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Academic and Career Trajectories of African American Males in San Bernardino

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
School of Behavioral Health
in conjunction with the
Faculty of Graduate Studies

Academic and Career Trajectories of African American Males in San Bernardino

by

Lolita Laree Lyles

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Family Studies

June 2013
Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this dissertation in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

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# CONTENTS

Approval Page .......................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iv
List of Figures ........................................................................................................................... ix
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ x

Chapter

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1
   Background ............................................................................................................................. 3
   Objectives of Current Study ................................................................................................. 9

2. Conceptual Framework .......................................................................................................... 11
   Overview .............................................................................................................................. 11
   Ecological Systems Theory ............................................................................................... 12
   Theory of Resilience ............................................................................................................ 16
   Defining Resilience ............................................................................................................. 16
   Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 18

3. Review of Literature ............................................................................................................. 19
   Family Influences ............................................................................................................... 21
   Neighborhood Influences .................................................................................................... 27
   Cultural Influences .............................................................................................................. 30
   Personal Resiliency ............................................................................................................. 38
   Service and Extra Curricular Activities ............................................................................. 40
   Family ................................................................................................................................... 41
   School and Community ....................................................................................................... 44
   Spirituality .............................................................................................................................. 47
   Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 48

4. Methodology ........................................................................................................................ 50
   Research Design .................................................................................................................. 50
   Participants .......................................................................................................................... 53
   Institutional Review Board (IRB) ....................................................................................... 55
   Data Collection .................................................................................................................... 57
   Data Storage ....................................................................................................................... 61
   Analysis and Coding Procedures ....................................................................................... 61
Open Coding .................................................................62
Axial Coding .............................................................63
Selective Coding .........................................................64

Validity and Transferability .............................................66
Presentation of Findings ...............................................67
Addressing Potential Issues in Research ............................67
Researcher as a Tool in Research Process ..........................69

5. Results ........................................................................71

Constructive Hardship and Counteraction .........................73

Financial Hardship .......................................................74
Fatherhood ....................................................................75
Absentee Fathers ..........................................................77
Justice System ..............................................................79

Eluding Negative Experiences of Others .............................80
Counteracting Negative Stereotypes .................................82
Detrimental Effects of Hardship .......................................83

Conditioned Construction of Masculinity ...........................85

Toughness for Survival ..................................................86
Tough Façade ................................................................86
Tough Mentality ............................................................88
Toughness and Student Trajectories .................................89
Avoiding a Veneer of Toughness ......................................90

Community and Family Support ....................................91

Mentorship ....................................................................92
Extracurricular and Recreational Activities .........................93
Clubs and Organizations ...............................................95
Teacher Support ...........................................................95
Spiritual Support ...........................................................95
Threatened Academic and Career Trajectories .................96
Family Support .............................................................97
Parents .........................................................................98
Extended Family and Friends .........................................98
Extended Family Members’ Experiences with Education ...99
A Lack of Family Support ...............................................100

6. Discussion ..................................................................102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prosocial Development and Achievement Theory</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Academic and Career Trajectories of African American Males in San Bernardino

by

Lolita Laree Lyles

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Family Studies
Loma Linda University, June 2013
Dr. Curtis A. Fox, Chairperson

A qualitative grounded theory approach is utilized to study the academic and career trajectories of twenty African American male collegiate students living in San Bernardino, California. There is limited research that explores the positive educational experiences of young adult African American males. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to fill a much needed gap in the literature by providing research on a population of students who are rarely examined from a strengths based approach. Prosocial Development and Achievement Theory explains the major social processes of members of the present study as it relates to their academic and career trajectories. Themes that emerged from the data include constructive hardship and counteraction, conditioned construction of masculinity, and community and family support. Participants were able to utilize adverse experiences as motivation for success. They also sought to negate the recurrence of negative patterns, and counteract negative stereotypes. Participants demonstrated an ability to overcome pressures to adopt a veneer of toughness apart from its potential use to survive the challenges of their community. Additionally, variations of community and family support were important to achievement and life adjustment. Implications for research and practice in field of Family Science are discussed.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

—Malcolm X (Brainy Quote, 2012)

Historic African American leaders such as Malcolm X and others often captivated audiences with their fiery and passionate speeches regarding the condition of Black America. They engaged the wider society in a retrospective glance that reflected the institution of slavery, rampant violence, intimidation, oppression, segregation, economic, social, and educational disadvantage among African Americans. Many of these leaders acknowledged education as an important element to the struggle of human rights, and an avenue for upward mobility (Brailsford, 2005). Throughout history, however, African American males in particular have typically demonstrated disproportionate underachievement in the area of education, which has been associated with a number of risks including poorer quality of life among African American families. Because education is a gateway for success in American society, this researcher has come to understand the importance of the distribution of knowledge for African American males, and their very significant role in improving overall quality of life for African American families. It is suggested that when young African American men pursue education, they are better positioned to be successful as citizens, husbands, and fathers (Hyman, 2006). Therefore, the development of successful academic and career trajectories for African American males is important to reaching conditions, opportunities, and states of
achievement that can support their positive well-being, and that of African American children, families, and communities (Hyman, 2006).

The present study examines academic and career trajectories of African American male collegiate students in Southern California. More specifically, there is a focus on the experiences of students in the San Bernardino area. The ecological systems theory is used to frame human development, and to map the influence of interactions within and between specific environments on the academic and career trajectories of members of the target population. A theory of resilience is utilized at the middle range to explain the outcome and processes of successful academic and career pathways, and positive life adjustment among African American male collegiate students. The following question is formulated in conjunction with this research: What are the familial and contextual factors that impede or mitigate achievement and life adjustment among African American male collegiate students living in San Bernardino, California?

The present study, therefore, identifies factors that impede or mitigate achievement and life adjustment by focusing on the following areas: 1) Participant goals and motivation for school and career 2) Positive and/or negative personal, family, and community factors that have impacted educational success and 3) Any obstacles that have impacted one’s personal trajectory as a student. The researcher previously alluded to the historic disproportionate underachievement and grim realities of African American males in society, particularly within the area of education. However, the current study takes a more strengths based approach toward the topic of interest, emphasizing factors and experiences that have allowed African American male collegiate students from San
Bernardino to navigate successfully and exhibit aspects of resilience. This includes their transition to college in the face of unfavorable circumstances.

The exploration of the academic and career trajectories of African American male collegiate students in the San Bernardino community is important to family scholars, and to the field of family science for the following reasons. First, the United States Census Bureau reports the city of San Bernardino as the second, poorest large city in the country (Inland Empire News, 2011). The city has become a poster child for economic devastation, a factor often associated with academic failure and poor quality of life in families (Edin & Kissane, 2010; Nikulina et al., 2011; Pagani et al., 1999;). Second, since it is suggested that severe poverty has attendant community and family problems that contribute to lowered academic achievement (Pollard, 1989), the adverse educational experiences of African American males, in turn, have important implications for African American families as a whole. The mitigation of such issues is grave. Third, while empirical literature has emphasized the underachievement of African American males, there is limited research that portrays the lives of young men who beat the odds and excel academically (Harper, 2006; Thompson & Lewis, 2005). Finally, considering the gap in empirical literature, the present study has the potential to inform the development of culturally sensitive curriculum, programs, and interventions. In addition, it has the potential to influence policies geared toward fostering greater success and more positive outcomes for African American males and their families.

**Background**

As previously mentioned, disproportionate underachievement is a wide scale issue
impacting African American males all over the country. Yet, the current study focuses on the population of interest within the sociocultural context of San Bernardino, California. African American males in this community are susceptible to a number of challenges. Developing a greater understanding of the sociocultural context of San Bernardino assists in better understanding the ways in which the factors outlined may be related to achievement, and academic and career attitudes of young adult African American males living in the community.

The city of San Bernardino, located in the Inland Empire of California and part of San Bernardino County, has a population of 209,924, where African Americans make up 15.0% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Of the 209,924 residents in the city of San Bernardino, about 36% of residents bring in an income of less than $25,000 per year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The U.S. Census Figures in 2010 indicated that some of the poorest people in the nation live in San Bernardino, with 34.6% living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In turn, San Bernardino is reported to be the second, poorest large city in the United States behind Detroit, Michigan (US Census Bureau, 2010). To date, some of the most talked about news regarding the economic condition of the city is that it has filed an emergency petition for municipal bankruptcy, after disclosing a budget shortfall and criminal investigation of some of its departments (KTLA News, 2012). It is suspected that layoffs could eventually follow as a result of the bankruptcy (KTLA News, 2012).

Given the already deleterious consequences of economic disadvantage, layoffs would only exacerbate the issues impacting individual families in the San Bernardino community. The San Bernardino County Community Indicators Report provides
important information regarding family income and family housing security. It is reported that nearly one fourth of children in San Bernardino County live in poverty (Community Foundation, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The number of low-income families and public assistance enrollment continues to rise. Additionally, it seems that job loss, increasing rent or mortgage costs, foreclosure, or not having enough money to afford the high upfront costs of renting or buying a home are challenges that are forcing many families to live in conditions beyond their control (Community Foundation, 2011). More and more San Bernardino County families are living doubled, or even tripled up as a result of economic constraints. Moreover, when shared housing is not an option, homelessness is often a result (Community Foundation, 2011).

The family housing security indicator measures San Bernardino County families’ progress toward housing stability by tracking the availability of rental assistance, as well as the number of public school students who are homeless or living in unstable housing arrangements (Community Foundation, 2011). Most residents seeking rental assistance are forced to wait several years for a voucher due to the economic condition and poor levels of funding. As of May 2011, there were 25,000 applicants waiting for a Housing Choice Voucher. Vouchers are limited since housing authorities have not had the opportunity to apply to the federal government for vouchers since the year 2003 (Community Foundation, 2011). In addition, federal law requires public school districts to report the number of students living in shelters, or those who are unsheltered in cars, parks, campgrounds, motels, or with another family due to economic hardship. In 2009 – 2010, well over 22,000 San Bernardino County students were identified as living in one of the unstable housing conditions described, or 5% of the total enrollment. On a per-
enrollment basis, San Bernardino County has more students who are homeless or living without stable housing than the California average and the southern California counties compared (Community Foundation, 2011). It is important to note that school districts are not required to count the number of homeless students who are unaccompanied youth (persons under 18 living without a parent/guardian). However, a subset of districts in San Bernardino County determined that 658 of their homeless students in 2009 – 2010 were unaccompanied youth. Typically, these students live in shelters, “couch surf,” or are unsheltered, sleeping in quarters most would consider unsuitable for human habitation. Unaccompanied youth are also at an increased likelihood to be victims of physical, or sexual abuse prior to leaving or being kicked out of their homes, and often come from homes where one or both parents abused drugs or alcohol (Community Foundation, 2011).

It is important to consider the impact of economic hardship on family disruption among San Bernardino families. For African American youth, disruption might refer to children never living with the biological mother, a greater number of caregiver changes in a child’s life, unmarried biological parents, not spending regular time with the biological father, not living with the biological father, and/or involvement with child protective services (Somers et al., 2011). It is suggested that such family disruption may have negative effects on educational outcomes where students perform more poorly. In fact, students who have experienced disruption typically score lower on academic or standardized tests, have lower grade point averages, are at increased risk of being left back a grade, and have lower educational aspirations (Jeynes, 2000; Sun & Li, 2002). Such effects are most pronounced for transitions during, or just beyond the high school
level, suggesting that young adult African American males who have experienced family disruption are at greater risk for poor achievement (Steele et al., 2009). Additionally, family disruption can also contribute to higher levels of crime, where youth from broken homes are more involved in truancy and delinquent activities (Shihadeh & Steffensmeier, 1994; Sun, Triplett, & Gainy, 2004).

The poor economic condition of the city and the effects on individual families may have some implications for the high crime rates the city of San Bernardino has contended with over the years. On several occasions, San Bernardino has been ranked as one of the most dangerous cities in the United States (Morgan Quitno Press, 2005). In 2005, the murder rate in San Bernardino was 29 per 100,000, the 15th highest murder rate in the country, and the third highest in the state after Compton and Richmond, California (Infoplease, 2005). In 2007, over 30% of homicide victims in San Bernardino County was African American, with a number of those homicides being gang-related (Community Foundation, 2011). In 2010, there were a total of 717 known gangs in San Bernardino County, and slightly more San Bernardino youth consider themselves a member of a gang than youth in neighboring counties (Community Foundation, 2011).

The condition of the education system is also an important consideration with regard to sociocultural context. The California Academic Performance Index (API) utilized in San Bernardino County schools summarizes progress toward achievement and academic growth targets. In 2010, San Bernardino city Unified School District had an API of 699, which is below the state API target of 800 (Community Foundation, 2011). The California Standards Test in English-Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics determines the proportion of students testing proficient or better in those subjects. Only
about half of San Bernardino County’s public school students are proficient in ELA, and 43% are proficient in Math. While the achievement gap has narrowed over time, proficiency percentages by race and ethnicity have consistently reflected the underachievement of African American students in comparison to their White counterparts in both ELA and Math from 2003 to 2010 (Community Foundation, 2011).

In addition, socioeconomic status (SES) continues to impact achievement. Among economically disadvantaged students only 39% and 38% were proficient in ELA and Math respectively, in comparison to 61% and 52% of students who were not considered economically disadvantaged (Community Foundation, 2011). A student is considered economically disadvantaged if both parents have not received a high school diploma or the student is eligible to participate in the free or reduced lunch program (Community Foundation, 2011). According to the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report, districts and schools in San Bernardino county are experiencing difficulty meeting the No Child Left Behind performance targets with more than half being identified for program improvement (Community Foundation, 2011). Further, San Bernardino County lags behind other regions in terms of high school graduates who are eligible for University of California (UC), or California State University (CSU) schools, and residents with college degrees (Community Foundation, 2011). African American students comprise only 10% of high school graduates, with 20% UC/CSU eligible (Community Foundation, 2011). In addition, community college and trade school placement rates in San Bernardino county are lower than the statewide average (Community Foundation, 2011).

Based on these findings, we can see the connection between economic disadvantage as a predictor of violence, crime, and other neighborhood stressors (Dubow
et al., 1997). Also, in light of its economic condition, African American males living in San Bernardino are at greater risk of poorer quality family life, as well as academic failure (Edin & Kissane, 2010; Inland Empire News, 2011; Nikulina et al., 2011; Pagani et al., 1999). Successful academic and career pathways, and positive life adjustment among African American males in San Bernardino, despite challenges that would otherwise lead to low achievement or failure, and poor overall adjustment indicates that such African American males exhibit aspects of resilience.

**Objectives of Current Study**

There is limited research that explores the positive educational experiences of young adult African American males. Therefore, the current study aims to fill a much needed gap in the literature by providing research on a population of students who are rarely examined from a strengths based approach. It is important to identify specific factors that have mitigated or impeded the academic success of African American males; as such information will be useful in informing both policy and practice. In addition, developing a theoretical understanding of the personal, familial, and social contextual experiences that bolster resilience in the academic and career pathways of the population of interest is important to the present study. Further, the hope is to give voice to thriving African American collegiate students from impoverished communities such as San Bernardino, as well as to inspire educational attainment and positive life adjustment among a new generation of African American males from this community.

While the reader has already gained some insight into the sociocultural context of San Bernardino, it will be important to further explore the ways in which such factors
may directly and/or indirectly impact the academic and career trajectories of African American males. The following chapter describes the theoretical framework and key concepts applied to the current study, and will assist in increasing the readers’ understanding of academic and career development in context among this population. Chapter three presents a comprehensive review of existing knowledge on factors that typically influence achievement related behaviors and beliefs of African American males, the challenges they face, as well as the ways in which they may foster resilience. Chapter four provides an in-depth discussion of the method of inquiry employed for purposes of the current study. Data collection, analysis and coding are among the procedures outlined. Chapter five outlines the present study’s findings, while chapter six provides an overall discussion of the results, as well as limitations, implications for practice, and future directions.
CHAPTER TWO
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Overview
As the field of family science continues to progress, it calls for a tighter reciprocal interaction between research and theory (Lavee & Dollahite, 1991). It is theory that gives meaning to research findings, and enables the development of systematic explanation of phenomena (Lavee & Dollahite, 1991). Since there is great variety in definitions as to what constitutes theory as it relates to social science, it is important to define clearly theorizing as the process of systematically formulating, and organizing ideas to understand and explain social phenomena (Doherty et al., 2004; LaVee & Dollahite, 1991). Moreover, theory refers not only to a body of laws that have been formulated from experimental science, but also to a body of generalizations of lesser explanatory power (Hill, 1966).

Theories typically differ in their scope, as well as in their level of abstraction (LaVee & Dollahite, 1991). Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) discuss the importance of theory at all levels of abstraction being meaningfully related to the problem domain. Grand theoretical frameworks, middle range, and micro range theories are utilized in explaining particular phenomena in the field of family science. At the highest level of abstraction are grand theoretical frameworks. They are made up of relatively abstract concepts and propositions, but provide a general framework for both the nature and goals of a discipline (Fawcett, 2000; Merton, 1968). In comparison to grand theoretical frameworks, middle range theories are lower order and more limited in scope (LaVee & Dollahite, 1991). They are confined to a particular content area, and involve elaborate
theoretical writing about particular domains such as organizations, communities, and/or social categories (Babbie, 2009; Doherty et al., 2004; Smith & Liehre, 2003).

For purposes of the current study there is an emphasis on the highest and middle levels of abstraction, as they are useful in describing, discovering, and predicting social phenomena. The ecological systems theory is utilized as a grand theoretical framework, and a theory of resilience at the middle range. The goal is to gain an increased understanding of the ways in which factors that impact the career and academic trajectories of African American males interact at various levels of ecology. The researcher also hopes to increase understanding of the ways in which factors at the different levels of ecology also have the potential to foster resiliency among African American males.

**Ecological Systems Theory**

Ecological systems theory is useful in understanding the ways in which individuals are impacted by their immediate environments, as well as various external factors. Utilization of this conceptual framework will assist in developing a greater understanding of the specific dimensions that influence the academic and career trajectories of African American males, and how they may foster resiliency and positive life adjustment.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, who was largely influenced by the work of Kurt Lewin that emphasized the interaction of the developing person with the environment, developed the ecological systems theory in 1979 (Moen, 1995; White & Klein, 2002). While he revisited the theory in recent years, reassessing, revising, and extending basic elements
and imperatives of the ecological paradigm, he refers to the ecology of human
development generally the same as he did in his early work (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In
fact, he believed that not only does the theory still stand, but also that it has been further
strengthened and extended by both scientific evidence and argument over time
(Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (2005) explains the ecology of human
development as a scientific study that involves understanding and explaining how human
beings grow and develop in light of changes in their immediate settings, relations
between settings, and larger contexts in which those settings are embedded. This, he
explains, is the cornerstone of the theoretical structure of the ecological systems theory.

