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WHO YOU KNOW AND HOW TO GO: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ON HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR BLACK MALES

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WHO YOU KNOW AND HOW TO GO: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL
ON HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR BLACK MALES

By

Morgan Elizabeth St. John

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
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WHO YOU KNOW AND HOW TO GO: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL
ON HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR BLACK MALES

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University of Nebraska, 2013

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This qualitative case study explores the relationship between social capital, or the social networks in a young man's life, and access into and persistence in higher education for a group of six Black, male, upperclassmen students at Heartland University.

Heartland University is a predominantly White, four-year institution in the Midwest region of the United States. The literature review discusses reasons for the steadily declining rate of males choosing to pursue a college education, particularly young Black men, whom have been referred to as an "endangered species" in society (Johnson, Farrell, & Stoloff, 2000). Providing a framework of social capital theory, the author asserts that social networks have powerful implications for the educational attainment of Black male college students.

Through a semi-structured interview protocol, qualitative interviews were conducted with six junior and senior Black, male Heartland University students. Students were able to share stories on the relationships in their lives that helped them to pursue, access, and succeed in higher education. Findings indicated the students' relationships with their parents, family members, and friends were essential in the college decision-making process, relationships with high school teachers were crucial in gaining insight about accessing higher education, and college administrators and college friends were

necessary to persisting in college. This research provides a model for Heartland University to promote higher levels of social capital for Black male students via their connections with administrators, faculty members, and peers, offering recommendations for future research and best practices in higher education student affairs.

Dedication

For Boston and its people;

The strong and ever-resilient city and community that helped me become who I am today

During the four most pivotal years of my life.

In memoriam of the lives forever changed during the 117th Boston Marathon.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my participants for reaffirming my belief that our relationships in life immensely shape our world. The six of you young men have truly inspired me, and I hope you achieve all of your academic and personal goals in the future. Never stop trying.

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Thank you to my family. I would not have succeeded this far in life without you. Mom and Dad, you have always provided for me, believed in me, and most importantly, loved me unconditionally. Thank you for being not only parents, but my best friends. To my sister Olivia, your creativity and passion drive me. Thank you for sharing your talent with me. To the Coweys, thank you for being the "fam family" I have always known. Thank you to my Nebraska cousins for helping me find heart in the Heartland.

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If this study is any indication, the unwavering support I have been blessed to receive has been monumental.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Without education, you are not going anywhere in this world.

- Malcolm X

Young men today are consistently falling behind in the education race, perpetuating one of the most troubling social crises of our time. In 2009, The U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics reported that a total of 116,580 female high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions while only 87,700 males enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This means that 57% of the new undergraduate students who entered a college or a university in the fall of 2009 were young women; less than half of the enrollees were young men. Even more startling, perhaps, is the lack of young Black males applying to colleges and universities:

- In 2008, Black males ages 18 and over accounted for 5% of the total college student population and 36% of the total prison population;
- In 2008, Black males ages 18 and over were imprisoned at a rate six and a half times higher than White males;
- In 2008, Black males accounted for at least 41% of the prison population ages 18 through 34; White males accounted for approximately 27% of the inmates in that age range. (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010, p. 88).

The preceding statistics identify what is going wrong for many of America's young Black men, more frequently choosing to drop out of school rather than attain educational completion in high school and/or college. Both academic and media sources constantly focus their attention on what has led to the breaking point for this population, citing reasons as to what has gone *wrong* in the lives of young Black men. However, what sometimes goes *right* for the Black males who succeed?

Clifton and Nelson (1992) asserted, “What would happen if we studied what was right with people versus what’s wrong with people?” (p. 20). Instead of examining the factors creating the gap between young men and women, between Black male students and everyone else, why not ask what positive elements could potentially close the gap in higher education enrollment? Despite being the lowest demographic going to college at a dire 5% of the total undergraduate student population, some Black men are persisting in college, despite incredible odds stacked against them (Dwyer, 2012, para. 1). The small population of Black males on campuses across the country begs the question best asked by Dwyer (2012), “But what enables some black males to overcome significant obstacles and go on to attend—and graduate from—college?” (para. 1).

The concept of social capital is one way to examine how some young Black men overcome obstacles, access, and persist in higher education. Originally theorized by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, social capital consists of the relationships in a person’s life that provide guidance and support in obtaining socially valued resources, such as education (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Putnam (2000) gave the example “most of us get our jobs because of whom we know” (p. 20). Cejda, Casparis, Rhodes, and Seal-Nyman (2008) claimed “institutional agents,” or sources such as family members, K-12 schools, and colleges and universities, are institutions essential in a student’s decision to seek out higher education. In an attempt to reveal what goes right for some, this qualitative research study seeks to examine the effects of social capital, or the social network of relationships, on higher education access and persistence for Black male students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to contribute to the limited research on educational successes and personal triumphs of young, Black male students. The research examines the levels of social capital experienced by Black men through their relationships and social networks and reviews how these factors empower them to access higher education. The voices of the men in this study speak to the challenges they have experienced in accessing and persisting in higher education. From their insights, these male students provided an understanding of how a college degree can become a reality for greater numbers of young men through meaningful relationships and purposeful goals, shaped by their social networks.

Significance of Study

The Black male achievement gap is no stranger to scholarly literature or modes of media, and a list of contributing problems was summarized by Lewis et al. (2010):

The nation's young Black males are in a state of crisis. They do not have the same opportunities as their male or female counterparts across the country. Their infant mortality rates are higher, and their access to health care is more limited. They are more likely to live in single-parent homes and less likely to participate in early childcare programs. They are less likely to be raised in a household with a fully employed adult, and they are more likely to live in poverty. As adults, Black males are less likely than their peers to be employed. At almost every juncture, the odds are stacked against these young men in ways that result in too much unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives. (p. iii)

The current literature concerning this pressing issue follows two trends: fixing the education system at the elementary, middle, and secondary school levels *or* creating more diverse, supportive environments for these young men once they have reached higher education. Providing adequate curriculum and support at all educational levels can

undoubtedly impact the academic and personal successes of young Black men, but examining the personal factors that contribute to their decision to attend and persist in postsecondary education could serve as a model for encouraging the next generation of Black male students.

This study is unique in researching the levels of social capital experienced by Black male students through their personal relationships and social networks and reviewing how these factors empower them to access and persist in higher education.

Research Questions

To delve into the topic of social capital and its role in the lives of Black men pursuing postsecondary education, the following research questions were developed:

- Who are the primary influencers in Black male students' lives that affect their decision to pursue higher education?
- Who are the significant contributors to the social capital Black male students use to access higher education?
- Who are the supportive individuals that enable Black male students to persist in higher education?

By inquiring about the relationships of the young men in the case study, the research questions sought to identify the social capital these students experienced in accessing higher education. The research questions allowed for in-depth qualitative interviews to emerge from this case study. Through sharing their life stories and views on the social networks in their lives, the Black male students involved in this research contribute to a

greater understanding of how young Black men perceive transitioning into and persisting in higher education.

Research Design

The methodology used for this research was a qualitative case study approach. This was chosen as the protocol for this study because the method allowed for rich insights into the lives of the participants. Through utilizing a theoretical framework of social capital, the interviews conducted revealed how the sociological theory applies to young Black men accessing and persisting in higher education. The purpose of this study was to identify what goes right for some Black males in their educational and personal experiences, and the qualitative case study model helped to interpret this phenomenon. The interviews were transcribed and coded for emergent themes and sub-themes that related to social capital theory and the value of social networks in a person's life.

Definition of Terms

Defining and understanding the following terms is crucial to exploring this research. For this qualitative case study on social capital and higher education access and persistence for Black males, the succeeding terms were used.

Access—Access is the process of attaining entry into higher education. Access is the general concept of making higher education reachable (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2010).

Black—The racial term “Black” was chosen to be inclusive of all ethnic backgrounds that identify with the Black identity, including African-Americans.

Influencer—An influencer is an individual that impacts a person’s life in some way. Mothers, fathers, siblings, extended family members, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, friends, and role models all proved to be influential people in this research.

Relationship—The use of relationship means the connection of one individual shared with another. Relationship in this case study applies to connections in the home, school, and community.

Persistence—Persistence is a student’s continued behavior leading to the accomplishment of a desired goal, such as attaining a postsecondary degree (Arnold, 1999).

Pursue—Pursue means to follow or chase after a certain objective, like completion of higher education.

Social Capital—Social capital involves the collective value of social networks and the inclinations that occur as a result of the social networks working together (Putnam, 2000).

Delimitations

Delimitations existed in this research due to the scope of the qualitative case study. The six participants all self-identified as Black and male, and these were the only demographics represented in this study. Additionally, graduation by the end of the 2013-2014 academic year was a requirement of the research because the primary investigator and advisor identified junior and senior students as the best fit for a study on academic persistence. Upperclassmen have more years of experience and perseverance in college,

and therefore their insights were highly beneficial to this study. The participants all studied at a single Midwestern, predominantly white institution (PWI), placing a further delimitation on the research.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include lack of generalizability. The small sample and qualitative methodology prevent the research from being applied to larger groups of students except for those potentially identifying with this study's demographic group. Additionally, time was a limitation. The researcher conducted this research over the course of two academic semesters to be used in a thesis paper as the final requirement of her master's degree. If this study had been conducted over a longer period of time using a longitudinal qualitative approach, the persistence of the Black males could have been examined throughout their undergraduate careers. As a young, White female, the primary investigator could not personally identify with the participants. Participants may have chosen to censor what was shared because of the researcher's background. Despite our racial and gender differences, trust was established between the participants and myself through the use of pseudonyms and private, intimate one-on-one interviews. I was also friendly, gracious, and welcoming towards my participants, and prior to and after every interview, each participant and I made small talk and formed a natural rapport with one another. Diversity and equality are two aspects of education I have always advocated for, and I feel that my affirming attitude towards my participants may have enabled them to trust me more than another White woman.

Conclusion

This study on the relationships in six young, Black male college students' lives was both challenging and rewarding for the researcher, and I believe the information examined throughout the next four chapters of this thesis provide a better comprehension of the impact of social networks on higher education access and persistence.

Understanding the successes of some Black men in college is necessary to helping the next generation of Black students access higher education.

In Chapter 2, the literature review overviews the causes of the widening educational gap between men and women, specifically focusing on the academic problems of young Black males. Proposed solutions to the gap are identified, and previous research on social capital for Black males is also discussed. The review of relevant sources additionally provides a theoretical framework of social capital, which was incorporated into the methodology of this research. Research methods are given in Chapter 3, explaining in great detail what was done in this qualitative case study. Chapter 4 introduces each of the participants involved in the study and includes excerpts from their interviews to identify the themes that emerged as a result of this research. The themes developed from the interviews address how the participants overcame obstacles through their social networks in order to access and persist in higher education. Finally, Chapter 5 connects the findings of the research to the relevant literature and provides recommendations for further investment by influential individuals in the education of Black males in an attempt to enable more young Black men to attain and utilize a postsecondary degree in the future.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Negative and depressing reports concerning the educational gap between young Black males and “everyone else” are abundant in educational research. As described by Billie and Carter (2012), “The preponderance of these reports correlates with the decline of Black males entering college” (p. 121). Black high school students are victims of both chronic and systematic academic troubles and behavioral problems (Davis, 2003).

Research today focuses on what’s going wrong with Black men rather than what’s going right for some. As Clifton and Nelson (1992) articulated, “the popular notion is that if you fix a weakness in an individual, the individual will become stronger; if you correct a weakness in an organization, the organization will become better” (p. 10). However, what Clifton and Nelson discovered is that excellence is a result of emphasizing strengths rather than fixing weaknesses. By presenting positive evidence of Black male students succeeding in education, recommendations could be developed to assist the next generation of young Black men in society.

Current solutions to the educational crisis for Black males provide two common solutions for addressing this predicament: fix the education system at the elementary, middle, and secondary school levels *or* create more diverse, supportive environments for these young men once they have matriculated into a higher education environment. Both of these solutions would inevitably improve the educational experiences of Black male students, but what can be done to further encourage and support young Black men to

participate in education, graduate from high school, and access higher education? The social capital, or social networks of relationships that provide resources in an individual's life, can be just as impactful in enabling a student to attain a college degree.

Synopsis of Literature Review

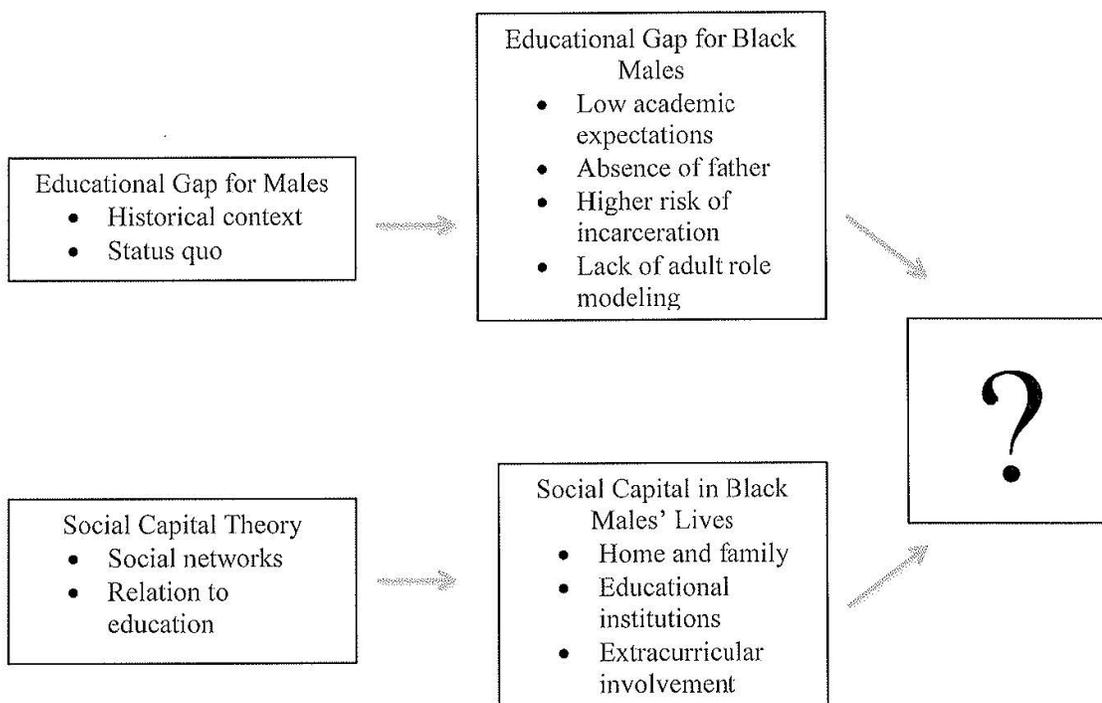


Figure 1. Organizational diagram of literature review.

The literature review begins with a historical and contextual assessment of the educational gap for males in undergraduate enrollment. Then, the image of Black males as “an endangered species” (Johnson et al., 2000) is explored through reviewing the contributing factors to this educational crisis. Social capital theory is then explained to provide the reader with an understanding of the sociological theory as the concept relates to young Black men and educational access and persistence. Relevant studies are

discussed to show social capital's impacts for Black male high school and college students. Finally, the material included in this literature review is critiqued to show recommendations for future research into Black males and higher educational access and persistence. This literature seeks to provide context for the qualitative case study examining the levels of social capital experienced by Black college male students through their personal relationships and social networks.

