

Summer 7-20-2018

# This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach of Black Male Success

Aaron Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalshowcase.lynchburg.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Smith, Aaron, "This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach of Black Male Success" (2018). *Graduate Dissertations and Theses*. 32.

<https://digitalshowcase.lynchburg.edu/etd/32>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Showcase @ University of Lynchburg. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Showcase @ University of Lynchburg. For more information, please contact [digitalshowcase@lynchburg.edu](mailto:digitalshowcase@lynchburg.edu).

THIS IS HOW WE DID IT: BLACK MALE LIFE SUCCESS

This Is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach of Black Male Success

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the University of Lynchburg

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

by

Aaron D. Smith, MEd

August, 2018

© Copyright by  
Aaron D. Smith  
All Rights Reserved  
August, 2018

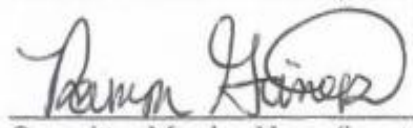
Lynchburg College  
Lynchburg, Virginia

APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, ("title"), has been approved by the Ed.D. Faculty of Lynchburg College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Chair (insert name)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member Name (insert name)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member Name (insert name)

7-20-18 Date

### Abstract

For decades, literature has described success for Black males as a hard-to-obtain phenomenon due to the nearly insurmountable hardships they face. Although this previous negative narrative has positively shifted within the last 15 years, there are still insignificant amounts of research on how to obtain Black male life success. This study sought to discover how 14 Black males in Central Virginia achieved life success. In this study, life success for Black males was defined and explored utilizing the psychological construct of well-being. This grounded theory study identified a framework for Black male life success which included a definition for life success as well as common attributes and circumstances for Black males on their journey towards life success.

Keywords: *Black Males, African-American Males, Success*

### Acknowledgements

To God be the glory! 1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV) “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.”

This journey has been a trying one, for sure. I feel like I’ve lost some relationships along the way due to the many nights and weekends of studying, writing, and praying. However, there have been a few consistent people who have been in my corner throughout this entire process, and to them I give thanks...in a moment.

First, I want to give thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without His ever-presence, I would not have made it to the finish line. This wasn’t easy. A scripture that came to mind often during the tough moments of this journey, however, was 2 Timothy 1:7 (ASV) “For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline.” It has taken fearlessness, discipline, and love to get to this point.

Love is what I received from this first group. My wife, LaShanta, held down the fort in my absence for the past four years. She’s been supportive in everything that I’ve set my heart and mind to, and I don’t take that for granted. We’ve been married for 11 years now, and I’ve known her for 17 years. For 10 of those 17 years, I’ve been in school; I’m ready to settle down. Thank you for believing in me and allowing me to pursue my dreams. It’s your turn!!! My son Elijah has grown quite a bit in this process. It’s my hope that he can see that education is important and with dedication and perseverance, anything is possible. I will continue strive to be a good example for him. My daughter Jasmine can’t even read this yet, but as long as she’s been alive, I’ve been on this journey. It was always a pleasure to come home to her smiling face – or her scowl – on a daily basis. She’s a breath of fresh air. My big brother, Reggie, has always

been there to support me in my endeavors as well. I appreciate the opportunity to use the 80-degree basement on multiple occasions to focus on this research. That was big time. His conversation, virtual reality, food, and internet access really helped to keep me going during the tougher times. My brother from another mother, Tae Tolbert, has been a rock standing the test of time. I always appreciate being able to come to his house to eat his food and watch sports, it was such a great outlet. I love him and his family and want to thank him for allowing our relationship to stand the test of time. Pastor and Brother, Tim Grant, was busy during the past four years with new family members, new degrees, and extra responsibilities in ministry. While not ideal, scheduling time to pray was super beneficial for me, thanks for being a brother and a spiritual guide. Brother George Ferguson, was a newcomer on the scene, but he really exhibited solid friendship throughout this process as well. He accompanied me to many cities and endured late nights at the hotel. And while he actually kept me from writing at times, the timing of his friendship was clearly ordained by God. This entire group's prayers and guidance have been extremely instrumental in my sustained success. Last but not least, the Ed.D. cohort was an amazing support group. I am excited about everyone's future.