A fundamental assumption of ecological theory is that individuals and families
are not simply shaped by environmental influences and contexts, but that they also impact
those contexts (Chibucos, 2005). A second assumption of ecological theoretical
perspectives is that there are several levels of environmental context, or nested
ecosystems in which the individual develops and interacts (White & Klein, 2002). These
are referred to as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) describes the microsystem as a pattern of activities, roles,
and interpersonal relations experienced by developing persons in a given setting with
certain physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive
characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief. The mesosystem is
comprised of linkages and processes between two or more settings containing the
developing person. More clearly, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. Similar to
the mesosystem, the exosystem also encompasses linkages and processes between two or
more settings. However, in the exosystem at least one of those settings does not
ordinarily contain the developing person. Yet, events still occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does not contain that person. Finally, the macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of the systems. Generally, each of these systems or contexts refers to settings that contain and directly influence the individual, settings that do not contain the individual but have indirect influence, and broader societal level values and ideologies that provide a total context for the other systems (Chibucos, 2005). Each of the levels impacts the developing person either directly, or through other systems (Chibucos, 2005).

While the researcher has already emphasized that the developing person is engaged in constant reciprocal interaction, a third assumption of ecological theory suggests that the contextual levels also interact with each other on a continuing basis. The important perspective to gain from this fact is that all individuals and families develop in environments with contextual characteristics that themselves influence, and are influenced by the other settings (Chibucos, 2005).

According to White and Klein, (2002) one uniform and consensual set of theoretical propositions has not yet been produced regarding the ecological framework, yet Bronfenbrenner clearly envisions the individual’s development within the ecosystems. His vision is that the individual grows and adapts through interchanges with the family, its immediate ecosystem, and more distant environments such as school and neighborhood among others.
With regard to the present study, it is important to understand that the lives of African American male collegiate students in San Bernardino are embedded in a series of direct and indirect relationships that influence their academic and career trajectories. Direct relationships might consist of those with family and teachers, while indirect relationships are comprised of neighborhood and cultural beliefs, for example. These interconnecting relationships have the potential to either bend trajectories in a negative or positive direction. In addition, amidst these various individual relationships are larger contextual realities such as poverty and discrimination that can contribute to failure or success among members of the target population.

As will be demonstrated in the review of existing literature in the subsequent chapter, the ecological systems theory is optimal because it demonstrates effectively the links between various factors influencing the achievement related beliefs and behaviors of African American males. It also supports the assumptions being made regarding the adverse educational experiences of these young men. However, scholars have not failed to acknowledge the shortcomings of ecological systems theory. One criticism of the theory is that it is not always entirely clear which system best accounts for the behavior we attempt to explain (Strong et al., 2011; White & Klein, 2002). Moreover, between the different levels of ecology, there is a great deal of overlap in how the different systems influence each other. Therefore, there is some ambiguity as to whether particular systems best account for achievement related behaviors and beliefs of African American males. Additionally, ecological systems theory has been more effectively applied to individual or familial development and growth (Strong et al., 2011). Yet, existing literature on the adverse experiences of the population of interest clearly reflects how individuals and
families are prone to decline as much as they are to development and growth. Ecological systems theory often fails to address this notion (Strong et al., 2011). Yet, it is best suited for the current study due to its explanatory power of development in context.

**Theory of Resilience**

As previously outlined, Bronfenbrenner (1986) often alluded to the notion that the family is the most efficient and effective agent for promoting child development (Moen & Erikson, 1995). One might ask how such development comes about. Moen and Erikson (1995) explain that from the perspective of the ecology of human development, the psychological and social resources of parents are essential to fostering development. Yet, since transitions and turning points in the family can transform the very fabric of a child’s life, the cultivation of resilience is important. Within the different levels of ecology described in the ecological systems theory also exist protective factors that have the potential to foster resiliency. Change is effected through the interaction of these various systems. The review of existing knowledge regarding the achievement related behaviors and beliefs of African American males generally reflect a problem-based orientation. Therefore, it is important to broaden knowledge about the mechanisms that may contribute to resilient outcomes for this population given the various consequences that may result (Thompson & Lewis, 2005).

**Defining Resilience**

Resilience and protective factors are conceptualized in a number of different ways. However, resiliency generally refers to the capacity to cope with one’s setbacks
and challenges (Moen & Erickson, 1995). As it relates to the present study, resilience is operationalized as the outcome and processes of successful academic and career pathways, and positive life adjustment among African American male collegiate students, despite factors that would otherwise lead to low achievement or failure, and poor overall adjustment (McCubbin et al., 1998). Walsh (1996) explains that there are many pathways in resilience, varying to fit diverse family forms, psychosocial challenges, resources, and constraints. Given the distinctive educational experiences of African American males, it seems that the nature of fostering resilience is also unique among this population (Ungar, 2008). This study takes into account the ways in which factors interact at the various levels of ecology to produce resilient outcomes among African American males living in San Bernardino, despite challenges they may encounter.

It may be surmised that African American male collegiate students attending school are surrounded by complex dynamic influences in their environment. These influences include the most immediate system which is the family, as well as extended family networks, school, neighborhood, church, work, and cultural beliefs to name a few. The influences described may extend to laws and policies that govern various social structures and relationships, as well as the larger cultural values of the wider society of which African American males are apart. For this reason, the ecological systems theory is used as a frame of reference that includes the increasing effects of various social structures on the academic and career trajectories of African American males. Resilience then, is shaped by a combination of the various influences outlined. The ability of African American male collegiate students to fare well even in the face of challenging circumstances is the focus of this study.
Conclusion

It is important to build upon what we have come to understand about development in context, and resilience among African American males. This will assist African American males and their families to engage better adaptive responses to living in impoverished communities like that of San Bernardino. Mitigating the issue of lowered academic achievement among this population will also provide an opportunity to address the attendant community and family problems, which is important to the field of family science. While the recursive use of theory is important to conceptualizing this process, the present study would also do well to be grounded in the current literature regarding the various factors that have the potential to influence the educational experiences of African American males.
CHAPTER THREE
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography. History tells a people where they have been, what they have been, where they are and what they are. Most importantly, history tells a people where they still must go, what they still must be. The relationship of history to the people is the same as the relationship of a mother to her child.”

—John Henrike Clarke (Bourne, 1996)

A lifestyle of disenfranchisement consisting of oppression, lack of inclusion, backward progression, and disproportionate underachievement has been the experiences of many African American men throughout history in American society (Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 2003). In fact, such trends continue to demand great attention, having resulted in devastating effects for this population.

African American males are overrepresented in categories typically associated with negative outcomes (Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2003). Over involvement in the criminal system, high rates of unemployment, poverty, and dying as a result of homicide are all characteristic of the pitfalls that beset African American men as a whole (Davis, 1999; Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 2003). In light of the social and economic hardships outlined, it is hardly surprising that the educational experiences of African American males also show signs of distress and call for great concern (Noguera, 2003). Lower levels of achievement appear to have the most significant consequences for future development of social identity, cognitive ability, emotional capacity, and social competence (Davis, 2003; Heath & MacKinnon, 1988). Since there is limited research on the experiences of African American collegiate students in general, utilization of literature from K-12 studies is
necessary to provide a context for the reader (Harper, 2006)

In many school districts throughout the United States, the overall achievement scores for African American male students are below those of other groups in basic subject areas; African American males are more likely to be placed in remedial and low ability courses, rather than advanced placement or honors courses; African American males are far more likely to be placed in general education and vocational high school curricular tracks than in an academic track; they are suspended from school more frequently and for longer periods of time in comparison to students of other groups; and African American males complete high school at lower rates than their female counterparts (Lee, 1991; Pollard, 1993; Whiting, 2009). African American males even suffer from drop out rates higher than the national average (Davis, 1999). Further, the drop out rate in some inner city schools is as high as 40 and 50 percent, and it is estimated that 36% of African Americans who are 25 and older do not possess a high school diploma (Davis, 1999). In turn, this provides some indication as to the high levels of underachievement in higher education among this population (Noguera, 2003).

These alarming statistics often leave researchers wondering why African American males suffer such poor academic outcomes. Therefore, a number of explanations have been posed to explain their educational difficulties. Some explanations have considered the immediate environmental settings of African American males, while others have considered the context of the larger social and cultural environment relative to their declining performance.
Family Influences

Family influences largely impact achievement related beliefs and behaviors of African American youth. Factors including family structure, socioeconomic status, parental relationship quality, parent school involvement, and parental school aspirations have all been linked to academic outcomes (Weiser & Riggio, 2010). Youth from nuclear families, or two-parent households tend to perform better in comparison to their peers from single-parent homes. Astone and McLanahan (1991) supported this notion utilizing regression analyses based on the High School and Beyond (HSB) study. Respondents were randomly selected 10th or 12th grade students at one of a nationally representative sample of over 1,000 U.S. high schools. The longitudinal survey (3 waves) allowed researchers to examine the effects of family structure on high school graduation, compare students’ grade point averages, school attendance, aspirations, and attitudes toward school across different family types. In addition, the survey included information on parenting practices during adolescence, and the sample was large enough to distinguish different family types to examine changes in family structure during adolescence. Findings suggested that youth who lived with single parents or stepparents during adolescence received less encouragement and less help with school in comparison to their counterparts who lived with both natural parents. Other researchers have found that students raised in nuclear families typically have better grades, higher standardized achievement test scores, high school completion, and college graduation (Amato, 2001; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Naevdal & Thuen, 2004).

Research also reflects a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement in that students of higher socioeconomic status tend to have better
grades, outperform their counterparts on achievement tests, and persist with education for longer durations of time (Matsen et al., 1999; Teachman, 1987). De Graaf (1986) explains that the strong relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement is a result of the greater cultural and educational resources afforded by individuals of higher socioeconomic status. In a study conducted by Teachman (1987), a National Longitudinal Study of high school seniors enrolled in public, private, and church affiliated high schools in the United States was used to determine how parents used material and nonmaterial resources to create a home environment that fostered academic skills, motivation, and orientation. The results supported the notion that educational resources increase educational attainment. It is important to note that educational resources were more highly correlated with indicators of family background for Blacks than for Whites. Therefore, exploring separately the effects of family background and educational resources among Blacks is important. In this case, family background does not refer to demographic indicators, but is meant to encompass a wide range of experiences and resources associated with one’s family (Teachman, 1987).

According to Matsen, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmonzy, and Ramirez (1999) parent relationship quality has a unique and significant relationship with both academic achievement and cognitive competence. Quality relationships generally have high levels of positive affect and warmth, emotional support, and a connection and support for autonomy (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). Such characteristics help to facilitate increased academic performance, school engagement, and higher standardized test scores (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989).

When we consider parental school involvement, it is important to discuss
measures including parent participation in school activities such as PTA, and parent conferences; communication regarding school between parents and children, the extent to which parents offer homework help, as well as supervision and monitoring of schoolwork (Mji & Makgato, 2006; Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996). Greater parental school involvement is related to higher achievement in standardized test scores, grade point average, and specific subject grades (Catsambis, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996). Catsambis (2002) used data from a National Educational Longitudinal Study to investigate connections between parent involvement practices and the educational outcomes of high school seniors. The researcher found that parental involvement indicators such as high levels of educational expectations, consistent encouragement, and actions that enhanced learning opportunities for students were family practices positively associated with educational success for students. Such family characteristics predicted student success regardless of students’ socioeconomic status, race, or ethnic background.

Finally, the educational aspirations that parents hold are also related to academic achievement. Parents with educational aspirations have expectations for their children to finish high school, enter college, and earn acceptable grades (Weiser & Riggio, 2010). Higher levels of educational aspirations positively predict enrollment in classes that are more challenging, and higher test scores (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Castambis, 2002). Additionally, parental educational aspirations predict whether students pursue higher education beyond the completion of high school and college (Bank et al., 1990; Castambis, 2002).

Based on these findings, we can draw some conclusions regarding the very critical roles that parents and/or guardians play in the educational process of youth. They
serve as the first teacher in a child’s life and are considered primary educators. Parents can also serve as decision makers and advocates in collaborating with school teachers in an effort to aid in their child’s educational career. Like other ethnic groups, African American parents desire for their children to be successful and to do well academically. However, some members of this population may lack the knowledge and resources to assist their children with academic success. Additionally, there are a number of other factors impacting African American parents that may impede upon their ability to be as involved in their child’s education as they would desire (Halle et al., 1997; Slaughter, 1987; Trotman, 2001). In turn, those factors have the potential to negatively impact the school performance, as well as the academic and career trajectories of African American males.

Strong, DeVault, and Cohen (2011) explain that ethnicity is an important demographic factor in single-parent families. Over 50% of African American children live in single-parent households, and African American mothers are more likely to be unmarried or widowed at the time of their children’s birth in comparison to their White counterparts. Issues surrounding the consequences of single motherhood have special salience for African Americans (Bodenhorn, 2007). According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) economic status best explains the differences between children from one and two parent families. The younger age of African American mothers, their greater family responsibilities, and lower education levels contribute to the lower income of African American single mother families (Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). Growth in the numbers of these African American single-parent families has proceeded at a much faster pace than for White families, and African American families have a much greater
likelihood of being poor (Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). This disadvantage creates circumstances that may compromise parenting practices. In a sample of 241 single African American mothers of adolescents, McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, and Borquez (1994) utilized a path analysis model to find that unemployment predicted higher levels of depression in mothers, which in turn negatively impacted the socioemotional functioning of adolescents. Using correlations and multiple regression analyses, Jackson (1999) was able to link unemployment to low parental involvement among single Black mothers. It is suggested that an inability to provide supportive, consistent, and involved parenting, increases the disparity between children raised in single parent and two parent families (McLoyd, 1990; Murray, 2001). Because of the greater proportion of African American children than children from other ethnic groups reared in impoverished single-mother families, they are at greater risk for negative outcomes including poorer academic achievement (Murray et al., 2001).

Research studies regarding children in single parent families also support the notion that there is a greater incidence of externalizing and internalizing problems than children growing up with two parents (Murray et al., 2001). More specifically, there is a greater prevalence of fighting, gang activity, adolescent pregnancy, and academic related problems (Jessor et al., 1995; Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Family structure is also associated with parent-child relationships, a factor consistently linked to academic achievement (Bloir, 1997; Fan, 2001; Zimmerman et al., 2000). Baer (1999) investigated parent-adolescent relationships focusing on effects of dyadic communication, family cohesion, SES, and family structure on family conflict among three ethnic groups: African American (n=1886), Mexican American (n=2657) and Euro American (n= 3052).
Independent sample t tests and multiple regression analyses indicated increases in conflict among all groups, suggesting that adolescents in single parent families reported more conflict with their parents, less positive communication, and lower levels of family cohesion than their counterparts (Baer, 1999; Laursen, 2005). These risks can compromise the academic futures of African American males.

Aside from the prevalence of African American single mother families, increases in drug babies and births to unmarried teenage mothers have contributed to a rise in children being raised by grandparents (Marx & Solomon, 1993). According to Marx and Solomon (1993) these grandparent-headed families are characterized by an overrepresentation of poor, unemployed, and poorly educated African American families. Children from these households are more likely to be viewed as poorer students, and are more likely to repeat a grade than children from traditional nuclear families. While family type alone does not determine educational adjustment, children in alternative family structures are generally more likely to have experienced instability and family disruption, which can contribute to a wide range of problematic outcomes and behaviors (Marx & Solomon, 1993; Somers et al., 2011). Family disruption can be more clearly described as children never living with the biological mother, greater total number of caregiver changes in a child’s life, unmarried biological parents, not spending regular time with the biological father, not living with the biological father, and involvement with child protective services (Somers et al., 2011). Family instability might consist of changes in parents’ intimate partners, their work hours, residences lived in, and their children’s schools (Marcynyszyn et al., 2008).

Debell (2008) used the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the
National Household Education Surveys Program to estimate the number of children in grades K-12 who lived without biological fathers, and the effects of that absence on their well-being. The sample was made up of 12, 426 participants, where 28% of White students, 39% of Hispanic, and 69% of Black students lived without their fathers. In bivariate comparisons, absent-father status was associated with reduced well-being including worse health, lower academic achievement, worse educational experiences, and less parental involvement in school activities. Other studies also suggest that family disruption and instability are significantly related to diminished parental availability, poor parental responsivity, higher risk of internalizing and externalizing behaviors, as well as lower academic achievement and poorer educational experiences for students (Lee & Gotblib, 1991; Marcynyszyn et al., 2008).

**Neighborhood Influences**

Wilson (1987, 1996) proposes that the concentration effects of neighborhood disadvantage and racial isolation influence various youth outcomes (Wilson, 1987). His theory suggests that neighborhood structural changes such as the loss of well paying manufacturing jobs, for example, have largely impacted racially segregated disadvantaged populations (Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). A scarcity of jobs leads to residents losing access to the formal labor market, in turn resulting in the depopulation of working- and middle-class families from predominately African American neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987). According to Wilson, (1996) where there are working- and middle-class families, there are benefits to the community. Middle-class families contribute both time and money to organizations that operate as social controls and
promote more conventional behavior. Their presence contributes to resources that increase the quality of schools, social ties, networks, and recreational activities, and enhance police protection within the neighborhood. Additionally, middle-class families act as social buffers that deflect high unemployment and poverty. On the other hand, however, the absence of these families isolates poor families resulting in concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. It is this disadvantage, or the high concentration of poverty, racial segregation, unemployment, crime, and social isolation, that has negative implications for the socialization of youth. This is important since the socialization of youth largely occurs within the context of their neighborhoods. Youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to be exposed to a number of risk factors that can disrupt positive development, and create an environment in which deviance and problem behaviors are tolerated. For example, drug activity, violence, crime, and other neighborhood stressors are often prevalent in these communities (Dubow et al., 1997). Therefore, we can see how the effects of growing up in poverty, or economically depressed urban areas warrant great concern for African American males (Noguera, 2003; Thompson & Lewis, 2005).

In one study, exposure to chronic neighborhood disadvantage included trash in many local yards and alleys; crimes such as stealing, property damage, and the sale of illegal drugs; feelings that one’s neighborhood was unsafe; having recently been around someone shooting a gun; as well as lack of sufficient funds to purchase food and other necessities (Dubow et al., 1997). Such characteristics are not surprising in disadvantaged urban communities, and neither is the significant relationship between chronic neighborhood disadvantage and antisocial behaviors among youth (Dubow et al., 1997;
Guerra et al., 1995). In fact, certain behaviors are elevated not only in these low-income urban neighborhoods, but particularly among African American males (Redelings et al., 2010).

As a result of concentrated disadvantage and deprivation of social control, African American males often adapt cultural mechanisms that enable their survival (Wilson, 1996). Such mechanisms may include aggressive behaviors that lead to homicide (Hall, 2011; Wilson, 1996). Redelings, Lieb, and Sorvillo (2010) used cause elimination techniques to estimate the impact of homicide on life expectancy in low-income urban neighborhoods in Los Angeles County (LAC), a leading cause of death of African American men in the region. They found that the impact of homicide on life expectancy was higher in low-income neighborhoods. The age-adjusted homicide rate during the study period was 10.6 deaths per 100,000 population, with 6,491 deaths reported. The majority of homicide deaths (82.4%) occurred among persons 15–44 years of age, and homicide rates were elevated in Blacks, and in males.

