a blessing in itself. I had great teachers, especially in high school. I was actually blessed with several young new teachers who I think, looking back on it now, even more so than thinking about it, were able to relate to the students' needs at that time because a lot of those teachers were new young and looking back on it, they could relate to the same age structures to an extent because they had just lived that life. They were willing to take the time to I guess in a way to provide what they were not provided or what they knew we were lacking.

Participant Ten added:

> I was a kid in high school, the teachers were trying to help me with everything and trying to push me to my limits. Especially a coach when I was in high school was an inspiration to me trying to push me and you know help me to achieve my goals during my track career. He also helped me find my path through college. I was not a citizen then and could not go, but I went to community college then became one. I then went to a university and he told me to walk on soccer and that made my way to graduation. I did not even know you could walk onto a soccer team and get a scholarship.

Participant Twelve added:

> I guess my high school teachers, specifically a technology teacher that gave me the confidence in myself to be able to go. Before he convinced me to even apply to colleges,

I kind of decided that I was just going to do like landscaping or some side work mow lawns, maybe getting a welding some kind of vocational trade. But he convinced me that you know that I could do more than that and convince me to pursue college as an option.

Participant Thirteen added:

So like teachers made it very clear that the better I do, the more effort I put into and more basically you get out what you put in kind of thing. A coach at my high school started talking about postsecondary opportunities and you started seeing people branch off into what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it.

Participant Fourteen added:

I would say just the fact that continually having educators around you that were familiar with you. I didn't bounce back and forth between schools. I was pretty active in sports and with my teachers always honor students, stuff like that so I would say just being well known in the school system. It definitely helped you as far as educators knowing what path to keep you on. You're like, hey, these people are watching me. I need to do exactly what I need to do and get on the right path.

Participant Fifteen added:

That I can look back and kind of see how coaches and teachers helped you know change my life and keep me on the right path. So in that same way I want to make sure that, especially as a teacher that I'm able to do the same thing for kids. I see it as part of my job to help others the way I was helped.

Change or Growth in Mindset

Participants where asked how they handled challenges when they occur. All participants have a personal plan in addressing challenges that they have developed. Eleven of 15 Participants demonstrated a growth in mindset in how that would handle a challenge. The remaining four found that they would also rely on the people they know that would help them if a situation needed it. Ten of 15 Participants recognized their change in mindset in handling challenges. Many of the participants stated that they handle them differently than they used to growing up. They no longer see a challenge as a roadblock but rather just a chance to grow.

Challenges Participants have developed a personal plan when they handle a challenge. Participant One stated:

> Well, I'm an engineer, so my trade troubleshooting problems is kind of what I do. You kind of look at the whole situation, you got to find out. I guess the root cause what's causing the challenge, what is the problem? You have to make sure it's you know clearly defined and then start looking at all the factors that make that a challenge. And then you just start breaking those down one by one. So, it's kind of like my professional career has helped me, I guess, deal with a lot of personal stuff too, because I can focus on kind of what's causing the problem and get to the root of that to get it out of the way to make things easier.

Participant Two added:

> Challenges, you know, there's a lot to be learned in a you hear the phrase, those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Most challenges aren't new. Most

challenges either you've dealt with before you know somebody who has so you know that networking approach reaching out to those mentors. Those folks that you know have gone through the same challenges and issues that you're currently facing so that it doesn't have to be as hard on you. And I think that's an important one. I guess sometimes people are afraid to admit that they're in a challenge. Maybe that challenge is very personal, could be that they are ashamed to reach out, and I've never really felt ashamed when it comes to challenges. Much of that emotion, you know, I've always seen that the end will justify the means that takes to get there. You know, it might be uncomfortable, but are you going to be happier that you did what you did when you get where you need to go and then go back to the drawing board, try things, you know, don't be afraid.

Participant Three added:

I didn't finish school, college, when I first started, I had a lot of underlying issues going on, but I'm going back in school. I pursued a career that I thought was going to be something I was going to go into for the long term, but it didn't work out as well as I thought it would. I feel like I was successful in that career. I was only there for a little while, but I was already supervising people and I was training people how to do things and I was respected by my coworkers; I just had a little hiccup. I'm gonna go back to school and make it better the second time around.

Participant Four added:

I look for solutions and I pray about it, pray about it as a Christian. I was given an example of how as an art teacher my principal asking me and the other specialists

teachers to support the regular teachers as they do project-based learning by doing things in our classes that connect to the units they're doing. I said this would be my project-based learning connection week coming up. So I had to come up with lessons connecting to all these grade levels kindergarten through fifth grade and find out what all of their themes are. I saw those problems and we handled them. I just took time to make sure I gave myself the time to think through what I needed to do and time to find information. It helped for me to give myself time to handle situations. So when I have a problem, I am not the best person with spur of the moment, here has a problem, which one do I need time to think it through. If you give me something like that. I will eventually handle it, but I will feel better if I have time to think through the situation and then present what I feel like is the best solution for me.

Participant Nine added:

When I face a challenge, I address the situation directly. If there's a challenge with a co-worker, I address that coworker directly. If there's a challenge with a situation, in my employment, we as a team work together. We talk about it and come to a conclusion together of how we're going to handle the situation. If there's a challenge at home we talk about it as a family. We don't jump to conclusions and make individual decisions, everything's handled as a group.

Participant Ten added:

How you strike to take it step by step and see what I can do to improve. Everything you have done helps you know your spots, you know, academic and maybe whenever

somebody tries to tell you that you can't. I have people in college they told me you ain't going to go to university because of my, you know, my limitations that I had back then. The way I deal with the English language. My English is still not the best, but I do not let it stop me, this language makes no sense to me no matter what I do, I have learned to work around my limitations and rely on others.

Participant Thirteen added:

Not everything is so time sensitive that you need to rush, rush for it with your head down, it's maybe taken a step back and realize why? Why is a huge piece of what I've brought into my decision-making process? Most people get like a problem or challenge and they get frustrated or kind of upset at that now on their way. But if you can kind of see where it came from, and why developed, it's honestly like doing research on your enemy and then figure out how to defeat them kind of thing. Taking a step back, take a break breather, and then especially become an aircraft commander, especially like that piece of my training, you got to make sure your actions are thought out.

Mindset Participants credit being able to think and learn from mistakes as a major development in handling challenges. Many said working with coworkers on a solution or finding people that can still help guide them if it is something they cannot figure out on their own. One reflected that he used to run from challenges and now he meets them head-on while another added that he finds them exciting.

Participant Two stated:

So, you know, thinking back to high school coaches and teachers and these that became mentors. They were really good with not showing me the exact path right getting you to

65

the start line and allowing me to make my own failures and learning from those failures. I think back to a colonel in the military. He said that you know the hard spot with millennials entering in the military, he said they've always been coddled. They have the helicopter mom or, you know, no one allowed them to fail. He said you can't be a great leader if you don't know how to fail. So, because what ends up happening is you have if you've never experienced failure and you're 28 and it's your first time .It's going to be tough, you don't know how to deal with that emotion you don't know how to deal with failure. My mentors, I felt like did a really good job of showing me, hey, it's okay to fail. It's okay to try and not do well or go back to the drawing board to figure it out and finish what you set out to do.

Participant Three added:

There's a YouTuber I watch who is a former Navy SEAL. He talks about he said good all the time when he served in Iraq and every time somebody came up with a problem, he has to be a leader, but he did not have all the answers. He learned to think on the fly to make things better and you have to stop and look at what is good and work around what is bad to get to where you need to be. I try to take that philosophy into my life.