There have also been other supporters during this process that have really allowed me to flourish, not just through direct support, but also indirect support. These people helped to make my life easier at some point during this process: Cheree Johnson, Marc Propst, Abdul Mumuni, Tanneshala Wilson, Aja Stevens, and Linda Hall. Words of encouragement from other colleagues at the University of Lynchburg were invaluable throughout the process. It's nice to have a feeling of support from an entire community. Thank you.

Last but not least, my Mom and Dad have instilled in me the foundation to believe I could achieve anything that I put my mind to. Their early example is what set this entire process into motion; they're the ones who have made this journey possible. Thank you.

Participants demonstrated fearlessness in sharing their story which in turn allowed me to complete this process. It's ironic that so many participants thanked me for the ability to share their story. But as I said to each of them, without them, there is no Dr. Smith. I owe these participants a lot. They were not compensated at all, and took an hour out of their lives to spend with me to tell me of their journey towards life success. Some stated that they are not successful, but I would beg to differ. Each participant has a unique story that deserves to be told. It was an honor for me to sit with each participant to hear their journey. My hope is that their stories help to shape the way Black men are seen in the future. Thank you sincerely. Additionally, a big shout out goes to the community solicitors who took their time to nominate Black males for this study; you, too, are appreciated.

The next two groups helped me develop the discipline necessary to succeed:

My Research Auditor, Caroline Nolan, has been around for this entire journey. She volunteered for quite a bit and although I didn't have much to offer, she ignored that and took on several very time-consuming challenges out of the kindness of her heart. The biggest challenge was auditing this work, ensuring that this research was an authentic and a fair representation of the participants. She was an invaluable part of the process and on this journey. Thank you.

My committee members were big time! Dr. Selden is a superstar and to say I was fortunate to have her as my committee chair is an understatement. She consistently demonstrated a spirit of excellence. I can only hope to one day serve as someone's chair in the same manner that she did for me. Dr. Walton may have had the most critical eye in this process



from the sociological standpoint. He asked excellent questions throughout the process and ensured I was staying on the right track the entire time. Dr. Goings, I look up to this guy. He's such an accomplished scholar in the Urban Education field; I was just honored to have him as part of this process. All of your expertise was invaluable in this process, and I'm looking forward to collaboration for future works.

I also would like to thank Dr. Gil Whiting, Dr. Christopher Lee, Dr. Chris Boyd, and Dr. Jolenn Williams for guidance and encouragement throughout this journey – and my cohort brother, the soon to be Dr. John Hughes IV. Brothers and sisters like them have helped pave the way for brothers like me. I appreciate that and I plan to pay it forward.

To anyone I've forgotten, and I'm sure that I have, please charge it to my head and not my heart. I appreciate you even if I did not articulate it here.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	ix
List of Tables .....	xii
List of Figures .....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Background .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions .....	7
Search Terms .....	8
Significance of Study .....	8
Definition of Terms .....	9
Organization of Dissertation .....	9
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .....	11
Introduction .....	11
Identifying Success .....	11
Well-being .....	12
Life satisfaction .....	14
Flourishing .....	15
Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment .....	15
Measuring Well-Being .....	17

Achieving Success .....	20
Attribution theory.....	20
Motivation theory.....	23
Goal-setting theory.....	25
Chapter Two Summary .....	26
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	28
Systematic Grounded Theory Approach.....	28
Research design .....	28
Sampling and Participants.....	30
Data Collection .....	35
Data Analysis .....	37
Credibility .....	38
Chapter Three Summary .....	39
Chapter 4: Results .....	40
Life Success .....	41
Categories .....	44
Core category: navigating hardship .....	44
Sub-category 1: External locus of control leading to life success .....	47
Sub-category 2: Internal locus of control leading to life success (Success Mindset).....	56
PERMA Validation.....	66
Conclusion .....	74
Chapter 5: Interpretations, Recommendations, and Discussion .....	76
Interpretation.....	76

Navigating hardships .....	78
The affirming community .....	92
Positive relationships .....	94
Receiving support .....	96
Future orientation.....	97
Self-efficacy .....	98
Spiritual attribution .....	99
Recommendations.....	101
Discussion .....	102
Limitations of study .....	102
Future research.....	103
Conclusion .....	104
References.....	106
Appendix A: Solicitor Message .....	128
Appendix B: Participator Message .....	129
Appendix C: Participant Rejection Message .....	130
Appendix D: Participant Interview Message .....	131
Appendix E: Interview Protocol (adopted from Jordan, 2014).....	132
Appendix F: Follow-up Email to Participator for Interview .....	134
Appendix G: Informed Consent Agreement .....	135
Appendix H: PERMA-Profiler .....	137
Appendix I: IRB Approval.....	138
Appendix J: Codes .....	139