Approach to the Literature

A variety of scholarly search engines were used to research the growing concern of Black males and their ability (or inability) to access higher education. To locate relevant literature, Academic Search Premier, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Journal Storage (JSTOR), GoogleScholar, and Project MUSE databases were utilized. Search terms included "Black," "males/men," "African American," "education," "educational gap," "educational issues/problems," and "social capital." Further search terms into Black male students' educational problems and social capital were also used, "low achievement," "delinquency," "graduation rates vs. dropout rates," "absent fathers," "bad role modeling," "relationships," "parents/families," "teachers," "extracurricular involvement," and "positive educational experiences." These sources all proved to be extremely relevant in uncovering the problems young Black men are facing and research into how social capital can help Black males to access and persist in education.

A Brief History and Status Quo of Boys in Education

Since the origin of higher education in America, white men have been the one population guaranteed a chance of admittance at post-secondary institutions. Dating back

to the first colonies, the earliest institutions of higher education were today's Ivy League schools, such as Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded in 1636 and Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, founded in 1701 (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). When these schools first opened their doors, only white males with financial means were allowed to pursue and obtain degrees. African American males were scarcely represented in higher education, even though the numbers of freedmen were increasing prior to and during the Civil War. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) formed in the 1850s to educate African American men (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The first school that allowed coeducation was Oberlin College in 1833, and the first recognized women's college was Georgia Female College in 1839. Before this time, women kept their roles in the home, as mothers or maids, and sometimes served as assistants or secretaries to male professionals (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, single-sex institutions of higher learning prevailed. However, a major shift in single-sex institutions took place during the latter portion of the 1900s. In the 1940s, only 25% of colleges and universities enrolled both men and women, but by the 1970s, 14% of institutions enrolled only men or only women (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Official coeducation of all colleges and universities was ruled in 1972 under the provisions of The Education Amendments of 1972, Title IX, which stated in United States Code, Section 20 that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 199). Since this

legislation, the gender gaps in enrollment at postsecondary schools became almost non-existent, but beginning in the 1980s up until today, every year, the amount of females enrolling at colleges and universities has been getting substantially higher than the number of males (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In the early 1990s, a wide array of literature perpetuated the belief that elementary and secondary school girls were lagging behind due to societal pressures, causing gender inequity in education (Kleinfeld, 2009). A report by the American Association of Women (AAUW) in 1992, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, was highly publicized and referenced in books such as Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1993), Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), and Peggy Orenstein's *School Girls* (1994). The works of these female authors asserted that young girls, especially those going through adolescence, experienced a loss of voice, lower self-esteem, and pressures to follow female cultural expectations of obedience and passivity. Sadker and Sadker's *Failing and Fairness* (1995) was concentrated on gender inequality in schools, stressing that the curriculum and the pedagogical methods of instructors advantaged boys over girls. For example, teachers paid more attention to boys, chastising girls for not raising their hands while accepting answers shouted out by boys. The instructors were also more likely to engage in intellectual dialogue with boys, which suppressed the cognitive development of young men at the time. All of these accounts confirmed that girls had problems in scholastic settings (Kleinfeld, 2009). In 1994, the Gender Equity in Education Act put forth that girls were an underprivileged population, and the legislation allocated funds for public education to address girls' needs. This act shortchanged boys, and no laws with

the impact or scope of the 1994 Gender Equity in Education Act have ever been created to focus on the classroom issues of boys (Sommers, 2000).

Judith Kleinfeld, a psychology professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and director of Boys Project, a group that advocates for interventions for boys, is well versed in the decline of male college attendees. In “The State of American Boyhood,” Kleinfeld (2009) reported quantitative information gathered from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative assessment of the knowledge America’s students possess and exhibit in various subject areas. Assessments are proctored periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history. In 2008, at the 12th grade level, boys were behind girls in foundational skills of reading and writing. The gender gap in writing was found to be drastic; more than one-fourth of young men (26%) fall below basic and just 16% achieved at the proficient/advanced levels. In comparison, only 11% of young women were below basic in writing and 31% reached the proficient/advanced levels. Reading comprehension levels were not any better. A third of the male students at the 12th grade level fell below basic compared to 22 percent of female students. In mathematics and science, subjects typically thought of as male dominated studies, gender gaps have almost diminished, with mathematics proficiency and deficiency levels almost equivalent between male and female students and males holding a slightly higher proficiency in science than females (Kleinfeld, 2009).

The gender gap on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores in critical reading and writing, essential skills for higher learning, shows that girls' knowledge surpasses the boys on standardized testing. Boys have also reported spending less time per week on homework, leading to tardiness, minimal participation, and unpreparedness in classes. Additionally, girls' grades from high school are higher than boys across all school subjects, allowing them to achieve higher GPAs (Kleinfeld, 2009).

Kleinfeld (2009) also found that not only are young men losing academically, but personally as well. For males 20-24 years-old, 20.7 suicides per 100,000 suicides occurred among males compared to 3.5 suicides per 100,000 suicides among females, and among 15-19 years old, 12.5 suicides per 100,000 suicides occurred among males compared to 2.8 among females. Boys are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with cases of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The delinquent crime rate and arrest among male youth are alarming; for offenses of murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault 486.2 cases per 100,000 were among male youth compared to 108.7 cases per 100,000 among female youth (Kleinfeld, 2009).

The Black Male Crisis in Education: “An Endangered Species”

Research confirms that the social and economic status of the African-American male has steadily deteriorated over the past quarter century. It is well documented that their rates of school failure, joblessness, homicide, incarceration, and other antisocial behaviors far exceed those of their white, Hispanic, and Asian male counterparts. In fact, the magnitude of these problems has led some researchers to characterize the African-American male as an endangered species. (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 695)

Categorizing young Black men as “an endangered species” stems from numerous reports on poor academic performance as a result of low academic expectations, the absence of a

father in a Black male's life, resulting in a higher level of delinquency and incarceration, and lack of adult role modeling, which are all factors that lower the access higher education to for young Black male students (Barrett, Katsiyannis, & Zhang, 2010; Brown, 2012; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; DeBell, 2008; Hossler, Ziskin & Gross., 2009; Johnson et al., 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Maylor, 2009; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Parker & Maggard, 2009; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Schott Foundation, 2008; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; Wildeman, 2010).

Low academic expectations. Less than half of all Black male high school students graduate. The Schott Foundation (2008) stated 47% of Black men enrolled in secondary schools earn their diploma, while 57% of Latino males and 75% of White males successfully finish. This statistic is even more drastic in crowded, urban public school districts, such as Detroit, where the graduation rate for Black males ranges from 20 to 30%. Kunjufu (2005) cited low achievement levels, high suspension and expulsion rates, and an exorbitant amount of special education referrals as reasons why so many Black male high school students are failing.

The racial mismatch of White teachers and Black students can be problematic in the nonwhite student's education. McGrady and Reynolds (2013) researched tenth-graders, their parents, English teachers, and math teachers, which were obtained through the 2002 Education Longitudinal Study (ELS). The data set included information on the critical transitions of students as they pass from high school to employment, higher education, or other opportunities collected through quantitative student, teacher, and parent surveys about the student's behavior, cognitive skills, and

involvement. McGrady and Reynolds summarized their findings, drawing the conclusion that as anticipated from previous research studies, White teachers reviewed their Black students more negatively than they perceived their White students.

A study by Hossler et al. (2009) said 86% of students that grew up with parents with a bachelor's degree or higher intended to enroll in college after high school. In comparison, 59% of students whose parents neither graduated from high school nor attended college had plans to enroll. Parents' or legal guardians' expectations about a young Black man's educational aspirations play a role in the amount of social capital the young man possesses. Disturbing statistics on high dropout, suspension and expulsion rates, low achievement levels, poor academic support from parents, legal guardians, and teachers all contribute to low academic expectations for Black males, thus impacting the educational crisis for Black boys and adolescents (Hossler, et al., 2009; Kunjufu, 2005; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Schott Foundation, 2008).

Absence of fathers and higher risk of incarceration. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) revealed 50% of Black children live in households without a father figure present, which is a disconcerting occurrence in the lives of too many Black boys. DeBell (2008) claimed the absence of a father figure is important, but is also one of a multitude of issues in a developing Black man's life. Cartwright and Henriksen (2012) researched the phenomenon of absent fathers in young, collegiate Black males' lives. This is a growing trend in the United States, and failure of many adolescent Black men is often attributed to the void of a male parent. Through a phenomenological approach using interviews, the

investigators determined supportive mothers and other male role models were critical to filling in for the nonexistent father-son relationship.

Wildeman (2010) also reported on the lack of fatherhood in young Black males' lives. One in four Black children born in 1990 had an imprisoned parent at some time before 14 years of age compared with only one in 25 White children. Wildeman also explained more than 50% of Black children grow up with a parent in prison, most typically a high school dropout father.

In Roettger and Swisher (2011), the authors discovered an increased likelihood that young Black males with incarcerated fathers will commit delinquent acts before 25 years of age. Data was collected from the in-home Add Health sample, consisting of 20,700 respondents in the seventh through twelfth grades, identifying as Black, White, or Hispanic. Three follow-up interviews were also conducted, which totals four waves of interviews in the longitudinal study. In relation to family structure, socioeconomic status, neighborhood characteristics, and closeness to their father, young men with incarcerated fathers had a greater average propensity for delinquent behavior and an increased risk of arrest in early adulthood.

Similar to Roettger and Swisher (2011), researchers Barrett et al. (2010) examined predictors of prosecution, incarceration, and repeat offending among 100,000 individuals from the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice. At first and second referrals of prosecution hearings, Blacks were more likely to be incarcerated than Whites. Predictors of offense for juveniles in the study included father absence, furthering the notion that Black boys and adolescents without a father figure exhibit higher levels of

abandonment, academic failure, delinquency, and incarceration (Barrett et al., 2010; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; DeBell, 2008; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; Wildeman, 2010).

Lack of adult role modeling. With the absence of a father in a young man's life, a lack of adult role models is an additional struggle for Black men growing up (Brown, 2012; Maylor, 2009; Parker & Maggard, 2009; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012). In interviews with Black male eighth-graders, Sparrow and Sparrow (2012) discovered Black adolescent men are likely to model the behaviors exhibited by their parents or other elders, which includes cursing, smoking, and participating in drug related activities. Growing up in poorer neighborhoods and low socioeconomic status communities set the boys in the Sparrow and Sparrow study up for difficulty in school. When role models do not properly demonstrate certain priorities, like education, clothes and shoes can become more important than grades and schoolwork.

Due to poor role modeling by parents and other familial role models, Black teachers are viewed as individuals young Black males can connect with and follow. However, as Maylor (2009) pointed out, this idea assumes all Black teachers are good role models for Black adolescents and that Black students will perceive these teachers as role models. This is not always the case, which continues to leave young Black males without a proper role model with whom they feel they can relate (Brown, 2012; Maylor, 2009).

In a study of multiple cities in 2000, Parker and Maggard (2009) researched the "street code" mentality of neighborhoods where young Black men resided. These areas

had high concentrations of joblessness, causing Black boys and adolescents to accept the “street code” of selling drugs as a legitimate form of employment. The young males in this study perceived what the adults in their communities were participating in, and the “street code” lifestyle was modeled onto them. Without proper role modeling, vulnerable Black men are likely to make poor choices, following what has unfortunately been modeled by the adults in their lives (Parker & Maggard, 2009; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012).

Low academic expectations, the absence of fathers and higher risk of incarceration, and lack of adult role modeling all reveal reasons why young Black males struggle with educational persistence and degree attainment well before they have reached the point of higher education (Barrett et al., 2010; Brown, 2012; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; DeBell, 2008; Hossler et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Maylor, 2009; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Parker & Maggard, 2009; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Schott Foundation, 2008; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012; U.S Census Bureau, 2012; Wildeman, 2010). Moving away from this image of Black men as an “endangered species,” the following theoretical framework of social capital will be explained to show how some Black males, such as those included in 5% of all undergraduates, overcome obstacles, access, and persist in higher education.

Theoretical Framework: Social Capital

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was one of the first writers to theorize about social capital. Originally schooled in philosophy, Bourdieu saw the growing field of American sociology as a field in need of much improvement (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007).

Bourdieu claimed that cultural capital has three elements (a) an “embodied disposition” that expresses itself in lifestyle choices (an incorporated form); (b) formal education and acquisition of skills and knowledge (an institutional form); and (c) possession of “esteemed cultural goods” (an objectified form). Bourdieu asserted that social capital consists of sustainable networks of relationships through which individuals can mobilize power and resources. Capital is cultural and symbolic; any aspect of society can take the form of capital if people are able to realize its unequal distribution (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). Dissimilar to other theorists of his time, social capital within Bourdieu’s theory was not overtly discussed; the concept was one component of his idea of cultural capital. Bourdieu’s main argument with the contemporary American sociologists of his time was variable-oriented analysis, or theorists that separated the effects of independent variables. Individuals vary in the amount of capital they have, and it is insufficient to study social space as an aggregate of individuals and their capital holdings (Bourdieu, 1985, 1991/1982; Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). In Bourdieu’s point of view, the power that social capital provides is dependent upon the structure of the field in which it is enacted.

In American sociology, the forms of capital are usually operationalized and analyzed as individual-level variables. The goals of the Coleman Report of 1966 were to explain certain aspects of the educational system and to analyze the way it related to educational achievement with the hope to introduce policies that could change the current system prescribing policies to change the system (Cain & Watts, 1970). Although the intent of the Coleman Report was to prove that financial resources matter, the results provided evidence of the opposite. According to the report, financial resources did not

affect achievement and learning. Nevertheless, social capital theory and further research presently suggest social networks can help provide access to resources that foster student success (Cain & Watts, 1970; Coleman, 1988; Coleman et al., 2011/1966; Clopton, 2011; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2011/1988; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Jencks & Brown, 2002/1975; Putnam, 2000; Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007).

The Coleman Report started a trend in educational research that continues today. One can take the suggestions of these educational researchers and apply them to other environments outside of the school. The Coleman Report started a movement in research to help discover that a variety of resources, such as financial support and social networks, play a role in the success of a student, thus allowing the student to increase their social capital. Many researchers now attempt to figure out why achievement gaps occur and how to fix them, which seems to be elusive. Ultimately, achievement gaps are likely to continue past kindergarten through twelfth grade education. If youth are not successful in their K-12 years, then they will more than likely fail to attain a postsecondary degree.

Coleman (1988) pursued a follow-up study in order to gain further insight on social capital. He used social capital theory to explain academic achievement. He studied the difference between high school dropout rates in religious and non-religious private schools. What he found, and later suggested, was that the social capital that was created mattered and the influence within the particular community caused a level of social pressure. This pressure, however, positively influenced the students' academic achievements.

After obtaining data from a longitudinal study of 252 children of teenage mothers, Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) explored the relationship between social capital and young adult success. They suggest that social capital clearly plays an important role in helping disadvantaged youth become successful. The authors imply that social capital includes a variety of influences or dimensions that contribute to different outcomes. Following their study, they encouraged researchers to take a deeper look into these influences and dimensions. The suggestion included analyzing different types of social capital (i.e., parents' resources inside the family, their social network, and their embeddedness in the community) and how it is linked to success in early adulthood.

Jencks and Brown (2002/1975) used the same data of the Coleman Report as a basis for their research about the effects high schools have on students. What they discovered was that schools need to be held accountable for their actions and make drastic changes to their goals in order to best serve their students. Jencks and Brown suggested school districts need to increase their effectiveness and reduce inequality. They also concluded that although there may not be improvement in both achievement scores and educational attainment, schools must make important educational decisions and consider what outcomes they are striving for.