Participant Six added:

I sat in classrooms where I didn't understand a single word that teacher would say, and I wanted to learn because I wanted to do well. What molded my experience was not giving up. Well, I would come back home and I would try to teach myself the material. Because at the house, I didn't have the pressure of the environment of my classmates of trying to absorb everything. It was at my pace. It was private. I could review it as much as I

wanted, I could make mistakes, and no one will notice. This became a habit and even when I was fluent enough to understand the classroom. I still kept this habit going and I would still come back home and try to perhaps not look over the information but try to learn new skills or new material. I'd like to learn that has become a habit and now I seek information. If I don't try to read something or if I don't learn a new skill. I feel like I wasted a day.

Let me explain it this way. My first job was a server at a restaurant. I absolutely hated it. It was probably the worst job that I've had. But it taught me a lot. I would be sweeping at that restaurant. The restaurant had a bar. I would go through drunk people trying to sweep and clean the area. Those moments for me that's not where I wanted to be, and I knew that. I think we all have similar experiences, but during those moments I didn't think of where I was, but I thought of where I wanted to be. That gave me a boost in the present moment. Well finish sweeping this and then you can go home and maybe you can start working to towards getting to where you want to be. I went to school in a rural county, I have found myself in not very desirable situations. But I'm always thinking about not about where I'm at, but about where I want to be. And that's always brings optimism in the face of challenges or not the best times.

Participant Seven added:

I now can meet a challenge and not run from it this is a lot differently than I used to. Honestly, I try to figure out why I'm here. And I don't I'll probably go like, why am I doing this? Why am I here? I'm like how did it happen if it's a challenge, you know, and

you know I plot the solution because everything has an answer it might not be the only answer but it will work and that is something I know I have grown in.

Participant Eight added:

> I try to rely on what I know and if not, then I reach out to people that I know that may have a little bit more maturity to me. Somebody who has lived life longer maybe they are very well skilled in this, you know, in that that avenue. Hey, help me get to let me get to where I'm trying to go here. I draw those resources. What I do is I reflect on what I've done in the past that may be similar. I also gathering information from those broaden sources, professors, colleagues, former coaches, whoever it may be, and hopefully I get over that hump in the road.

Participant Nine added:

> I don't know if it's really topic related but learn from the things you do wrong. And figure out how not to do it wrong and you appreciate the things you do right and strive to do better the next time. Appreciate the people in your life, even if there's times you feel like they're coming down, try to help elevate them.

Participant Thirteen added:

> Now it's more of a responsibility to myself and my crew and now that I'm an instructor pilot. I find myself in books and studying more now than even when I was as a co-pilot trying to learn the system. I know a lot of stuff now, but I want to stay sharp and stay strong in the material because I owe it to the guys I'm teaching. You got a new kid

coming out of the academy, who, you know, sees this big airframe has no idea how to handle it and if he messes up that is on me as well as him. The perseverance has always been there. It's just how it's created and where I put motivation from is different and it evolves always be willing to grow on the things you do not know.

Changes in Family Structure and Circumstances

Nine out of 15 Participants reflected on how the changes in their family structure affected their lives growing up. Many participants acknowledge major life changing events such as being raised by a single parent or relocation affected their education and life. A few reflected on experiences of conflict in the family. Two stated that it was a blessing when their parents separated due to the marriage going bad and have more adults that were happier in their life. Two participants were between the ages of 11-15 when their parents immigrated to the United States. They reflected on how this change put them in a different role in the family. Another participant was adopted by a family of low income and reflected on the changes the adoption brought in his life.

Participant One stated:

As a child, my parents got divorced when I was young, second grade, I believe. And at that point, my mother moved us away to actually a different state and we attended school there for about 3 years before moving back to our current state. And then I finished out my middle school and high school there. And I've actually been living, I guess there ever since. I've actually experienced a lot. Like I said, I was with my mom. She was myself so I look at her and I said, I see how, you know, she could help provide for three kids not having anyone else around and that helps me see that. You know, even though we don't

have a lot that she could still make it happen and there were sometimes growing up, like I said, it was a little rough, but seeing that she could still pull through. That was a big influence on me and saying, Hey, you know, she can do it. I can do it. Then there's kind of another end of that spectrum. My dad wasn't around much at all for my childhood. We're a little bit closer. Now we talk some more. But then seeing what he did and how he treated my mother caused me problems.

Participant Five added:

My family was difficult at best. I didn't have a lot of immediate family. My mom and dad were divorced since I was 2 and my dad, well, he had a paint company. And it went very well when I was very, very young and some good business. But he did some bad things and it fell apart. There was lots of tension in the house, but me and my siblings, and my older brother and I had good connections when we were kids with my dad. I was still pretty young, my dad's business started going bad. About 2008 so I guess I was about 10 or 11 by then and things are going bad, he got arrested and went to jail. He lost everything. To be honest, I was there when it happened by myself with him and it was hard seeing him carried off, and I got taken too, my mom had to come get me. She cleaned houses and she didn't really make a whole lot of money. So I guess you could say that we were definitely the poor, the poor kind of family. It was hard jumping back and forth from my mom and dad, because they're divorced, but I guess I'll get into that later. I had two sisters on my mom's side. Those sisters would always stay with my mom and me and my brother went back and forth with my dad. I guess I could say that my dad was a little unreliable because he was always late for everything. My mom did

have it out for my dad and she didn't like my dad. So it was all a lot of conflict between my mom and my dad. Dad would always look for angles and not be successful and she would get mad. She would fuss a lot and tell me I was just like him. That was hard since I knew she did not like him. I really didn't say anything ever to my mom. I added a whole lot of tension there. My sisters and I did get along. And I did have step-siblings on my dad side, and they were two step-children both older than me and I got along with them. It was definitely two different worlds being at my mom's or my dad's but it was all right. I would say for education purposes that was not really the best because it seemed like no one, my dad or my mom, knew what was going on with me education-wise and they didn't have any education themselves. My dad was a go-getter. He was always trying to do something and very energetic, he always had a dream but never really put work into getting it. My mom was also very energetic but she was more punctual and reliable, then my dad nothing ever really work out like he planned. Looking back on it he was using drugs which explains a lot and she was a heavy drinker.

You know, the other kids they're all really different at my elementary school. I don't remember much from it. I just remember that I was very good student from kindergarten to third grade, and then about fourth grade, I don't really know what happened. I just kind of started falling off. I was doing I was doing really, really bad this kept on 9th, 10th, and then 11th grade it got better. I decided to move in with a teacher's family 12th grade year and that is when I did my best. That's when I did really, really good.

Participant Six added:

I think that at times my parents did not know the best way to help me, especially because we moved to the United States when I was 11. We were new to this country. We went through culture shock. I am the oldest one out of my siblings. I was a male and because of that I think that a lot of responsibility fell on my shoulders to try and take care of my younger siblings, and I took that seriously.

Participant Seven added:

As a child, my family was kind of broken up into two sections because my parents are divorced. It's like my dad side and my mom's. My family, my dad and my mom were pretty light. Not going to say carefree, but always kind of like loose reigns. Well, looking back on it they still micromanage a lot, but I mean I got my ass beat, but over weird stuff. Not over school or grades but like over not coming home or talking back. I got spanked when I did things wrong on my father's side. He was always kind of like always there for me, but in a very different way than my mother's side. I always felt like if I was talking to my father or my grandfather, they would listen and not really have a lot of say. My granddad on my dad side was trip to grow up with he is pretty serious dude. And if he got mad, he was kinda scary. You know that nobody really double crossed my grandpa growing up. He was a serious dude, but he had a very light soft side to him you just kind of forgot he was a badass at sometimes so that's pretty much on my dad's side of the family. My mom was always the person that would like I would get you something absolutely ridiculous a child, and she would not have the money for normal things but would over spend on extra things. My mom's mom, my grandmother was very

by-the-book, like you don't do anything wrong. If you do you get a whooping. My

mom's dad passed out drunk and froze to death on our front porch. Everyone knew it.