Homicides have reached crisis proportions among African American males, and in low-income urban neighborhoods homicide is estimated to decrease life expectancy among this population by nearly five years (Hall & Pizarro, 2011; Redelings et al., 2010). In addition, arrest, conviction, and incarceration are also characteristic of African American males from the neighborhoods described. Boyd (2007) suggests that African American males who are unable to find employment, who are deprived of a decent education, and who lack skills that are required in a highly technological age are often times left with no recourse but to resort to illegal means of making a living. Moreover, there are five times as many African American men in prison as in four-year colleges and
universities, a fact that has dangerous implications for not only this population, but for the country as a whole (Davis, 1998).

Thompson and Lewis (2005) hold that in light of these neighborhood influences, members of this population are provided little support and encouragement that would guide them toward a pursuit of academic achievement or success. Delgado Bernal (1998) goes so far as to say that pursuing career goals that require extensive college and university education is not always valued or viewed as feasible for students who enter into the school system at economic and educational disadvantages. In turn, concentrated neighborhood disadvantage exerts a significant influence on college aspirations, where living in a disadvantaged context lowers college aspirations among African American youth, largely impacting their academic and career trajectories (Stewart et al., 2007).

**Cultural Influences**

While family, peers, neighborhood and their related factors undoubtedly have the potential to negatively impact the academic and career trajectories of African American males, factors in the larger social and cultural context are also important to consider. Hall (2009) suggests that the historical construct of American manhood has been that of White male dominance. African American males often experience very early in life feelings that their access to traditional manhood is limited, and exposure to the stereotype of intellectual inferiority. As a result, they begin to shape their sub-cultural response by developing a coping mechanism referred to as the *Cool Pose*, or a veneer of toughness and fearlessness for the sake of earning respect and preventing being challenged by
others (Hall, 2009; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2003). This tactic is seen as being necessary to negotiate potentially threatening circumstances.

The Cool Pose largely impacts the academic performance of African American males in that they tend to perform poorly because they perceive schooling as contradictory to their masculinity (Davis, 2003). It consists of the use of very deliberate and striking styles of demeanor, speech, gesture, walk, stance, and other physical gestures. The pose demands respect, and requires violent resolutions in defense of manhood. By participating in delinquent behavior and performing below intellectual capacity, African American males gain acceptance and respect among their peers, are regarded more highly, and are placed on social pedestals (Hall, 2009; Hall & Pizarro, 2011; Noguera, 2003). Therefore, projecting manhood and commanding a certain level of respect takes precedence over reaching academic excellence.

The relationship of the Cool Pose and homicide was examined by analyzing with multivariate statistical techniques 721 homicide incidents that occurred in the city of Newark, New Jersey. As a result of the study, Hall and Pizarro (2011) concluded that the Cool Pose was linked to homicides involving African American males. The Cool Pose leads African American males to consistently devalue traditional concepts of manhood. As a result, underachievement and significant increases in delinquency and homicide persist (Hall & Pizarro, 2011).

Often times, the Cool Pose and other cultural messages are misunderstood by White middle-class teachers and are seen as insubordinate, hostile, and threatening (Davis, 2003; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992). These messages that carry over into school influence the ways in which members of this population are treated, positioned,
and distributed opportunities to learn (Davis, 2003). While relationships with parents are extremely important in shaping child development, teacher-child relationships are also associated with children’s emotional, behavioral, and academic development, and enhance their motivation to learn (Ames, 1992). Unfortunately, a number of researchers have reported that compared to their counterparts, children of color have more negative relationships with their teachers (Hughes et al., 2005; Kesner, 2000). These negative relationships have been noted as early as elementary school. In a sample of 127 children attending elementary school in a large urban setting, various sets of analyses were conducted to examine associations between student demographic variables, academic orientations, behavioral orientations, and teacher-student relationship quality. Participants were primarily students of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings indicated that variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in teacher ratings of conflict and dependency in teacher–student relationships. Externalizing symptomology such as delinquent and aggressive behavior demonstrated one of the strongest associations with the conflict and dependency relationship constructs (Murray & Murray, 2004).

Saft and Pianta (2001) explain that teachers, regardless of their own race, rate relationships with African American students and other students of color as higher in conflict. Since teachers typically have a lower tolerance for aggressive and socially defiant behavior, in such cases they are more likely to demonstrate teaching that is less responsive, warm, nurturing, and encouraging (Cunningham & Sugawara, 1988; Safran & Safran, 1985). This largely impacts students’ academic outcomes and can have lasting negative effects.
The school environment as a whole is also an important consideration. Howard (2002) detailed a qualitative study that examined 30 secondary students’ descriptions of teaching practices in urban contexts. Student interpretations identified three central teaching strategies that had a positive effect on student effort, engagement in class content, and overall achievement. These strategies included teachers who established family, community, and home-like characteristics; teachers who established culturally connected caring relationships with students; and the use of certain types of verbal communication and affirmation. In turn, African American students are often times disengaged because they feel culturally disconnected, and that teaching strategies are not conducive to their learning (Davis, 2003; Howard, 2002).

In addition, declines in teacher expectations have also impacted the academic trajectories of this population. James (2011) discusses several stereotypes of African American students as fatherless, trouble maker, athlete, and underachiever and the ways in which such stereotypes contribute to their racialization and marginalization that in turn structure their learning processes, social opportunities, life chances and educational outcomes. These stereotypes exist in relation to each other, and serve to categorize and disenfranchise African American youth as they negotiate the school system (James, 2011). Debunking these stereotypes is a challenge for students, educators, and society as a whole (James, 2011).

A shortage of male teachers might also help to explain the cultural disconnect that African American boys experience in the classroom. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010) discuss the transformative influence of male teachers in terms of their capacity to address not only the educational needs of boys, but broader social justice and equity matters.
More specifically, it is suggested that African American male teachers have several important advantages in educating African American students (Jordan & Cooper, 2003). These include strategic use of shared knowledge, modeling appropriate behavior, and in some cases common social experiences (Jordan & Cooper, 2003). The rapport that African American male teachers have the ability to build with male students through their common cultural heritage trumps even social class differences (Jordan & Cooper, 2003). Finally, the value-added dimension of being exposed to good teachers who are African American men might be a key factor in raising the probability of success for African American students (Jordan & Cooper, 2003). However, the shortage of African American male teachers largely impedes the potential for such reform, as well as the potential to strengthen the overall community.

Media and print are influential with regard to the types of images portrayed of African American males. In today’s society, African American males are often portrayed as criminals or extremely talented athletes and entertainers (Noguera, 2003). Other images portray Black males as violent, disrespectful, unintelligent, and hypersexualized (Davis, 2003). However, images of African American males as successful professionals, researchers, and scholars are seldom seen. This is detrimental to the academic and social growth of this group.

The overrepresentation of Blacks in the sports world contributes to over identification with athletic achievement to the detriment of academic achievement. Beamon & Bell (2006) used a case study of an entire football team at a major Division I university to address several dimensions of the socialization process as an indicator of the overall success or failure of student athletes. Findings suggested that in comparison to
White student athletes, African-American respondents were found to place less emphasis on academics than athletics during their socialization process. Statistical analyses of the data indicated that as emphasis on athletics during the socialization process increased, poor academic performance increased. Therefore, the socialization process of African American males can impact their academic success.

There appears to be an overemphasis of sports in the socialization of African American males. Sports are also seen as an easier route, or alternative to education for upward mobility (Braddock, 1991). Further, Bierman (1990) argues that sports media creates mistaken illusions for impressionable African American youth and produces a false sense of potential career success. In fact, various types of sports including basketball and football represent the athletic version of the rags-to-riches story for many African American youth. While upward mobility usually consists of long years of education and hard work prior to reaching financial security, sports serve as a means to secure a comfortable income and a capacity to shortcut the process of higher education. As a consequence, the emphasis that African Americans pay to athletics tends to impede their socialization and academic performance (Bierman, 1990). The same is true with regard to the entertainment industry.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) developed what is referred to as the burden of acting White to explain how oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference contribute to school performance differences among African Americans in comparison to their White counterparts. The term “acting White” usually refers to African Americans who speak in ways; display attitudes, behaviors or preferences; or engage in activities considered to be White cultural norms (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; McArdle & Young,
From this perspective, it is important to understand the assumption that the experiences of Whites and middle-income people serve as the norm from which nonmajority children are deviating (Spencer et al., 2001). Therefore, in terms of academic achievement and success, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) describe “acting White” as part of a larger oppositional peer culture constructed by African Americans in response to a history of enslavement, discrimination, and inequality. More specifically, academic achievement is devalued because it is perceived as conforming to standard White norms of success. African American students are driven toward low school performance and sabotage their own careers by taking an oppositional stance toward academic achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In turn, African American students who may strive for academic success suffer racialized peer pressure, or have their cultural authenticity called into question, and are accused of acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tyson et al., 2005). Stinson (2011) used qualitative participative inquiry to give voice to four academically successful African American men in their early twenties. Although participants were able to successfully negotiate the burden of acting White, they acknowledged instances in which the theory applied to their educational experiences.

Notions that being academically successful is un-cool or acting white speaks to the ways in which African American males are socialized. It is important to consider the social significance of “the streets” in this socialization process. “The streets” often act as an alternative to family, church, and other community-based institutions that facilitate socialization. It is a socialization institution that largely influences the psychosocial development and overall life course trajectories of African American males. According to
Oliver (2006) males who are part of the street culture adhere to values and norms that place emphasis on toughness, sexual conquest, and hustling. In turn, there are typically three different roles that these males adopt in construction of their masculine identity including the tough guy or gangster, the player, and/or the hustler or baller. The tough guy or gangster is willing to resort to violence for respect, and to resolve disputes. Among players is an overt emphasis on sexual conquest and sexual promiscuity. The hustler or baller aggressively pursues access to economic opportunity or material goods by engaging in entrepreneurial activities from hip hop artists to drug dealers (Oliver, 2006). “The streets” is an important setting in the lives of marginal African American males because it provides an alternative to traditional opportunity structure as a means of achieving status and respect (Oliver, 2006). However, there are a number of problematic consequences associated with the pursuit of manhood and social recognition in “the streets”. Whitehead, Peterson, and Kaljee (1994) obtained data from interviews of 600 African Americans residing in Washington, DC and Baltimore, and found that among Black men, participation in street related activities was linked to increased rates of substance abuse and drug trafficking. Other consequences include disconnection from employment opportunities, interpersonal conflict and violence, high rates of incarceration, and poor attitudes regarding academic achievement (Oliver, 2006).

While on the surface student attitudes may seem like more of a micro-level explanation for the poor academic achievement and disengagement among African American males, it is in fact deeply rooted in culture. Past literature has focused on student resistance and the notion that negative school attitudes of African American students is a learned behavior that is enforced by the community (Fordham, 1996;
MacLeod, 1995). It seems that young children, particularly African American boys are participants and victims in this culture of anti achievement (Davis, 2003). Yet, despite the potential negative achievement related beliefs and attitudes outlined, there are African American males who overcome the pressures of society, who beat the odds and demonstrate resilience and positive life adjustment. Therefore, it is important to explore the unique nature of fostering resilience among this population.

**Personal Resiliency**

As outlined in chapter two, resilience is shaped by a combination of social structures and relationships. McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, and Futrell (1998) explain how resiliency patterns found in African American families in turn shape personal resiliency in African American youth. For example, the nurturance and support that exists in African American family networks assist in the development of individual resiliency characteristics, which have been identified among factors positively impacting the achievement related beliefs and behaviors of the population of interest.

Brailsford (2005) explains that characteristics such as being goal oriented, having initiative and motivation, and experiencing the self as possessing a measure of agency have been associated with support for academic achievement among African American youth. African American youth who take initiative and who are motivated carry the belief that they can do anything they put their minds to. Like most resilient youth, they do not give up easily and are flexible in developing a range of strategies, skills, and ideas to pursue their educational goals (Brailsford, 2005). Impoverished youth who exhibit individual resiliency characteristics typically view themselves as having agency and
freedom to select their own path and direction. They make these decisions through the
development of self-confidence and self-determination. They also have an ability to
make an adequate appraisal of their circumstances, to assess their capacity for action, and
to predict its effects. Resilient African American youth have a view that education is
important for upward mobility, and serves as an opportunity to escape the effects of
poverty (Brailsford, 2005).

Seccombe (2002) also explains the importance of individual factors, suggesting
that youth who exhibit the characteristics described have a sense that obstacles are not
insurmountable, and that they have control over their fate. Seccombe (2002) describes the
development of a high degree of self-esteem and self-efficacy as a special skill that serves
as a source of resilience. In addition, Teti, Martin, Ranade, Massie, Melebranche, and
Tschann (2011) explored the individual strengths of 30 low-income, urban African
American men. Semi-structured interviews produced rich narratives, which uncovered
numerous sociostructural stressors in their lives. While the men identified stressors such
as racism, incarceration, and unemployment, they also identified individual resiliency
characteristics such as perseverance, a commitment to learning from hardship, and
reflecting and refocusing to address difficulties as forms of resilience. They credited such
factors as contributors to positive life adjustment.

Greene (2002) also acknowledges the importance of individual resiliency among
youth by explaining that young people should have access to experiences that allow them
to develop individual resiliency characteristics that include self-esteem and self-efficacy.
She argues that the process of becoming more resilient is self-reinforcing to a certain
extent. Therefore, as people begin to exert their determination to create their own paths,
take care of themselves, and exert their independence in positive ways, they experience successes that reinforce their efforts. Community service and service learning opportunities can assist in developing this sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy that is important to fostering resilience among African American males.

**Service and Extracurricular Activities**

It is suggested that youth who engage in pro-social behavior are more resilient. Interacting systems such as school, neighborhood, and community invite participation in various pro-social behaviors. Pro-social behavior might consist of participation in youth development programs and activities that contribute to the promotion of positive academic outcomes and life adjustment. Participation may include involvement occurring in extracurricular activities, and community or service-learning programs (Billig, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Ungar et al., 2005).

Community and service learning opportunities have been linked to positive academic outcomes since youth who engage in such activities typically have more behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement in school. Klute & Billig (2002) conducted a large-scale study of Michigan Learn and Serve program with students in grades 7 to 12. Participants who had participated in service learning activities were more cognitively engaged in English language studies than their counterparts. It was also suggested that participating youth paid more attention to their homework and put forth more effort in school in comparison to their non-participating counterparts. Service learning has also impacted student attitudes or motivation regarding academics. These students are more prone to view school as stimulating, interesting, and fun which has
important implications for academic achievement (Billig, et al., 2003; Billig & Meyer, 2002). Participating students have also outperformed their counterparts on standardized tests in basic subject areas (Meyer, et al., 2004).

Aside from service learning, other pro-social activities might include community involvement in school clubs or programs, as well as performing arts or team sports. Eccles, Barber, Stone, and Hunt (2003) found these activities to be linked with positive outcomes both in adolescence and in adulthood. Quantitative analyses demonstrated that adolescents in 10th grade who were involved in prosocial activities had lower rates of drinking alcohol, getting drunk, using drugs, and skipping school in 12th grade than non-participants. At ages 21 and 22 they had lower rates of drinking alcohol, getting drunk, using drugs, and both driving while alcohol impaired and riding with an alcohol impaired driver. Among inner city urban youth, involvement in extracurricular activities has been linked to resiliency patterns including lower levels of antisocial behavior, gang involvement, delinquency, and substance abuse (Tiet et al., 2010). Therefore, African American males are more resilient and increase their likelihood of developing positive academic outcomes and life adjustment with involvement in service and extracurricular activities.

**Family**

The various strengths found in African American families have also been instrumental with regard to resilient outcomes for African American males. Research regarding African American families has moved away from paternalistic views and having both parents within the family, to yielded versions of families that are more
realistic among African Americans. However, the literature has focused more on the risk factors associated with these alternative family structures as opposed to the warmth, affection, cohesion, commitment, and emotional support that extended kinships can also provide (McCubbin et al., 1998; Seccombe, 2002). McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, and Futrell (1998) explain that despite social inequities of racism, the public health and social welfare statistics on poverty, homicide, AIDS, teen pregnancy, and homelessness, most minority families go on with every day living. This daily functioning requires high levels of motivation, commitment, tenacity, and creativity. Sustained collaborative relationships assist in this process, in that African American families develop and maintain a sense of resiliency by engaging in diverse modes of social interaction that facilitate participation in and growth through relationships (McCubbin et al., 2008).

The social support demonstrated in familial relationships has contributed significantly to academic success and positive life outcomes (Brailford, 2005; Orthner, 2004). Warmth, nurturance, affection, and establishing expectations for African American youth are a means of social support. For example, parents who express high expectations for their children to pursue academic success even though they themselves had not been able to graduate from high school help to instill the value of education, which in turn is a predictor of more successful outcomes. Through a qualitative research design that included ethnographic interviewing, case studies and observation allowed Brailsford (2005) to understand how a group of Black youth in South Africa who experienced poverty achieved academic success and demonstrated a resilient trajectory. Results indicated that with regard to the atmosphere in the family, strong support influenced a resilient response. Yet, even when immediate families cannot provide
certain support, extended family members may offer financial or material support such as food and clothing, and/or indirect support in the form of positive role models, and advice related to the pursuit of higher education (Brailsford, 2005; Logan, 1996).

Other scholars have also linked the role of the family to achievement among African American males (Maton et al., 1998; Morales, 2010; Taylor et al., 1995). Maton, Hrabowski, and Greif (1998) discuss specific parenting themes related to outstanding achievement among this population. Determined and persistent academic engagement including an emphasis on the importance of education, high levels of performance, high expectations, and engagement in early school activities determine advocacy for appropriate academic placements, involvement with teachers and parent organizations, providing structure and help with homework, and arranging placements in summer educational programs. Strict limit setting and discipline directed to teach African American males a sense of right and wrong is also an important theme, in addition to love, support, good communication, and modeling. Finally, African American parents or caretakers who encourage community connectedness and resourcefulness among their male children are effective in helping to build resiliency, or a pathway to academic success.

Ungar (2004) further explains that resilient youth who successfully engage with their caretakers feel better about themselves and are more likely to succeed at life tasks. These youth consider themselves to have a powerful identity where they are competent, in control, meaningfully involved, attached, and accepted. Therefore, parents and other adult caregivers offer youth experiences in which they build for themselves powerful identities that reinforce experiences of well-being. Rather than having a mentality that
adults are a hindrance, resilient youth view adults as needed to provide structure and opportunity for their empowerment. They also identify their caretakers as worthy of notice and respect, and as being concerned with their well-being.