## List of Tables

3.1 Participant Demographic Information .....	34
4.1 PERMA-Profiler Descriptive Statistics .....	71
4.2 Correlations Between PERMA Constructs and Demographic Data.....	72
5.1 Participant Education Level and Salary Range.....	83

List of Figures

4.1 PERMA-Profiler Participant Results .....	68
5.1 Black Male Life Success Theory Framework.....	77

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Background**

Life success is multifaceted and difficult to measure (Griffin & Page, 1996). Bostock (2014) indicated, “The way that success is defined shapes our working lives. It affects how organizations perform, who progresses within them and how power is exercised” (p. 8). Because of this, many studies throughout the decades have attempted to analyze and define this subjective, generalized concept of success for various groups including different social classes (Katz, 1964), ethnicities (Cornell, 1987), education level (Salili, 1988), professional statuses (Bostock, 2014; Kalet, Fletcher, Ferdman, & Bickell, 2006), and sex (Dyke & Murphy, 2006). These studies have advanced the varying definitions of success. These definitions have changed over time, and vary by group.

Though studies have been conducted concerning the subjective nature of success, in general (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Oishi & Suh, 1999; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), there is very little data concerning the pathways to or definition of life success for Black males beyond formalized schooling. Through a grounded theory approach, this research provided an opportunity not only to define what success meant for Black males in the Central Virginia region but also to discover how these Black males were able to navigate their way to that success.

Psychologists have studied the subjective construct of life success for many years in the forms of subjective well-being, flourishing, and satisfaction with life (Butler & Kern, 2014; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2010). Additional research has attempted to develop theories to explain how a successful life is achieved, including but not limited to attribution, motivation, achievement, and

goal theories (Covington, 2000; Heider, 1958; Locke & Latham, 2002; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Weiner, 1972).

Significant research has been conducted concerning factors that contribute to Black male success within the educational realm (Hargrove, 2014; Harper, 2012; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Rolland, 2011; Ruffins, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). For example, research has converged to identify common characteristics associated with Black male student success. Gilman Whiting's (2009) study on scholar identity in diverse males identified nine constructs for successful students. Whiting (2009) indicated that successful diverse male students demonstrate self-efficacy, future orientation, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, strong need for achievement, academic self-confidence, race pride, and masculinity. Resilience otherwise known as "grit" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007) has been found to correlate with both academic success as well as life satisfaction for young Black men (Strayhorn, 2014; Singh and Jha, 2008). However, less is known about the successes of Black males beyond the classroom. As a result, a definition of life success as well as determinants of life success for Black males are not clearly identifiable.

While a significant amount of information concerning Black male success in the educational system is available, an insignificant amount of information beyond formalized training or education for Black male success is available. Conversely, barriers to academic, family, social, and financial success of Black males are well documented (Blake & Darling, 1994; Howard, 2008; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Oliver, 2006; Page, 1997; Raphael, 2006; Roberts, 2004; Sampson, 1987). These barriers have been well-publicized in books, media, and research (Brown, 2005; Hutchinson, 1997). Whiting (2009) declared, "the toll that is taken on Black males shows up in all economic, social, and academic areas—more than



all other males and females” (p. 224). Goings (2015) stated that although barriers for Black males exist, there are those who have become successful; but their stories are rarely shared. Beyond the educational system, the reflective story about how Black males have overcome these barriers to achieve life success has not been an area of study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Life success has been difficult to attain for the Black male (Blake & Darling, 1994). Noguera (2003) stated, “all of the most important quality-of-life indicators suggest that African American males are in deep trouble” (p. 431). Educational, life, and career barriers to the success of Black men within the United States have been well documented (Blake & Darling, 1994; Holzer et al., 2005; Pettit & Western, 2004; Sampson, 1987; Shapiro, Mashede, & Osoro, 2013; Thomas, Thompson, Pollio, Greenberg, Conwill, Sall, Klukken, Davis, & Dias-Bowie, 2007; Western, 2000; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). Ratcliffe (2015) stated there are few opportunities for success for disadvantaged minorities in the United States. Not only have Black males historically been one of the largest disadvantaged groups within the country, they are at high risk for failure across many life domains (Baker-Fletcher, 1996; Small, 2017).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2015, a majority of Black males in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades across the country did not reach grade level proficiency in key subject areas including reading, mathematics, history, and science (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). In addition, less than one-quarter of Black males were at or above grade level in these same subject matter areas (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). In 2015, the Schott Foundation for Public Education reported that the high school graduation rate for Black male students stood at 59%, the lowest graduation rate among all races and sexes. Concerning higher education, Harper (2012) reported that the six-year