Seems like I got asked that a lot growing up if I was his grandson.

Participant Eight added:

I was born in Southeast Washington DC. I am adopted twice, not once, but twice. That is

correct. I was adopted informally, the first time. The second time was a formal adoption,

which led me down to North Carolina. I have 10 brothers and sisters, most of which I

have did not met up until my arrival to North Carolina in 1996. I moved to a small town

in eastern North Carolina. I stayed there for about a year or so and then I moved to an

even smaller town in eastern North Carolina. Broken is the best way I can describe my

family. That's very traumatizing. That's the result of trauma, not knowing where to go to

get out of it. So that's one thing that I would like to say that I mean that's the epitome of

my family, they are super religious. They are religious to the point where I or some

would say that religious to a fault, because at some point you have to start relying on

yourself. Now, what is it, it's faith without action is dead. I believe this was the word of

the Bible. And if you just have faith that you don't act upon it, kind of leaves you, you

know, back at square one. So yeah, my family's overly religious close knit, but they don't

really know each other. I knew, and that was most of my family didn't have any high

school education. In fact, none of them graduated high school. None of them went to a

college. They all accomplished I guess one would describe is the bare minimum as bad

as that may sound and I knew I didn't want that, I wanted something else.

Participant Nine added:

>As a child growing up there was some difficulties. I was loved very much by everybody around, but I came from a broken house. Oh, but in my mind, instead of viewing it as a bad thing, I viewed it as, I was blessed with more love than most people. I would have gotten maybe not as far as I have if it were not for a lot of support. Whereas some people had a mommy and daddy love them. I had multiple mothers and fathers; they love me and multiple grandparents. They love so, in that way, I was blessed in some ways and not blessed in others. The thing is all we had was love and it blinded us to other problems.

Participant Twelve added:

>We moved around a lot with a single mother. I had two older siblings and a twin brother. We bounced around the same school system for well, until high school really. I probably went to five different elementary schools. Looking back on it, I think it was to keep people out of mom's business or because we probably did not pay the rent or something.

Participant Thirteen added:

>So when I say I was born and raised in Illinois by myself for a few years and then sister was born seven years later. That was the household. Everything was good, home, dog you know. Then it changed when I was about third or fourth grade. My parents split up. I moved to North Carolina. I had some family here and looking at the family aspect there was, it was mostly just my mom by herself with my sister for years until I got close to middle school, which is when both my parents actually remarried, and I gained two

stepparents. But that the family aspect of what I usually lived with between holidays was mother and stepfather sister and myself and like a dog or something. And then I saw my father side of the family like anytime they were any school type holidays so think summer, Christmas, or spring break. Basically, that is how I live with from middle school, all the way through high school, and even college. I say both my parents had a lot to do with my education, but definitely my mom just because she was they're going through all the school and the initial, third, fourth, fifth grade. I was young, I didn't understand like do work and I like wasting time. Then it was like her harping on successes is self-define you have to achieve and put in the work and kind of thing.

Participant Fourteen added:

I think when I was 17 or 18 my parents divorced. I am still close with both of them. I still spend just about equal amount of time with both of them still talk to both of them just about every day of the week. I guess it was better that it happened late in my childhood because it seemed to have a bigger impact on my brother who four years is younger than me. I have been there for him. He is not in a good place in life.

Lack of Family Financial Resources

Nine out of 15 Participants perceived difficulties with the lack of income in the home. Many acknowledge that being raised by a single parent put a lot of strain on finances. One participant described how hard it was to focus on school when you had no structure and no food at the house. A few reflected on how having no money made it hard to do the same thing at school that others could do. Two participants reflected on bad situations they experienced as children due to the neighborhood or trying to make money for what they needed.

75

Participant One stated:

I grew up with a single mother. So it was a little rough. Sometimes we didn't always

have the nicest clothes and shoes like everybody else. It was kind of a little bit of you get

what you got. I was a little bit lucky because I didn't have an older brother, so I didn't

have to have hand me downs, like my sister's kind of had to do. My mom used to leave

the first Saturday in the month and we did not know why. We found out when we were

adults that she would drive into Virginia two hours always to yard sales so that she could

buy our toys and clothes. No one knew she did that or would know where they came

from. Sometimes she would hide them until she could repair or bleach them to make

them look new. There was one good thing about that, I guess it just makes you breathe a

little easier, knowing that if something does come up, or if you want something you can

just go get it and take care of yourself.

Participant Two added:

I wouldn't say we were poor; however, we were always paycheck to paycheck. I would

say between everything that had to be paid for there was not a lot left. My parents

always tried their best to afford us opportunities that they necessarily weren't afforded

and because of that, that definitely led more to the paycheck to paycheck lifestyle and

even you know incurring debt that I'm sure they're still paying off today. That is the

family that I come from. Dad always found work and mom did what she could. I was

able to go to college and not just go to college but go to college under a program that

financially assisted me in going to college to be the youngest of three boys and where

your family's paycheck to paycheck colleges is not a guarantee. The only way you can

make it a guarantee was for you want to make it a guarantee you, yourself. I was told at a pretty early point my high school career that college was going to be up to me financially.

Participant Four added:

I grew up in a single-parent home. My mom was a single parent who was a teen parent. By the time she was 19 she had three sons. That created a hard environment because she raised us by herself which caused us to live in poverty. Most of the time when we were younger, we were on welfare. School to me was a refuge. So that was a big thing. At that time, I remember, my school was all black when I went to elementary school, then the following year, I ended up being bused somewhere else. So that was interesting. The elementary school was a good size and I could not tell you how many students were in that building, because of course as a low key and I really didn't pay attention. The teachers were good. I'd never felt awkward with my elementary teachers at that school. You know, I haven't had puppies and did not have toys. That is when it became clear to me that, oh, you ain't got much. My family was limited. Some of the things I could not do for instance would be assigned projects at school. My mom can't go out and buy certain things for me to get these projects done at a level that would have been better. So I'm piecemealing whatever I have from home. I remember we had a science project, we had to make a model of a brain. We used some, you know, flour and to make a salt dough clay and we didn't have any salt. All we had was garlic salt. Which led to my brain smelling, wow, strongly but that's what we had. And that's what I had to use to get the project done. I remember another incident where the teacher for language arts said go

77

to the North Community College and do your research for this research project. So mom, you know, she's the only parent, she's had to find opportunities to her to take me over there to do that was difficult. We did not have a car. So things like that will come up when she's got three kids by herself. It hurt having to find a way which, you know, she was able to find a way but just the stress it create it made me feel, you know, hesitant to make certain requests or make certain demands on my family, even though I wanted to be able to do certain things or participate in certain things. I feel like I always had to take consideration, you know, don't put stress on your mom. She's already doing enough. So it would have helped me to have had resources made available from the school or some kind of support with somebody. They needed to understand that a everybody's not gonna be able to do this at the level that we would like because some kids just don't have the means. They have the motivation, but they don't have the means.

Participant Five added

As a kid when I did my homework, it was always a kind of a struggle because I would always leave my bag at school or on the bus. There were always a million sounds at my dad's house. Sometimes it was hard to work when there was no food and no adults would be home. I dealt with it because I got tired of mom running him down all the time. So I just kinda quit working on school and faked it. I didn't really understand or know what to do for any of this stuff. So yeah, I just went with that. And I was like okay well that's what I'm going to do, and I didn't know my GPA was something that was going to determine me getting into college.

Participant Seven added:

The cafeteria at my elementary was a decent size, you know, pretty big everybody can be in it at one time. I ate lunch but did not know it at the time, but it was free lunch. Looking back on it I guess I did not know we were poor. I just thought everyone got free lunch. You know, most of my teachers where I guess if you want to go on like gender all female and let's see white women. I just remember them fussing a lot, they always seemed upset. Things about the school I liked, art teachers and a music teacher, they seemed to be happy. It was a very good time for me. I can relax and not worry about getting in trouble. It was an escape and it was the same each day which I started to like. I did not know at home what would happen from one day to the next.