Entwisle et al. (2011/1988) also referenced Coleman, but focused on a younger demographic. These researchers discovered that national academic programs, such as Head Start, were shown to be helpful to both the student and their parents. However, the influence of these early programs is not long lasting. The authors considered the life course approach, which considers how students from economically disadvantaged lives

are able to be successful. By studying the life course approach, researchers can see how low socioeconomic status students cope during transitional times.

Robert Putnam (2000) gave another view of social capital in American sociology in his book *Bowling Alone*. For Putnam, social capital is political and is key in maintaining democracy. In modern American society, social capital is declining as fewer and fewer people are engaging in politics. According to Putnam, social awareness, gained through education and access to information can mobilize a person to be more political, thus increasing their social capital. Putnam also discussed the concept of “*bridging* social capital,” or the construction of social networks that extend beyond the aforementioned groups of homogeneous populations. Bridging social capital creates new relationships and assists individuals in adjusting within new environments and communities” (Clopton, 2011, p. 60). In this way, bridging social capital can help individuals get ahead by earning a college degree, for example. Putnam’s idea supports the widely accepted belief that the people in a person’s life allow them access to opportunities.

Bourdieu’s view of social capital was dissimilar from Coleman and his followers. Bourdieu focused on how social capital could produce or reproduce inequality in society. Although there are various definitions of social capital, a central theme is that social networks have the potential to increase a person’s social capital (Bourdieu, 1985, 1991/1982; Cain & Watts, 1970; Clopton, 2011; Coleman, 1988; Coleman et al., 2011/1966; Entwisle et al., 2011/1988; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Jencks & Brown, 2002/1975; Putnam, 2000; Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). However, literature on social capital

tends to explain how the theoretical concept negatively plays into individuals' lives. Lareau and Horvat (1999) argued that previous studies of social capital have placed too much focus on the factors that lead to inequality rather than exploring how social capital mobilizes people. Therefore, research into the ways individuals convert social capital into access in order to obtain educational advantages is necessary.

Cejda et al. (2008) claimed, "As a theoretical construct, social capital has contributed to a deeper awareness of factors impacting the college attendance decisions of underrepresented students" (p. 35). The following studies looked into social capital and social networks developed through a young Black males' families, educational institutions, and extracurricular involvement, which all influence their educational access and mobility.

Social capital: Home life and family. One's home life and family inevitably affect an individual's social capital (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Palmer & Dancy, 2008; Richardson, 2009). Harper and Griffin (2011) focused on Black male undergraduates who grew up in low-income, working class families and enrolled at highly selective, private, predominantly white institutions (PWIs). The researchers used a phenomenological approach and in-depth, qualitative interviews to examine how the 219 students in the study navigated their way in accessing higher education. When discussing the participants' relationships with their parents, Harper and Griffin reported parents' lack of knowledge and/or participation affect their son's ability to access higher education and resources. Parents' levels of educational attainment and financial resources affected actualization and development of college aspirations.

Palmer and Dancy (2008) also explored the impact of familial relationships on the academic persistence of Black men. In their study, 11 African American males enrolled in HBCUs participated in qualitative interviews. The research yielded that parents, grandparents, brothers, and other members of one's family circle "encouraged, nourished, and inspired students to be successful" (p. 13).

Richardson (2009) specifically focused on the relationship between an uncle and their nephew. His ethnographic analysis included young African American males living in inner city, low-income neighborhoods in single-female-parent households and researched the vital role of extended family male role models in the young males lives. Although fathers and stepfathers can provide fatherhood for African American men, uncles can also serve as a source of male guidance. Richardson concluded uncles are a form of social capital for low socioeconomic African American males. Family inevitably impacts the social capital for young Black men (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Palmer & Dancy, 2008; Richardson, 2009), but educational institutions also provide social capital resources necessary in accessing higher education (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Oseguera, Conchas, & Mosqueda, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010).

Social capital: Educational institutions. Concerned with college student retention, Strayhorn (2010) looked into race and gender and the constructs' relation to social and cultural capital in academic preparation for African American and Latino eighth graders. "College ready" students tend to persist in higher education more frequently than less academically prepared students. In his study, Strayhorn set out with the purpose of determining the influence background traits, academic preparation for

college, and sociocultural capital have on academic achievement in college, with grade-point average (GPA) as the indicator of the factors' impact. Strayhorn's quantitative research relied on the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). A nationally representative sample of eighth-grade schools and students was obtained utilizing the instrument. The eighth-graders' high school achievement was compared with their college GPA. The research findings included the following claims: cultural capital impacts academic achievement; African American males' socioeconomic status was the most influential predictor of their success in college; Black students achieved higher if they were involved on campus; and college preparatory programs and parental involvement in education helped raise the GPAs of African American men.

Also utilizing data from NELS, Oseguera et al. (2011) reviewed academic engagement among Southeast Asian, Black, White, and Mexican high school youth. Factors such as time spent per week on homework, relationships with peers, and interactions with teachers all contributed to social capital for the different races of students. Much of the research on social capital explores the concept within the home and family life, but even more important, the authors assert, is the social capital gained through educational resources and relationships within the school.

Once in college, the relationships formed with faculty members are seen as vital to Black male student success. Palmer and Gasman (2008) conducted research on the role of social capital in academic success for African American men at a Black college. 11 African American men participated in the qualitative case study and were questioned

about the factors that contributed to their educational achievement. These results revealed faculty members were instrumental in encouraging academic success. In addition to the social capital accessed in educational institutions provided in the classroom, the social capital acquired through extracurricular involvement is equally important (Clopton, 2011; Harper, 2008; Kolb, 2007; Richardson, 2012).

Social capital: Extracurricular involvement. Harper (2008) conducted a study on the social capital undergraduate African American males had as a result of their access to influential social networks via extracurricular involvement. Harper wrote:

Equitable access to social mobility and advancement through education were among the intended outcomes of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and related legislation. Despite this, scholars have illuminated the ways in which colleges, universities, and schools continually disadvantage African American male students. (p. 1030)

In his research, Harper (2008) demonstrated that although the majority of African American males are suffering in the education system, there are a percentage that go on to succeed in college with the help of their social networks. His interviews with 32 African American collegiate men at six predominantly White, research extensive universities revealed campus leadership, active out-of-class engagement, and the acquisition of social capital were vital in empowering these young males to persist in education.

Kolb (2007) researched Black male students participation in a student political organization at a university and the social capital that came about as a result of membership. Over the period of 18 months, observational research and interviews were completed to find the acceptance of Black males into a Black, female-centric student

political group encouraged the males and allowed members of the group to feel solidarity between the two genders because of their racial connection. This provided the involved Black students with a sense of community.

Richardson (2012) sought to examine the impact of athletic coaches in adolescent African American males' lives. He asserted that coaches had the potential to positively influence the choices of young men in an urban high school. Richardson used interviews, community-based participant observations, home observations, and auto-ethnography as research methods in his study. Adult supervision, guidance, information, support, encouragement, and community ties to other forms of social, human, and cultural capital were all aspects coaches provided for their athletes. His findings suggest more research needs to be done on athletic coaches and other mentors in the lives of adolescent Black males to further inspect the sources of social capital coaches and adult role models can provide.

In another study regarding athletes and social capital, Clopton (2011) compared the differences in social capital for African American and White male student athletes. The students he researched were undergraduate, traditional-aged, collegiate athletes playing for NCAA Division I sports teams. Participants were randomly selected from 23 institutions for a quantitative study utilizing the Social Capital Assessment Tool (SCAT). The SCAT instrument consisted of five items focusing on two salient constructs of social capital: trust and norms of reciprocity and social networks. The study found no racial differences existed in the levels of social capital African American and White student athletes perceived in their athletic environments, but this did not extend into other

elements of campus life. The community and social capital African Americans experienced in athletics was not carried over into their academic or social lives on their campuses.

Through on campus leadership opportunities, political engagement, and athletics, Black male undergraduates throughout the studies experienced social capital in their higher education institutions (Clopton, 2011; Harper, 2008; Kolb, 2007; Richardson, 2012). Social capital through extracurricular involvement, in addition to social capital gained through the home and family and in educational institutions, enable Black students to access and persist in higher education, even if their educational, familial, and financial backgrounds have challenged them (Clopton, 2011; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Harper, 2008; Kolb, 2007; Oseguera et al., 2011; Palmer & Dancy, 2008; Richardson, 2009, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010). Although the research of these scholars provided an understanding of how social capital and social networks in Black males' lives allow them to access postsecondary education, the researchers left room for improvement in studying this topic in the future.

Summary of Literature

Literature delving into the problems American males, specifically Black male students, are facing in education today presented a framework for identifying some of the ways this systemic problem could be addressed. The theoretical concept of social capital serves as a model for examining how the relationships in a person's life can impact that person's ability to access certain cultural goods, such as a higher education. The studies cited provided relevant research for further looking into the role of social capital, or the

social networks, young Black men use to access and persist in college. Through this case study on the influential and motivational relationships for six Black, collegiate males, I hope to contribute to the body of work on the link between social capital and higher education access and persistence.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The declining number of males, specifically Black men, on college campuses across the country raises concern about the future state of Black manhood in America. However, above these troubling statistics, a small population of young Black males is still represented in the national undergraduate student population (Lewis et al., 2010, p. 88). What influences and motivates these young men to access and persist in higher education? This qualitative research study seeks to examine the social capital, or social networks of relationships, that Black males utilize in accessing postsecondary education.

Abandoning the trend of failure reported in many of the relevant sources of literature reviewed, I decided to instead highlight the successes of young Black men in higher education through this qualitative case study. By conducting qualitative interviews using an in-depth question protocol, I was able to obtain insights into how relationships affected the young males' lives and educational careers.

Study Rationale

The rationale from this research was demonstrated through the absence of studies on Black students' gains. Causes of the numerous educational problems Black boys and adolescents endure prior to ever realizing higher education were low academic expectations, the absence of fathers and higher risk of incarceration, and lack of adult role models (Barrett et al., 2010; Brown, 2012; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; DeBell, 2008; Hossler et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Maylor, 2009; McGrady &

Reynolds, 2013; Parker & Maggard, 2009; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Schott Foundation, 2008; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012; U.S Census Bureau, 2012; Wildeman, 2010). Some studies have sought to review how social capital enables Black male students to access and persist in higher education (Clopton, 2011; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Harper, 2008; Kolb, 2007; Oseguera et al., 2011; Palmer & Dancy, 2008; Richardson, 2009, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010), but further research into this topic should be done to fully understand how supportive social networks throughout one's life can position them for higher educational attainment.

Research such as this qualitative case study is necessary in comprehending how to better educate and serve students of this population in the future. By building stronger social networks prior to college, especially in high school, young Black males can utilize those influential individuals and resources to access postsecondary study and rely on established support while in higher education. Additionally, their social networks can expand during their collegiate experiences, increasing their social capital and chances of persistence, degree attainment, and success.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions of this case study were developed in order to further examine the educational achievements of young Black males in relation to their social capital, a concept that asserts social networks can significantly enhance a person's life. The following questions were used in creating the methodology for this research:

- Who are the primary influencers in Black male students' lives that affect their decision to pursue higher education?

- Who are the significant contributors to the social capital Black male students use to access higher education?
- Who are the supportive individuals that enable Black male students to persist in higher education?

Methodology Rationale

The purpose of qualitative research was highlighted by Merriam (2009), “Qualitative researchers are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Employing this definition of qualitative research, using semi-structured interviews for my research topic was the best method for examining social capital’s impact on higher education access for young Black men. Gaining perspectives on how the relationships in their lives influenced and motivated them to persist and succeed in education was an insightful method of studying Black male students.

The concept of the qualitative researcher as the “primary instrument” in research also rationalizes choosing a qualitative methodology. Merriam (2009) noted the primary investigator serving as the data collector is an important characteristic of qualitative research (p. 15). By acting as the primary instrument through which research was obtained in my study, I was then able to review the information I gathered from the interview transcriptions and identify themes and sub-themes. Expressing the insights of the participants through themes was more impactful than representing their views through statistics. The young Black males’ experiences can be better understood through rich,

thick descriptions, therefore choosing to conduct a qualitative study suited the scope of my leading research questions.

Case study models involve in-depth study of a single or a few groups (McMillan, 2012, p. 5). Case study research operates under a bounded system of researching (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Stake (1995) claimed that a case study approach is less of a methodological decision but a question of what is being studied (p. 443). The narrow focus on Black male, upperclassmen students at a singular Midwestern PWI justifies using a qualitative case study approach. Utilizing the case study methodology was a “means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). Examining the persistence of young Black men at a PWI is a bounded system. The participants of the research revealed positive aspects of their academic and personal experiences, relating to the case study model’s focus on a single group with a shared success and uniqueness (Merriam, 2009, p. 41). These men were different in that they have persisted in higher education, negating the trends of previous research studies.

A special feature of a bounded case study is descriptive reporting of findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). In anthropology, rich, thick descriptions mean complete, offering a “literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (p. 43). Due to the subject I was interested in studying, I knew discussing life experiences and relationships would be very personal for my participants. I anticipated collecting rich, thick descriptions from the interviews, and I have reported the insights of the young

Black males in this format. The descriptive aspect of the case study model was something I wanted to achieve through conducting my research.

An additional specialty of a case study is heuristic (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). Case studies can be heuristic because this form of research can “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under the study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (p. 44). A common societal belief formed by statistical data is that Black men drop out of school and often become involved in criminal activities. This case study on Black males in higher education dispels the negative view of failure by highlighting the social network resources some students use to succeed. Therefore, my research is heuristic by heightening the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon being examined within the study in a distinctive way.

Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

The epistemological perspective I exercised in constructing this research was an interpretive/constructivist epistemology. Merriam (2009) explained the purpose of the interpretive/constructivist epistemological perspective as to describe, to understand, and to interpret. The interpretive/constructivist epistemology is found in qualitative research, and the perspective seeks to describe, understand, and interpret “multiple realities” (p. 11). The participants in this case study provided multiple realities in their interviews. Piecing these multiple realities together allowed for a broader interpretation of social capital in Black male college students’ lives.

The theoretical perspective for this qualitative research was the sociological theory of social capital. Developed from Bourdieu (1985, 1991/1982), Putnam (2013) defined social capital, “The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all ‘social networks,’ or who people know” (para. 1). The participants of this research have familial, peer, and educational social networks. Relationships the young Black men had with the individuals in their social networks influenced the social capital they possessed in accessing and persisting in higher education.

Participants

This case study involved a purposeful sample, which is an “information-rich” group of participants (McMillan, 2012, p. 105). The participants chosen for this study met certain criteria by being Black, male, and a junior or senior at the PWI being researched. As members of the three mandatory criterion for this research, the individuals involved in the case study were in a place to offer information-rich descriptions about their personal experiences and relationships. Snowball sampling was the main method for recruiting participants. Snowball sampling involves selecting individuals based on recommendations (McMillan, 2012, p. 105). The participants were referred to me because they fit the criteria of the case study demographic. General information on the students is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Basic Participant Data

Interview	Pseudonym	Gender	Year	Major	Age	GPA
1	Jamal	Male	Junior	Communication Studies	22	2.7
2	Philip	Male	Junior	Art/Graphic Design	24	2.9
3	Colby	Male	Junior	Communication Studies/ Ethnic Studies	21	N/A*
4	Marvin	Male	Senior	Child, Youth, and Family Studies/Sociology	24	2.7
5	Rickey	Male	Senior	Communication Studies	29	2.9
6	Derek	Male	Senior	English/Ethnic Studies	22	3.6

Information compiled from Demographic Worksheet (see *Appendix C*)

*N/A: Participants were given the option not to disclose any information they felt uncomfortable sharing

These students identified as Black, and each student held a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or above (only one student withheld information about their GPA). The participants came from primarily urban environments, and there was a balance of in-state and out-of-state locations they originated from.