**School and Community**

Both the school and community play important roles in fostering resilience among African American males. As previously discussed, supportive and nurturing family relationships predict successful school outcomes. However, such relationships are also important in the context of the school. Resilient African American males perceive their teachers and other significant school personnel as role models and a source of encouragement (Brailsford, 2005). Wood and Turner (2011) highlighted findings from a qualitative study of factors impacting the academic success of 28 African American male students in community college. Data was collected at a midsized institution in the southwestern United States. They found that elements of faculty-student engagement positively affected the academic success students. More specifically, African American male students were able to perform better when they felt they received personal attention from faculty. This personal attention referred to faculty members exhibiting a friendly demeanor toward students from onset, checking in on student academic progress, listening to student concerns, being proactive in addressing performance issues, and encouraging students to succeed. These concepts associated with personal attention work collectively to create an affirmative faculty-student relationship (Wood, 2011). Low-socioeconomic urban students of color reference effective caring school personnel as role models, exhibiting encouraging, empathetic, supportive, and strict characteristics
These academic mentors offer skillful mentoring for future success, and also act as cultural translators, translating academic language into words and ideas that students readily understand (Morales, 2010). Further, Wood (2012) explains that African American males desire to succeed, and to create a better future for themselves and their families. However, the shared responsibility in assisting them to achieve their academic and career goals is needed to produce successful outcomes. In addition to supportive relationships, the nature of the school environment is important and has led to successful academic outcomes for African American males.

Harper and Griffin (2011) utilized data from 219 students at 42 colleges across the United States who were part of the National Black Male College Achievement Study (NBMCAS), the largest ever empirical research study of Black undergraduate men. Their research was guided by a phenomenological approach and used individual interviews with participants to describe the policies and programs that enabled Black undergraduate men who grew up in low-income and working class families to successfully navigate their way to and through predominantly White private postsecondary institutions. Findings suggested that access to unique K-12 school environments contributed to college readiness for students growing up in urban communities. Magnet schools that emphasized particular academic specialties such as science, technology, and performing arts, and that promoted a strong college-going culture also contributed to their success. Participation in school programs that aimed to identify and nurture students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds was also beneficial, affording students opportunities to develop partnerships important for successful transitions to college (Harper & Griffin, 2011). In addition, schools and programs that offered opportunities for scholarships and
other forms of financial awards helped to make college matriculation possible for African American males (Harper & Griffin, 2011).

Another important aspect of the school environment is the relationships students build with their peers. Davis (1999) explains the important role that peers play in the lives of African American males. They exert a great deal of influence and control on youth to conform to group values and norms. Because peers are so important to African American males, schools should provide opportunities for peer counseling, peer leadership groups, and mentoring. These opportunities assist in fostering resiliency among this population. Schools can train African American males as peer counselors or facilitators to help other African American students cope with social, emotional, and practical problems (Davis, 1999). Peer leadership groups are effective in encouraging at-risk members of this population to establish friendships with more conventional students (Davis, 1999). These relationships can also be facilitated through students working together to solve community problems. Finally, mentoring programs should involve supportive, non-judgmental volunteers, and should address ways to curtail risks such as antisocial behavior and academic failure (Davis, 1999).

Resilient African American males not only feel supported in their schools, but feel supported in their overall communities as well (Davis, 1999; Teti et al., 2011). Members of this population benefit from community interventions including neighborhood resource teams, workshops, consciousness-raising strategies, community planning and action teams, youth training and employment, as well as after school programs. Members of these groups often include police officers, social workers, health care workers, school personnel, parents, and neighbors to name a few (Davis, 1999).
These interventions are most successful in assisting African American males to foster resilience when they are comprehensive in nature, and focus on institutions that affect the lives of African American males (Davis, 1999). Moreover, the community can assist students in developing positive feelings and attitudes toward school, which is important to their academic success (Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006).

**Spirituality**

Many scholars have noted that African Americans tend to have a strong religious orientation (Greene, 2002; Logan, 1996; McCubbin et al., 1998; Riggins et al., 2008; Teti et al., 2011). Though religion or spirituality is defined in different ways, resilient African American males reference it generally the same, as a source of strength to overcome adversities (Teti et al., 2011). Teti et al (2011) who explored the individual strengths of 30 low-income, urban African American men through qualitative inquiry found that participants referenced religion or spirituality as a means of emotional support and guidance, a source of stress relief and comfort, and a way to accept and address challenges.

Involvement in the African American church is a vehicle for religion and spirituality, intensifying bonding relationships in African American families, and providing messages that assist in the development of positive self-concept (Logan, 1996; McCubbin et al., 1998). Spirituality deepens and expands the values of African Americans, leading them to see adversity as an opportunity for growth and positive development (Greene, 2002). Riggins, McNeal, and Herndon (2008) explain that with regard to African American male collegiate students, those who capitalize and embrace
their spirituality increase the likelihood that they will continue their collegiate experience. Social support from religious institutions, and specific acts of spirituality such as prayer are instrumental in this process.

Apart from spirituality, the notion of adversarial growth was explored in a qualitative study of eleven Latina/o collegiate students. Participants were able to overcome personal and academic challenges through responses including positive reframing, and using low expectations as motivation (Cavazos, Johnson, & Sparrow, 2010). They were able to remain positive in the face of adversity, and were motivated to overcome perceived stereotypes that they would not succeed. Similarly, a sample of female university students was able to build resilience following adversity in adolescence. Most perceived the adversity as catalyzing personal growth, which in turn positively influenced their life adjustments (Shepherd, Reynolds, & Moran, 2010).

In addition to adversarial growth, the use of negative role models has been used to harness motivation as it relates to success, achievement, and behavior change. Lockwood, Sadler, Fyman, and Tuck (2004) found among a sample of university psychology students that those considering abstaining from potentially deleterious activity were more likely to view negative models as effective motivators. The aforementioned studies, however, do not explore the experiences of African American males.

**Conclusion**

While the review of existing literature has undoubtedly provided some insight into the potential risk and protective factors related to the academic and career trajectories of African American males, it is important to note that more studies than not
utilize quantitative methods. With regard to the effects of family disruption, for example, the disadvantage associated with quantitative methods of inquiry is that they do not provide information on the timing, cause, or duration of family disruption. Yet, such factors have important implications for effects on the academic and career trajectories of youth, and should be explored. In other cases, the results of quantitative approaches are helpful but are limited in that they provide less elaborate accounts of participant experiences. In addition, the context of the study is ignored in quantitative research, and context is a very important element to the current study.

Although there have been qualitative studies conducted regarding the educational experiences of African American males, rarely do those studies emphasize the experiences of African American collegiate students. Existing literature has shed light on the various ways of fostering resilience among African American male children and adolescents, but there is a current gap in literature explaining the existence of resilient African American male collegiate students, and the ways in which they positively achieve and experience positive life adjustment. There is also a gap in literature explaining the process of this population engaging positive adaptive responses to living in impoverished communities. Therefore, there is a great need for research such as the present study that aims to emphasize unique experiences of resilience and positive life adjustment among African American males given their particular sociocultural context. The subsequent chapter details how the researcher went about this process.
CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Methodologically based theorizing has become of great importance to the field of family science, and family scholars place an emphasis on research techniques that contribute to the development of new ideas (LaRossa, 2005). The present study utilizes a qualitative research design. Qualitative methods rely on non-statistical procedures to generate theory (LaRossa, 2005). Data that emerge from qualitative studies are descriptive, and are reported in words or pictures, rather than numbers (Creswell, 2009; Gelo et al., 2008). There is an emphasis on discovery, description, and meaning as opposed to the more traditional natural science principles of prediction, control, and measurement (LaRossa, 2005; Osborne, 1994). The purpose is not to generalize findings, but rather to enrich one’s understanding of human behavior and its meaning (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2006; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Moreover, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the processes of human interaction between individuals, and the ways in which they grow and change (Daly, 2007). The goals of the present research are consistent with the intent of qualitative approaches in that the researcher hopes to gain an in-depth understanding of behavior and processes, and of phenomena within a specific context, particularly factors influencing the academic and career trajectories of African American male collegiate students living in the San Bernardino, California community (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

A number of underlying assumptions are inherent in the qualitative research approach. Corbin and Strauss (2008) outlined these assumptions including the following:
There is no divide between external or interior world; interactions generate new meanings; actions may generate further meanings; contingencies are likely to arise during a course of action; actions are not always rational; means-ends analytic schemas are usually not appropriate to understanding action and interaction; and a useful fundamental distinction between classes or interaction is between the routine and the problematic. In summary, the methodological implications of the assumptions outlined convey that the complexity of the world provides no simple explanation for things, and events are the result of multiple factors interacting in complex and unanticipated ways (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To capture as much of this complexity as possible in the process of research is important to qualitative approaches, (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

While it is imperative to consider the underlying assumptions of qualitative research, choosing a paradigm to inform the process of research is also of great importance. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) each paradigm within qualitative research holds a perspective, and a set of questions that can be applied to data to help researchers draw out contextual factors, and to identify relationships between context and process. Research paradigms are used as a lens to identify research interests and questions, as well as the research design. Additionally, working from a particular paradigm assists in the guidance for interpretation of collected data (Daly, 2007). Daly (2007) suggests that each of the paradigms has a separate framework of beliefs, habits, values and tools, and is based on different epistemological positions that include that of the subjectivist or the objectivist. Objectivists believe that there is a concrete, predictable reality that exists independently from our processes of thought. Subjectivists on the other
hand, believe that there is no objectivity since the researcher always incorporates his or
her values and interpretations into the process of qualitative research (Daly, 2007).

It is the belief of the researcher that a paradigm leaning toward subjectivist
epistemology corresponds with the current study in that there is no objectivity since the
researcher always incorporates values and interpretations into the process of qualitative
research (Daly, 2007). The goal is to play an active and deliberate role in organizing and
assigning meaning to the data as a way of constructing higher order categories and theory
(Daly, 2007). This research is collaborative in nature, allowing interaction between both
the researcher and participants. More specifically, the researcher actively engaged
participants in the process of describing their experiences as it relates to the goals of the
present study (Charmaz, 2006).

The methodology used to facilitate this study is grounded theory. Grounded
theory, developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss, is the systematic generation of
theory from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Distinguishing characteristics of grounded
theory include simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis phases of
research, creation of analytic codes and categories developed from data rather than
preconceived hypotheses, the development of middle range theories to explain behavior
and processes, memo-taking that includes writing analytic notes to explicate and fill out
categories, and sampling for theory construction (Charmaz, 1995).

In grounded theory, theories are created that are empirically grounded in data,
which in turn inform data collection. Grounded theory utilizes a constant comparative
method to establish analytic distinctions, and to make comparisons at each level of
analytic work. It involves continuous sampling and analysis, allowing researchers to
gather the information needed to appropriately convey the experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Daly, 2007). Chiovitti and Piran (2003) further explain the importance of determining what is happening in the data, and what those happenings represent. This exploration assists in identifying categories, relationships between and within data categories, as well as core categories around which all other categories revolve.

The present study maintains three basic principles important to grounded theory including theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation. Charmaz (2006) explains that theoretical sensitivity is the process by which researchers move from the descriptive to analytic level of analysis, considering multiple vantage points, making comparisons, following leads, and building on ideas. Theoretical sampling is important to collecting additional data in relation to emerging core categories or subcategories. Theoretical saturation was achieved at the point whereby no new or relevant themes were emerging from particular categories. Additionally, the actual size of the sample was determined on the basis of saturation.

**Participants**

Two sets of participants were used for this study, which included both African American male collegiate students and community members. The researcher provides details regarding both samples although only the sample consisting of student participants was utilized for purposes of the present study’s analysis. Students consisted of African American males in undergraduate programs at a college or university in the San Bernardino area. They were between ages 18 and 24, and able to participate in both an interview and focus group conducted in English. As previously outlined, the size of the
sample was determined on the basis of saturation. Saturation for the present study was achieved at around twenty participants.

The researcher also conducted a focus group with a second set of participants that was made up of members of the San Bernardino community. Members of this sample consisted of parents, teachers, and other professionals who worked in San Bernardino, and who by virtue of their work had interactions and involvement with young African American men in the community. Other community members included clergy and members of churches in San Bernardino. Focus group participants engaged in a discussion regarding the familial and contextual factors impacting the academic and career trajectories of African American male collegiate students. Participants in this sample were not limited to any particular age group, race, or ethnicity. Yet, it turned out that the group was also made up of African American males. They were, however, required to have had some interaction and/or experience working with African American males in the San Bernardino community. Both the student and community focus groups were made up of about 8 willing participants. Again, the sample of community professionals was not used for purposes of the current study’s analysis. Yet, since it was part of the data collection process the researcher found it important to include as part of the present study’s methodology.

As previously described, the United States Census Figures in 2010 indicated that some of the poorest people in the nation live in San Bernardino, with 34.6% living below the poverty level (U.S Census Bureau, 2010). In turn, San Bernardino is reported to be the second, poorest large city in the United States, and has become a poster child for economic devastation, a factor often associated with poor quality of life in families as
well as academic failure (Edin & Kissane, 2010; Inland Empire News, 2011; Nikulina et al., 2011; Pagani et al., 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore, San Bernardino was considered to be a central location for this type of study. In light of this, African American male collegiate students included in the present study were graduates of a San Bernardino high school, and/or they were required to have spent a minimum of two years living in the San Bernardino community.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

In consideration of the welfare and protection of human subjects, prior to any collection of data, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process was critical in giving careful attention to issues of confidentiality, coercion, safety, and informed consent. There were minimal risks associated with participation in the present study including confidentiality and the possibility of experiencing changes in feelings or mood associated with personal reflection. Since interviews and focus groups utilized for purposes of data collection were audiotaped, it was possible that audiotapes would contain information that identified participants in the study. To minimize this risk, the researcher transcribed each audiotape within four weeks of the interview, removing all identifiable information, and destroying the audio file upon completion. To address this risk in the focus group the researcher made a public request for confidentiality in addition to transcribing audiotapes, removing identifiable information, and destroying it upon completion.

In the event that reflecting on sensitive issues in one’s life caused unwanted moods or feelings to surface, the researcher was prepared to offer referrals to a
psychotherapist to address any issues. Participants were provided a contact number and address to the Behavioral Health Institute of Loma Linda University located only minutes away from the San Bernardino community.

Upon receiving approval from IRB, the researcher proceeded with data collection and research that was conducted in convenient locations at and around local colleges and universities in the San Bernardino area. Students whom the researcher was referred were provided an explanation of the study and both the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Those interested were provided an informed consent document that further outlined the purpose and procedures of the study, the risks previously discussed, study benefits, and participant rights. Participants were required to provide a signature indicating that they were informed, and agreed to terms of the study. Refer to Appendix A. Once the informed consent was signed indicating an interest in participation, arrangements were made to do the interview and/or focus group.

With regard to the community sample, those whom were referred to the researcher were also provided an explanation of the study as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Like the student participants, members of the community sample were presented with an informed consent form. Refer to Appendix B. If they agreed to the terms of the study and provided written consent, arrangements were made to do the focus group at a time and location most convenient for the group. It any case, however, it was important to convey to participants that the study was completely voluntary and they always had the right to decline participation, or to stop their involvement at any time.
Data Collection

A snowball sample of elicited referrals from persons with whom the researcher was familiar was utilized in recruiting African American collegiate students for purposes of this study. Community member participants were identified through reputation and involvement in community groups in San Bernardino. More specifically, the researchers’ previous involvement in community organizations in San Bernardino afforded the opportunity to ask them for referrals of parents, teachers, community organizers, youth program officers, and others that have knowledge of youth and youth issues in the San Bernardino community. They were contacted and asked to participate.

Data collection consisted of autobiographical narratives, in-depth interviews and/or focus groups with study participants. In recruitment, the study was framed for African American male collegiate students as an invitation to tell their experiences leading up to being admitted into college, and the factors that contributed to their academic resiliency/success. Prior to beginning the in-depth interview, and at the end of the focus group, a written narrative response was requested of African American male collegiate participants, not to exceed 10 minutes. This data collection strategy assisted in obtaining information regarding students’ educational, and related experiences, and was written in response to the question: “Provide an explanation of the factors that have most impacted your academic and career trajectories, and how they have shaped your ideas about work, school, and career.” Participants listed their answers, or responded in two to three sentences. Refer to Appendix C.

The goal of the interview itself was to acquire rich descriptions of the dimensions contributing to academic resilience in light of influential social and environmental factors
Hill & Thomas, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were utilized with African American male collegiate participants, consisting of broad, open-ended questions. Interviews were audiotaped and did not exceed 90 minutes. All interviews were conducted face to face. Therefore, no phone interviews were conducted.

Interviews with the collegiate students focused on the following areas:

1) Participants’ goals and motivation for school and career
2) Positive and/or negative personal, family, and community factors that have impacted educational success and
3) Obstacles that may impact one’s personal trajectory as a student.

Sample questions from the interview guide included the following:

1) Please share with me your motivation/thoughts for school and career, and future aspirations such as: plans for school, work, and career.
2) What would you say are some of the dominant or important messages you have heard/felt expressed from your parents/guardian regarding education, work, and career?
3) In a family or community we hear some positive and negative messages that somehow impact our motivation to advance ourselves, what are some of the positive and negative messages you have encountered growing up in your home with family, school, community? Refer to Appendix D.

Focus group interviews were also utilized wherein participants shared their views in a group with others, exploring the ways in which their experiences corresponded. One group was held for collegiate students, and a separate group for community member participants. Both groups were between 60-90 minutes. It is also important to note that
community members participated only in the focus group. They were not expected to provide narrative responses or to participate in an in-depth interview.

For community member participants, the research study was framed as an invitation to discuss knowledge of the experiences of African American males, and any personal experiences regarding the topic of interest. To elicit their participation, the researcher briefed potential participants regarding the aim of the study, the procedures, as well as the associated risks and benefits as outlined in the IRB section. Like collegiate participants, interested community participants were expected to provide written consent.

The following script was used in this process:

“Dear Sir/Madam: I am a doctoral student at Loma Linda University and am conducting an important study of young adults that are trying to make life work for them in San Bernardino. You were recommended by someone who thinks that you have knowledge of the struggles of African American male youth and their success in work and career. I am wishing to put together a panel of about 10 persons like you to discuss some essential issues with me to add breadth to my study. I am kindly asking for your voluntary participation at a time that is convenient for the participants. All willing participants are asked to sign this consent form and then proceed if they wish. Please allow me to give you a copy of the informed consent.”

At the time of the focus groups, the researcher acted as a moderator beginning with an introduction of herself, and an explanation of the aim for the group. Participants had an opportunity to briefly introduce themselves and shared some background information with the group. This assisted in establishing rapport. The moderator established ground rules that included participants talking one at a time, and also made a public request for confidentiality in participation. The moderator posed questions to the group, and helped to focus the discussion on the relevant subject area. This may have consisted of probing for detail and clarity when needed. The moderator also worked throughout the allotted time pacing the discussion, ensuring order, and that the goals of
the focus group were attained. All focus group interviews were audiotaped and used for the purposes of data collection.