I remember the first day of high school, my mom came and got me. I wish I had a great day. I was like, oh my God. I'm sorry, I mean pretty standard size, you know, I mean, it was kind of scary. The first day of school for me there was like, I'm pretty sure it was a record amount of fights in my school that day my freshman year, I was pretty anti-social my freshman year. I wasn't involved in a lot of things, I kind of became a recluse. I wasn't involved in a lot of things. I kinda like realized that the things that I kind of missed out on a young kid kind of made me feel like I was behind in some areas. So in the past like 5, 6 years in my life, I've tried my best. I don't understand what somebody saying I try and google it. So many people that come from the poor background that I come from just don't know things that others do. You know like how you can, you know, manage your finances or buy a car or a house.

79

Participant Eight added:

My father was overly religious he'd have us up at 3am in the morning, walking around the town barefoot praying. This was a small town but for an 8, 9, and 10-year-old kid doing this on a consistent basis was hard. This continuing all the way up until the time of high school graduation. Just looking back on some of the people of my childhood they are not doing well. I think I've attended about six funerals of people that were my age. They were in the lifestyle that I thought that I was living. I was going to have a short life going to get hurt or end up in jail. It's just not somewhere that I want to be. The amount of times that I've stayed up at night wondering if somebody is gonna make it or I get a message on Facebook saying, Hey, man did you hear about so and so or looking to see who knew about the gunshots everyone heard but no one called the cops on, it was not a life I want anymore.

Participant Eleven added:

We didn't have a lot of things growing up. We had food we had clothes. They weren't the best clothes they came from other people and sometimes it was bad when at school you would get called out for it. Even as a child I saw how money was a big struggle. I don't feel what my kids have to worry about that. Yes, we are money cautious and conscious about things, but it's not, I don't feel, like we have to live from paycheck to paycheck and I didn't want to live like that. I didn't want my kids to have to go through that. When I wanted like a new pair of shoes or I needed a jacket sometimes my parents could not afford it. If I needed something for baseball, I had to find little odd jobs. Whether it was mowing grass or raking leaves or whatever I could to try to buy be able to buy those

things on my own. One of those led to a pretty traumatic experience where I was taken advantage of and my kids will never be in that situation.

Participant Twelve added:

Mom worked any side gig, she gets in between, just to try to raise four kids. I mean, it was pretty happy we did a lot of, you know, hunting for food and stuff. You know did what we could to keep bills down. Definitely conscious of the cost of things and how to avoid unnecessary frivolous things that that other people might consider were, you know, a necessity. We never went anywhere.

Participant Fifteen added:

When I was in my early elementary school, I would have thought nothing about, you know, inviting friends over, things like that. And then for a while as I hit middle school and even like early bit of high school, it became one of those issues to where I was more socially aware. I think it happened after I went home with a friend, I started to realize we were poor. I would be kind of like nervous or I hate to say it but embarrassed almost about having friends over. Some of the people that I associated myself with were very well-off and had different lifestyle than I had. My family lived in a trailer park and my brother I shared a bed until I left for college.

Parents Prioritizing Success in School

Nine out of 15 Participants reflected on their drive to do well in school came from their parents. Eleven out of 15 Participants credited their mother for setting academics as a priority. None of the participants credit their parents with explaining the connection between doing well

in school and the career you chose to do after school. Many participants reflected on achievement and wanting their parents, particular their mother to be proud of them. Two mentioned carrying this desire to make their parents proud into their life after school.

Participant One stated:

> I did have a big influence from actually my mother. She was a single mother that raised us. She set forth a pretty good example. She always tried to make sure we kept our heads on straight and make sure that we did not vary a little bit or go outside the line. She helped keep us straight. She did not have a lot of money and felt bad that she could not get us what the other kids had but she made us read and do our schoolwork. She took a lot of pride in our grades and achievement. To be honest I liked making her proud.

Participant Three added:

> My mom and dad were both present in my life. They probably they put a lot of high standards for me especially being the oldest child to do well in school. Well to do well in all aspects. They were a big factor instilling determination in me from a young age. My mom wouldn't take anything less from me than As and Bs. I had to make sure I did pretty good. It was just the thing I knew that if I came home with less than successful grades that my mom wasn't going to be happy. So I just did the best I could.

Participant Four added:

> Mom did get some support from family members in terms of, you know, helping to raise us monitoring us, that kind of thing. But as a result of her being a single parent, things were pretty strict. She was very guarded protective of us wanting to make sure we didn't

get in trouble. She didn't want us to be in trouble with the police. She didn't want us to be in trouble at school, so she pretty much put the fear of God in us, which kind of kept us on a good path. We were not perfect. But, it just kind of made us a little more hesitant to get into any serious trouble. So, but she did stress to us importance of education. She wasn't that involved in education, to the point that she could help us with our work, she did not finish high school, but she always paid attention to our grades. She would say I'm not accepting this D or I'm not accepting that so she made us aware that education was important in the family, even though she didn't have a lot of it she still stressed it to us. Her message was don't bring any bad grades in his house. It was important, first of all, my mom saying you're going to school and you're going to do the best you can do. The fact that I was a good student because I enjoy learning helped me. That allowed, me to then help her by being able to help my younger brother, because my mom was busy at work. So she couldn't do what was important with him so I am glad I was there. Seeing my mom's emphasis, despite her economics and the low education level, shows me how much of a difference that can make because I see students now that I have who don't have a parent like that.

Participant Six added:

My family always cared for me. They've always provided for me and even though they haven't been able to help me maybe, for example in school with my homework, they always provided me the resources in order to get it done. And as of now, my family's still the same, they're always there to help. And again, even though they may not be able to help with resources, for example, to get a car loan or do other common adult things,

they always provide me the resources in order to grow. I just know that they're always there for me. My parents have never straight up, come up to me and said, you need to persevere, or don't let life defeat you. They've never said anything like that, but they have worked really hard. They have been consistent. They have consistently gone out there and tried to provide for my siblings and I. That to me is an example that I can follow. I try and follow that that example and try to apply it in everything that I do.

What happens in school starts at home. I think that I can only speak of my experiences. Everyone has different experience but in terms of my situation, I think that I was lucky and privileged to have such a great family that cared for me and wanted me to do well. They try and provided the resources when I asked for them. They believed in me. I think that was such a big contributor to my success. I don't think the other kids in my situation had the same experience at home, where they might not felt as supported and I think that makes a big difference.

Participant Seven added:

My parents drilled into me as a kid to focus on your school. They were never as strict is a lot of parents were, you know, I mean, nothing against my parents. It's just how they were so they wanted me to do well but never provided the structure to make it really happen. I used to think I could not do it, I did not know that I needed structure till later.

Participant Thirteen added:

And at the time, only my mom was the person governing me. She made it very clear, like she expected me to do well. She wasn't the type of parent to like demand straight As and

84

then beat you when you did not get them. It was more like I expect just you to make school a priority, kind of thing and sports and everything else is good. It was a priority, but it's not number one. Right. She made it clear that was where I was going to go and put my effort. As I got older and into middle school and into high school I kind of developed into my own person.

Participant Fifteen added:

When I was growing up, my parents, my mom got really used to me making good grades all the time in school. So eventually, when I got into high school and stuff, she would definitely push to me to make sure that for the most part, I was still bringing home all As. I think that was the first time I kind of had to explain to her that high school was a little different, you know, honors courses and things like that. But having her just kind of always checking throughout middle school or elementary school made me learn how to be a better student. It kind of helped me because when I got to college on my own and I still had that same mentality of I need to try to be the best and every class because I wanted to please her. Okay, I gotta figure this out because I want to be better. I want to be the best at this so I can please mom.