graduation rate for Black males within public colleges and universities was 33%, the lowest graduation rate among all races and sexes. Poor educational results create a lifelong cycle of struggle for Black males. As noted by Isokova and Nazarbekova (2001), the cycle of struggles begins with poor education. A poor education results in unemployment; unemployment, in turn, leads to low incomes; subsequently, low incomes lead to poor education; and poor education consequently, perpetuates unemployment.

The statistics correlating poor education and unemployment indicate that Black men are lagging behind. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), as of March 2018, the United States unemployment rate was 4.1%. Although this rate has held steady since the latter part of 2017, and is the lowest unemployment rate in the United States since 2001, the Black male unemployment rate (7.3%) was nearly double the unemployment rate for White (3.9%) and Asian (3.0%) males and higher than Hispanic males (5.4%) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018).

Higher rates of unemployment negatively affect wealth and income for Black males as well. Concerning income, in the first quarter of 2018, the median Black male income in the United States was \$37,596 annually, falling below the national average for male earnings \$45,812 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Breaking that quarterly data down into average weekly earnings, Black men who had full-time jobs during the first quarter of 2018 earned \$723 per week, 72.5% of the median for White men (\$997) and 60.3% of the median for Asian men (\$1,199) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The Black male median average was congruent with weekly wages of Hispanic males, \$723 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). These lower wages find more Black and Hispanic males in poverty. Black males made up 25.2%

of the impoverished population as compared to 14.2% of non-Black males in the country (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

When considering wealth, Black households have a net worth of \$11,000; the net worth falls to just \$1,700 after subtracting durable goods such as cars, electronics, and furniture; both figures are less than other demographics within the study (Asante-Muhammad, Collins, Hoxie, & Nieves, 2017). Asante-Muhammad et al. (2017) defined wealth as, “the buffer families need when faced with unexpected economic shocks like a lost job or a broken-down car. Wealth is the capital available to families to take advantage of economic opportunities, like buying a home, saving for college, or investing in the stock market” (p. 6).

Disparities in income have led to poor health care for the Black male community. The United States Department of Health, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) reported that due to a lack of appropriate health care, which includes preventative care for children and adults, Black males have a life expectancy of nearly five years less than their white counterparts. Black men were the least likely group of all demographics to live past 72 years of age in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Life expectancy is not the only health concern for the Black male population. Pieterse and Carter (2007) discuss the racism-related stress that is an additional burden to the psychological health of Black men, which affect their quality of life and well-being.

As demonstrated above, the success, life-fulfillment, and life-satisfaction of Black males lags behind other groups in the United States. Because of this deficit narrative, according to Tyler (2014), Black males are commonly referred to as hostile, aggressive, lazy, docile, sexually promiscuous, dishonest, thieves, crooks, and convicts. Burrell (2010) argued that as a result of this negative narrative, at a young age, seeds of doubt are planted in the minds of Black boys

concerning their success. Burrell (2010) stated that this negative narrative stifles “children’s ability out of fear of failure [which] increases the chances that they will fail...The children grow up to give up and retreat when faced with possibility” (p. 63).

Although those negative narratives and descriptions may be prominent, successful Black males can be found in many communities. This study examined the stories of 14 individuals in the Central Virginia region who were deemed successful by other community members. How these Black males were able to achieve their triumphs and life successes was the focal point of the study. This study sought to debunk the more prevalent negative narrative that exists in the literature for Black males.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the literature for Black Male life success. This study sought to develop a definition for Black male life success, as defined by Black men who were described as successful within the community, and to document the journeys of these Black males who currently reside in the Central Virginia region to create a grounded theory about how this life success can be achieved. This qualitative research study assisted with the development of a theoretical framework and grounded theory for the success of Black males beyond formalized educational opportunities. This study is critical to the body of life success knowledge due to the negligible amounts of information concerning life success from a Black male viewpoint. Despite the plethora of research concerning Black male success within colleges and universities as well as K-12 schools (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Glenn, & Johnson, 2012; Noguera, 2003), there are no studies that focus on the life successes of Black males beyond high school or college. Due to the limited information available, a new theory was necessary to assist with the explanation of life success for Black males.