Family background was a key component of the study because familial relationships add to a person's social capital. On the demographic worksheet provided to each participant at the beginning of their interview (see *Appendix C*), questions about their parents' levels of education were asked. All but one of the six students identified as a first-generation college student. First-generation college students were described by Paul (2012), "First-generation college students—undergraduates whose parents did not

attend university—have reason to be proud. They’ve made it, against daunting odds” (para. 1). Parents’ educational experiences are represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants’ Parents’ Educational Attainment

Participant	First-Generation College Student? Yes/No	Father’s Highest Level of Education	Mother’s Highest Level of Education
Jamal	Yes	Unknown	High School
Philip	No	College	College
Colby	Yes	High School	High School
Marvin	Yes	High School	Some College
Rickey	Yes	Unknown	Middle School
Derek	Yes	High School	Some College

Information compiled from Demographic Worksheet (see *Appendix C*)

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to the start of the study, the primary investigator completed the Consortium for Institutional Review Board Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protections (CITI) for certification in human subjects research. Additionally, approval was sought from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). In the IRB process, I indicated 10 participants would be included in this study. However, due to lower numbers of Black, male, upperclassmen at the PWI research site chosen for this research, only six participants were recruited. After identifying individuals interested in the study, the students were emailed an informed consent letter (see *Appendices A & B*). Before each

interview was conducted, each participant was given the opportunity to review the informed consent letter and sign the document. Confidentiality of the students was maintained by assigning each student participant a pseudonym and keeping all research related documents on a password-protected computer. Additionally, the influential individuals each participant discussed were assigned pseudonyms.

Research Site

The research site for this study was a PWI located in a Midwest state of the United States. The university is large, public, four-year, primarily residential, and research extensive. For the purposes of this study, the institution will be referred to as Heartland University.

Heartland University is a land-grant institution and the flagship university of the Midwest state it is situated in. As of the fall 2011 semester, there were a total of 19,345 undergraduate students, 4,679 graduate students, and 589 professional students enrolled. The entering class of 2011 was 4,093 freshmen with a mean ACT score of 25.3. 67% of students complete their degree programs within six years.

Data Collection—Interviews

The data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol can be found in *Appendix D*. Interviews were conducted during the 2012-2013 academic year at Heartland University. As Merriam (2009) explained, semi-structured interviewing uses the following questioning methods:

- “interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured interview questions;”
- “all questions used flexibility;”
- “usually specific data required from all respondents;”

- “largest part of interview guided by list of questions or issues to be explored;” and
- “no predetermined wording or order.” (p. 89)

Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to change the order of the question or introduce different topics in each interview based on the progression of the interview. For example, some participants would speak about a relationship in their life before I even posed a question related to that relationship while others required further questions to fully explain a relationship. As Merriam (2009) asserted, this structure of data collection provides the researcher the freedom to adapt to situation at hand, accommodating the “emerging worldview of the respondent” and adding new ideas to the topic (p. 90).

The interviews with the six participants took place over the course of three weeks of the same month. Each respondent was interviewed once, and the interviews averaged about 30 minutes each. Interviews took place in private group study rooms of Heartland University’s main library. All of the interviews were audiotaped with the participants’ permission so that the tapes could be transcribed and checked for accuracy. During the interviews, I did not take notes because I wanted to be fully engaged in what my participants had to say. I also found myself nodding and agreeing with certain points they made about individuals in their life. This strengthened my connection to my participants and research.

Data Analysis

Utilizing the method of “categorical aggregation” of data (Creswell, 2007, p. 163), I identified common relationships discussed in the six separate interviews. The

research questions led to the development of three different processes relevant to the topic. These three thematic processes required the help of significant individuals to complete. While the relationships discussed were unique to each student's situation, I was still able to discern some common elements of their meaningful relationships, connecting them to the processes of deciding to pursue, accessing, and persisting in higher education. "In vivo codes," or using words directly from the interview transcripts, created a portrait of six successful, collegiate Black men. The three thematic processes and sub-groups that assisted the young men through each process are illustrated through the report of rich, thick descriptions in Chapter 4.

Validation Techniques

In order to validate the information contained in this study, the primary investigator utilized two methods of verification peer debriefing and inclusion of rich, thick descriptions. Applying various validation techniques in the analysis of the data collected shows triangulation, or checking for accuracy of the data by more than one method (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

After the interviews were coded, a peer debriefer read excerpts from each interview. This method of peer debriefing is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). The role of peer debriefer was to review the transcripts of interviews and make their own codes or notes as needed. My peer debriefer was a White, male master's student in my same program. I have studied

with this peer over the course of the program and respect his academic ability and knowledge. From his analysis, I was able to compare his codes and notes with my own analysis. The process of peer debriefing allowed for similarities in the discussion of the research to emerge while eliminating potentially biased interpretations of the data.

Rich, thick descriptions are a unique component of reporting qualitative data. By utilizing quotes from the participants' interviews, a descriptive narrative came through in the data analysis of this research. In conducting a case study on Black males' and social capital through their relationships, I wanted life stories to represent how society can work towards empowering this disenfranchised group in society, specifically in higher education. Use of rich, thick descriptions accomplishes this.

Role of Researcher

The reality of higher education access for all has not been achieved. As the literature review summarized, growing up as a Black male includes many challenges in society, in the educational system, in the community, and sometimes, even in the home life. Before conducting this research, I was knowledgeable on the quickly widening gender gap in undergraduate student enrollment numbers from projects I had completed in previous courses. With closer research into the topic, it became apparent that young Black men are the least represented group on colleges and universities around the country. This case study is just the beginning of me challenging this reality.

In this research, I aimed to uncover the contributing factors to a Black male student's success prior to and during their pursuit of a postsecondary degree. I designed a case study with a semi-structured interview protocol, seeking the relationships and social

networks in an individual's life that had contributed to their social capital. The life experiences revealed to me through the six interviews I conducted clarified what goes right in the lives of some young Black men. While their brothers who have dropped out of high school, committed crimes, or not realized their potential for a higher education have failed in the eyes of society, the participants of this case study are an example of how educational access and persistence can become more prevalent among the Black male population. My role as a researcher has allowed me to share the experiences of these young, collegiate men with the hope that their stories can serve as an inspiration and lesson for the educators, influencers, and role models in every Black male's life.

My relationships with my participants were developed in my private interviews with them, and I believe my ability to connect with them granted me access into hearing about their personal lives. Although I cannot verify that all of the information about these young men was disclosed to me due to the possibility of self-censorship, the interviews with six of Heartland University's Black male upperclassmen contributed to a better understanding of the case study's topic.

Conclusion

This third chapter described the methodology of the qualitative case study in more detail. With an established knowledge of the research methods, the reader will be better able to interpret my data, analysis, discussion, and recommendations in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to provide a glimpse into how some young, Black male students are able to access and persist in higher education via the social capital they have in their lives. Of primary interest was the identification of social networks, if any, that guided and supported the participants in their decisions to pursue, enroll in, and be retained in higher education. To further explore this topic, the following research questions were developed:

- Who are the primary influencers in Black male students' lives that affect their decision to pursue higher education?
- Who are the significant contributors to the social capital Black male students use to access higher education?
- Who are the supportive individuals that enable Black male students to persist in higher education?

The themes that emerged from the case study seek to answer the overarching queries in order to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between higher education access, persistence, and social capital for Black males.

Introduction to Participants

The participants involved in this study were communicated with via email. Their interviews were scheduled in the afternoon hours of February days in the beginning of a brisk and busy spring semester at Heartland University. All six students were

interviewed in private study rooms of the University's main library. As each participant greeted me in the lobby of the library, they paused the track on their iPod, removed their headphones, stopped the phone call or text conversation they were in the middle of, and powered down their iPad. A common characteristic of all of the students was how tuned in they were to their modern technological devices, how connected they were to their social networks. This is an attribute of the "millennial" generation currently enrolling in and transforming colleges and universities today, best described as "a generation of college students who were born, grew up, and will live their lives in a nation undergoing a transformation from an analog, national, industrial society to a global, digital, information economy" (Levine & Dean, 2012, p. xi). For these students, the vital relationships in their lives are no further away than the dialing of a phone call, drafting of a text message, sending of an email, or posting of a Facebook status. This shared characteristic of each student walking into the library using some type of technological device speaks to the age these young men are living and learning in.

Another shared commonality among the participants was the urban environments they grew up and thrived in. Three of the participants were in-state, and three hailed from metropolitan areas of other Midwest states. Their geographical locations are represented in Table 3.

A third similarity for the young Black males of this case study was the value they placed on the relationships in their life, which is revealed in the findings of this chapter. Prior to going more in-depth about the study's three identified research themes, or central

Table 3

Participants' Geographical Locations

Participant	Year	Age	Hometown
Jamal	Junior	22	Omaha, NE
Philip	Junior	24	Omaha, NE
Colby	Junior	21	Kansas City, MO
Marvin	Senior	24	Chicago, IL
Rickey	Senior	29	Lincoln, NE
Derek	Senior	22	Kansas City, MO

Information compiled from interview transcripts

processes, and the people that shaped the lives of the participants, background information on each student is provided in the succeeding sub-sections.

Jamal. Jamal's initial view of Heartland University was different from how he perceived his highly diversified, supportive high school in Omaha, Nebraska. However, Jamal quickly adjusted to the collegiate environment, adopting the conviction that his situation is only temporary, "I was never one of those people that needs to be comfortable. I guess, like, a lot of people feel like they have to be comfortable. That doesn't make sense to me. It's not the real world, it's not, and I knew that early." Confident in his academic ability, Jamal claimed there was never a question of whether or not he would pursue higher education; it was instilled in him by his mother and educators early on in his scholastic career. Jamal is the last of five children, born five minutes after his sister. Though his twin is identical to him in appearance, the two are "polar opposite" in terms of personality traits. Describing himself as the more academic

of the two, Jamal is respected by his family members for following his goals and is a role model to his younger cousin, who will be enrolling at the University next semester.

Jamal regards the relationships in his life as essential although fleeting, highlighting his practical approach to life:

I love the people who I have in life anymore. I'm of the full understanding, or at least the belief that every relationship ends at some point. And if that comes with death, then I guess that comes with death . . . so I try to really appreciate the people I have now.

Philip. Philip was always going to college because his parents told him so. His mother and father are both college graduates, so when the time came for him to tackle the college application process, Philip followed the guidance of his guardians. During his transition from high school to college, Philip said he knew what to expect since family members before him had attended the same institution. Competition between him and his twin brother grew tense when Philip chose scholarship money over studying at an institution out-of-state. Philip feels this caused strain on his familial relationships, particularly with his dad, who pressured him to explore institutions further away from home. Above the opinions of his parents and rivalry with his twin, Philip has found solace in his relationship with his grandmother and his high school best friend and roommate at the University. In Philip's eyes, his relationship with his friend is more like family:

Me and my best friend, we don't talk about school that much, but she always pushing me to do good. But she always be complaining. She gets mad, "Because you don't like to be sleeping. Like, you staying up until 4:00, and you be getting up at like 6:00 and you don't sleep, it's like you need to sleep." So I'm like, "Alright, you know, I'm going to sleep." She's like, "No, for you to sleep, I'm going to take your car keys away so you can't go nowhere, so you stay at home and sleep." Say what? Okay, what the deal (laughs).

Philip's best friend makes sure he takes care of himself, giving him a place to call home.

Colby. Colby is a self-identified extrovert, and he believes this trait has allowed to him to transcend in a predominantly White higher education environment:

Coming here, and it wasn't that many African Americans . . . it was kind of a shift of like, 'Okay, I'm totally in a different place now, because this isn't what I was used to.' But, I knew that. Like I did my research about the school and everything before coming here, and I knew that I was going to experience that . . . I came expecting like just to feel out of place and everything, but I really didn't. When I came here I was able to find my niche, and I was able to take advantage of being one of the few African Americans here. It just helps you stand out, and you're more noticeable . . . that can be a blessing and a curse depending on which way you look at it. But, I liked it because more people knew you. So, that opened it up for many opportunities. I've had tremendous opportunities being here that I never would a thought that I would have had, you know, if I had gone to some other institution. But, who would have known?

Holding an optimistic view on life, Colby is extremely grateful for all of the opportunities he has received, the relationships he has fostered with his family and friends, and the connections he has made through a scholarship program in Kansas City, Missouri. Colby faced challenges when his mother died very early in his life and his father was imprisoned until he was 10, but his relatives, peers, and Kauffman Scholars Program advisors helped him learn to love school and do well academically. As he aspires to attend graduate school post-graduation, Colby feels blessed for all that his father and role models have taught him.

Marvin. Marvin is popular at Heartland University. Despite being a highly visible student leader on campus through organizations such as Campus NightLife, Afrikan Peoples Union, and Alternative Spring Break, Marvin was hesitant coming here, "It's culture shock definitely, but it's not that bad . . . a lot smaller . . . I try to get involved and meet as many people as I can, because I didn't know anybody when I got

here.” Coming from Chicago, Marvin learned to adjust to the smaller city lifestyle by establishing close relationships with individuals at the institution. Through his campus involvement, he has prospered at the University. Marvin said he is sad to graduate and leave the tight-knit group of friends he has made. He owes his academic and personal successes to their love and support.

Rickey. Rickey stands out from the group of participants as the only non-traditional student. At 29, Rickey is proud to have graduation from college on his horizon. Prior to attending Heartland, Rickey studied at a junior college to prepare him for the four-year university experience:

My experience in the junior college was a little bit more, uh, I don't know if I want to say like culturally comfortable is the right word, but it just a little bit more comfortable because of the people. A lot of the people in the junior college were first time, uh, first university and college students as well as myself . . . that college was more geared for that type of person . . . I would say it was more of a familiar setting for me, at the junior college.

Although the cultural climate at Heartland was “chilly” when he first transferred in, Rickey’s own sense of accomplishment and encouragement provided by his wife, young children, mother, and sisters allowed him to persist. Meeting an inspirational African American male administrator at the university led him to discover the Student Support Services office. Through this department, Rickey was enrolled in a TRIO Program, or “federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds,” and given employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, para. 1). These experiences have all been very positive for Rickey, and he is thankful for all of the people that have boosted him closer to his educational goals.

Derek. Derek was very fortunate to accompany his cousin and best friend, Colby, when enrolling at Heartland University. Another participant of the Kauffman Scholars Program in Kansas City, Missouri, Derek networked with people, easing his transition as a first-generation student. Derek was timid upon arriving, “When I actually got here, it was kind of, I was kind of afraid in a way because the minority population here isn’t that big, or that dense . . . it was a lot different from home.” Derek has sustained in school with the backing of his two closest peers from home and the adoration of his huge family back in Kansas City. Trips home for him consist of family outings, spending time with as many as 60 cousins. Keeping up with relatives on Facebook allows Derek to feel supported daily, and he cannot wait to share his graduation and start of graduate school with the family that consistently stands behind him.