Being Part of an Athletic Team/Peer Group

Eight out of 15 Participants credited being involved in a sports programs with helping them achieve success and learn how to handle challenges. They reflected on learning how to handle a failure to helping them later in life with challenges or unexpected changes. They perceived this involvement influenced their peer group. Many participants credit teammates with helping them get more involve in clubs and activates in school. Some even mentioned

changing their schedule to take harder classes because of their encouragement of their teammates and coaches. Seven out of 15 Participants perceive having a friend group that was focused on success helped them. They think being around students that cared about their grades and achievement helped them connect it to their future. They also like the competitive drive this grew in them to being able to compete with students who were driven to do well in school.

Sports Participation Participants credit being involved with a sport team as a factor that taught them how to handle challenges. They also credit their teammates as being a better peer group to help them focus on success.

Participant Two stated:

> We were always involved in sports, which again, you know, that kind of influence me how I became the man I am today. You know, sports are definitely part of that and I always have a competitive nature, you know, between me and my brothers and trying to outperform each other, whether it be, you know, in school or in sports. That competitive nature, it never left me, you know, might not compete in sports anymore, But, the lack of the competition sports is only made my competitive nature and in other areas that much stronger because I got to put it somewhere. I think sports have contributed and are a great humbling experience, no matter how good you are, you're never the best. Even the best have bad days and they fail. So that's always been to me a great lesson giver is sports and being able to participate in that and experience success on the sports fields and failures on the sport fields. I feel it gave me the ability to handle it later in life.

Participant Six added:

Soccer was what level the playing field. I really started making friends and I was good. I learned English and started hanging out at my teammate's houses.

Participant Seven added:

You know, I tried out for baseball in seventh or eighth grade I had not played baseball since I was probably like third grade, before my parents split. I tried out for it in middle school. I remember my mom picked me up after tryouts and I was upset, I was like, defeated. I was like it was horrible, absolutely horrible. My mom was pushing me to do things. I tried out for football my freshman year of high school. I hated it, because I wasn't big enough way, I was way too small. I did wrestle because one of my mom's friends convince me to do it. I was pretty good at it. But I had like lacked confidence when I would do it in a meet. I would almost be petrified. I would dominate people in practice, way bigger than me. Then in a meet, I get out there and like just freeze. I stuck out in the season. I started hating the feeling, I got out of that I did. I do. Some friends from church convinced me to try track and field. I did that, I was pretty decent at it. I'd already been running from wrestling. I kind of was the best on my wrestling team at running. I didn't have to lack the courage to physically dominate somebody else because I knew I couldn't. I could just run as fast as I could, and nobody can keep up with me. So I started doing track I wasn't the best with that crowd but they were encouraging and told me that I was faster than they were when they were freshmen. I kind of started getting good. My coaches and my friends, from high school from church really what pushed me my freshman year to keep doing it. I started meeting new people and the community

around and became part of a relay it was fun. Then I got I got sick. I got pneumonia missed like 20 some days of school. I was pretty upset. The coach found me at the end of school and ask what happened to me. I told him how sick I was and he invited me to come to running camp that summer with the best runners in the school. That right there changed my life to have someone believe in me.

Participant Ten added:

Being new to the country, school was hard until I started playing sports in high school. It was very good once I started playing. Sports, which was my escape from all the new stuff, really helped. I liked running and especially soccer. However, the small school we were at did not have soccer, in fact many people did not even know the sport. So I joined the running team. We were good and hanging out with them really started making me feel a part of the school and helped my English. One thing that I really, I think it is a success is me going to the states with the track team and finishing sixth place. So that was pretty sweet. Being able to achieve that with teammates when you are new to the country.

Participant Eleven added:

And I thought that my only way of getting out of the rural area was through sports but it didn't work out that way. I still learned a lot from them. Life is challenges and you got to be willing to overcome anything just like in winning and losing in baseball. I don't like to fail. I don't like to lose. So always see a challenge is I want to win and do what I can do. When you know whether it's, you know, putting an extra time or whatever it needs to be to be successful. Yep, baseball taught me how not to give up. Another thing we were

a small school, sometimes we knew we would lose before the game even started, but we still went out there and did our best.

Participant Fourteen added:

Growing up my family support was always there for sports. I believe me, my brother played every sport imaginable with like baseball from T-ball up until I think I was 20 years old, like 2 years of club baseball at ECU. In sports I learn how to rely on others and how to handle setbacks and failures. My dad would not be at the house, but he was at our games. Looking back on it, that really meant a lot to be able to play a sport.

Participant Fifteen added:

Sports, I think, was also a big thing that change my outlook on school. My parents were very involved. They wanted me to be active, but by the same token, they really wanted to make sure that if I was going to do anything athletically that my academics had to stay up to par. So that definitely helped mold me going through school and then just support system in general, whether it be friends, parents, teachers, and coaches. I think it all kind of dates back to my childhood. Not even just academics, but also athletics that thing that helps as well because I kind of think you encounter different challenges. It helped me deal with hard times. My sports team got me accepted by a group of people that were going places and it helped in school.

Peer Group Participants perceive their peer group at school helped them know what was expected to be successful. They credit their peer group with encouraging them to do well and with helping them know how to navigate challenges.

89

Participant Four added:

> Finding peers who felt like I did and realizing that you know I have a community of
> friends who are proud to be nerds. That was good. You know, that was necessary finding
> peers who were interested in being motivated in school, interested in learning what's
> essential. If I had not had those people going through school and especially when I got in
> high school and I found other black kids who were in advanced classes and we would
> just joke about the nerdy stuff that was essential. Otherwise, I would have still done my
> best, but it would have been emotionally more difficult because I would have felt like
> I'm the only black kid amongst all these white kids in class.

Participant Six added:

> I familiarized myself a little bit more with the school, creating more and more
> friendships. By the time I got to high school, I wanted to act as if I had always been here
> and I had been raised here. And in a way, I think that was for me to fit in, but also for me
> to be confident enough to take on any challenge in the school system. I started really
> getting American friends. And I think that this was one of the reasons of why I did well
> in high school. Then I discovered class rank. I didn't know that students are ranked
> against each other. I would have never figured this out if I didn't surround myself with
> other kids that actually cared about it. I remember a time when one of my good friends.
> had a transcript in his hands, and I asked, what is that. He said, Oh, I'm just checking my
> class rank. And I said, well, what are you talking about, he said you didn't know we were
> all ranked. That day I went to the office and asked for my transcript to figure out what
> my class rank. From that moment I was hooked. I took it as a challenge. It became a

competition and that made me excited. I had a lot of success in school because it was almost a game or a challenge. It's still the same way today if I face a challenge. I get even more excited because I know that once I overcome that challenge. I will be so happy. If things are not a challenge, it's possible that I may not be completely into it.

Participant Seven added:

I meet new people. When I started high school, I was in the lower standard classes, I do not know why no one ever asked me if I wanted to be. None of the people in those classes were really doing anything. I started hanging out with people from the cross-country team I ran with and started taking classes with them because my coach told me I could do it and he was right. My first was Honors Biology, it went well so I took I other honors course and started meeting a lot of new people. You know, cross country was good. I always maintained like A or B and if I needed to study, I probably should have. I started socially getting involved a lot of people meeting a lot more people coming out of my shell academically. I really like the honors classes better because they wanted you to do something besides just worksheets and test.

Participant Thirteen added:

Especially with my group of friends, it was like take every opportunity you can to be successful. That's another huge aspect I wanted to speak on because I said like, you know, you are definitely swayed by who you surround yourself with. And I, you know, my friends, it was just like if you anything less than 98 you were made fun of. And if you didn't start that if you didn't start that sport game and they did you work harder to do

it with them. It was like you know you buckle down to put your head down and you can

get it kind of thing. I had a great friend group in high school that helped me get where I

am.