Sample focus group questions for the student group included the following:

1) What have you seen, read, or heard about the educational experiences of African American males and have you found these things to be consistent with your own experiences?

2) As Black men growing up the various communities of San Bernardino what are some of your perceived benefits and drawbacks in pursuing higher education?

3) As Black men, what would you say are some of the influences that your community environment has had on your academic and career trajectories? Refer to Appendix E.

Sample focus group questions for the community members group were:

1) I’m wondering what your thoughts are about the family environment in which these young men have grown up, and the kinds of influences that this environment might have had on their career and academic trajectories?

2) What are some of the major deterrents to academic and career success that you see prevailing in the environment for these young Black men?

3) Please share with me your feelings about the San Bernardino school system overall and what you have witnessed to be the experiences of young Black men going through the educational pipeline. Refer to Appendix F.

Triangulation, or multiple sources of information that included the autobiographical narratives, interviews, and focus groups utilized for purposes of the present study, increased the range of voices and experiences brought to the data
collection effort. This in turn increases the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2009; Daly, 2007).

**Data Storage**

All data collected from the narratives, interviews, and focus groups were stored both electronically and in hard copy format. Electronic data was stored on a password-protected computer in the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences at Loma Linda University. Hard copies were also filed in the department in a locked file cabinet and locked office. As previously mentioned, all audio was destroyed following transcription of the data, and identifying information was deleted from transcripts.

**Analysis and Coding Procedures**

According to Charmaz (1995), grounded theory requires simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis in that the researcher’s emerging analysis shapes data collection procedures. This involvement not only directs the researcher’s efforts, but also leads the researcher to take control of the data. Early analytic work might have led the researcher to collect more data around emerging themes and questions. By simultaneously becoming involved in data collection and analysis, the researcher was able to avoid volumes of general or unfocused data that did not lead to anything new. In addition, it was important to expect to collect additional data on emerging analytic interests and themes since utilizing a grounded theory approach. Systematic use of the constant comparison method was useful in shedding light on any hidden assumptions and
patterns found in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Open, axial, and selective coding procedures were repeated until saturation of the categories was attained.

**Open Coding**

For purposes of this study, interviews were transcribed verbatim. The formal process of analysis began by breaking the data apart in a way that would allow the researcher to delineate concepts. This is also referred to as the open coding procedure. In the open coding procedure, data was examined line by line in order to identify the participants’ descriptions of thought patterns, feelings, and actions related to the themes developed in the interviews. To assist in making analytic sense of the rich stories and descriptions of participants, the researcher looked for and identified what was happening in the data. For example, determining what was going on, what people were doing, what they were saying, how structure and context served to support, maintain, impede or change those actions and statements were important considerations to this process (Charmaz, 1995). To illustrate, following is an example.

One participant in the present study answered a question regarding the extent to which he felt supported in his education and career goals. He replied with this statement: “I would say I have a pretty good support system between my family, my brother, my auntie, my dad.” Using the open coding procedure the researcher coded the phrase “I would say I have a pretty good support system” as **Expressing contentment with level of support**, and the phrase “…between my family, my brother, my auntie, my dad” as **Supported by immediate and extended members of family**.

This line-by-line coding procedure was done with all of the data. The codes
derived represented emerging themes formulated in words closely resembling those used by the participants. This served as an attempt to maintain the semantics of the data. In turn, the codes were grounded in the data. Journaling and the writing of analytic memos also began during the process of open coding, where notes and ideas were recorded about emerging ideas in the data. These processes were modified as needed as the research continued (Charmaz, 2006).

**Axial Coding**

It is not always clear where open coding ends and axial coding begins since there are identifiable connections among concepts even in the early stages of analysis. Yet, the process of axial coding related categories to subcategories, specified the properties and dimensions of categories, and reassembled the data fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

In the present study, codes were developed in two phases: (1) examining the data for individual participants and (2) across participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Links between various open codes were explored and emerging patterns and relationships were identified. The researcher organized participant responses based on the identified categories. These categories emerged as the central piece of analysis, linking all subcategories together (Daly, 2007). The categories were then compared and contrasted to determine the ways in which they were similar or different (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006).

Forty-four categories were developed in the present study. Rather than treating these separately, they could be treated as single categories involving several properties.
Categories in this study were related to one of the following: (1) Hardship (2) Masculinity, or (3) Support. The first classification included titles such as: Economic Hardship, Difficult Life Challenges/Changes, Absence of Male Figure, and Negative Male images, for example. As the analysis continued some categories were merged like Economic Hardship and Difficult Life Challenges/Changes. Concepts related to Masculinity included Toughness, Street Life/Rules, Overcoming Street Life, Social Relationships, and so on. Some important examples of Support were: Family Relationships, Dominant Family Messages, Family Members’ Experience with Education, Extra Curricular Activities, Teacher Perceptions, and Spirituality/Religion.

As these ideas continued to evolve they came to have linkages with the properties of a formal theory presented to explain the major social processes of participants in this study.

**Selective Coding**

Selective coding began once links between subcategories were established, indicating that theoretical saturation had been reached. Core categories emerged as the central piece of analysis, linking all subcategories together to formulate a theory (Daly, 2007). At this stage of analysis there were three main themes: (1) Constructive Hardship and Counteraction, (2) Conditioned Construction of Masculinity, and (3) Community and Family Support. A core category to which all other categories were related had to be identified at the heart of the analysis. This category helped to provide a theoretical explanation of relationships among various categories (Daly, 2007).

In determining the factors that mitigated achievement and life adjustment among
African American male collegiate students in San Bernardino, it seemed that participants identified a number of adverse circumstances and negative stereotypes which they were able to overcome. They had the ability to reframe negative experiences and use them as motivation for success. Participants were also able to overcome pressures to adopt a veneer of toughness, and utilized levels of community and family support that positively influenced their overall trajectories. The notion that African American male collegiate students were able to develop prosocial ways of coping with familial, social, and contextual challenges, and that levels of community and family support was significant to their resilience (as operationalized in this study) is important in explaining the Prosocial Development and Achievement Theory. This theory explains the major social processes of participants in this study.

After outlining the grounded theory, it was important to ensure that the theory was linked closely to the data, and faithful to the every day reality of participants. The major exceptions included one participant who was unable to reframe his negative experiences to develop prosocial coping. Neither did any level of community or family support positively impact his academic or career trajectory. Rather such experiences led the participant to find little importance or value in education.

Since the data analysis process was not necessarily sequential, it was useful to constantly re-examine the data, codes, categories, and the proposed model as whole. Data was reviewed several times by the researcher, writing memos to identify meaning units (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Writing preliminary analytic notes, or memos about codes, comparisons, or any other ideas about the data assisted in defining ideas that best fit and interpreted the data as tentative analytic categories (Charmaz, 2006). When questions
arose and gaps in categories appeared, it was important to seek data that answered such questions. Therefore, returning to participants to learn more and strengthen analytic categories as discussed earlier was necessary. Memo writing assisted in this process, and also ensured validity (Charmaz, 2006; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

**Validity and Transferability**

It was important to maintain balance between the rigid structure of grounded theory as prescriptive methodology and the flexible use of interviews as adaptive methods (Daly, 2007). In order to increase validity and reliability, triangulation of methods was utilized. A combination of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and autobiographical narratives was useful in understanding the educational experiences of participants more clearly. Additionally, these multiple sources of information contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Daly, 2007). Systematic use of the constant comparison method also enhanced the credibility and transferability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). The focus group also served as a member validation check further ensuring validity of the study (Hill & Thomas, 2000). Over time, modifying the interview guide, research question and content areas of the emerging theory according to incoming information from participants assisted in enhancing credibility (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). This process was informed in large part by the constant comparison method. Finally, it was important to provide details about the sample and setting characteristics, as well as to delineate the level of theory generated to assess transferability of this study (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003).
Presentation of Findings

In presenting the findings of the study, the researcher aimed to provide rich, and accurate descriptions of the participants’ experiences. The researcher noted any patterns found in the data, as well as specific quotes and examples that are useful in appropriately conveying the experiences of participants. Another important factor as it relates to this study’s presentation of findings is the researcher’s shared experiential base with participants. The researcher was able to draw from personal experience, not to impose those experiences upon the data, but as a comparative case to stimulate thinking about various properties and dimensions of concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Addressing Potential Issues in Research

Researchers play an important role in qualitative research, and are engaged in all aspects of the process. As a result, qualitative researchers may be faced with a number of challenges (Houghton et al., 2010). In conducting a study of this nature, it is important to consider the vulnerability and disenfranchisement often experienced by African American males. In addition to poverty, many of the participants experienced marginality, victimization, disempowerment, discrimination, and oppression (Thompson, 1992). Thompson (1992) explains the importance of utilizing research as an opportunity to contribute to personal and social empowerment of such groups. Part of empowering participants involved the researcher promoting access to economic and social capital (Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002). Further, in light of the potential vulnerability and disenfranchisement of African American males, Daly (2007) discusses mindfulness of class differences and its effect on the research process. Therefore, reducing class
differences through deliberate acts such as dressing down, for example, was important on the part of the researcher.

Critics emphasize that qualitative interviews create a problem of bias as a result of selectivity, or an inability or unwillingness to convey some of the data presented (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). In light of this potential issue, qualitative researchers are encouraged to disclose any form of biases, any assumptions toward the research, expectations, and relevant history (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006; Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005). Corbin and Strauss (2008) also suggest that the researcher keep separate notes aside from memos and field notes. The purpose is to record impressions of the participants, and the researcher’s reactions. This process assisted in minimizing potential biases, in turn increasing the credibility of the research study.

Another challenge that had the potential to affect the current study was the potential exploitative relationship between the researcher and participants. This refers particularly to the nature of the power imbalance, and the psychological, emotional, and/or personal influence it can have on participants (Cutliffe & Ramcharan, 2002; Hofman, 2004). Orb (2001) argues that reference to principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice assist in alleviating ethical issues that might arise in the relationships between the researcher and participants. Further, researchers should be mindful of the ethical implications when managing relationships that develop through research (Houghton et al., 2010).

According to Daly (2007) any time we conduct research we take on the ethical responsibility of ensuring that the rights of participants are protected. He explains that our protection of participants should extend to broader levels of accountability. At the root of
this accountability is the way we as researchers represent participants, which is largely based on one’s personal paradigm selection or epistemological positioning. Earlier the researcher alluded to the fact that paradigm selections are a framework for the researcher’s beliefs and values, which largely influence the research process. Therefore, it was important to be transparent and invite participants to contribute to and comment on the way their experience was being presented so as not to be overshadowed by the researcher’s influence (Daly, 2007).

**Researcher as a Tool in Research Process**

The technique posed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) that was discussed in the previous section was also useful in minimizing any disadvantages associated with being an *insider-outsider*. This term refers to researchers conducting research with populations of which they are also members. Therefore, they typically share an identity, language, and experiential base (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

The present researcher gained an understanding of the population of interest within their sociocultural context, having been raised in the same under-resourced community. As an African American female under the age of thirty who went through the San Bernardino city public school pipeline, the researcher understands first hand the obstacles young people growing up in central neighborhoods and urban communities face. Similar to other San Bernardino youth the researcher dealt with issues of economic disadvantage and hardship, and was exposed to violence, crime, and other community stressors. Based on personal experience and exposure the researcher has become mindful of the needs of members of the target population and the factors that matter to them.
The researcher has also worked as a teacher in the public school system and is knowledgeable of the characteristics of public schools and their impact on quality education, as well as the issues impacting African American male students from disadvantaged families. Because the information that results from this study was filtered through the researcher, it was important to consider the insider role in interacting with participants, and the way in which it had the potential to benefit and/or impede the process of research. The insider role allowed the researcher more rapid and complete acceptance by participants that contributed to them being more open with the researcher, increasing the level of depth to the data gathered (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). On the other hand, the insider role might have also resulted in role confusion or conflict, or in the researcher experiencing difficulty separating her personal experience from that of participants (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Breen (2007), however, suggests that all researchers are insiders – as humans studying humans. That is, despite culture, ethnicity, and/or economic background, critical awareness, accurate empathy or enhanced insight and understanding are skills that all humans are capable of exhibiting.

Generally, when addressing challenges associated with qualitative approaches, researchers should adhere to ethical guidelines, and practice integrity to achieve the qualities of soundness and consistency among values, beliefs, and methodological strategies (Daly, 2007).
CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

African American males are susceptible to a number of negative factors having lived, and in many instances, having been raised in the city of San Bernardino, and educated through the San Bernardino public school pipeline. Members of this population who graduate high school and go on to pursue higher education demonstrate a level of resilience. As previously discussed, resilience in the present study has been operationalized as the ability to develop successful academic and career pathways, and achieve positive life adjustment.

Findings from the qualitative grounded theory approach utilized in this study suggest that African American male college students in the San Bernardino community develop resilience in unique ways. Prosocial Development and Achievement Theory represents the major social processes of achievement and adjustment among African American male collegiate students in the current study. Most participants were able to develop prosocial ways of coping with personal, social, and contextual challenges that they encountered in the San Bernardino community. While they experienced hardship and were exposed to poor influences, participants were able to reframe their ideas about those experiences. They also sought to change negative patterns of behavior that led to poor life outcomes. Additionally, participants made deliberate choices that allowed them to escape negative stereotypes regarding the academic and career trajectories of African American men as a whole. Ultimately, participants in this study were able to transform their negative experiences into more positive ones. Collegiate students in the present
study also utilized various forms of community and family support that positively influenced their trajectories and life adjustment.

Three themes emerged from the process of grounded theory, and were identified to explain participant experiences as it relates to their academic and career trajectories. These include the following: (1) Constructive Hardship and Counteraction (2) Conditioned Construction of Masculinity and (3) Community and Family Support. In the present study these themes have been categorized as the Three C’s and may be referenced as such. Following is a more detailed explanation of the Three C’s and the ways in which these factors influence the trajectories and adjustment of participants in the sample. A diagram (Figure 1) is presented to illustrate the core category and emergent themes discussed in this study.
Constructive Hardship and Counteraction

Constructive Hardship and Counteraction is a theme that emerged to explain how African American male collegiate students utilized hardship experiences in the present study. Hardship experiences for members of the sample generally consisted of challenges collegiate students endured pre-college, or over the process of their childhoods, or youth. Hardships were adverse or unfavorable circumstances that participants were dealing with in their everyday lives apart from their schooling experiences. These challenges occurred
in the context of their work, families, neighborhoods, and/or overall communities. It seemed that adverse or unfavorable experiences were critical to most participants developing motivation to achieve, and to the development of successful academic and career pathways, and positive life adjustment.

In addition to hardship experiences as motivation for academic success and positive life adjustment, participants utilized the experiences of others around them, as well as overall poor images of African American males. Witnessing the negative or hardship experiences of others often resulted in participants seeking to avoid undesirable behavior or characteristics, and the recurrence of negative patterns. Participants were deliberate also in counteracting negative stereotypes of African American males, which positively influenced their overall trajectories.

While the nuances described were true for most collegiate students in this study, not all participants described their experiences in this way. Therefore, the researcher is careful to also provide an account of alternative participant experiences that are not necessarily in line with those that follow.

**Financial Hardship**

Among hardship experiences that participants encountered was that of financial hardship. Participants in this study linked their financial struggle with a lack of education. Therefore, they viewed education as a means for upward mobility. This led participants to perceive education as being important and in turn motivated them to pursue higher education.
Trey explained that he learned the importance of education the hard way. He happened to be a student who decided to return to school after taking time off and having been in the workforce. He went through a number of changes including unstable employment and financial hardship. He was opposed to returning to a lifestyle of living paycheck to paycheck and trying to make ends meet. Therefore, college seemed to be a better alternative:

Trey: “Working, getting fired, getting laid off, getting a car note, struggling to pay that, and insurance, and going to nobody to get help. I didn’t have no mom or pops really help me so, I do it on my own so, I learned the hard way, not the easy way like the rest of these kids do.”

Derrick shared a similar experience with Trey in that he and his family struggled financially to meet basic human needs. Initially, this deterred his focus from school and he made the decision to enter the workforce rather than pursuing education:

Derrick: “… I felt we didn’t have enough money. So, instead of focusing on my education, I was just trying to make money somehow, have a job or whatever, pay some bills. Instead of having my full focus on school, it wasn’t. It was stuff around school pretty much.”

Over time, however, Derrick became a father, and education became more of a priority.

**Fatherhood**

The transition into fatherhood led to an important shift in the mindsets of participants, causing them to consider the well-being of their children, and in turn making the decision to pursue higher education as a means of providing their children with greater resources and opportunities. Participants described the financial difficulty they
experienced taking care of their children, which served as a source of motivation to advance their education.

Derrick felt that having a college degree would not only increase his sufficiency and diminish financial related stress, but would also better position him to provide for his young daughter: “I have a daughter, so, that is my motivation. I want her to live a better life than me.”

Jerrell, who also became a father at a young age, was working three jobs to make ends meet and care for his son while attending school. He experienced some difficulty in achieving balance, but felt that being a father was just something he had to do. He explained that his three-year-old son suffered from cerebral palsy, which is characterized by motor impairment and can present with global and mental dysfunction (Krigger, 2006). This circumstance led him to want to pursue a degree in physical therapy.

Jerrell: “Now it’s like I work at Friday’s, I work at Dollar Tree.” Like, I make music too, and I’ve been selling that and that’s like part of my income, so. I don’t know. It’s just a lot of things.”

Jerrell also said: “I have like a, I have a three year old, and he has CP, and that’s part of the reason I wanted to be a physical therapist. So, I’d say he’s like a big motivation.” Jerrell did not only feel responsible for providing financially for his son, but his son’s condition with cerebral palsy motivated him to pursue a degree in a discipline that would allow him to provide appropriate care as well.

Participants who were also fathers were able to utilize their experiences as motivation towards their academic and career trajectories. They felt that having an education would assist both them and their children to achieve more positive outcomes.
Absentee Fathers

African American male collegiate students in this study were also motivated by hardships that included dealing with issues involving their own fathers, particularly absenteeism. This seemed to influence their academic and career trajectories, and life adjustment. Participants described the ways in which their fathers’ minimal or lack of involvement in their lives negatively impacted them. However, they used those experiences as motivation to be what they referred to as better men. This vision of a better man seemed to develop from participants’ disappointing relationships with their fathers, and the qualities that they felt their fathers lacked.

Participants explained that the minimal or lack of involvement of their father’s in their lives led them to struggle to find themselves as they transitioned into manhood. As a result, they believed that they made poorer decisions than they might have otherwise made had their fathers taken a more active role in their lives. Moreover, participants were forced to learn many of life’s lessons through trial and error since they lacked the guidance and nurturance of their fathers. Anthony said: “My father wasn’t really involved in my life so I didn’t have that male figure. So, I pretty much had to learn how to be a man by myself. And unfortunately I learned the hard way.” Additionally, Sean explained in reference to learning the importance of education and the motivation he had developed to pursue higher education: “…Like, nobody else taught me this, especially not having a father so that’s just like a boom!”