The purpose for the grounded theory approach, in this context, is to provide a means by which information on beliefs and behaviors regarding life success could be extracted from semi-structured interviews of Black males to develop a theory delving into the “how” and “why” questions. Hays and Singh (2011) indicated that this qualitative research design “approach[es] a phenomenon by setting aside preconceived notions to formulate (but not test) a theory about that phenomenon, moving from simpler to more complex construction or descriptions” (p. 49). Theories explain processes or actions which surround an experience or sequence of events on a particular topic (Hays & Singh, 2011). The qualitative research approach for grounded theory allowed for insight to emerge from data analysis which led into additional data collection and analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to identify Black males in Central Virginia who have been described as successful by other community members. The study’s 14 participants were asked questions recounting their journey to a successful life and to define what success meant to them. Because of the subjective nature of success, individuals set different standards for their definition of life success due to their varying backgrounds. As a result, although stories that emerged differed, there were commonalities or themes present within each participant’s experience. These themes were utilized to generate a theory for what life success is and how it was achieved by Black males in the Central Virginia region.

The goals of this study were three-fold. First, this study sought to discover what attributes Black males in Central Virginia use to define life success. Second, this study sought to describe the journey participants traveled to achieve life success. Lastly, this study sought to utilize the grounded theory approach to determine themes within important experiences to

explain how this success was obtained. A theory of life success for Black males was generated through the careful coding of participant testimonies establishing themes amongst successful Black male participants. The three research questions answered through this study were:

1. What attributes do Black males in Central Virginia use to define life success?
2. How do Black males describe their journey towards life success?
3. What experiences were most important to obtaining life success?

### **Search Terms**

A list of search terms was used to investigate Black male success for this study, including: “Black Male Achievement,” “African American Male Achievement,” “Black Male Life Success,” “African American Male Life Satisfaction,” “African American Male Life Achievement,” “Black Male Life Achievement,” “Black Male Life Accomplishment,” “African American Male Life Accomplishment,” and “Black Male Performance.”

### **Significance of Study**

Although many Black males are successful, not enough of these success stories are documented (Majors & Billson, 1992). Documentation of these stories is important so that younger Black males, educators, mentors, and others can point to specific examples of Black male success and generate a roadmap for how it was achieved. This study has significance due to its ability to reveal how Black males, who currently reside in Central Virginia, have achieved life success. This study provides a theory that may be used to develop further research in the area of life success for Black males.

## **Definition of Terms**

To better understand topics of this study, a list of definitions can be found below. Initially for this study, the definition of life success was subjective for the soliciting agents until it was defined by participants. The life success definition below was synthesized based on findings in this study, to be discussed in Chapter 4.

Black male – This term is used interchangeably with African American male to describe men being of African or Black descent (inclusive of Caribbean) (Hargrove, 2014).

Central Virginia – Identified as Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford and Campbell Counties; the Towns of Altavista, Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford and Brookneal; and the City of Lynchburg (Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, 2016).

Life Success – The act of achieving set goals, influencing goal achievement for others, discovering one's purpose, not falling victim to negative statistics or stereotypes, and/or being content with one's current circumstances.

Solicitor – One that solicits; (Merriam-Webster, 2017) an agent who solicits potential participants, for researcher's study, through the utilization of their network.

## **Organization of Dissertation**

Chapter 1 has provided introductory information concerning the importance of this study as well as the research questions. Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a review of research concerning the identification of success, in general, and methods by which it can be obtained. Chapter 3 of this dissertation discusses the participants of this study while describing the methodology utilized in this study. Chapter 4 details the results of this study first defining life

success, then describing participant's journey to success, and finally validating participant's well-being measure (a strong indicator of success) based on self-reported PERMA-Profilers data.

Chapter 5 examines the interpretation of the data; it discusses the findings and provides recommendations moving forward.



## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section reviews literature identifying the subjective term of “success” in the form of the psychological construct of well-being. The second section reviews the general pathways of those who achieve success. These pathways include theories of causation such as the attribution theory, which makes causal inferences to success or failure (Harvey & Weary, 1984) as well as goal and motivation theories, which explain how motivation to achieve goals affects success or failure (Covington, 2000). Due to the negligible amounts of research on achieved and defined Black male life success, this review of literature has focused on the generalized body of work related to the identification and achievement of success.

Although classic grounded theory recommends the construction of a theory from the data before reviewing the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990) determined that a review of nontechnical literature may not hinder the emergence of the theory. Therefore, while the literature in this chapter describes success, in general, additional literature more specific to Black males is discussed in Chapter 5, after information was collected and analyzed per the approach used in grounded theory research (Martin & Turner, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

### Identifying Success

This section of the review highlights two well-being concepts describing attributes of success generally accepted within the United States. This section examines the dual construct of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. The hedonic view describes psychological attributes of one’s perception of happiness in life, which can be an indicator of success (Butler & Kern,

2014). The eudaimonic view describes a sense of accomplishment or fulfillment (Waterman, 1993), also an indicator of success.

**Well-being.** Well-being is a psychological construct that has been studied for decades with the intent to assist with the understanding of how and why people flourish (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Cheung and Lucas (2015) described well-being as “an overarching construct that captures the affective feelings and cognitive judgments people have about the quality of their lives” (p. 1). Well-being is frequently classified within the realm of positive psychology due to its correlation with functioning in a positive manner (Diener, 1984). Ryff and Singer (2003) identified well-being as a multidimensional model that emphasizes positive self-regard, quality ties to others, management of one’s surroundings, having purpose and meaningful engagement, and continued growth and development. Characteristics of well-being have been correlated with successful attributes such as job satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003), goal achievement (Sheldon & Elliott, 1999), and better health (Ryff & Singer, 2006). Harter et al. (2003) conducted a study which positively correlated workplace engagement with successful business employees. In a longitudinal study of the self-concordance theory, Sheldon and Elliott (1999) found that those who obtained their self-concordant goals achieved greater well-being. In a meta-analysis of the eudaimonic benefits of well-being, Ryff and Singer (2006) concluded that there are health benefits for those who are well. Workplace engagement, goal achievement, and health benefits are results of being well.

Well-being is subjective in that it relies upon an individual’s evaluative reaction to his or her life (Diener & Diener, 2009). Subjective well-being (SWB) measures are important to identify due to individual’s reactions to similar situations, evaluating each situation on their experiences (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Subjective well-being is a cognitive-

judgmental dimension which reflects an emotional evaluation, characterized by three constructs: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction which have been linked to important outcomes (Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014). Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) identified the positive effects of positive affect indicating that those who are subjectively well tend to be more charitable, others-centered, prosocial, and cooperative, as well as having larger social rewards, better work outcomes, greater coping abilities, better immune systems, being more cooperative, and living longer than individuals who are not happy. Oishi, Diener, Suh, and Lucas' (1999) study utilizing 23-day diaries of college students found that if participants high in the achievement value were successful in achievement domains, they would feel satisfied with life, whereas those who were high on benevolence values felt satisfied with life when they were successful in the social life domain. Oishi et al. (1999) continued to say,

The patterns of relations between domain satisfactions and global life satisfaction provide valuable information on individuals' SWB. In order to understand individuals' subjective well-being, it is critical to document the processes through which individuals construe various facets of life domains and life as a whole (p. 177).

A large volume of research on SWB has been conducted with findings generally concluding that higher levels of two of the three constructs, life-satisfaction and positive affect, in combination with low levels of the third construct, negative affect, generally lead to a more successful life (Diener et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Sheldon & Elliott, 1999). Through their study of SWB measures, Diener et al. (1999) determined that those who are well have a positive temperament, possess adequate resources to achieve goals and do not ruminate excessively on bad events. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) conducted a study concerning the pursuit of happiness through deeds and gratitude related to positive affect and life satisfaction,

diminishing negative affect. Sheldon and Elliott (1999) indicated that positive affect and life satisfaction are derived from the self-concordance of goals.