Lack of Experience Affected College Success and Understanding

Nine out of 15 Participants perceived that their background made college different for

them. They reflected on feeling behind from the moment they arrived on college. Because they

did not have the same experiences as other college students, many expressed not being able to

relate to other students. Two reflected on the lack of offerings at their high school put them at a

disadvantage in college. One reflected on being poor and black at a predominately white

college at a time that there were not a lot of transition programs and how it made for some

difficult situations.

Participant One stated:

I grew up in small schools, my whole career. So, you know, the biggest school I went to

probably had, I don't know, maybe 175 people in it. My first semester at this large

university, I had one of my general education classes that had about 400 people in it and

we were in like stadium seat was like in the movie theater. And I'm like what did I get

myself into. So it was a little rough my first semester. It was a big shock. I wasn't used

to it. There we're a couple classes where the smaller schools that didn't have a lot of the

resources for like calculus. My very first calculus class. The instructor first day said who

did not have calculus in high school. Four of us raised our hands and failed that class.

Luckily, the university, I went to had a freshman repeat policy where to go back and take

it again the next semester and that grade replaced the previous one so I didn't have a failing grade on my record. I think it was just a big shock of going from not having a lot of resources or upper level stuff and then they kind of went straight into it there. But like I said, it's also a big shock because it is one of the best universities in the state, however, they are not prepared for people of different backgrounds.

Participant Four stated:

I went to ECU which is predominantly white demographic as a minority student. I studied art. I just felt the out of place there a lot here and I had experienced one time with a faculty advisor who made a comment that I know he was trying to be trying to relate, but he was off base. He made a comment that I was lucky being black because I knew where I came from. He said he was all a mix of Scottish and English and all of that. He wasn't sure of where he came from. I was like, you have a doctorate, Africa is not a country and it was just off base and I did not correct him on it because I just like approved my schedule and let me go. As far as the economic situation it was difficult. I have financial aid there, but even going through college, I had to contribute to my family with the financial aid that I received because of my family's financial situation. It was important and necessary for my family, my mom expected us to help support the family. So even though I was in college money was needed. So when I got financial aid check I had to take part and send it home which left me a deficit. In terms of getting my supplies and having food to eat. I would have to go, week to week and go ask for money from my family. They will try to find money after I'd already given money and it was difficult. The people that I did get to know in college was different because of a Christian group

that I was involved in. It was just totally foreign to me. And the things they were concerned about like their car or their ski trip and things that were just so foreign to me. I'm sitting here wondering about, what am I going to eat for dinner, because I don't have any food money, but I didn't tell them that. I didn't feel like I had anywhere to go to talk to anybody about my experience being economic disadvantaged in a minority on that campus. I'm not saying they didn't have resources. I just didn't know where to go and I was not comfortable enough to ask. I know they had a Black Student Union, but that is not to me the same thing as Academic Support. I just would have appreciated a more targeted outreach, in a sense, and make people not feel different

Participant Seven added:

I went to a big university. I got a full ride. I met a lot of people. I always kind of felt like I didn't really fit in with a lot of people around there. I don't know if it's because their political views or where they came from or what, but I just, I met a lot of people that I had a really good time, but it just wasn't really so kind of focus on school I focused on work.

Participant Nine added:

After community college I went to East Carolina. It was good. Haha. There were some different challenges you know from the community college system and a big difference in the classes. I tried to get help since English was still hard for me, but they offered none. Then I walked onto the soccer team. I became part of the team and they got me the

help I needed. It seems wrong that as a student I got none but as a soccer player they had all this help.

Participant Eleven added:

I knew that education was important. I didn't take it very seriously in younger grades. As I got older, especially my first year of college I realized I was not prepared. It was eye opening experience I should have tried a whole lot harder in school. I made it through Mount Olive College, and it was, it was kind of tough. I felt like I was behind from the moment I arrived. I couldn't find a job in the field that I had a degree. I went back to school to do this and because of those experiences that I had put forth a whole lot more effort to learn and to succeed to be where I am today.

Participant Fourteen added:

I would say going to college was a little different because nobody could help me. Not that I did bad at ECU, I did fine, but I say that was a different. It took a little bit more to apply yourself. I would say about my nursing degree, I'm glad I did not do that 18-19 years old because I don't know that I would have been able to handle it. I'm kind of glad that it was pushed back and was able to start that at 22-23 years old.

Credit Difficulties from Childhood for Their Perseverance

Seven out of 15 Participants perceive that having lack of resources and difficulties as a child has help keep them moving to their goals. Participants reflected that not wanting their children to be exposed to what they had to endure was a major drive for their perseverance. They

did not want to live the way they had to live growing up. They reflected on wanting stability and providing for others.

Participant Five stated:

> I think it really helped in a way being hungry at an early age, I told myself that I would make sure I would always be able to afford food and heat.

Participant Eight stated:

> Things are looking well for me. I'm glad that I'm the person that people can come to instead of being the person that needs to escape. I put myself in a position to where I could escape. I constantly think about as a 30 year old young man. Um, what would put me in a position to where I feel like I don't need to go back to that lifestyle, you know, it's scary. I mean, there's so much that I can say what my perseverance comes from just seeing that that avenue that I could have went down. It was just all black. It was tunnel of nothingness. And it's not somewhere that I want it to be, um, fast forward 12 years, and here I am exactly where I you know I want to be. And ultimately, that's it. I mean, just looking at my old surroundings compared to my new surroundings. It's part of my perseverance.

Participant Eleven added:

> I saw the way that we live versus way other people live. A saw the mistakes and my parents made I did not want to follow in their footsteps. I wanted to do better than that. I did not want to live the same life that they live. It's something that's in me that makes me strive to keep pushing to do better, because I don't want, I don't want my kids to live like I had to live either.

Participant Twelve added:

> I saw my siblings had drug addiction and stuff. So it's this other people not pushing
> themselves to be better and everyone around me and I decided to kind of rise above that.
> I did not want that for myself or my future children.

Summary

Chapter 4 reviewed the findings of the research study. The researcher conducted 15 open-ended interviews with male graduates from Title I high schools. Besides graduating from a Title I high school the participants had to meet two of the following three criteria: first generation college students, formerly on free and reduced lunch/zero family contribution on FASFA, or self-identified as growing up in a low-income family. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were shared with the participants to make sure their words were recorded correctly. The researcher read the transcripts to locate emergent themes and subthemes. The researcher reported the findings under the themes that emerged within the guiding questions of the research. The findings were reported from the interviews that illustrated the emergent themes and subthemes.

Chapter 5. Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 5 includes the findings, discussion, and conclusions from this phenomenological study. Recommendations based on this research and implications are also discussed. Chapter 1 provided the introduction to the history of the male underperforming the female in education. When economic status is considered this underperformance widens for males from households of poverty. Trends in data were presented as well as the need to gather qualitative information to be able to look beyond the data. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature of the poverty gap in education, the gender enrollment gap in college, parents in poverty, needs of males in education, and resilience and growth mindset to help further understand the research questions. The methods and procedures of the research study are presented in Chapter 3. The findings of the emergent themes related to the research question are presented in Chapter 4.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south. This study uses the phenomenological research approach to examine the life influences of successful male graduates. True to the nature of this research the definition of success and if it was obtained was determined by the participants. Data were collected from interviews of 15 male participants. The interviews were transcribed, and the researcher examined the transcripts looking for emerging themes relating to the research questions. The emergent themes became the findings of this qualitative study which led to understanding the perceptions that male graduates of Title I school contribute to their success.