Some participants expressed in detail their disappointment and dissatisfaction in the relationships with their fathers. However, as a result of their experiences they felt motivated to not repeat patterns of absenteeism. They desired to live lives and make
choices that would categorize them as better men. Corey explained: “Um, well personally for me it was always the thought of being better, being a better man than my dad was.” A participant by the name of Anthony said:

Anthony: “I feel like me and my father are more like an uncle-nephew relationship. We are not as close as I want to be, nor I feel we should be. I can’t call on my father if I need anything, because he calls me when he needs things. Growing up I used to always think of my dad as the greatest, my dad was superman pretty much. But, once I came to the realization pretty much around 11, 12 years old, and saw that my dad wasn’t the best of fathers, it kind of hurt me. You know? It made me feel like my hopes were …it let me down.”

Anthony further explained: “I told my father at a young age that I wanted to be better than him.”

Similar to other participants, Sean was raised without his father, and described his childhood as being unstable. He moved around from home to home, and felt that he wasn’t provided the emotional care that was necessary for healthy development:

Sean: “…My life growing up, like that triggered it, from me not having a certain love or things you need as a child grows cause like, you can’t just raise a child and expect em’ to grow up, or him, or her to grow up and Oh! They’re gonna be perfectly fine! They’re gonna have a job! Because it’s more to that than just giving you food, and water, and clothes.”

He further explained that no one else in his family had attended college. Therefore, he found it important to make the difference and pursue a college education:

Sean: “…Well coming from my background my family is not educated. So, I’m like the only, I’m my mom’s only son to ever go, well, only boy on the side of the family to go to college. So, if anything it would be to keep on going because nobody else is going to college in our family, and it would just make our last name look better. Plus, overall. So, they would just push that to me like to keep going to school since nobody else in our family has been going to school.”

Finally, was able to come to terms with events that occurred in his childhood since being in college, which motivated him to continue in his pursuit:
Sean: “I feel like college has helped me out a lot, especially if you been neglected as a child, as I was and certain stuff. So yeah, I would say it has helped me as a person, help you grow, and it answers a lot of questions.”

Participants who experienced father absenteeism developed prosocial ways of coping. They were able to reframe their experiences with hopes of breaking negative patterns and achieving positive adjustment which was important to their academic and career trajectories.

*Justice System*

For other participants, hardship experiences involved run-ins with law enforcement or the justice system. These events triggered participants’ motivation for change and positively influenced their academic and career trajectories and life adjustment since they did not want to lead lives that would land them in prison.

Andrew credited his experiences with the justice system as having been his motivation to turn his life around. When asked what triggered a wake up call for him he responded: “Uh, had to be unfortunately through the justice system a couple of times, finally got it, before I had to go to the big house.” He went on to explain that he wanted to avoid the penitentiary: “Didn’t want to go to jail.” “I saw what it was like in there. I don’t want to live there for the rest of my life.”

As a result of the trouble that Andrew was getting into with the law, he was eventually enrolled in military school, which he described as a difficult experience, but one that changed the direction of his life:

Andrew: “I would say that once I got into the military school, got my butt kicked a couple of times, had to work out, I was like imma actually do my work. There was a actual punishment for not doing your work, exercises, everything, anything you can think of at that moment, you’re gonna have to do it. So, it was really hanging over my head like I don’t want to do this tomorrow so imma hurry up and
get this work done, doesn’t matter if I have to stay up until 2 or 3 in the morning. It was the consequences really that motivated me in my life, the consequences of failing, going to jail, those were my motivators.”

Trey also explained how the trouble he encountered with the law impacted his life:

Trey: “Man! It impacted it so much, like I didn’t want to go to school. I mean, my scholarship, when I had a scholarship … I was there a few months, and I don’t wanna talk about it but, I caught a case, and that is what kinda slowed me down, and like, slowed me down from really wanting to go back to school. I just forgot about it and started working.”

Although Trey was reluctant to share what he was charged for, those charges were grounds for dismissal from school and caused him to lose this athletic scholarship. As a result of this experience he lost his desire for school and entered the workforce as previously discussed. However, after experiencing financial hardship, he later returned to college viewing it as a means for upward mobility and a way to ensure a more positive life adjustment.

Participants seemed to fear the consequence of permanent jail time and therefore, made conscious decisions to turn their lives around. As a result of their experiences with the justice system, participants shifted their attention to their education, which contributed to their prosocial development and achievement.

Eluding Negative Experiences of Others

As previously outlined, most African American male collegiate students in this study not only used personal hardship experiences as motivation for prosocial development and achievement, but they also utilized the experiences of others around them. Participants may have witnessed the experiences of family members, friends, or co-
workers who endured hardship due to a lack of education and therefore desired to avoid those patterns.

This was true for participants like Trey. He explained that part of his motivation for wanting to pursue higher education stemmed from witnessing the experiences of others. He hoped to avoid a lifestyle that brought about negativity, and unhappiness. Although he was already in the workforce and experiencing his share of hardships, he foresaw a life for himself that was better than his present circumstances, and better than the circumstances of those around him. He perceived education as a means for improving his life’s outcome:

Trey: “My motivation is, when I was working at this warehouse and seeing dudes my age and older was coming to work, drugs, hating life. I don’t want to go back to that lifestyle. I want to be able to be happy, go to work, and smile every day.”

Another participant by the name of Derrick explained that he witnessed how hard his father worked and the hardships that he endured as a result of not having a college education. He felt motivated to have a better life that included more flexibility, and leisure. Additionally, he was set on not repeating negative patterns:

Derrick: “Like seeing my pops work so much that’s kinda been my motivation cause I wanna work hard but I also don’t wanna be as tired, you know I wanna have more room to do what I want with my money that I make.”

Derrick further explained: “It makes me wanna try harder to succeed so I don’t fall into that same hole. It doesn’t make sense to repeat some of the things you not supposed to repeat.” Devin and Jerrell shared similar opinions and experiences. They witnessed in their communities the outcomes of those who lacked an education. They felt determined to not allow that to be their outcomes or experiences:
Devin: “Because I see what not having a college degree will get you. It’ll just get you the regular. If you just wanna get by then go ahead and work, but if you wanna be somebody, be successful, the only way to do it is to go to school.”

Jerrell: “…there’s a lot of people who really aren’t doing anything with their lives”. “…Like certain apartment complexes where it’s just people like living off welfare. They have no plan of getting out of it, they are just living. And, that’s not what I wanna do, and I guess I just made sure that I’m not gonna be one of those people.”

It seems that witnessing hardship experiences that resulted from a lack of education among family members, friends, and co-workers led participants to foreshadow their own futures, seeking to avoid the recurrence of negative patterns and desiring to improve their life outcomes. This in turn contributed to their prosocial development and achievement.

**Counteracting Negative Stereotypes**

Another factor that contributed to prosocial development and achievement for participants in the present study was their ability to counteract negative stereotypes. Rather than detailing very specific and personal challenges like financial hardship for example, these participants discussed hardship experiences in the context of the larger society. Part of their hardship experiences included being stereotyped as African American men. They explained that African American males are often categorized as uneducated, hyper sexualized, deadbeat fathers, criminals, and drug dealers to name a few. As a result, they deliberately sought to counteract those stereotypes through the pursuit of higher education and positive life adjustment. They felt motivated to achieve, and were disinterested in perpetuating any negative perceptions of African American males as a whole:
John: “I mean, I accept the fact of what they say, but I don’t take it in stride, as I take it to heart because if anything that should add fuel to the fire where I can prove you, but I’m not going to prove you the way you want me to. Imma prove you based off these academics, imma prove you based off inspiring others who are African American to come into a four year university and make something of yourself who can be just like me, if not better than me. You know, instead of accepting it and running away from the challenge.”

Andrew said, “…I don’t believe in stereotypes. I’m out to prove stereotypes wrong.” For participants like Andre, the little relevance that stereotypes had in his personal life led him to feel less defined by them, and in turn more confident in his ability to achieve: “Like, my father is not a stereotypical deadbeat or whatever. So, seeing that that’s not necessarily the reality kind of showed me that I can be successful. Not necessarily live up to a stereotype.”

Participants used negative stereotypes as a model for what they did not want to become. They deliberately made conscious choices that were opposed to what they described as broad opinions about African American males, one being that African American males are uneducated. By pursuing higher education participants felt that they were overcoming the threat of stereotypes, and proving them to be false. This contributed to their prosocial development and achievement.

**Detrimental Effects of Hardship**

Although 17 participants in the present study discussed the significance of *Constructive Hardship and Counteraction* to their prosocial development and achievement, not all participants in the study described their experiences in this way. Other participants may have identified adverse circumstances they encountered, or what they considered normal struggles living in the San Bernardino community. However,
they did not utilize those experiences as motivation for their education or adjustment. In fact, hardship experiences damaged the trajectories of participants in some cases, leading them to find little interest or value in education despite being college students.

Rodney explained that he had a troubled youth that included parental divorce, unstable living, risk behavior such as cutting and several hospitalizations as a result. He always struggled academically, and his parents resorted to physical punishment when he could not master the concepts. Rodney began to associate academics with physical punishment, which caused him to shy away from school related work and activities in fear that he would be physically punished if he did not meet the educational expectations of his parents. He lost an interest in education and instead focused most his attention on his music and acting career. He explained that education was not his priority.

Rodney: “…Like with my dad, like this is elementary school work so for them to not be able to help me be able to solve math and everything like that which is one of my weakest subjects still to this day, for me to not be able to understand that and get beat and all this other stuff for not being able to figure out how to do the homework, it really scared me educational wise, which is why I figured out other stuff that I wanted to do.”

Rodney was unable to reframe his negative hardship experience, and it did not serve as a source of motivation or contribute to his prosocial development or achievement. He explained that he was in college by force and had no real interest in pursuing higher education. In the following statement he describes the message his parents sent to him regarding attending college: “I was always told that if I don’t that I’m going straight to the military or something like that, as soon as I turn 18, I’m getting kicked out of the house.”

In Cordell’s case, his father had minimal involvement in his life similar to other participants. However, he did not describe it as hardship and he explained that it had no
weighing on his prosocial development and achievement. His attitude regarding his father’s absenteeism was that he could not miss what he never had. He said: “I kinda never knew what it was like to have him consistently be there. So, it hasn’t really been hard at all.”

For the majority of African American male collegiate students in this study, however, hardship experiences typically fueled a level of motivation and desire for personal and academic success. Their experiences seemed to foster growth and change in their lives, where they were able to take adverse situations and produce positive results. They also sought to learn from the experiences of others and to avoid both negative cycles and stereotypes. Participants acknowledged that despite their hardship experiences, they were determined to move forward with their goals. Derrick said: “I think everybody has obstacles but if you want something you’ll get it. That’s how I feel. So, if I want something imma get it. Even though it may be hard sometimes.”

John shared a similar view:

John: “…you can grow up in the rough areas, you can grow up in hardships, and you know, it’s a struggle but at the same time you can challenge that negativity to positivity, you know a positive outlook and actually make something of yourself. All it takes it just you to, one narrow path and honestly strive for success.”

**Conditioned Construction of Masculinity**

As it relates to prosocial development and achievement, participants in the present study were able to come to terms with issues associated with the construction of their masculine identities. In the interest of their educations, they demonstrated an ability to overcome pressures to adopt a veneer of toughness that is demonstrated often through violence, dominance, and fearlessness in the interest of warranting respect and
negotiating threatening circumstances. In many instances, however, participants exhibited what they deemed a reasonable amount of toughness to survive the social and contextual challenges of the San Bernardino community. On the other hand, 3 participants in this study found the adoption of this veneer unnecessary, and in turn escaped the associated pressures to conform all together.

*Toughness for Survival*

Participants in this study were able to maintain balance between their collegiate and neighborhood/community experiences. While they were not advocates for unnecessary violence or intimidation, they explained that the nature of the San Bernardino community required them to exert a level of toughness for means of survival.

Cordell: “…without the toughness to go along with street smarts, you may not make it past another day. Only because there are certain rules that we have to obey whether we want to or not as far as how we dress, what colors we wear.”

Cordell: “You have to adopt that toughness or you could get beat up, or you could find yourself in the wrong neighborhood, and if you are in a neighborhood that’s not your friend, it’s sink or swim. So, a lot of us because we’re trying to get our degree it’s like okay if we’re in the wrong neighborhood we have to figure out how to fight our way out cause at the end of the day I have to keep going to school, keep taking the same road to school all the time.”

Andre said: “You can’t be weak in this kind of area ‘cause it is kinda rough.” “…you have to like …oh how do I put it? Like, put on more of a masculine persona or façade you know what I mean?

*Tough Façade*

Toughness is both uniquely defined and contextualized for members of the target
population. In the present study participants described toughness in two distinct ways: (1) a tough façade or (2) a tough mentality. The tough or masculine façade was used to shield vulnerability, and to send an important message to those in the community who posed a potential threat to the personal safety and security of participants. The message they hoped to send was that they would not be bullied or pushed over, and would go to great lengths to protect themselves as well as their families. In the event that participants felt threatened, they explained that the exertion of power and domination was both necessary and justifiable. Yet, they described toughness as being something they only had to resort to under such circumstances. Following are a few examples:

Nathan: “Like situations involving my family where I have to stand up for let’s say a little sister, little brother, and I see somebody trying to get at them, I can’t just back down and say that’s your business. So, situations like that I do get involved.”

Devin: [Toughness is] “Being able to hold yourself cause they always gon’ test you to see if you weak or not. So, soon as they do test you man just make sure to let em’ know that you not to be dealt wit’ and just handle your business. Like I’m here to do myself, and whatever you wanna do to affect me is not gon’ happen. So, don’t try me. That’s basically it.”

Corey: “I feel like yeah you have to be tough um just for the fact like um if you exude the toughness about you, people leave you alone. But, if you show like a weakness they will like mess with you daily. But, um I think that’s something I learned from a very young age cause um I was always littler than everyone around. So, like if anybody would pick on me I had to like exude my toughness. Like, when I was growing up I did get kicked out of school a couple of times, and I’ve been suspended and kicked out of high school before, like just for exuding my toughness. But, I feel like that was also a learning factor for me too cause like once I got out of that environment I felt like I don’t have to be, like I can finally be comfortable and be myself.”

For Corey the notion of toughness was contingent upon the community environment. However, he explained that his true sense of identity was not reflected in his tough façade.
Tough Mentality

Although the tough façade has more of a physical connotation, other participants in the study described toughness as a mentality or way of thinking. Mental toughness seemed to replace the need for a tough façade. Similar to others in the study, these participants acknowledged that they encountered several challenges in their community. However, they felt those challenges required them to be mentally tough, rather than to adopt a masculine façade:

Rodney: “I would definitely say I had to have a tougher perspective here compared to everywhere else that I’ve been in the state.”

Darren: “…hard on the inside, soft on the outside. That’s how I feel like you have to be. Some people feel like you have to be both. I feel like, I don’t have to be both, if anything, mentally. Mentally tough, San Bernardino makes people mentally tough.”

This mentality seemed to also influence the way in which participants perceived threatening circumstances. Demarcus explained that he initially felt pressured to adopt a traditional veneer of toughness that included dominance and violence. However, through growth and experience he learned that if he showed respect to others, in most cases they would reciprocate that respect and consideration:

Demarcus: “Um, at first I believed that I had to. At first I believed that I had to express my dominance, and express that I really just would not be walked on. But, through my experiences and through growth I’ve found that if I treat people the way I want to be treated, that I would not receive that treatment, at least most of the time. With that being known, I’ve never really had to show a bad side of myself, and I was always respected because I respected others. So, I pretty much gave and got back what I gave to others, and I don’t feel it’s always necessary to have to resort of violence, or be a violent person, because we’re all brothers and sisters. I feel like we always deserve to love and to be loved by others. So, I don’t feel like I need to be violent with anyone to be honest.”
He went on to explain that no longer having to demonstrate a tough façade alleviated stress and tension, allowing him to focus more of his attention on his education:

Demarcus: “Uh, relieved stress and tension because for the first part when you’re thinking about people who are angry with you or people who want to hurt you or people that want to come up against you, thinking about that adds stress to your process of learning, and when that stress is relieved and you come to that understanding that you cannot allow others to actually direct your steps, you can’t allow people to have your mind, you actually have control over your own mind and have to be comforted with yourself. When I figured out that other people don’t necessarily deserve my negative feelings or anything like that, it relived a lot of stress and it made me focus more because I was actually at school for what I came to school for.”

**Toughness and Student Trajectories**

While participants acknowledged the need for either a tough façade or mentality in specific situations, they explained that those experiences typically did not negatively influence their academic or career trajectories. Although they had to deal with neighborhood/community pressures and challenges, they still persisted with their educational goals. Devin explains that in educational settings his focus is not on being tough:

Devin: “…When I’m at school it’s not about that. It’s about learning, making sure I do right on this test, getting this paper done. Being tough don’t really affect me in my school and stuff like that, just my neighborhood, I would say that.”

John also explained that a veneer of toughness did not negatively influence his academic experiences: “It never really impacted my academics, but it more just impacted me as a person, because I was trying to fit something that I wasn’t.”
Avoiding a Veneer of Toughness

As previously mentioned, there also existed participants who rejected the notion of toughness all together for various reasons. Sean explained that the San Bernardino community is mostly rumored to be bad, and has a poor reputation as a result. However, he has not found it necessary to adopt a veneer of toughness.

Sean: “I don’t think it’s that tough. I just think it’s hype most of the time because it’s San Bernardino, and a death capital. But, if you think about it’s not even really that many ghetto people up here. Like, people predict or say that San Bernardino is ghetto or whatever, but people on campus, yeah you got yours here and there but the only one’s going to school is the one’s trying to do something with their life. So, they ain’t up here, you know what I’m saying, trying to make things worse than what they is. They just doing what they need to do, so. I don’t think you have to adapt growing up in San Bernardino.”

James explained that he thought survival overall was a difficult task, but that toughness was not something that needed to be exerted to others, not even in the San Bernardino community. He said: “It’s tough to survive but I don’t think that should be portrayed through your own physical characteristics or like personality or what not or expressed to other people.”

Moreover, Jerrell explained the way in which the nature of his neighborhood influenced his experiences regarding a veneer of toughness. He did not find it important to the construction of his masculine identity. When asked whether a veneer of toughness was necessary to survive in the San Bernardino community he replied: “No. I live in Highland and it’s like a White washed neighborhood.” Here, this participant was insinuating that he lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. Therefore, the exertion of toughness was not important or vital to his survival. It is also important to note that Jerrell’s parents were highly educated, and of a higher socioeconomic status. This afforded his family the opportunity to live in a more affluent part of the community.
Based on these findings, participants who found it necessary to exhibit a reasonable amount of toughness to negotiate the social and contextual challenges in the San Bernardino community were still able to successfully navigate their academic and career trajectories. They were able to maintain balance between their educational and neighborhood experiences, and demonstrate a conditioned construction of masculine identity. In turn, this contributed to the prosocial development and achievement of participants.