The relationships in the six young Black males lives were described in many different ways, such as motivating, helpful, caring, and even sometimes as challenging or restricting. The findings reported in the succeeding sections on research themes seek to identify the influential, giving, and supporting individuals in each male student’s life.

Research Themes: Three Central Processes

Following the three research questions introduced in this case study, three processes, or research themes, developed. These three processes are (a) deciding to pursue higher education, (b) accessing higher education, and (c) persisting in higher education. During each one of these thematic stages, impactful people enabled the young Black males to go through each process. The sub-groups under each research theme are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Themes and Sub-Groups

<p><i>Theme/Process I: Deciding to Pursue Higher Education</i> The participants decided to actively chase after higher education as a result of the primary influencers that encouraged them to pursue a degree.</p>
<p>Primary Influencers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Family • Peer Networks in High School • Self
<p><i>Theme/Process II: Accessing Higher Education</i> In order to attain entrance into a four-year university, participants required the social capital provided by a variety of social networks and significant contributors in their lives, specifically those individuals found in their high schools.</p>
<p>Significant Contributors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Family • High School Teachers • High School Academic Advisors and Guidance Counselors • High School Administrators • Junior College Instructors and Peers • Self
<p><i>Theme/Process III: Persisting in Higher Education</i> Several relationships allowed the participants to continue on in their pursuit of a degree from a four-year university. The supportive individuals that enabled the participants to persist in education have helped the young men reach the prospect of graduation in the next year.</p>
<p>Supportive Individuals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Family • Peer Networks outside of College • Peer Networks inside of College • Faculty • College Administrators • Role Models

Theme/Process I: Deciding to pursue higher education. Deciding to pursue higher education is undoubtedly a choice made, or rather goal set, by an individual, but

making the commitment to pursue a postsecondary degree comes along with the considerations of anxiety, homesickness, student loan debt, and self-doubt. Above these concerns, people most often find guidance by listening to the advice of loved ones. The decision to pursue higher education was supported by parents, family members, peers in high school, and self-reflection for the six participants. Through these relationships, the students used their social capital of families and friends to actively chase after their dream of higher education.

Parents. Five out of the six participants were first-generation students. This means that neither of their parents or generations before their parents attended a college or a university. Therefore, parents were very influential in the decision-making process for the young men. Although the parents could not provide the resources the students required in the next process of accessing higher education, they were typically very supportive of their sons' decisions to pursue higher education. Jamal referred to his mother as a superhero because she imparted the value of education to him:

Mom is superwoman. I love her. For someone who only got a high school degree, I think it was amazing that she was able to raise five people . . . her number one thing was always like school, education . . . she's very wise. And, I don't know if that just comes with the title of mother, or just experience, or whatever it is. But, I picked up on that very early. So, from that standpoint, education was always, always key to me.

His mom's modeling of education as key led Jamal to believe a higher education was a wise choice for him. Similarly, Colby's father held attending college as important for his son:

When my father came home [from prison] when I was 10, I believe, I've lived with him ever since . . . growing up with him . . . it was great. He pushed me . . . it was just really good . . . from a low income family, no one's going to a major

four-year institution. . . My dad was very motivational, even though he never has gone to college before. He understood the magnitude of the scholarship that I was getting and how much of a blessing that it was because he didn't have that opportunity. And many people in Kansas City didn't have that opportunity. So for me to have that, he was just an extra motivating factor as well, because he didn't want to see this opportunity fail, or fall between the cracks, because he wanted to make sure that I took advantage of these opportunities since he wasn't able to have them himself.

Colby's dad helped him to understand why pursuing education would be beneficial, even though his dad did not have the same chance. His father was able to convince Colby that a member of their family was entirely capable of going to college when equipped with the right resources, such as the scholarship Colby received. Colby not only realized his family members did not have the same opportunities to attend higher education, but he also understood the importance of his choice to go to college for his community in Kansas City. With the assistance of his father, Colby was supported in chasing after a bachelor's degree.

Philip's relationship with his parents was strained throughout his college decision-making process, dissimilar from other participants. Instead of feeling supported by his father and mother, Philip said he was challenged on the decisions he made regarding which higher education institution to attend:

I have an identical twin brother. So we both in college at the same time . . . And I feel like it was always favoritism towards him because he went to school out of state, and I didn't. I didn't want, I did not wanna go to [his school], like I didn't wanna go there . . . I could have went there, I got scholarships from there, I just didn't want to. I didn't like the school, I didn't like the campus. There was nothing there that appealed to me to want to go there . . . I feel like my dad always, I feel like he's always gonna hang that over my head that my brother went to school out of state, and I didn't.

Philip had options when deciding about college, and he had parents that had gone to college before him. From the outside, one could assume Philip's decision about higher education was an easier one than for other students in this case study, but his father's unsupportive pressure to attend a school out-of-state complicated how Philip was able to access higher education. Therefore, Philip needed individuals outside of his home environment that could help him make his decision to attend college a reality, which is discussed in further detail through Theme/Process II.

Unlike Philip, Derek was a first-generation student, and his parents pushing him to enroll in college was troubling because after that step, they were unable to help him with other decisions about college, such as choosing his major. Although he felt very close to his mom and his dad, the distance from them when Derek left for school was very difficult for him, especially because other students did not understand that no one in his family had attended higher education:

Coming here, I guess, was kind of hard because it was just distant from school and home. When I came here, people didn't understand like, 'Oh, he's a first university student,' where they had a mom and dad who both went to college and I didn't. Then when I go home, neither of my parents went to college, so they don't have a understanding exactly where I was coming from.

Derek's inability to rely on his parents for academic assistance post-deciding to attend college necessitated connecting with other individuals that helped with the next process of accessing higher education.

Family. In the same way parents influenced their sons in choosing to pursue higher education, family members also impacted the students' decisions. Similar to most of the parents discussed in this case study, many family members did not attend college

themselves, therefore role modeling for the young men how beneficial college could have been had the family members gone. By not pursuing higher education, family members served as real life examples of individuals that could have benefited from a college degree.

Colby's unique parental situation caused him to rely on his relatives in his early years. When his mother passed away and his father was imprisoned, he first lived with his maternal grandmother and then later with one of his father's sisters. His grandmother, aunt, and other members of his family wanted to see him succeed, not only for himself, but also for them:

They kept pushing me, you know. Like I said earlier, I'm not in it for myself . . . I knew that I had so many family members that, you know, didn't even graduate high school. So, I had the opportunity to graduate and I had a opportunity to continue my education, so I didn't want to let anyone down, I didn't want to let this opportunity go in vain because I knew that there's people that probably wanted to continue but they didn't have the means to.

Colby wanted to make his family proud by choosing to pursue a college degree, and in this way, Colby's family was gratified through their young relative's academic successes. Although they did not attend higher education themselves, they are able to live vicariously through their grandson and nephew.

Rickey's father was absent from his childhood, so other father figures were vital to Rickey growing up. Rickey looked up to his mother's brothers. His uncles played a large role in his upbringing, and he referred to his uncles as the sources of his academic and career aspirations. Inspired by his uncles, Rickey wanted to have a life for himself that his uncles were unable to attain:

All of my uncles are extremely smart. They're great, critical thinkers, they have a good sense of the world and of politics, and, uh, what's going on around them. But none of them have, like, what we would consider like good jobs, you know. And, and so, looking at them, I learned that just having that knowledge and just being smart and being articulate, you know, wasn't good enough, you had to have that formal degree to along with it.

His uncles indirectly influenced his decision to attend higher education. By not receiving degrees themselves, Rickey's uncles provided a model for what Rickey wanted to become. Rickey's choice to go to college was heavily based on his family role models.

Although Derek's parents had no concept of the college experience, his older cousin did. His cousin was vital in his choices about pursuing higher education, "My cousin . . . we're like really, really close, and she actually goes [here]. I think that kind of helped me make the decision factor." Family members, whether intentionally or unintentionally, were factors that affected the students' decisions about attending college.

Peer networks in high school. Outside of the home and family, peers in high school were very influential for the young men prior to accessing higher education. The participants shared how the friends they had in high school shaped their ideas about going onto college.

Philip discussed his two very different groups of friends. Philip had friends that supported him academically, whom he aspired to keep up with in terms of school, but he also had friends that unfortunately chose criminal activities over education:

I have like two set, two types of friends. You know, like some friends do gang banging, sell drugs, and all that stuff. Other type of my, other half of friends don't do that kind of stuff. So like, my friends that didn't do that, it was like engrained in my head that I was gonna go to college. It wasn't an option. Like, after you go to high school you go to college . . . But, as far as like friends, I think we all like, once we made—graduated high school was just like, 'Yeah, we're gonna go to this school, we're gonna go this school, this school.

Philip was able to talk with his more academically minded friends about the institutions they wanted to apply to, and therefore, his friends were able to relate to him and provide encouragement in his decision to go to college. In a more indirect way, his “gang banging” friends were also supportive of his choice to pursue higher education; they modeled what Philip wanted to stay away from so that he could succeed.

Rickey’s friends from high school and childhood were very similar to the dropout friends Philip described. Rickey’s friends also influenced his decision to choose education over illegal activities:

I had some pretty good friendships in high school. But, like, I’m the only one of my friends, like that I like, out of the group of kids . . . that I grew up with, like from, you know, junior high, elementary, high school, I’m the only one of them that actually graduated high school. So I have a good relationship with them, but a lot of them weren’t in school a lot, or, you know, dropped out of school or what have you, so.

Although Rickey’s friends were a support system for him, none of them are able to share the experiences Rickey has received by becoming a college student. Rickey is thankful for his relationships with them, and he believes they helped him chose to attend college over dropping out of high school.

For Colby, the cultural environment of his high school influenced his choices about college. He was fortunate to attend an institution that expected students to go on to postsecondary education:

I went to a charter school, it was K through 12, and there was only about 1100 total, and there were only about like I think 250 people in all of high school, so all of 9 through 12. But, I was pretty much friends with everyone. Everyone liked everyone. I tell my friends here that my high school isn’t like the ones you see on TV where the popular crowd, the jocks, and all that. Everyone was popular, you know . . . there was people that was a different, but we didn’t have

the bullying and people that go picked on, and the shoving in lockers . . . everyone that graduated, everyone went to higher education of some sort . . . I believe they all went to either a four-year institution or a community college. We all did enroll into, to go in school, so we all were kind of the same mindset, even though we went down different paths in different schools . . . my friendships were good in high school.

The students in his high school were friendly with each other, and they were all focused on receiving education post-high school. The social network Colby had in his high school consisted of motivated and talented peers, leading him to go on to college after graduation.

Some peers were reassuring about the participants' choices to pursue higher education while others served as examples of what the students did not want to become. Through both of these social network systems, peers in high school were important in the college decision-making process for the young men.

Self. For one of the participants, the strongest relationship he relied on when making the decision to pursue higher education was the internal relationship he had with himself. Marvin asserted that his choice to go was one made all on his own, "Basically my decision really. I wasn't forced to go to college. Family just said do what you wanna do. I wanted to go, so." His family supported him in his decision, but ultimately Marvin made the choice by himself. His own internal relationship is what affected his pursuit of a higher degree.

Parents, family members, and peers in high school relationships were primary influencers for the participants in deciding to pursue higher education. After the students made the decision to go to college, they required help in actualizing their goals. Social capital for accessing higher education was provided by the following people.

Theme/Process II: Accessing higher education. Accessing higher education can be seemingly impossible for students today, especially those that identify as Black, male, and/or first-generation based on the low numbers of these groups actually entering higher education. As such, the relationships in a student's life that provide access into higher education can be life changing. This section explores the second thematic process that emerged from the research, which is accessing higher education. In this process, significant contributors of social capital enabled the men to access entry into college.

Parents. Parents were only a factor in accessing higher education for Philip. Both of his parents attended college, which was unlike any other participant in the study. When parents achieve higher education before their children, they are able to impart these experiences upon their children. Philip gained insight about pursuing higher education as a result of his parents' collegiate experiences:

My parents . . . that's just how it is. And like with my kids, like that's how, like, after high school, you don't get a job, you go to college, and you can work your way through college. Like that's how it was molded.

Philip's parents assisted him with making college visits and preparing for applications. His parents had insights that other parents in the study did not, showing how the social capital they offered to their son allowed him to access higher education. Similarly, Philip had other members of his family familiar with going to college, increasing the resources Philip held in initially entering higher education.

Family. Again, Philip was the only participant to have members in his family that assisted with accessing college. When reflecting back on what his transition into

Heartland University was like, Philip said the knowledge he obtained from members of his family made for a smoother transition:

Both my parents went to college and graduated from college, so, I wanted to like explore like going out a state, so [this institution] was like my last resort . . . But leading more to the question in coming here was, I mean, it was alright. To me, [this city is what you make it . . . just because it's in-state, I kinda knew what to expect already because my cousin came here, he was here already when I came here my freshman year. And like previous to that year I came down and check out the campus, when I knew UNL was gonna be one of my options to come here. So I mean as far as adjusting to campus and everything like that, it wasn't too hard.

Knowing what to expect ahead of time was a head start for Philip, and his entry into college may have been less troubling than the situations experienced by other participants. His family wielded social capital valuable in accessing higher education.

High school teachers. For the young men without parents or family members with information and resources necessary for accessing higher education, high school teachers were the most significant contributors in gaining admission into college. The participants had fond memories of many of their high school teachers. The teachers held high academic expectations for the students, which caused them to work hard for good grades, moving them closer to their goal of entering the realm of higher education.

The participants in the study were all gifted students, evidenced by their 2.7 or higher GPAs (see Table 1). Although each participant had high academic ability, teachers fostered their skills, allowing them to have successes in high school, inevitably paving the entry way into college. Jamal recalled how influential his English teacher was because she showed compassion for her scholars:

For the longest, school's always just been something that I was just good at . . . I mean, every class had some good and some bad to some extent . . . English class,

just because I love words . . . My junior year English teacher, she's probably one of my most favorite teachers I've ever had. First day of class junior year, she said I'm not here for you guys, I'm here for the books. I was like oh, I'm not gonna like this lady at all. But I did, because she lied to us; she really did care about her students. I think after that, me and her really, we built a friendship. Ms. Daley had to be 55, 60 years old, and my senior year, I didn't have her for English, but I would always be in her room before school started and we'd talk about politics, we'd talk about books. We'd argue or we'd agree on certain things.

Ms. Daley not only provided challenges for Jamal in the classroom, but she also discussed important topics with Jamal, such as politics. Jamal's critical thinking skills were strengthened through his relationship with Ms. Daley, thus influencing his ability to access higher education.

Jamal also shared that his relationships with most teachers in his high school were positive, suggesting that students must form good connections with teachers in order to do well academically and be accepted into college:

I think every teacher I ever had, there was some connection, to some extent. It wasn't simply Jamal showed up to class, Jamal left class, Jamal turned in an assignment, Jamal didn't turn in an assignment. They all knew me, and it wasn't just because I was on their class roster. They knew their expectations, they knew I would give more than probably most. So, I would say every teacher to some extent, they could point out my face. They knew my name, they probably talked about me with some other teachers, I don't know, maybe that's just my hope. So, for the most part, I think I was good with every teacher I ever had, but there are the select few, through the annals of time, I remember who they were.

Jamal's insight reveals how his academic ability was fostered through having encouraging relationships with his teachers. His instructors saw his academic ability, respected him for his scholastic skills, and maintained high expectations for him. With this attention to his academics, Jamal was able to succeed and therefore enter college.