Statement of the Problem

A qualitative approach is needed to deeply examine the trend in numerus data studies that demonstrate the decline in male achievement (Bayrak & Gulati, 2105; D'Agostino et al., 2019; Henkhaus, 2019; Peterson, 2009). The inclusion of successful male graduates from Title I schools who navigated their childhood, education, and career choices share their perceived influences that molded their life is necessary to develop strategies in this area. The review of literature in Chapter 2 as well as the emergent themes in Chapter 4 bring attention to the need to explore this complex issue. By using this approach, the words of the male participants along with the research combine to be an avenue to examine and explore the issues of the male poverty gap in education.

Summary of Findings

The perceptions of male graduates from Title I schools on their experience and challenges were recorded after open-ended questions. For example, out of the 15 male participants 11 identified hardships in family situation or income when they were asked "Tell me about yourself? The open-ended questions were developed in order to not lead participants to any forgone conclusions but rather let them develop their story that they wanted to share. The analysis of data collected in this research led to themes that emerged from each research question.

Research Question 1 Discussion

Research question 1 focused on the perceived influences of life experiences that affected their adulthood. This research identified nine emergent themes related to this research. Many of these themes echoed quantitative studies of poverty gap, disruptions in home environments, involvement in school, lack of opportunities, and mentors affecting their adulthood.

The perceptions of male graduates of Title I high schools regarding what affected their life experience contained some common themes in the interviews. The participants perceive that changes in family living, marriage status, and family makeup impacted their childhood. "I never knew what man was going to be home when I woke up the next morning. It really made me not want to come out of my room especially if it was the weekend until I knew mom's company was gone" Another added: "Seems like every year I was starting a new school. That was kinda hard. I never made many friends because what was the point."

The male participants perceived the support and importance that parents placed on grades and school as a strong motivational factor. "My mom would get so excited if I made a good grade. She would always tell me to make sure I made good grades because school was important." This support the work of research that found many generational poverty parents did not view themselves as successful in education; however, the perception of living in low socioeconomic status did not affect how they thought their own children could achieve (Betson & Michael, 2015; Ladd, 2012). Even though the parents wanted the students to be successful in school many parents did not have the structure or the knowledge to connect school success with the increase in opportunities in the future. The male participants perceived that limits due to lack of family income brought a lack of structure. Violence in the neighborhood or lack of stability added a lot of stress to their childhood experiences "I remember one time someone in the neighborhood got shot and mom was like you ain't going to school today. I found out later because she did not want me waiting for the bus with all the police outside still investigating." Another one added on having a lack of income "I think being hungry at home was one of the hardest things for me. The school started sending home bags of food on Friday but we divided between all of us." They perceived a family member as successful as a role model to a college

education and strive to be that role model for others. "My cousin on my mom's side was a nurse, I was so proud of her when I was a kid because she would show up with her scrubs on, that is really when I decided I might want to be a nurse one day"

Patterson (2009) noted that a social stigma arose from the discrepancy between an impoverished family's resources and a wealthier family's resources go deeper than not having the newest toy. Many children withdraw and do not want to get the parents in trouble (Joo, 2010). Participants reflected these views as they described the difficulties growing up. They express not wanting to cause conflict with a parent and also not wanting to bring attention to their lack of food and support.

One of the major findings of this research was the tendency for 14 out of 15 participants to determine that success is combination of financial security and personal happiness. Participants approach success within a model of having the ability to change your situation and adapt to new challenges. "I feel success is knowing how to be happy. Knowing that no matter what you are going to be ok, you might have all the answers today but that is ok, as long as you are willing to find them then it will be ok" For 11 out of 15 participants success is defined as a personal experience and something with internal and external features. "I think success how you feel inside and being able to take care of your physical needs." In the interview 14 out of 15 participants perceived personal successes because of being happy with where they are even though they might not be satisfied but they feel a sense of accomplishment. "I do think I am successful I just now know I want more. It is not that I am unhappy, I just want to be able to do more for others that I love." They perceive challenges as a natural occurrence of success. "When I get a challenge or have a problem it is just part of being an adult, you know like if life was easy then what is the since of living kind of thing." Duckworth (2016) explained that people with grit

knew that hardships might be temporary and kept focused on the bigger picture. The male

graduates who have found success seem to have the belief that they still might have setbacks, but

it does not affect the bigger picture.

Research Question 2 Discussion

The second research question examined the perceptions of male graduates from Title I

high schools of their high school experience. The study identified nine common themes shared

by the majority of the participants. The themes with a strong high school success component

were involvement in athletic programs, positive peer groups and mentoring by education support

staff. Many participants perceived sessions in which school personal helped explain college and

career opportunities and made them aware of their choices and what they needed to have in place

for their next steps.

The perceptions of the participants on their influences in high school had some common

themes from the interviews. Participants perceived that their success started when a direct

intervention happened in a program or by school personnel. "When a teacher just started

checking up on me that was a major turning point. I could not believe that someone really

cared." Many participants did not have long-term plans until the school personnel brought it up.

"Funny thing is I always tried hard to get good grades, but I lost focus. I think it was in middle

school when they started selecting people for health science careers or something that I got

talked to about what I was going to do after high school." Even though the majority of

participants reflected their parents wanted them to be successful in school, none of them had

connected that success beyond the momentary satisfaction of a good grade. When school

personnel advise them to start planning for their future was when many participants started to

make the connection. This illustrates a need for parent education on planning for success after

K-12 education. Programs like the Minnesota Family Investment Program in which families are intentionally worked with to help develop the child's path at home and school.   Participants perceived aligning themselves with peers who were more focused on success contributed to their experience "No one in my classes took school seriously, in fact it was not till I switched and took harder honors classes that I realized that kids cared about school. I started hanging out more and more with those kids and it really paid off." Participants perceived that involvement in sports helped them gain confidence and improve their network and confidence. One stated "I think our football team never won a game. At the time I wanted to quit but I decided not too and now looking about on it, I think it was the first thing I never quit. I think that taught me a lot that I use today." They attribute their sports involvement with learning how to overcome failure and strive for success, "Man when I first started running, I was not very good. I just remember setting a goal and having the coach work with me to get it. When I ran, I just wanted to be faster the next time. I started eating better and getting more sleep and really training" Many participants perceive a change in a life lesson that was spurred by conversations with adults they admired. "One day this teacher asked me where I saw myself in 10 years. My first thought was dead, and he was not amused. He said I see you far from here in control of your life"

Davis-Kean and Ellis (2005) found that parents in low socioeconomic homes may not have the structure and support needed to help raise their students to understand the importance of an education to improve socioeconomic status. This is reflected in the number of participants who had not connected success in school with life after school until someone explained it to them.

Research Question 3 Discussion

The final research question in this study was how male graduates from Title I high schools perceive influences in college, career-technical, and employment help them achieve their current level of success. The study identified nine common themes shared by a majority of the participants. Based on the research the themes that lend to success were changes in mindset and handling challenges, experiences in postsecondary education, and coming to terms with your past by crediting it as a lesson to help you grow. Many participants did not want to live in the manner that they did as a child and use this as the source of their perseverance. These same participants at some point experienced a different life early by taking advantages of opportunities to attend camps or enrichments. This allowed them to see other opportunities besides the ones they grew up with.