**Community and Family Support**

From the data emerged a third theme referenced here as Community and Family Support, which contributed to participant prosocial development and achievement. It seems that some level of community or family support impacted participants’ choices to pursue higher education, as well as their ideas about its importance. This in turn assisted in the development of successful academic and career pathways, and positive life adjustment.

For participants in the present study, community support was comprised of mentoring or shadowing programs, extra curricular and recreational activities, clubs/organizations, as well as support from coaches, teachers, and members of church communities. Eighteen participants described community support as having been important to their prosocial development and achievement. It was not necessarily the source of support itself, but the kind of support that participants received, which positively influenced their trajectories and overall adjustment. Participants gained
positive role models, inspiration, confidence, and a sense of accountability from these various sources of support outlined.

**Mentorship**

Calvin expressed his interest in becoming a doctor. He was particularly interested in sports medicine and neurosurgery. He was exposed to the field of neuroscience through a shadowing program that allowed him to spend time with a professional already in the field. He was provided mentorship and guidance, and explained that he had the opportunity to tour the hospital at which the neurosurgeon worked:

Calvin: “Well, right now I have a mentor, Dr. Jones, and he took me on tours of the hospital and that interested me. I actually got to be in the surgical room while they were doing surgery. That right there helped my interest in neurosurgery because he’s a neurosurgeon right now.”

This experience led to Calvin giving serious thought to his future as a doctor. He persisted to research programs at various medical institutions, and hoped to accomplish his goal of beginning his residency within the next ten years:

Calvin: “Well, within five years I see myself at UCLA to pursue medical school. Right now they are ranked five in the western part of the United States, so, that is another interest. Another interest would be like Oregon or Washington, and NYU. Within ten years I plan on being a physician, either a neurosurgeon or sports medicine physician, within ten years from now. Hopefully starting my residency.”

Anthony also participated in a mentoring program that positively impacted his academic and career trajectory, and life adjustment. A local community program provided him both mentorship and a scholarship to support his college education. He explained that he felt inspired by the success of his mentors in the program, and felt more confident in his own ability to succeed:
Anthony: “My senior year in high school I happened to receive a scholarship through Young Scholars by a brother by the name of Tyrek Stevens. Seeing how successful he was and also being around other African American successful men, it just gave me that extra push that told me I can do it. It felt like they all were lending a hand in their own individual ways. So, it’s more so seeing men of color progress is what actually gave me more confidence that I can also be there one day if not farther than that.”

**Extracurricular and Recreational Activities**

Opportunities to participate in extra curricular and recreational activities also served useful for participants in this study. Participation in school sports is usually subject to certain academic requirements, holding participating athletes accountable for maintaining passing grades and an acceptable grade point average. Derrick explained how much he enjoyed playing basketball, and how important it was in his life. He was happiest when he played basketball, and was motivated to maintain good grades just to be apart of a team. He credited basketball as being the reason he did as well as he did academically as a high school student: “Yeah, basketball was really the way I passed all of my classes. If I didn’t play basketball I probably would have failed. I probably wouldn’t have got the grades that I did if it wasn’t for basketball.” He also explained that his basketball coaches pushed him very hard academically. Although he questioned their motives, he explained that having their support benefited his education. Nathan shared a similar experience:

Nathan: “Sports, the coaches always held us accountable for our grades. We had grade checks about, like every third week of the month or something. And, they always pushed us to work hard. I remember junior year when I started slacking, I got pulled off the basketball team because my grades weren’t high enough. That wasn’t even from the coaches first, they were gonna do it but my parents pulled me off first. And, after that I kinda, I had to start working harder and stuff cause I really wanted to play basketball.”
Having to uphold such standards placed these participants in a position where they were eligible for college. Even now as collegiate students, some still use extracurricular sports as a motivating factor for their success. Devin shed light on his personal experience with the following statement:

Devin: “Without football I wouldn’t be in school really. Like, I probably would get done with my AA but if it’s not for football I probably wouldn’t even want to go to the university level. But, I feel like I’m so good in football, I feel like it could take me to the university level so I can get done with it. You know, get a degree while I’m there, might as well. So, football is the main drive for me right now.”

Sean also explained how being part of the football team motivated him and boosted his confidence. He also had hopes to attain an athletic scholarship and transfer from the community college to the university level:

Sean: “It’s pushed me to stay on my grades. Also, it helps me to stay on track cause I wanna get a scholarship and either/or cause it’s beneficial. Another this is like, it keeps me in shape so when I come on campus and I dress up and stuff, it makes me feel good in my clothes, when I’m working out and stuff and actually doing something to better myself.”

Like Participants Devin and Sean, Corey also had a great passion for athletics. He played sports throughout his childhood and had dreams of playing professionally. He discovered though, that although he was growing older, he was not growing any taller. This led to him doubting his ability to become a professional athlete. Yet, he still had a great passion for sports and wanted to be involved in some way. This led to his desire to pursue a degree in sports broadcasting:

Corey: “Well, my major is Mass Communications. I wanna go into broadcasting, specifically sports broadcasting.” “[I was] involved in sports all my life. I played peewee baseball and basketball. I also did pop warner football. So, I think that’s where I found my passion for it. And then, as I got older I seen I wasn’t growing no more [laughter] so I couldn’t be that superstar athlete. So, I just still want to be involved with some aspect of it.”
**Clubs and Organizations**

While mentorship and extracurricular activities have undoubtedly been instrumental to the academic and career trajectories, and life adjustment of participants, opportunities for involvement in clubs and organizations have also been significant. Greg explained that involvement in various organizations prepped him for the real world. He explained that clubs and organizations serve as not only networking opportunities, but as partnerships to ensure that students perform well academically. When asked about how such involvement has positively impacted his academic and career success he responded with:

Greg: “It definitely has you set down a blue print of how you want to make your name known in a positive light, and how to network with certain people. But also, before you do that, you have to make sure you’re on top of your academics. So, it’s kinda a relationship like hey, we can help you out, we can invite you to different things, but you have to make sure to take care of your work on your end. So, it kinda preps you a little bit for I should say the real world, and just kinda how things work.”

**Teacher Support**

Community members such as teachers also provided encouragement to participants positively influencing their trajectories and life adjustment:

Anthony: “Hearing from multiple teachers that I have the potential beyond means; that I can do anything that I would like to, that I have talent in multiple areas, and facets of life, and hearing that over and over and over and over again.”

**Spiritual Support**

Support from religious or spiritual communities were also beneficial for participants. These communities offered encouragement to participants in pursuing their
goals, and sent positive messages regarding the importance of education:

Demarcus: “Um, well I’d say that a lot of messages that I hear that have motivated me in the past would have to come from my church, my faith, my belief that I can do the things that I feel I can do within myself. If I know that I can do them, then I can do them, and if I keep that attitude, it’s been lots of people who have told me you are your own limitation basically. So, if I refuse to limit myself, then that same drive and that same potential will always continue to be within me and I’ll be able to succeed it whatever it is I do.”

Devin explained that members of his church including the pastor, first lady, and church deacons encouraged him to stay in school. They also expressed to him that in order to make something of himself he needed an education. When asked about the messages his church community expressed to him regarding education he replied:

Devin: “…To stay wit’ it, to get your degree. At least get a B.A. [bachelor’s degree] out of it, you feel me? Cause an AA [associates degree] is really not nothing nowadays. [They tell me] to stay in school, if you wanna work then you can work but stay in school while you doing it cause that’s like the only way to get out really, to be positive.”

**Threatened Academic and Career Trajectories**

While the community support systems discussed were useful for the majority of participants in this study, Jerrell explained that extra curricular activities posed a threat to his academic and career trajectory. He explained that his high school rugby team functioned much like a wild fraternity that was out of control: “Rugby kinda hurt me a little bit. You know, it was like a fraternity so I was doing a lot of partying when I was on the rugby team.”

Similar to other participants, Rodney had a great deal of community support. Mentors, and members of his church community encouraged the pursuit of higher education. However, he simply found no value or interest in academics. In fact, he
viewed education as standing in the way of reaching his goals to become a professional musician and actor. When asked about potential obstacles that could stand in the way of him reaching his goals, he said:

Rodney: “Honestly speaking the only thing is this whole school idea. For me, I don’t see the point in it if I’m just here for general classes, and then even if I wasn’t here for general classes, being at a community college, having to transfer and do all that other stuff is time consuming.”

No amount of support or encouragement that Rodney received from mentors or members of his church community with regard to education led him to find any value in education. He held to the notion that he was in only in college due to the force of his parents.

**Family Support**

In addition to community support, family support was an important factor to the prosocial development and achievement of African American male collegiate students in the present study. Family support was experienced by 17 of the participants. Participants explained that members of their immediate and extended families provided encouragement and support with regard to their education and career, which shaped their ideas about its importance, and motivated participants to attend college. Family members may have had educational aspirations for participants, provided specific resources, or assisted them in gaining a sense of accountability for their education and decisions. Family members may have also modeled the importance of academic related achievement through their own experiences with education. Varying methods of family support provided to participants ultimately assisted them in attaining more positive outcomes as it relates to prosocial development and achievement.
Parents

When asked what assisted in helping him stay on top of schoolwork Andrew replied: “I would say my mother, she was always on me about school.” Another participant, Andre, credited his family as being important to his academic and career trajectory: “Basically, it just goes back to my parents and different family members. I’ve had a couple of professors here that have supported me too, but it mostly goes back to my family.”

Parental educational aspirations seemed to be important to Darren’s experience, where attending college was perceived as more of an expectation than an option. Darren explained his experience with the following statement:

Darren: “Well, my mom, she was very, when it came to education she was very strict on it. Um, she told me that, she would always tell me that she didn’t mind if I brought home a C if it was the best I could do. But, half the time it wasn’t [laughter] so, she just really wanted me to be the best at whatever it is I’m doing when it came to school. So, I would say that’s the biggest thing. And also, college wasn’t really an option. It was more of where I’m going vs. if I’m going, so.”

Extended Family and Friends

In addition to parents, extended family members were also important to the participants in this study. This might have included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Additionally, participants seemed to discuss friends or significant others who played important roles in their lives, providing resources, holding them accountable for their education, and for making choices that would contribute to positive life adjustment:

Corey: “…My grandmother she always like every time she talk to my mom on the phone she tell her to tell us like to do good and be good. So, the whole just being successful comes from my mom and my grandma.”
Andrew explained how important his grandfather was in his personal life, as well as with regard to his education:

Andrew: My mom and my grandfather really raised me. He is basically like my dad, the father figure in my life. My mom is a real disciplinarian, really hard on me, like any mother who wants to see her son succeed. My grandfather was the you know, moral support, whenever I felt bad about something, I could vent, get whatever off of my chest like this and this is going on, then he would lead me on the right path. So, I appreciate both of them in my life.

Regarding his grandfather, Andrew added: “He always asks me did you need anything typed over here at the house? Did you get all your homework done before you go to school this week?” Cordell gave an account of the support he received from his girlfriend and friends during a time he was experiencing financial hardship and considering leaving school:

Cordell: “I feel very supported. Like there were times when I wasn’t really sure I was gonna keep going to school as far as college wise because of money and stuff. And, because money was an issue, getting classes was an issue. And there was times when school had started and I still didn’t have classes, but my girlfriend at the time kind of just pushed me. So, whether its my girlfriends or my male friends or my family, it’s a strong backing to just finish. So, even if it wouldn’t have been her, like my friends still would have been like you need to come to school, figure it out. If it hadn’t been my girlfriend or my friends, my family would have been like just wait and then when you can get in there. So, I’m always pushed to finish.”

**Family Members’ Experiences with Education**

Another family factor that influenced the prosocial development and achievement of participants was the college experiences of their family members and friends. Participants discussed following in the footsteps of those who had attained college degrees. Steven said: “Yeah, college is kind of a big thing in my family. All my elder siblings, they went to college.” Other participants replied with the following:
Nathan: “I have had inspirations as far as like sisters and cousins. I have a cousin who goes to Harvard, who is attending Harvard right now, so. I look up to them and I want to like get to where they’re at.”

William: “Well, I have an older brother. He’s a doctor. Well, he has a Ph.D. he’s a electrical engineer doctor. And then I have my sister who has two degrees, one’s in sociology and one in psychology, and another brother who graduated with a chemistry degree, wants to be a pharmacist. And then I’m next in line, I’m doing accounting, and then I got another brother at this school. He’s a business major as well. Not sure what concentration yet, he’s still figuring it out. But, he’ll get a degree as well in business. So yeah, everyone has their own degree. Everyone has their own thing that their working on.”

In some instances, participants felt encouraged to pursue higher education because of their family members’ lack of education. Witnessing the various challenges and struggles they dealt with inspired participants to attain better for themselves:

Cordell: “I would say their experiences impacted me because I can see what they don’t have as a result of not going to college. And so, I have pretty much a road map of okay, if I don’t go then I may end up like this.”

A Lack of Family Support

While most participants in the study received some level of family support that contributed to prosocial development and achievement, participants like Trey and Derrick did not receive a great deal of family support. They explained that there were no important messages regarding education expressed in their families, neither did members of their family pursue a college education. Trey said: “You know what? None of them graduated so they never pushed me in front of education. I did it on my own, actually. So, they really didn’t say much towards that.” As previously discussed, Trey had experienced a great deal of hardship that led him to discover the importance of education and motivated him in his pursuit. Unlike Trey, Rodney had the family support but still had little interest in academics.
Community and family support consisting of mentorship opportunities, sports, organizations, as well as positive messages and encouragement from family and friends were important to the academic and career trajectories, and positive life adjustment for participants in the present study. These various factors helped to inspire students, and shape their ideas about their futures and the importance of education.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

This study responds to a call for research that examines African American males from a strengths based approach. The researcher explored the various personal, social, and contextual factors that positively influenced the academic and career trajectories and life adjustment of participants. This analysis signifies the importance of prosocial development and achievement among African American male collegiate students in the sociocultural context of San Bernardino, California.

Four important points were raised in particular as it relates to the findings from the current study. First, when African American male collegiate students have the ability to reframe adverse experiences and use them as motivation for success and opportunities for growth, they are more likely to have more positive trajectories and life adjustment. Second, when members of this population are motivated to negate negative patterns, and to counteract negative stereotypes associated with being African American males, they tend to achieve better outcomes. Third, African American males who overcome pressures to adopt a veneer of toughness apart from its potential use to survive the challenges of the community are more resilient. Finally, African American males who receive forms of community and family support are more likely to view education as important, and in turn have more successful academic and career trajectories, and life adjustment.

Adversarial Growth

This study adds to efforts to explain the importance of adversarial growth to success and behavior. It demonstrates how hardship experiences among African
American males can be used as motivating factors for academic and career success, and positive life adjustment. Similar to Cavazo, Johnson, and Sparrow’s (2010) qualitative study that explored adversarial growth among collegiate students, participants in this study were able to reframe their negative experiences or circumstances, and utilize those hardships as motivation. Moreover, participants viewed their experiences as opportunities for growth, which was important to their prosocial development and achievement.

**Masculinity among African American Males**

This study does not necessarily reinforce typical ideas regarding masculinity among African American males as it relates to academic resilience. Past researchers explain that typically a veneer of toughness negatively influences the academic performance of African American males since it causes them to perceive schooling as contradictory to their masculinity (Hall, 2009; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2003). Therefore, this shaped the researchers’ ideas about the notion of toughness where there was the expectation that its existence would lead to deleterious effects for participants. Yet, participants in this study had a conditioned construction of masculinity where a veneer of toughness did not significantly influence their trajectories. While it did shape their sub-cultural response to some degree where it might have been necessary for survival in their community, participants were able to set those experiences apart from their schooling experiences. This positively contributed to their prosocial development and achievement.

While a veneer of toughness typically references the exertion of violence and dominance to negotiate threatening circumstances, for participants in this study an
alternative perception of toughness also existed. Participants discussed the notion of mental toughness, which allowed them to persevere and effectively deal with the social and contextual challenges of the San Bernardino community. Therefore, it is important to note that for participants in this study, toughness does not necessarily carry the negative connotation that is to exert physical violence or domination. But, it also embodies characteristics of confidence, commitment, and adaptability that are important to resilience.

**Sports Socialization**

Findings from the current study seem to be in line with empirical research that suggests the importance of community and family support to academic achievement. Extra curricular activities such as sports were an essential means of community support for participants in this study. Past studies discuss the over emphasis of sports in the socialization of African American males (Beamon, 2006; Beamon, 2010; Bierman 1990; Braddock, 1991). It is suggested that elevated levels of sports socialization in the family, neighborhood, and media exist within the African American community. As a result, African American males may face consequences such as lower academic achievement, higher expectations for professional sports careers as a means for upward mobility, and lower levels of career maturity (Beamon, 2010). Beamon (2010) explored this notion using a qualitative analysis of 20 former collegiate athletes’ perceptions of sports socialization. Participants were from universities all over the country. In-depth ethnographic interviews revealed that the respondents’ perceptions were that their socializing agents and environments emphasized athletics over other roles, other talents,
and the development of other skills. This in turn influenced their attitudes toward education, as well their aspirations and goals for the future.

Based on these and similar findings, the researcher expected that sports involvement would be detrimental to the trajectories and adjustment of participants. However, in many instances the African American males in the present study utilized extra curricular activities like sports involvement as motivation for academic success. It seems that the confidence and level of accountability that participants gained as a result of this social activity overshadowed its potential negative affects. Having to maintain acceptable grades and grade point averages to participate in sports activities motivated students in terms of their education, and contributed to their prosocial development and achievement, making them more resilient as operationalized in this study.

This would seem plausible since involvement in extracurricular activities in general has been linked to positive outcomes (Billig, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Ungar et al., 2005). More specifically, Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt (2003) found this to be true in their study which linked participants in structured leisure activities to positive youth development, and the association of extracurricular activity involvement with educational behavior. They found that participants in most extracurricular activities achieved better educational outcomes than non-participants even after controlling for social class, gender, and intellectual aptitude. Additionally, participation on sports teams predicted better educational outcomes. Participants in this study seemed to share a similar experience.
The Importance of the Family

As previously mentioned, family support was a factor important to most participants in the present study. In addition to more traditional, paternalistic views of family, this study demonstrates the importance of extended family members who make up yielded versions of African American families. The present study also demonstrates how these familial relationships influence and contribute to prosocial development and achievement for members of the sample.

The academic and career trajectories and life adjustment of participants were influenced by familial relationships in a numbers of ways. First, family members provided encouragement and support for African American male collegiate students in this study. Family members tended to verbally emphasize the importance of education for upward mobility, and to widening the opportunities available to students. Participants’ family members also made them aware of the aspirations and expectations they had for their educational attainment. Other studies emphasize the importance of parental expectations, suggesting that students tend to value education more and have more successful outcomes when parents express high expectations for them to pursue academic success (Brailsford, 2005; Logan, 1996).