Philip's teachers similarly mentored him about going to college. The instructors created opportunities for the students to have extracurricular involvement:

There was like some other teachers that had like a impact. We started like this organization in high school, it's like AALA, African American Leadership Association, or something like that. We started this organization in high school, and [a teacher was] one of the facilitators . . . we took trips to Kansas City, to go to museums and things like that, and I think that program lasted two, it was for my junior year . . . went to my senior year.

By investing in students such as Philip, the teachers associated with the AALA organization showed Philip opportunities available to him through education. By advising him in this way, Philip was equipped with the motivation necessary to succeed in his college application process.

Rickey shared one of the most notable student-teacher relationships. His White, female teacher paid great attention to him, and she allowed him to explore a prominent individual that later became one of his biggest inspirations:

There was one teacher at Eastern High, I think her name was Melanie Smith, um, I had her for like Composition, or something. And we were coming up with research topics, and she told me that I should really look into researching Malcolm X. And, you know just from, you know, growing up in the type a school setting that I was, I was kinda taught that Malcolm X was just as racist as the white people were, you know, at the time of the '60s . . . that he wasn't really nobody to admire or look to get inspiration from. And I had shared that with her. And she was a White lady of course, and she told me that no, that was not the, that wasn't the case at all and encouraged me to get his book and to read it. And, uh, once I did that, that kinda gave me a racial identity that I really never had. And, uh, just kinda opened, opened up a lot a different doors. And, you know, kinda made me want to, uh . . . achieve my potential. And so I think that that was one of the biggest, one of the biggest turning points, I think.

Helping Rickey to develop a sense of his “racial identity” in his scholastic environment opened up his perspective to creating academic goals for himself. His teacher Ms. Smith changed his life immensely, and as a result of her guidance, Rickey was able to access higher education as a first-generation student.

Even for the participants that exuded high levels of self-confidence, such as Jamal, forming relationships with teachers gave the students the information they then utilized to gain entry into college. In the words of Jamal:

I guess I've never been one to really attribute success or not success to one person or group of people. Um, at least not in terms of my life. Even though I clearly know it wasn't just me alone. But I'm, I'm a very self-driven, self-determined, self-understood person. I'm not gonna say they helped me get to college as much as they helped me understand some things. Um, and, I think a lot of that just came with time and growth as a person, as a student. As a friend with certain teachers.

Befriending his instructors allowed Jamal to further develop as a student and person, which aided in his transition into the ranks of higher education.

Teachers were, without question, some of the most influential supporters when these young men were accessing higher education. Their knowledge was shared with the students, thus preparing the students to continue their learning post-high school.

High school academic advisors and guidance counselors. The high school academic advisors and guidance counselors whom supplemented what the students were learning in their classrooms also contributed to the social capital of the young men. Marvin explained his relationship to his guidance counselor, "Yeah, I saw her a couple times a year. And she gave me like lot a good advice. She told me about the University, so." Advising Marvin on the steps he needed to take in order to gain entry into Heartland University aided in his success.

Colby and Derek, two best friends from Kansas City, Missouri, both participated in the Kauffman Scholars Program (KSP). The program spans from a student's seventh grade year up until their graduation from college, and the mission of the program is to

help urban students prepare for and complete higher education (Kauffman Scholars, 2013, para. 1). Offering scholarships to KSP participants, the program undoubtedly equips participants with the proper tools for a college education. Colby shared that his advisors within the KSP were some of the most impactful relationships for him while accessing college admission:

I'd build relationships with them because we have what's called an academic coach. So, they were the ones that watched our grades and everything, and if they were slipping, then they would find tutors for us and things like that. Then, I also had a life coach, so this was a person that I could talk to just about anything personal, you know, that I mean I'd a felt uncomfortable talking to my dad or a family member about . . . so, I had all those people in my corner, too, so I could go and talk to about school and classes and different things like that.

Having both academic and life coaches with whom Colby could speak with was important for him because he described himself as an average student. Without their support, Colby may not have fully realized his potential and accessed higher education. Derek similarly praised his advisors in the program for showing him what college would be like, "I had a college tour here, my senior year. And I really liked the campus a lot. So, that was like the biggest reason why I came here." Visiting a large, public, four-year university in a different state was a vital moment for Derek as a first-generation student. The KSP advisors allowed for Derek to have opportunities that would have been difficult to experience without the program.

Guidance counselors and academic advisors during high school were crucial for the participants because five out of six of them identified as first-generation students. The guidance counselors and academic advisors through their schools or a scholarship

program such as KSP were necessary in obtaining information on the college application process.

High school administrators. The final group of significant individuals in the high school environments for the students was their administrators. As outstanding students, many of them formed connections with their principals or other administrators in their high schools.

Jamal formed a bond with one of his high school vice principals during his years in middle school. The administrator formed a good relationship with Jamal and a group of his friends, and the vice principal tracked the progress of the students when she moved from middle school to a high school level administrative position, “She was a real down to earth lady. She would keep it real with you, no matter what. But she, you could tell that she was also very endearing because she cared.” Jamal said having another adult mentor to speak with besides his teachers was incredibly comforting for him.

Philip formed a strong bond with his principal because his parents knew her. He claimed the principal would frequently check up on him, but for good reason:

I never got in trouble in high school or anything like that, so wasn't like bad trouble, was more like, ‘Hey, how you doing, what do you think about this?’ And, ‘I’m thinking about doing this in college, or the police program in school.’ Like just running ideas by her, things like that.

Philip discussed college options with his principal, and she served as an excellent role model for him when he was applying to schools. Her assistance aided him through the process of accessing college.

The administrators of Rickey’s school included him in opportunities not extended to other students, which he said made him feel a sense of importance:

By the time I had went to Eastern [High School], I think I was like in 11th or 12th grade, and so I was a pretty good student as far as like not being, like, a juvenile delinquent or whatever like that. And so my relationship with the [administrators] . . . you know, of course I went to Eastern, so I kinda stuck out like a sore thumb. And so my, uh, relationship with the administrators was pretty good. I remember they were hiring a new administrator or whatever, and so they put together a group of us students and parents, to be on the interview board, and I was one of the students that they chose.

This meaningful experience for Rickey showed the investment the administrators were placing on his educational career path, and their individual attention propelled him into postsecondary education.

Junior college instructors and peers. One of the students had an additional postsecondary perspective because he matriculated into a junior college after high school before transferring to Heartland University. A junior college, which is also referred to as an associate's or community college, is known as a postsecondary institution that will "offer associate's degree and certificate programs but, with few exceptions, award no baccalaureate degrees" ("Carnegie Classification, 2000, p. 101). The junior college provided Rickey with further preparation for a four-year university baccalaureate program. Rickey explained his junior college experience as the following:

My experience, uh, in the junior college, was a little bit more, uh, I don't know if I want to say like culturally comfortable is the right word, but it was just a little bit more comfortable setting because the people, a lot of the people in the junior college were first time, uh, were first university and college students as well as myself. Uh, we had a lot of non-traditional students. Um, and it seemed like that that college was kinda geared more for that type of a person. And so, it was a little bit . . . more of a familiar setting for me, at the junior college.

The sense of familiarity Rickey shared with the instructors and peers of his junior college prepared him for entering a four-year university. Although Heartland University was an unfamiliar setting at first, Rickey was able to adjust because of the confidence he

developed as a result of his connections with members of his junior college community. Enrolling at courses at a community college prior to transitioning into a four-year university can be critical for first-generation students such as Rickey because some students require the extra support of junior college level administrators and peers in order to access a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution.

From their testimonies, the adults in their scholastic environments, such as teachers, administrators, advisors, counselors, and junior college instructors, left a definite impression upon the students. The participants were ultimately able to access higher education as a result of what their instructors, principals, or other academic administrators in high school or junior college bestowed upon them. The social capital provided through relationships with school personnel, particularly teachers, prior to higher education is essential for young Black males seeking a college degree.

Theme/Process III: Persisting in higher education. The relationships discussed thus far helped the students decide to pursue higher education and actualize their goal by accessing college. As the young men shared, arguably the most substantial relationships in their lives were the ones that have sustained them through their years of college up until the present. With graduation on the horizon for the participants in this study, their families, friends, college community members, or other relationships carried them through the academic and personal hardships faced during higher education.

Parents. Similar to the initial decision-making process the students endured, parental support was key to persisting in higher education. Colby lovingly talked about his father:

My dad is my biggest role model because he showed me what it is that I didn't want do. I don't think role models always necessarily have to be positive, I tell him this as well. I'm glad that you did the things that you did, because it shows me, it showed me what I shouldn't do, and, and what I shouldn't be like. Not saying that he's a bad person, he's a great guy, you know, but we just all have our characteristics, or our flaws, you know, that kind of throw us off track . . . it showed me that I'm not going to go down the same path as he did. So he is an amazing role model, and I truly respect him now for being such a motivational push for me to continue on my education. And even though he can't really relate to what I going and what's going on in my life, he's a great learner, and he's willing to learn and understand what it is that I'm going through as a college student.

Although Colby's father has never known what college is like, he nurtured Colby's academic aspirations. At first serving as a model of what not to become, Colby respected his father for all that his dad had done for him, especially for being a single parent and the largest source of inspiration in his life.

Marvin similarly explained the amount of respect he has for his mother and father. He said his mother was his greatest form of advice whenever he needed help with anything while his father taught him how to work hard and have good ethics. He joked that although he has not always listened to what his parents tell him, he held a deep appreciation for their role in his life.

As Derek prepared for graduate school in the years to follow, he believed his parents had been his strongest advocates. Derek claimed:

I have a lot a support, I have a lot a support. Like my mom, she asked me what schools have I been considering [for graduate school], and I told her University of California, Berkeley and she's like 'whoa, that'll give me and your dad a new place to visit' and things like that. Just little stuff like that.

The special moments Derek shared with his mother and father revealed how a loving relationship can propel a student closer to their aspirations, which for Derek was proceeding onto graduate school.

Only one participant expressed trouble with his parents throughout his college career. As Philip recalled:

I feel like my parents could have been a little bit more supportive of me going to college, especially knowing like my background, like the area that I come from. Like a lot of Black men don't, don't go to college, and like I'm Black, I don't have any kids or anything like that. Like people my age have at least two or three kids, like a lot of my friends have kids. And so, I feel like, more or less with them, it's just like this is what you're supposed to do, so you don't need reassurance for it. And like to get reassurance from them would have been like pretty cool.

Despite lacking reassurance, Philip did well academically, which placed him only one year away from graduation at the time of this study. Philip's tense relationship with his parents was supplanted by other familial relationships. Similarly, the other participants also found that their family members provided constant support.

Family. From serving as a role model to other family members to receiving the financial and emotional support of siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, spouses, and children, the young men of the research were forever grateful for the familial support networks in their lives. Jamal spoke on his role as a mentor for his younger cousin:

She's at least a solid five years younger than me . . . but I, as she got older, I think she understood, I guess, my approach as to why I went and did things. Then I find out last year, that for one of her English classes, she wrote an essay on me. On people who inspired her, or things like that. See, I never would have thought that would have happened . . . we had gotten closer, but I'm not used to people writing on me. So, I think that, that really changed a lot . . . it changed in terms of growth between me and her.

Being viewed in a role model light by his younger cousin was surprising for Jamal, but at the same time humbling. Serving as her guide to college, Jamal realized how monumental being the first to go to college was for his family. This epiphany led Jamal to work harder towards his goal of finishing in the next year.

Similarly for Colby, he was a source of inspiration for his older sister:

She was always the person I looked up to . . . but now recently, she's been looking up to me . . . she started college, she unfortunately, well not unfortunately, because I love my niece, but she got pregnant . . . she ended up getting pregnant, so she dropped out, and she came home . . . she's unfortunately, not doing anything . . . right now . . . the incentive, my drive for success and everything now, and just kind of motivates her, even though I am her little brother, it's motivating for her to want to go back to school and everything like that . . . that makes me feel good, because you know growing up, I looked up to her.

A turning point in Colby and his sister's relationship was when Colby had reached a higher level of education than her. As such, Colby's sister looked up to him, even as one of Colby's older siblings. However, Colby attributed his motivation to the admiration his sister has for him, which displayed how his relationship with his older sister allowed him to be retained and succeed in higher education.

Philip's love for his grandmother was one of the most important relationships in his life. He was able to succeed as a result of his grandmother's unwavering support:

My grandma, she really supportive though, so she helps out whenever she can . . . My grandma, I love her to death like. That's my only living . . . grandparent left . . . My grandma . . . she's very supportive. She always, my grandma hates crowds. She hated seeing us get hit in football, but she would still come watch the game, even though it was cold outside, she would leave at halftime, but like she would make a effort to come. And so like I was really happy. Just like even though you can't see them sitting in the stands sometimes, just a good feeling the knowing that they there to watch you, you know . . . Like if I, I had anything, I would call

right now, like, and whatever I need, she'll do to her best ability like to accommodate me.

Philip's literal explanation of his grandmother attending all of his football games in high school despite how she felt about the weather or about the violence associated with the game created a metaphor for how his grandmother supported him through college.

Although his grandmother never received a higher education, she was constantly present in his life because he always felt her support, even if he did not see her daily. This example shows how critical family can be in higher education persistence for Black males.

Rickey was the only participant that discussed a relationship with a significant other, his wife. Rickey and his wife and young children shared in his higher educational experience, "I'm married. I have a wife. And she's really, really, really, really, really supportive. [Our children] are just motivators. Just really good motivators. They bring out the best in you because you want the best for them." In the same way Colby felt inspired to do well for the sake of his sister, Rickey wanted to succeed for his spouse and young children.

Colby most poignantly expressed why his persistence in higher education was important for his family. Family supported the young men in this study, which highlighted how social capital through familial networks leads to college retention and success for young males:

I hate being a disappointment to people. And even if they wouldn't say that they were disappointed in me, I would feel that they would be disappointed in me if I were to screw up somehow and lose this opportunity, or not finish what I've started. So, yeah, not in it for myself, I, I'm there to make it for them, too . . . it just makes me feel good when I'm on Facebook all the time, and I'm like

updating what I'm doing and cousins who I haven't talked to in a while, they've been watching my Facebook and they see what I'm doing . . . and then they go, "You know, I'm so proud of you" . . . they're watching me, and to see that they are proud of my efforts and everything, that just makes me feel really good.

Peer networks outside of college. Peer networks outside of college typically consisted of friends that had not gone onto higher education. In the same way these individuals influenced the participants to decide to pursue higher education in Theme/Process I, the peers not in college were also motivators for the students to stay in college.

Jamal explained how highly friends from his community thought of him, simply because Jamal was one of the only people they knew to go onto higher education:

I'll never forget, I think it was my freshman or sophomore year of college, I ran into an old friend and he said, 'Yeah, you're like the Barack Obama of [our city]. And I was like, 'Nah, homey.' Like I don't, I don't think it's anything like that at all. But for the people that hold you in such, such a high regard, just because they have those high expectations of you, and, maybe they didn't necessarily trust themselves to do something. But to be able, for them to watch me, and, I guess for that to kind of inspire them to do more . . . the words that they say . . . and at times, it's stressful to know that people put that weight on you. But, at the same time, it's is very pleasing to know that those words are really out of admiration and support of you.

Garnering the adoration of his peers not enrolled in college pushed Jamal to work harder. Although his friends could not help him with college advice, they were still able to support him by looking up to him.