Of the male participants interviewed 12 out of 15 perceive that their mindset has changed in how to handle obstacles. "Failure is how you get to a better answer" Another participant added on mindset, "In college no matter how much I hated it, I knew that I could learn how to handle it by finding help" Participants also perceive their background as making postsecondary education more difficult than their college peers from other backgrounds. "When I moved into the dorm, I did not have parents to help or anything, so it was just me. I remember how weird I felt that day, everyone else had all this help and I was alone. The first day I almost left. My roommate's mom asked me what my parents did for a living, and I remember lying." Another stated, "Man I hated being poor and white in college. Seemed like there was something for everyone at the student union but me. I was not a frat dude, not black, not female, not foreign, and not gay." In 2016 male students with a 0-family contribution on the FASFA had a college graduation rate of only 18.4%. Only 1.3% obtained a master's degree. (U. S. Department

of Commerce, 2019). Around eight of the participants alluded to their perseverance comes from growing up with limited resources and not wanting their own family to have to grow up that way. "No matter what I have food to eat and a house that I can heat, that really drives me to know my kids will not have to worry when they get home from school." If people had a growth mindset then they knew that they could change and develop an ability they lacked (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). Being involved in programs during their educational experienced that modeled how to handle obstacles and overcome failures seemed to be a common theme in what has allowed the majority of participants achieve their current level of success.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations for practice are made based on the findings of this particular study:

- Organize focus groups of parents from low socioeconomic status to provide support and make them feel included, emphasis the need for a plan for life after school and help provide the structure needed to make it successful.
- Expand counseling and career and college readiness programs to enable all students to get the support needed.
- Expand or develop mentoring programs particular for students who are not involved in sports and clubs.
- Develop staff development for high school coaches and teachers on how to be mentors to low socioeconomic students.
- Increase early opportunities in elementary school for students to get pulled out for special activities.

- Increase programs in college designed to mentor low socioeconomic students.

- Increase finical support and instructional materials for students from low socioeconomic status.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research are proposed based on the findings of this particular study:

- Replicate this study with female graduates from Title I schools to see if there are shared perceptions.

- Replicate this study with successful male college graduates to see if they share common perceptions or life influences regardless of family background.

- Replicate this study with a focus on a particular race to see if perceptions change.

- Conduct research on the effects of sports involvement in teaching perseverance.

- Conduct research on existing mentoring programs at every level of education.

- Study perceptions of parents with low socioeconomic status in the resources they need to guide their students successfully.

Summary

This phenomenological study examined the perceived influences that male graduates from Title I high schools attribute to their success. The study combined a review of literature of challenges of male students and trends on their education and life in generational poverty with open-ended interviews of people who were formerly in generational poverty. The data collected from the interviews were studied and themes emerged about influences on their success. The

findings of the study were used to propose recommendations to grow programs in areas that were identified to have been effective.

By studying the common themes of the males who successfully navigated and improved their living situation the research suggests areas that programs can grow. Through their own words and experiences one can see the need for interventions and support. Direct and intentional involvement in school through mentoring and athletics contributes to a growth mindset that aids in perseverance when life gets challenging.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

Principal Investigator's Contact Information:

G. Coleman Bailey, Jr,   **email**: baileygc@etsu.edu   **cell:** 828-260-5977

Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

Informed Consent Form

This paper explains about being a participant in a research study. Please read this carefully. This will help you decide if you would like to volunteer to join this study.

Study Details

What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I High Schools the rural south. Research questions that will guide this study are: *How do they perceive their high school experiences? What are the perceived influences in college, career-technical, and employment that helped them get to their current level of success?* The data collected in this study may contribute to the general knowledge base in this area and inform the creation of a framework for addressing needs of male students from Title I schools.

Participant's Understanding

- You agree to participate in this research study. You understand that you will be one of approximately 15 people being interviewed for this research.
- You understand that your participation is voluntary. You understand that you will not be paid for your participation nor will there be any cost to you to participate.
- You understand that participation involves being interviewed by Grady Coleman Bailey, Jr. This interview will be conducted over the ETSU Zoom platform in a secure location. The interview will be recorded in a video and audio format. A transcript will be made in which you will be able to review and edit any response. This interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes.
- You understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You understand that you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

- You understand that you will not be identified by name, that a pseudonym will be assigned to you and that all references to workplace or school that you attended, or any other identifiable information will not be included in the final product. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the ETSU Institutional Review Board (non-medical) and research study staff have access to study records.

- You are aware that all data will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher and all information that can identify you will be removed. This data may be stored for future studies. Additional consent will not be asked for it use in the future.

Who should you contact for questions:

If you have any questions or research-related problems at any time, you may call the Principal Investigator Grady Coleman Bailey, Jr. at 828-260-5777 or email him at baileygc@etsu.edu. This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may also contact the ETSU IRB at 423.439.6054 or irb@estu.edu for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant.

By agreeing to participate in this recorded interview, you confirm that you have read and understand this Informed Consent Document. You also confirm that you had the opportunity to have it explained to you verbally. You confirm that you were able to ask questions and that all your questions have been answered. You are confirming that you are 18 years or older and you freely and voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Questionnaire for Interviews

Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Coleman Bailey and I am currently enrolled in the doctorate program at East Tennessee State University in Education Leadership. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the experiences and challenges of male graduates from Title I high schools in the rural south. The purpose of this interview is to determine your perceptions in what you attribute to your success. All personal information will remain confidential and used only for the purpose of this research. With your consent I will record this interview on the zoom format in both audio and video recording. I am doing this to be able to record your words accurately. You will be able to review the content of your responses to make sure they are accurate before they used in this research.

1. Tell me about yourself?

2. Describe your family as a child and adolescent?

3. Where did you go to school, elementary, middle school, high school, college?

4. What factors molded your educational experience?

5. How would you define success?

6. Do you consider yourself successful? Why? / Why not?

7. When you encounter a challenge how do you handle it?

8. What do you contribute to your perseverance in striving to be where you are now from where you started from?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time, I will type the transcript of this interview and email it to you read it to make sure your words are recorded correctly.

Hello, my name is G. Coleman Bailey, Jr. I am a Doctorate student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Program. I am doing a study that involves determining factors that contribute to success in male graduates from Title I high schools. I am looking for male graduates from Title I high school who identify as being successful. This study involves interviews which should take about 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews will take place online via zoom in a private location of your choosing. Please think about participating. Participation is voluntary. If you have any questions, please contact me at baileygc@etsu.edu or 828-260-5977.

Sincerely,

G. Coleman Bailey, Jr.

VITA

GRADY COLEMAN BAILEY, JR.

Education: Ed.D. Educational Leadership, 2020
                                 East Tennessee State University
                                 Johnson City, Tennessee

                          M.A.   Science Education-Physics, 1993
                                 East Carolina University
                                 Greenville, North Carolina

                          B.A.   Science Education-Physics, 1991
                                 East Carolina University
                                 Greenville, North Carolina

Professional Experience: Director of Alternative and Virtual Education,
                                 Avery County Schools;
                                 Newland, North Carolina, 2020-Present

                          Science Teacher, Avery County High School;
                                 Newland, North Carolina, 2011-2020

                          Science Teacher, D H Conley High School;
                                 Winterville, North Carolina, 2002-2011

                          Science Teacher, Jamesville High School;
                                 Jamesville, North Carolina, 1992-2001

                          Science Teacher, Williamston Middle School;
                                 Williamston, North Carolina, 1991-1992

                          Graduate Assistant, East Carolina University,
                                 College of Arts and Sciences,
                                 Greenville, North Carolina 1990-1992

Honors and Awards: NC Outstanding STEM 9-16 Educator of the Year, 2020

                          NCSTA Distinguished Science Teacher Award, 2016

                          North Carolina Teacher of the Year Team, 2007

National Teacher of the Year US Space and Rocket Camp, 2007

NCHSAA Coach of the Year, 2006

Northeast Regional Teacher of the Year, 2000 & 2006

Pitt County Schools Teacher of the Year, 2005

D. H. Conley High School Teacher of the Year, 2004

Conference Cross Country Coach of the Year 2011

Martin County Schools Teacher of the Year 1995 & 2000

Jamesville High School Teacher of the Year 1994 & 1999

Conference Volleyball Coach of the Year 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000