Educational expectations for participants in this study were not only supported by words, but by action and modeling as well. Some participants discussed the importance of having parents, or other relatives who had attained college degrees. Students in turn found value in academic success and sought to pursue higher education, which positively influenced their academic and career trajectories and adjustment. Morales’ (2010) qualitative study of 50 high achieving low socioeconomic status students of color also
revealed that high parental expectations supported by words, actions, and positive modeling mitigated potential effects of risk factors and contributed to the process of academic resilience. This is consistent with findings in the present study.

Family members’ experiences with education included those who attained college degrees as well as those who had not. Yet, in both cases such experiences positively influenced the prosocial development and achievement of participants. Parents who did not attend college themselves but who established expectations for participants still helped to instill the value of education, providing a means of educational support, which influenced a resilient response (Brailsford, 2005). Participants also discussed witnessing the hardship experiences of their relatives who had failed to pursue education. In some instances members of their family may have been struggling financially, or leading a life that participants did not perceive as promising. Therefore, African American males in the current study utilized their relatives’ poor experiences as motivation to pursue higher education. Participants viewed education as an opportunity to better themselves and to achieve more positive life adjustment, contributing to their prosocial development and achievement.

The variations of family support outlined are unique in that even when participants were not held to educational expectations, or did not receive encouragement related to academic achievement, family was still an important influence. Whether participants believed that family members provided positive or negative modeling, they still typically utilized family relationships and/or experiences to harness motivation for success, achievement, and behavior change.
More on Prosocial Development and Achievement Theory

It is important to discuss Prosocial Development and Achievement Theory as it relates to the ecological systems theory and theories of resilience. As previously outlined, one of the goals of the present study is to gain an increased understanding of the ways in which factors that influence the academic and career trajectories of African American male collegiate students interact at various levels of ecology. Factors in the microsystem that most immediately impacted participants included school, family, work, neighborhood, and religious institutions. The relations between these microsystems largely influenced the trajectories and adjustment of participants. Additionally, while participants did not have an active role in the educational experiences of family members, for example, those experiences still influenced their immediate context. Finally, the sociocultural context of the San Bernardino community also played a significant role.

As demonstrated from findings of this present study, direct and indirect interactions at the different levels of ecology served useful with regard to the trajectories of African American male college students, bending them in a positive direction and assisting in the development of positive life adjustment.

Strengths and Limitations

There are a number of strengths and limitations related to the present study. First, the construction of the model that has resulted from this study is limited to data obtained from a selected group of African American male collegiate students. Therefore, this cautions transferability to African American males in other contexts. Additionally, while this study is effective in providing insight into the factors influencing the academic and
career trajectories and life adjustment of African American male collegiate students, it does not measure the degree or weight of such factors.

Strengths of the study include its qualitative design that calls for in-depth examination, detailing the process of participant experiences, and providing a rich description of those experiences. The use of direct quotes was not only illustrative of the research findings, but allowed participant voices to be heard. Additionally, while qualitative research is not as concerned with sample size as quantitative methods, a total of twenty collegiate students participated in this study. Theoretical saturation was achieved with this sample suggesting that no new theoretical insights or properties were emerging from the data.

Considering that much of past research utilizes quantitative methods, or studies the target population from a deficit based model, the present study’s contribution to existing literature is an additional strength. It provides greater insight into factors that contribute to resiliency among African American males; a population rarely studied from this strengths based approach. Additionally, this study offers important implications for future research and practice.

**Implications for Practice**

This study can be helpful in improving the academic and career trajectories of other African American male students in the San Bernardino community. It can provide an approach to understanding the factors that cause academically successful African American males to resist challenges and barriers they may be confronted with, and the dimensions that facilitate their academic success. The ecological framework utilized in
this present study emphasized several environmental systems that have the potential to influence the trajectories of participants. Based on the present study’s findings, this theory was optimal in examining the experiences of African American male college students in San Bernardino because it effectively demonstrated the interconnecting relationships between family, work, neighborhood, cultural beliefs, attitudes, and education. Therefore, it would appear that any attempt at fostering resilience among members of this sample would need to focus on the different levels of ecology including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. In light of this, the following implications for practice take into account the immediate environments of African American males in this sample; connections between family, peer, and school experiences; as well as cultural context.

In terms of program development and implementation it might be useful to focus on assisting participants to build personal resilience, or characteristics such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. Such characteristics allow participants to reframe adverse experiences, and in turn utilize them as motivation for success. Exploring the Cool Pose, or the veneer of toughness and assisting participants to develop healthy coping mechanisms is also important. Additionally, involvement in extra curricular activities, opportunities for shadowing and mentoring, and/or sending positive messages about the importance of education are all notable factors with regard to programming and implementation.

The present study targets young adult African American male college students in an urban community. Yet, early intervention programs geared toward African American male children and youth can aid in positioning members of the target population for academic and career success. Given the findings of this study and the sociocultural
context of San Bernardino, early intervention programs should provide African American male youth opportunities to gain knowledge and develop interpersonal skills to overcome community challenges such as gangs, violence, and street life. It would be important to explore both the attraction to, and risk factors associated with street life. That is, the threat it poses to families, schools, peers, and the overall community. Additionally, early intervention programs should teach African American male youth to successfully navigate social relationships. Youth should also be knowledgeable about the various factors impacting African American families and communities and, in turn, characterize the ways they can contribute to creating positive change.

Programs should encourage and validate family participation in fostering resilience among African American males. For example, opportunities should be available for family members to become involved as volunteers, or to participate in various events or activities. Families should also be encouraged to partner with programs to create consistency in practices at home and in the community that will sustain learning and behavior.

In addition to effective program development, this research can be beneficial to family life educators in developing educational curriculum for workshops and seminars geared toward African American males and their families. Educators can provide resources and information regarding effective tools and strategies for fostering academic resiliency based on empirical evidence. This can lead to more successful collaboration between families, schools, and community organizations committed to improving academic and career outcomes for African American male students.
The present study also has important implications for marriage and family therapists (MFTs), as well as policy makers and family advocates. Findings can aid in raising the critical consciousness of MFTs, making them more aware of hardship and other factors that have the potential to limit the development and adjustment of their African American male clients. The methods of resilience demonstrated by participants in this study are important considerations for policy makers seeking to improve college opportunities and postsecondary degree attainment rates for African American males. Finally, family advocates can act as mediators between the system and the family. They can help to educate professionals on the strengths and needs of African American males as a means of improving the well-being of African American families as a whole.

**Future Directions and Conclusion**

While the present study is an effort to improve academic and career trajectories and life adjustment among African American males, it will be important to build on the concepts derived to further push this goal. Future research should also take into account the ecological systems theory, targeting different levels of ecology and interlocking connections as it relates to the educational experiences of African American males.

Given that participants utilize adverse circumstances as motivation for success, it might be useful to further explore the specific factors of personal resiliency that contribute to that ability. In reference to the ecological framework, researchers might consider how factors that make up the various systems influence the personal resiliency of participants. Future research might also address the use of negative role models as effective motivators among this population. The ability to negate the recurrence of
negative patterns seems to be an important process to the academic and career trajectories of participants in this study. Therefore, further exploration is necessary. Another area worthy of future research is the implementation of the present study’s method and procedures with African American males in other contexts.

Seeing that the present study utilized a sample of students who were enrolled in universities as well as community colleges, it might be useful to examine the trajectories of such students separately. Could it be possible that trajectories differ among African American males in San Bernardino who attend community college versus students who attend universities? Examining post college success would be important. Also, trying to determine what developments support African American males’ interest in pursuing degrees beyond the baccalaureate is an important consideration.

The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework adopted from the National Black Male College Achievement Study also includes questions that researchers could explore to better understand how African American male collegiate students navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post college options (Harper, 2012). According to Harper (2012) the questions developed from this framework shed light on three pipeline points including pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post college success. There are also eight researchable dimensions of achievement that include familial factors, K-12 school forces, out-of-school college prep resources, classroom experiences, out-of-class engagement, enriching educational experiences, graduate school enrollment, and career readiness. He suggests that given what the literature says about the significant impact of peers and faculty on college student development and success, particular attention should be devoted to understanding
their role in the undergraduate experiences of African American males.

This study contributes to research that has begun to move beyond deficit perspectives of achievement and has placed emphasis on the important factors that positively contribute to prosocial development and achievement among African American males. The more we understand about the successful processes of African American males, the better positioned we are as scholars, educators, and practitioners to assist this population and their families to engage better adaptive responses. This study accounts for several of the factors positively influencing the achievement and adjustment of African American male collegiate students in San Bernardino. Mitigating issues of achievement among this population provides an opportunity to address attendant community and family problems, which is important to the field of Family Science.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT: YOUNG ADULT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Purpose and Procedures
You are invited to participate in a study entitled “FAMILY EXPERIENCES & ACADEMIC & CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA”. Faculty and graduate students in the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences of Loma Linda University are conducting a study that focuses on the academic and career trajectories of African American male college students in the San Bernardino area. Specifically, this study will identify factors that impede upon or mitigate achievement and life adjustment.

We are hoping for your voluntary participation in this study. Participants will be asked to take part in a 60-90 minute interview and/or focus group. The interview will focus on the following areas: 1) Your goals and motivation for school and career 2) Positive and/or negative personal, family, and community factors that have impacted educational success and 3) Obstacles that may impact your personal trajectory as a student. A student researcher will conduct both the interviews and focus groups. Each will be held at a convenient location such as the Boys and Girls Club on 9th Street in San Bernardino, or at the research building in the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences of Loma Linda University. A few youth participants would be asked to participate in the focus group. Also, other persons who did not participate in the interview would be asked to participate in the focus group until there are 8 focus group participants.

At the end of the interview, and at the end of the focus group, a written narrative response would be requested. It would be written in response to the question: "Provide an explanation the factors that have most impacted your academic and career trajectories, and how they have shaped your ideas about work, school, and career.”

Risks
There are only minimal risks associated with participating in this study. These include the issue of confidentiality, and the possibility of experiencing changes in feelings or mood associated with personal reflection. Please note that if you are to participate in this study, your interview will be audio taped. It is possible that the audiotape of this interview will contain information

Subject Initials: __________
Date: __________
Page 1 of 3
Consent Version Date: __________
that identifies you as a participant in this study. We minimize this risk by transcribing each audiotape within four weeks of the interview, removing all identifiable information, and destroying the audio file upon completion.

**Risk of Harm to Participant**
In the course of the interview, it is possible that reflecting on sensitive issues in your life may cause unwanted moods and feelings to surface. If this were the case for you, we suggest consultation with a psychotherapist to address any issues. This service may be obtained at the Behavioral Health Institute, Loma Linda University, 1686 Baron Rd. Redlands, CA, phone (909) 558-9552.

**Confidentiality**
Aside from the minimal risks described above, your participation is confidential. Once your interview is transcribed, all records of your participation will be deleted. When the results of this study are published, all responses will be grouped together with other participants and we will not report any data from your interview that in any way identifies you as a participant.

**Benefits**
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, although the results of this study will be used to help improve the academic trajectory of other African American male students in your community.

**Participants' Rights**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you decline to take part in this study, even after you have started you would be free to do so.

**Impartial Third Party Contact**
If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909) 558-4647 for information and assistance regarding the study.

**Informed Consent Statement**
I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators or institution from their responsibilities. I may call Dr. Curtis Fox at (909) 558-4547 ext. 47010 if I have additional questions or concerns. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____________________________  ________________________
Signature of Participant       Date

Subject Initials ________
Date __________
Page 2 of 3
Consent Version Date: ________
Investigator Attestation

I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

________________________  ______________________  __________
Signature of Investigator      Phone number      Date

Subject Initials: ______
Date: __________
Page 3 of 3
Consent Version Date: _______
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT: COMMUNITY PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Purpose and Procedures
You are invited to participate in a study entitled “FAMILY EXPERIENCES & ACADEMIC & CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA”. Faculty and graduate students in the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences of Loma Linda University are conducting a study that focuses on the academic and career trajectories of African American male college students in the San Bernardino area. Specifically, this study will identify factors that impede upon or mitigate achievement and life adjustment for this population.

We are hoping for your voluntary participation in this study. Participants will be asked to take part in a 90-minute focus group. The group will focus on ideas about school, family and community experiences that are believed to impact the academic and career trajectories of African American male college students in the community. A student researcher will conduct the focus groups. Focus groups will be held at a convenient location such as the Boys and Girls Club on 9th Street in San Bernardino, and/or at the research building in the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences of Loma Linda University. A few youth participants would be asked to participate in the focus group. Also, other persons who did not participate in the interview would be asked to participate in the focus group until there are 8 focus group participants.

Risks
There are only minimal risks associated with participating in this study. These include the issue of confidentiality, and the possibility of experiencing changes in feelings or mood associated with personal reflection. Please note that if you are to participate in this study, the group interview will be audio taped. It is possible that the audiocassette of this interview will contain information that identifies you as a participant in this study. We would seek to minimize this risk using a public request for confidentiality in group participation, and by transcribing each audiocassette within four weeks of the interview, removing all identifiable information, and destroying the audio file upon completion.

Subject Initials: 
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Page 1 of 3
Consent Version Date: 

A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST HEALTH SCIENCES INSTITUTION
Risk of Harm to Participant
In the course of the focus group, it is possible that reflecting on sensitive issues may cause unwanted moods and feelings to surface. If this were the case for you, we suggest consultation with a psychotherapist to address any issues. This service may be obtained at the Behavioral Health Institute, Loma Linda University, 1686 Baron Rd. Redlands, CA, phone (909) 558-9552.

Confidentiality
Aside from the minimal risks described above, your participation is confidential. Once the group interview is transcribed, all records of your participation will be deleted. When the results of this study are published, all responses will be grouped together with other participants and we will not report any data from your interview that in any way identifies you as a participant.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, although the results of this study will be used to help improve the academic trajectory of African American male students in your community, and experiences of those who mentor youth in San Bernardino.

Participants’ Rights
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you decline to take part in this study, even after you have started, you would be free to do so.

Impartial Third Party Contact
If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909) 558-4647 for information and assistance regarding the study.

Informed Consent Statement
I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators or institution from their responsibilities. I may call Dr. Curtis Fox at (909) 558-4547 ext. 47010 if I have additional questions or concerns. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant     Date

Subject Initials: ________
Date: ______________
Page 2 of 3
Consent Version Date: ________
Investigator Attestation

I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Investigator _______________ Phone number _______________ Date ____________

Subject Initials: ________
Date: ________________
Page 3 of 3
Consent Version Date: ________
APPENDIX C

STUDENT NARRATIVE RESPONSE

In the space below, please provide an explanation of the factors that have most impacted your academic and career trajectory (i.e. positive or negative experiences; influential family members, peers, coaches, counselors, or other individuals; organizations or groups, community, etc.) Describe how these factors have helped to shape your ideas about school, work, and career. You may write on the back of this page if you need additional space.

Factors that have impacted your academic and career trajectory:
How the factors you outlined have impacted your ideas about school, work, and career:
APPENDIX D

STUDENT IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

(1) Please share with me your motivation/thoughts for school and career? Share your future aspirations with regard to plans for school, work, and career.

(2) Follow up: What would you say are your best goals for education, work and career?

(3) What would you say are some of the dominant or important messages you have heard or felt expressed from your parents/guardian regarding education, work, and career?

(4) Enabling factors: In a family or community we hear some positive and negative messages that somehow impact our motivation to advance ourselves, what are some of the positive and negative messages you have encountered growing up in your home with family, school, community?

(5) Follow up: Can you talk about the others (positive or negative)?

(6) Individual characteristics: Now I want to shift to some questions that may involve a lot of memory and reflection. From your earliest memories and beyond, please share with me some of the memorable, personal characteristics that have been instrumental in you achieving some measure of educational, school, and/or career success?

(7) There are many images of African American males reflected in the media including Television, radio, Internet, etc. What messages would you say have been dominant in helping to shape attitudes of personal success and advancement for you personally being part of the Black community?

(8) Urban communities often demand “toughness” or the appearance of “toughness”. What have been your experiences growing up in San Bernardino in terms of what you need to do to survive in your community?

(9) Follow up: How would you say this veneer of toughness has impacted your personal trajectory as a student, or impacted your pathway to career success?
**Family Level**

(10) Let’s talk about family factors. Share with me what it was like growing up in your home/with your family (probe about relationship with parents/guardian, siblings, close friends).

(11) Tell me about your parents with regard to their experience with education, work, and career, and the kinds of influence their choices may have had on you.

(12) Tell me a little more about your family’s configuration or family makeup (Inquire if participant grew up in nuclear household, with single parent, grandparent, etc.). What are some aspects of how you function with one another?

(13) What has it been like in school for you as a student? (Probe about schoolwork, school behavior, social relationships, motivation, and extra curricular activities).

(14) What is the extent to which you feel supported in your education, work, and career goals? (Probe for types of school resources available that may positively impact participant academically).

(15) Who has been most influential to you positively or negatively to achieve or to fail to achieve? (Probe about family, peers, and media).

(16) Do you feel there are any obstacles that might stand in the way of you reaching your goals? If yes, what might those obstacles be?
APPENDIX E

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

(1) What have you seen, read, or heard about the educational experiences of African American males and have you found these things to be consistent with your own experiences?

(2) As Black men growing up the various communities of San Bernardino what are some of your perceived benefits and drawbacks in pursuing higher education?

(3) As Black men, what would you say are some of the influences that your community environment has had on your academic and career trajectories?

(4) Please discuss some obstacles that you have seen or experienced as an African American male college student.

(5) As Black men, do you feel culturally connected in your classroom environments? Is it conducive to your learning? How have such factors impacted your achievement?

(6) What would you like people to understand about the educational experiences of African American male college students?

(7) As you prepare yourself for your future career, what are your thoughts about the preparedness of the world and the opportunities that will be available to you?
APPENDIX F

COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

(1) I’m glad that you came to talk with me today about young Black males living in San Bernardino. First, I would ask what might you say are some of your thoughts about these young men?

(2) How would you describe the community environment in which they have grown up?

(3) I’m wondering what your thoughts are about the family environment in which these young men have grown up, and the kinds of influences that this environment might have had on their career and academic trajectories?

(4) What are some of the major deterrents to academic and career success that you see prevailing in the environment for these young Black men?

(5) Please share with me your feelings about the San Bernardino school system overall and what you have witnessed to be the experiences of young Black men going through the educational pipeline.

(6) What advisement do you think or know of that these young Black men from San Bernardino receive from the school system?

(7) I am wondering what your views are regarding the mentoring that these young African American men have received and/or are currently receiving from others in their community?

(8) What advice do you have for educational systems, families, and community organizations for achieving greater academic and career success of African American youth in our society?