Philip's peers outside of college allowed him to reevaluate the importance of his pending college degree and understand the financial worth he stands to gain as a result of attaining higher education:

My other half of friends, like 'Oh, I got a job, working, do this,' whatever. Have this much money and this, that, other thing. Man, it's like you can check on

those friends once in a while, but you don't wanna get distracted, because yeah, they are making money, don't get me wrong, like they make money, but it's like, okay, you make a K here, and you gonna max out at probably 40, because you don't have a college education . . . so, like, it's worth it going to school and getting a higher education.

Philip's critical view of his friends that did not choose to attend college shows how these peers caused Philip to continue on with his education. He thought the value of his higher education was too important to give up, which was affirmed by seeing his friends struggling to earn minimum wage without high school diplomas.

Colby and Rickey also spoke on how their peers' failure led to their drive to succeed in college. Colby said:

I have a lot of friends that fell through the cracks, you know. And, it hurts. It honestly it hurts a little bit because I never try to make it seem like I'm better than them . . . I was just afforded an opportunity and I took advantage of.

The negative feelings Colby felt from friends from home inadvertently forced him to do well in his academics because he was pressured to prove himself. Rickey echoed:

None of them are in college. Many of them didn't graduate high school. So, as far as support not much. But it's not like negative either . . . it's not like they're not, they don't support me, but it is something that they haven't had experience with.

Rickey's friends were unable to provide assistance to him in college matters, but he was still optimistic about the support they showed him. Overall, because peers outside of college were unfamiliar with the collegiate experience, these individuals helped the young men through serving as examples of what the participants hoped not to become.

Peer networks inside of college. On the opposite side of spectrum of friendship support experienced by the participants, peer networks inside of college were much more visibly helpful than the peer networks from home. Jamal was a fraternity brother of one

of Heartland University's multicultural Greek organization, which connected him to minority members within the larger campus community:

My fraternity specifically, I love it. And, they'll, they'll ask all the time, 'Are you happy with your decision?' I'm more than happy. You know, there was never a doubt in my mind. My fraternity's motto is 'Friendship is essential to the soul.' So, there's something in that. There's something embedded in, into the relationships that you, you can build with people, the bonds that you create with people that are lasting . . . that's the definition, that's the importance of a lot of the things that we value in life.

Jamal continued on to explain the late night conversations with his brothers were some of his most memorable experiences in college. Sharing conversation was vital for Jamal as dialoguing with a friend provided him with a strong sense of respect and support. His fraternity brothers' display of concern and willingness to offer a helping hand to Jamal throughout his college career enabled him to stay focused on his studies and graduation goal.

Philip's best friend was more like a sister to him than a friend,

My best friend, I'm really close to her though . . . we're best friends . . . she goes here . . . we actually live together now . . . she supports my madness. And my expensive taste and everything else.

Keeping a close friend has again allowed Philip to triumph over the awkwardness he perceived from his parents, and his best friend was there for him every day without question. Colby also resonated with Philip's sentiment on how important best friends are:

We all support each other, and we bounce off each other. I love it because, that's what I love about college. Everyone is here for a common goal, everyone's here to get that degree, you know. Some people are here to have fun and party and all that stuff, but ultimately everyone's here to get their education and their degree . . . so, I do have their support because we all want to graduate together, too . . . the friendships that I made here, I know they are going to last for a lifetime.

Sharing a common goal and higher purpose for their lives enabled Colby and his close group of friends to continue to strive towards the attainment of their degree. Marvin reflected on how invaluable friends have been during his time at Heartland University, “It’s been great. I met a lot of good people. Definitely gonna miss them after I’m done. Hopefully I’ll be like keeping in contact with a lot of people.”

Rickey, the only non-traditional and married participant of the group, had different emotions about the people he shared his college experience with. In regard to his peer networks in college:

I kinda just, like, come here and get my job done and go home. I mean, like I have people that I’ve had past classes with and I see them and we’ll talk and be friendly with each other . . . But, like I said, like as you get closer and closer to graduation and you’re in those classes that pertain to your major, you start to see the same faces over and over again, you know, from different classes. And that’s been the case with me. So, yeah, I got some pretty good acquaintances. But like nobody I’m, oh, yeah, you know, friend, you know like that.

Rickey’s connections to peers within the campus community were on the surface rather than deep like the other students in the study. Above this, having familiar faces in the classroom comforted Rickey. Peer networks in college added to the academic drive the young men experienced as a result of their social networks.

Faculty. Faculty members seemed to be the least important relationships for the participants as only one student brought up an influential connection with a professor.

Derek attributed his desire to persist because of a faculty member:

I’m very close with Dr. Miranda Johnson. She’s a professor in the College of Business. And we communicate all of the time. And so, like, just professionals in general, I would say, are really impactful in life, simply because I learn new things about the college campus, or things that I should consider in terms of my future endeavors.

Dr. Johnson impacted Derek's decision to go on to graduate school after he graduates, and this reveals how impactful she was on his willingness to attain a degree. Faculty members could potentially serve as a greater source of social capital in relation to college persistence, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

College administrators. Administrators in the University were highly significant in the retention and success of the young males. Administrators served as counselors, mentors, and even employers for the students in this study.

Two prominent figures for the students were the Director of the Multicultural Center and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, whom are both minority males that are highly visible campus leaders. Philip explained how the Director of the Multicultural Center and his academic advisors always kept his best academic and personal interests in mind:

My mentor, scholastic advisors, here on campus, like my scholarship advisor, and Darrell Bayer, the head of the Multicultural Center, they be on check, they be, like, checking on me to make sure I'm doing good, if I need anything . . . it feels good when people check up on you, you know . . . because I do a lot on campus. Like, I do a lot of work on campus. But I'm not always like, 'Oh, I did that, I need a pat on the back.' I don't care, I know I did it, so that's all I really need. But, you know, it never hurts for somebody that comes be like, 'Oh yeah, you know, you did a good job with that.' Like, that's pretty cool sometimes to get that reassurance.

Through involvement, Philip has been connected to people like Mr. Bayer. Bayer has been a mentor and role model for Philip, which provided Philip with the motivation to be educated and obtain a successful career like Mr. Bayer.

Colby also praised Mr. Bayer for all that he has done for him:

He is my mentor . . . because I want to go into higher education student affairs, eventually . . . so, I talk to him quite a bit, and he's been really good with connecting me with people in student affairs, so I can kind of get the insight on it. And, he's just a role model because, he kind of comes from a situation similar to mine, you know. He wasn't the best in school and everything like that, and I wasn't the best. And our backgrounds are similar . . . he's just someone that I can look up to, because it's really good to see that someone that came from a similar situation that I was in can be so successful, as he is now.

In Mr. Bayer, Colby found a role model that overcame a hard situation, similar to Colby's own struggle with a deceased mother and imprisoned father. Seeing someone from the same situation tackle obstacles and succeed is incredibly reaffirming when chasing after one's own goals, and Mr. Bayer has caused Colby to persevere.

The Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs was another administrator of color that inspired students to carry on. Colby shared when faced with a crisis of which major to study, Dr. Marco Carreno was there for him every step of the way while he was trying to figure out what to do with his life. Advice on academic majors offered by college administrators was extremely helpful for the students because many of them were first-generation status and did not receive support in this area from parents or family members. Marvin's academic advisor from the English department was described as "cool . . . [she] helped me out, especially, for like advising which college courses and just like regular advice, life advice." College guides such as academic advisors and staff members of the collegiate community contribute to the willingness to persist, demonstrated by the young Black males interviewed.

Rickey was also unique in the group because of his involvement in a TRIO program. During his first few months at the University, Rickey met administrators that positively impacted the rest of his college career:

I'd say the biggest thing that helped me along with that was the TRIO programs. That's been a great support system for me . . . I didn't know the TRIO programs existed . . . I was up in the Office of Career Services, I think like, talking to somebody about the career fair or something. She thought that I should be introduced to Dr. Thomas Hampshire. And, he's an African American male that heads Career Services. And so me and him, you know, talked . . . I told him a little bit about myself, and then he told me about the TRIO program. 'Cause I had actually, I had told him that I was having trouble in one of my, math classes, and, uh, I was going down to [the math department] to get tutoring. But, like, you could sit down at [the math department] for like 30 or 40 minutes and have one person, you know, come help you on one problem, which is totally different from when I was at Student Support Services and I was like in their little tutoring group or whatever . . . it wasn't as busy, and, you know.

From the Director of Career Services' recommendation, Rickey was able to receive the academic help he needed. However, what he did not anticipate was the prospect of a job in the Office of Student Support Services. After meeting with the director of the office, Rickey was not only placed in a TRIO program, but also offered an employment opportunity. Coordinating events for the office was a pleasure for Rickey, allowing him means to get involved while receiving assistance with school, "I'm not sure exactly how my college experience would have quite been without [the people in TRIO], if I wouldn't have found that [network]."

Administrators from the entry to upper level of Heartland University touched the lives of these participants, which explains how college administrators' relationships with their students can provide social capital essential to college persistence.

Role models. The final group of individuals identified as a source of inspiration for the young males, enabling them with the will to persist in higher education, was role models the students have never met. Although the role models were more ambiguous

figures present in the participants' lives, they served as motivators in the academic persistence process for the participants.

The students commonly held Malcom X, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela as members of the Black community that were very inspirational in their lives.

Rickey discussed:

To this day, you know, I still read Malcolm X's literature and, you know, always think that if he could a grew up in the type of world that I'm growing up now, you know what he could have been. And, uh, having thoughts like that, you know, just really gives me, like, a sense of responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities that I have because of people like Malcolm X and everybody else back in that time era.

Viewing the tribulations Malcolm X had to bear in his lifetime pushed Rickey to become all that he can be in memory of important figures such as his late hero.

More recently, President Barack Obama has empowered young Black males across the country. As Colby spoke for his generation:

I'm determined to meet them, Barack Obama and Michele Obama, in these next 4 years, while they're still in the presidency, I'm going to meet them. I make this joke, I say, 'If I meet Barack Obama, Michele Obama and Oprah all today, I could, I might die tomorrow and be happy.'

The hope of someday meeting his role model was a driving force for Colby even though he has never had the opportunity to personally connect with the President or the First Lady.

Finally, religion was powerful in the persistence of the students. Marvin shared how his love of God kept him optimistic, especially during hard times:

Well, definitely 'cause last year, took last semester off, 'cause a money. He's definitely been there a lot. Especially like last first week, like this past January, I waited until like Friday to sign up for classes 'cause I had no money, but . . . showed up, and people like helped me out. So that, he's amazing. Definitely.

Famous role models and religion were sources of inspiration for the young Black males, providing them with enthusiasm and hope about their educational goals, inevitably leading to their persistence in higher education.

Conclusion

The three themes that emerged in the analysis of the data illustrate how the relationships in a person's life are essential in making the decision to pursue, accessing entry into, and succeeding in higher education. From the interviews with six young, Black male students in the junior and senior levels of Heartland University, data seeking to answer the research questions has been provided. Chapter 5 connects the research presented to the literature reviewed and makes recommendations for future research and best practices based on the implications of this bounded case study on social capital and higher education access and persistence for Black males.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

The final chapter of this study focuses on a discussion of the three thematic processes while connecting the findings to the literature presented in Chapter 2. The research conducted used a qualitative, semi-structured interview protocol to identify the relationships that provided social capital for six young, Black college students, allowing them to access and persist in higher education at a four-year PWI located in the Midwest region of the United States.

Research in this area is necessary to explore the avenues by which some Black males succeed in both education and society. As discussed in Chapter 2, young Black men have been referred to as “an endangered species” (Johnson et al., 2000). The Black male race is arguably disappearing from college and university campuses as a result of terrible middle school and high school graduation rates, high levels of criminal activity and imprisonment, and lack of adult role modeling and absent fathers (Barrett et al., 2010; Brown, 2012; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; DeBell, 2008; Hossler et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Maylor, 2009; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Parker & Maggard, 2009; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Schott Foundation, 2008; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; Wildeman, 2010). The obstacles and stereotypes many young Black men are faced with in their pursuit of higher education are seemingly insurmountable based on the crime, death, and dropout statistics frequenting headlines and scholarly literature alike, but this research seeks to provide an alternative

perspective through the findings of the case study and connections to other literature on social capital's impact on Black male college students.

Summary of Findings

The guiding research questions of the case study aimed to ascertain the vital relationships in the young Black males' lives that enabled them to access and persist in higher education. Using a framework of social capital, or the social networks a person is connected with, the following questions were posed:

- Who are the primary influencers in Black male students' lives that affect their decision to pursue higher education?
- Who are the significant contributors to the social capital Black male students use to access higher education?
- Who are the supportive individuals that enable Black male students to persist in higher education?

At the start of the research, I expected to find out about the characteristics relationships helped the students to develop, thus assisting them in accessing and persisting in higher education. However, the semi-structured qualitative interviews with the six participants went in-depth into the important people in each person's life, causing relationships rather than characteristics to become the focal point of the case study. The findings of the case study presented in Chapter 4 were organized into three central thematic processes that students experienced in their pursuit of a college degree. Under each theme, sub-groups were discussed to show the powerful players in each step of the college-going process for the young men. Understanding the essential relationships for a group of Black male

college students at Heartland University provides implications on how meaningful relationships and the social capital a person's connections wield have the potential to set a student up for success in reaching higher educational goals. The main points covered within this chapter include:

1. How the themes and sub-groups under each process respond to the research questions and current literature on social capital and Black males.
2. Implications from the study for future practice at Heartland University and potentially at other higher education institutions looking to improve the accession and retention rates of Black male students at their institutions.
3. Recommendations on how relationships can be established and/or strengthened in order to promote higher social capital for young Black males in regards to accessing and persisting in higher education.

Summary of Themes and Links to Literature

Three central processes emerged from the research, identifying three themes in the case study on social capital and higher education access and persistence. The students in the study moved through three thematic processes with the guidance and support of sub-groups of individuals in their lives. These three processes were deciding to pursue higher education, accessing higher education, and persisting in higher education. Each of the three themes involved relationships that assisted the young men in the processes indicated. The sub-groups of relationships were parents, family members, high school peers, high school teachers, high school administrators, high school academic advisors and guidance counselors, junior college instructors and peers, peers in college,

peers outside of college, college faculty, college administrators, role models, and relationships with oneself. The following major summary points were identified from the findings:

- Parental and familial relationships were critical for the participants when making the decision to pursue higher education.
- Relationships with teachers were highly important for the participants while accessing higher education, especially for the first-generation college students.
- Friendships were both directly and indirectly supportive for the participants while in higher education. Peers within college shared experiences and offered advice while peers outside of college provided motivation to persist in school.
- College administrators had a profound impact upon the participants, while faculty members were less influential.
- Relationships had a role in deciding to pursue higher education, gaining access into college, and continuing in higher education for the participants of the case study.

Deciding to pursue higher education. The first research question inquired who the primary influencers were in the college-going decision-making process for the Black male students. The research conducted suggested the support of parents and family members is critical in this process. However, Harper and Griffin (2011) claimed Black male undergraduate students struggled in actually navigating higher education when parents lacked information and college experience. Similarly, although parental support

was apparent for the students when deciding on going to college, parental involvement did not extend past basic encouragement. For Derek, neither of his parents were able to understand what he was going through when applying to and studying in college. Parent and family members can serve as some of the most influential cheerleaders of young Black men, but without proper information, their support may fall short, especially for first-generation students.

Lack of adult role modeling and absent fathers is an apparent issue for Black children growing up today (Barrett et al., 2010; Brown, 2012; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; DeBell, 2008, Maylor, 2009; Parker & Maggard, 2009; Roettger and Swisher, 2011; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; Wildeman, 2010), but Richardson (2009) explained how uncles can be highly powerful for a Black male. This correlated to Rickey's relationships with his uncles, whom he described as the largest sources of inspiration in his life. Parental and familial relationships were critical for the participants when making the decision to pursue a college degree, responding to the first research question. However, the students required networks within their high schools to actualize their higher educational goals.

Accessing higher education. The second research question discerned who the significant contributors of social capital were for the Black male students in accessing higher education. The case study found relationships with teachers were highly important for the students while accessing higher education. Research by Oseguera et al. (2011) concluded interactions with teachers contributed to social capital for students of different racial groups of students, particularly minority individuals. Each participant

spoke on the experiences they had with their teachers in high school, and their stories revealed that because teachers held high expectations for them, the students were pushed to succeed in their high schools. As a result of good grades and graduation from high school, the young Black men were able to access higher education.

Strayhorn (2010) found in his study that college preparatory programs and parental involvement in education helped raise the GPAs of African American men from eighth grade through college. Colby and Derek were both supported through a college preparatory program in which academic and life coaches gave them the resources and tools they needed to access higher education. For Philip, the only participant in the case study with parents who attended college, his parents' involvement in his application process was beneficial to him, even though he grew distant from his parents while in college. College preparatory programs could be an asset for first-generation students lacking college knowledgeable parents or family members.

Persisting in higher education. The final research question asked who were the supportive individuals that enabled the Black male students to persist in higher education. Parents, family members, and role models were all mentioned as highly encouraging individuals, but the interesting discoveries were the contrasting relationships between friends in college and friends outside of college and between college administrators and college faculty members. Friendships within the campus community were directly supportive for the young Black men because friends at school shared goals and interests as well as advice and comfort. Jamal said his fraternity brothers taught him the invaluable lesson that “friendship is essential to the soul.” The influence of his

friendships at college sustained his educational prowess. Harper (2008) examined the student involvement of 32 Black, male college students and discovered connections to peers provided social capital that retained his participants in college. Dissimilarly, friends outside of college from the students' hometown communities were a motivating force because they served as examples of what the young men did not want to become. As Philip explained, his drug selling and gang banging buddies contributed to his decision to go to college and succeed while in higher education. This would be an interesting relationship dynamic to study in the future since none of the literature reviewed explored this unique motivation for Black men.

Another interesting comparison between relationships for the participants was between the college administrators who had a profound impact on the participants and the faculty members who went almost entirely unmentioned in the interviews. Derek explained how a professor in the College of Business Administration encouraged him to look into graduate study, which he planned to pursue after completing his undergraduate degree. However, in the six student interviews, Derek was the only participant to shed light on a meaningful professorial relationship. Administrators were discussed at length by the case study students, suggesting this group of individuals were more influential in the retention of the participants. Once in college, the relationships formed with faculty members are seen as vital to Black male student success. Palmer and Gasman's (2008) research studied 11 African American men at a HBCU and found professors provided strong social capital for the participants. As a result, the faculty members were critical to fostering student success. Heartland University is a PWI, and the diversity among the

faculty is more limited than at a HBCU. The students formed relationships with administrators of color. Promoting the hiring and retention of faculty of color in order to retain Black students would be beneficial for the PWI.

The three processes identified from the research have been connected to the research questions and the relevant literature presented at the beginning of this work. In the succeeding sections, implications of this research for future practice at Heartland University will be given as well as room for future research in the field of higher education student affairs.

Implications of the Current Study for Future Practice

Implications of this case study on the social capital for Black, male college students at Heartland University when deciding on, accessing, and persisting in higher education include the following:

1. Key individuals within the Heartland University community were college administrators and peer networks at the University. More efforts to connect Black male students with administrators should be considered. Pairing minority college students with administrators of color could allow for a successful mentorship program between the two groups. Black male students require emotional support, knowledge about the institution, and encouragement and role modeling in order to access and persist in higher education. The overarching conclusion from this research asserts that relationships are essential to the educational success of young Black males. Peer networks can be strengthened through providing more opportunities for

student involvement. Student organizations allow students to form bonds with peers with similar interests. By presenting more opportunities to build relationships with administrators and peers, more Black male students at Heartland may be inspired to persist.

2. All participants pointed to the significance of their educators prior to college. The University should consider how relationships are being constructed with K-12 schools in the surrounding areas to help facilitate the educational pursuits and accomplishments of young Black men. Teachers, guidance counselors, and high school administrators are vital to accessing college, and teacher-student relationships must continue to be strengthened. Instructors in high school and earlier in life are capable of equipping a student with the tools they need to access and succeed in college, and as such, the University should work with these educators to equip them with information on the college-going process. Understanding this crucial relationship and fostering the networks of teachers and their students within the elementary, middle, and secondary school levels is necessary to helping a young Black male realize his potential.
3. Faculty members must develop stronger relationships with their students outside of the classroom. Heartland University should brainstorm strategies to promote faculty-student engagement. Holding extra office hours, out of classroom activities, or other forms of face-to-face interaction outside of class time has the ability to strengthen faculty-student relationships. Incentives

could be offered to the faculty members who choose to spend more time working with their students. Faculty members have the ability to be incredibly influential in an underrepresented student's collegiate experience, and Heartland University should be aware and support these important relationships.

4. Heartland University should continue to promote the hiring and retention of administrators and faculty of color in order to provide role modeling for Black male students. If faculty members cannot fulfill this role, Heartland University should consider extending the network to identify and connect students with other role models in the community who have had success in terms of completing a degree. Creating a more diverse campus will lead to stronger recruitment and retention of students of color, particularly Black males.

The varied implications of this research necessitate further research on the Black male student population at Heartland University and in every educational level to advance practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research exploring social capital and social networks for young Black men should continue to be conducted. As this case study has demonstrated, relationships are central to educational success and higher education access and persistence. Further studies following this focus would confirm the best practices for increasing the social capital Black males use to gain entry into and persist in college.

The current literature does not provide much insight into the peer networks in Black students' lives. Researching how stereotypes of dropping out of high school and participating in criminal activities served as motivational factors for Black men when choosing to go to college would be an interesting area to study. The peer networks in and out of college both supported the participants of this research in different ways, and examining the contrast between these two groups would provide perspective on the dissimilar forms of social capital each group promotes.

This case study has been highly insightful, and working with the six unique men in the research was incredibly inspiring. Future research on this population should be done to understand how educators at all levels could better support Black males so that they are able to pursue higher education and achieve their ultimate educational and personal goals.

Final Thoughts

As the students included in this study faced graduation within the next academic year, they were asked to share their final thoughts on their experiences at Heartland University.

In the words of Jamal:

Me and the University . . . I wouldn't say a rocky relationship. No, I wouldn't say that at all . . . with everything, there's good and there's bad . . . I do I respect [the school] from an academic standpoint, I really do. Like I say it is a Division I institution. It is one of the nation's leading research institutions . . . more so the issue I've had is more on a social level, more on a minority level, more on a multicultural level . . . But, you know, it's been good to me, and I've been good to it, as far as I'd like to think . . . I'm, I'm proud that my degree is in Communication Studies, and hopefully that doesn't change . . . I'll be very proud that it says [Heartland University] on it.

From the perspective of Philip:

I'm feeling great, actually. Finally back on the uphill of my downward hill slope. I had three semesters where it was just like 'Oh my goodness!' . . . maybe reevaluate some things, because of people in my life. 'Why am I not doing so well in school as I really wanna do?' So, I finally did that, got back on track, and I'm where I want to be. I'm where I want to be . . . just trying to keep my, keep open mind of where I want to work . . . I'm looking forward to it just because I'll be done with schoolwork. But, the same time, getting adjusted to the real world aspect of it . . . but, the way I got my plans set up, I won't have to worry about that.

As told by Colby:

I love school now . . . it's been a hard road. Last semester wasn't the greatest semester for me . . . I had some academic challenges. But that just comes down to me . . . you would think that I would know by now, my fourth year (laughs). But, we all make our mistakes, and I just had a minor setback, but this is something that's going to push me . . . I'm still going to graduate on time, I'm still going to get out when I need to . . . life isn't always straight and narrow and a smooth ride, so we're going to need those bumps in there just to make sure that this life is worth living, really . . . I take the negative and I turn it into positive the best way I can . . . I'm just excited about that . . . I'm thankful for the mistakes that I made, because I'm able to learn from them and grow from them as a person, and I know not to make that mistake again if it comes to me. I'm really excited for graduation because . . . I do know that I'm going to go on to grad school . . . I like learning and I like school now . . . I understand the necessity of it, and how important it is, and, and why I need it to get to where I want to be in life. So, I appreciate it for those aspects, even though some days are harder than others. But, I enjoy it. I fully enjoy it.

Described by Marvin:

It's been good so far. Like, surprisingly good. 'Cause I had my doubts, or like, didn't know what to expect when I came here. Like different stereotype that everybody do about [this state] outside of it. But it's been good so far though. I'm glad I came here. I have no regrets at all coming here.

From Rickey's reflection, "I'm excited. I'm excited. I'm excited. I am very excited to not be writing papers anymore, doing tests." Finally, as expressed by Derek,

“So, it’s just the little things that remind me of the reason why I’m here on campus . . . the reason why I’m here at the University.”

As reported in the media and in scholarly literature, Black men as a whole are being failed by systemic problems in society, specifically within the educational system. For the minority that is able to rise above their stereotype of becoming an endangered species, their stories are powerful and deserve to be brought to light. By sharing their experiences and relationships, this case study has informed recommendations for Heartland University in an attempt to promote the higher educational success of more Black males in the future.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine how the social capital, or social networks, in Black male college students’ lives led to their decision to pursue, gain admission into, persist, and succeed in higher education. Under each of the three thematic processes identified, sub-groups were discussed to explain how the relationships of primary influencers, significant contributors, and supportive individuals created social capital for the group of Black male students, thus impacting the participants’ ability to reach their educational goals. The hope is that this research will inform best practices in the home, community, and sectors of education in the future in order to promote the success of young Black males in American higher education and society.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Letter**IRB Approval #: 20130113129 EX****Identification of Project:**

Who you Know and How to Go: The Impact of Social Capital on Higher Education Access for Black Males

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to understand how social capital, or the relationships in a black male's life, impacts that student's ability to access higher education. You are being asked to participate because you fit the subject requirements of this research as a black, male, senior student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your personal experience will provide insight into how young males are enabled to succeed in college through their social networks.

Procedures:

The procedure of this study will be an interview inquiring about the student's lived experiences. The questions are semi-structured, meaning that they are a set of the same open-ended questions given to every participant of the study. The interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes. Your interview will be conducted in a private meeting space in either the [REDACTED] or the [REDACTED]. The interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University [REDACTED].

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. Should you feel at risk or discomfort at any point of this research study, there is psychological treatment available on a sliding fee scale in the University Health Centers.

For the University [REDACTED] Counseling and Psychological Services, please call [REDACTED].

Benefits:

This study is part of an effort to show the influences and motivations that affect African American male students' access to higher education. There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. Results from this qualitative study will help the researcher of this topic to complete their Master's degree program and

advance her understanding of student affairs in higher education. The information may also be used for publications and presentations at local and national conferences.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data from the interviews will be stored securely in the locked office of the investigator. The investigator will only see your information for the year it will take to complete this research project. The data from this research will be used to complete the thesis requirement for a master's of art in educational administration at the University [REDACTED]. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences or meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregated data. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research. You may ask your questions at any time, including before giving consent to participate in the study. You may call or email the investigator or the investigator's advisor at any time. Our contact information is:

Morgan St. John – Cellphone: [REDACTED], Email: [REDACTED],
Office Phone: [REDACTED]

Dr. Brent Cejda – Email: [REDACTED], Office Phone: [REDACTED]

Institutional Review Board:

If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigators or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED].

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to not answer any question or questions if you choose. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher.

Consent, and Right to Receive Copy:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

_____ Initial if you agree to be audiotaped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator

Morgan St. John, Investigator

██████████ ██████████

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Hello!

My name is Morgan St. John, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration [REDACTED]. I am pursuing a master's of arts in higher education student affairs. I am working on my thesis, which is focusing on the relationships in a young black male's life that motivate him to access and succeed in higher education.

I am looking to interview current [REDACTED] students (graduating by May 2014) on their personal experiences, and I was wondering if you would be interested in volunteering for my study. As a participant, you will participate in one 45-60 minute interview with me in a private meeting space on campus. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed for you to review and check for accuracy. I will use a pseudonym for your name and any other names given so that no personal information is identifiable in the report of the research.

Additional information for participants of this study:

- You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.
- You must be graduating by May 2014.
- Participation within this study is completely voluntary.
- You can decline to participate or withdraw at any time without any penalty or loss.
- All of your responses will remain confidential and will be kept in a password-protected computer until May 2013 when the study is complete.
- The interview date and any other personal information will be anonymous.
- The data collected from the interviews will be used for research purposes only and will not be disclosed for any other reasons.
- There are no known risks for participants in completing this study.

If you would be interested in helping with my study or have any questions about my research, please contact me at morgan.e.stjohn@gmail.com or contact me at either of my telephone numbers. If you would like to have contact with someone other than the researchers, please contact the Research Compliance Services Office [REDACTED].

Best,

Morgan St. John, Graduate Student
Dept. of Educational Administration

Dr. Brent Cejda, Department Chair and Professor
Dept. of Educational Administration

Appendix C

Demographic Worksheet

Participant Demographic Worksheet

Name: _____

Pseudonym: _____

(Name to be utilized in the documentation of the research)

1. Please define your ethnicity and race:

2. Age: _____

3. Major(s)/Minor(s): _____

4. GPA: _____

5. Anticipated graduation date: _____

6. Do you consider yourself a first-generation college student (first in your family to attend college)? Why or why not?

7. Father's highest level of education (if known):

8. Mother's highest level of education (if known):

9. Any other demographic information you think the researcher should know:

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Date:

Location:

Investigator:

Respondent:

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am conducting a research study on the impact of relationships higher education access for black males. Your perspective and experiences are important for this study, so I would ask you to discuss your views openly during this interview. I will be recording the interview so that I may accurately reflect this conversation. I will be transcribing the recording and will ask you to review the transcription for accuracy of meaning.

(Review consent letter and obtain respondent signature)

Do you have any questions before we get started?

- 1) Describe what coming to this university was like for you.
- 2) Please tell me about your high school experience, including:
 - Favorite course/subjects
 - Relationships with teachers/guidance counselors/other leaders in the school
 - Friendships
 - Extracurricular activities
- 3) How would you describe your family?
 - How do you view your parent(s) or legal guardians?
 - How do you view your sibling(s)?

- How do you view other family members?
 - What role did your family play in your decision to come to college?
- 4) Name any role model(s) you have in life. What has their relationship meant to you?
- 5) Tell me about your current experience. What are your feelings about graduation?
- 6) How much support do you feel that you have from . . .
- Family?
 - Other adults and mentors in your life?
 - Friends outside of the university?
 - Friends at the university?
 - Any other individuals?
- 8) Is there anything else you feel I should know?

Probes as needed - silence, nodding, “tell me more . . .,” “give me an example . . .”, “walk me through . . .”, “what do you mean . . .?”

Thank you again for your time and meeting me today. I look forward to sharing the transcription with you to make sure it accurately reflects your experience.