Ryan and Deci (2001) indicate that well-being has two primary focuses (a) hedonic or happiness (e.g., satisfaction with life) and (b) the eudaimonic or human potential (e.g., flourishing). Hedonic well-being, or happiness, is a combination of life satisfaction, positive mood, and the absence of negative mood (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Eudaimonic well-being, or human potential fulfillment, occurs when lives are congruent with deeply held values (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The eudaimonic well-being construct reviewed in this chapter includes flourishing which is a combination of feeling good mentally and functioning effectively (Huppert & So, 2013). A combination of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being characteristics can be found in Seligman's (2011a) PERMA (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) theory. This theory is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

**Life satisfaction.** Life satisfaction is an exploration and evaluation of one's happiness with their life (Cheung & Lucas, 2015; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2013). In a study investigating happiness, Shin and Johnson (1978) discovered that happiness is more than mere pleasure; life satisfaction is a positive assessment of life situations according to individual's unique needs and resources relative to the environment and culture in which they function. While developing a measurement for life satisfaction, Diener et al. (1985) described life satisfaction as one's judgment of their circumstance in comparison to the standard that each individual set for themselves which has not been externally imposed.

A positive correlation with those who are happy has been made with those who are successful (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Utilizing the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), a measurement for life satisfaction, Pavot and Diener (2008) found that life satisfaction

has a predictive value for the success of specific life outcomes such as health, marital satisfaction, and social relationships. In Lyubomirsky et al.'s (2005) study concerning the correlation between happiness and success, the researchers found that positive affect engenders success due to active involvement in goal attainment. While life satisfaction correlates with one's happiness, flourishing correlates with one's potential for fulfillment.

**Flourishing.** Flourishing is a research term that was previously described as psychological well-being (Diener et al., 2010). Diener et al. (2010) indicated that flourishing expands upon Bradburn's (1969) definition of psychological well-being as the balance between positive affect and negative affect. In a study investigating mental health, Keyes (2002) described flourishing as the positive presence of mental health. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017) describes positive mental health as a combination of one's emotional, psychological and mental well-being. Positive health allows individuals to: "realize their full potential, cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017, Mental Health and Wellness section, para. 1-4).

**Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.** The PERMA theory, developed by Martin Seligman (2011a), suggests that one can flourish through the development of five well-being constructs: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This theory combines both the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being constructs. Seligman's (2011b) theory builds upon life satisfaction's traditional method of placing a significant value on one's subjective, emotional state in order to determine success by considering the non-emotional, objective nature of success creating a well-rounded view of well-being. In their development of a measurement for PERMA, Butler and Kern (2014) explained

the differences between objective and subjective success saying objective success can be impacted by circumstance, opportunity, and ambition while subjective accomplishment involves a sense of working toward and reaching a goal. The PERMA theory focuses on the psychological construct of flourishing, which is subjective, but not exclusively tied to emotion, which denotes that individuals, “need to accept responsibility for important personal decisions, irrespective of whether we obtain a sense of achievement from making good choices” (Seligman, 2011b, p. 61). The five elements described in Seligman’s (2011a) PERMA theory are as follows:

- Positive emotions encompass the emotions such as happiness, pleasure, and comfort at a given time.
- Engagement refers to psychological connection, being interested in or engaged with a particular cause.
- Relationships include integration with society, community, social networks, and loved ones.
- Meaning refers to being connected to something larger than self and having a sense of purpose and direction in life.
- Accomplishment is the idea of making progress towards one’s goals and achieving results that lead to both external recognition and a personal sense of accomplishment.

Huppert, Marks, Clark, Siegrist, Stutzer, Vittersø, and Wahrendorf (2009) stated that a major criticism of many subjective measurements utilized is that they tend to rely on single-item measures of life satisfaction or happiness, rather than more refined, multi-item measures. Ryff (1995) discussed the importance of identifying the convergence of multiple positive well-being

constructs. The inclusiveness of several wellness constructs within the PERMA theory provides both the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being which correlates with success.

### **Measuring Well-Being**

Huppert et al. (2009) indicated the importance of subjectively measuring well-being constructs in their study of the well-being and success of people in Europe. In their study, Huppert et al. (2009) created and tested the European Social Survey which sought to combine subjective constructs of well-being with previously measured objective constructs for individuals in Europe. In the United States, there have also been of a plethora of valid measures for well-being such as: (1) Watson, Clark, and Tellegen's (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), (2) Diener et al.'s (1985) Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), (3) Pavot, Diener, and Suh's (1998) Temporal Satisfaction With Life Scale (TSWLS), (4) Diener et al.'s (2010), Flourishing Scale (FS) and the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), and (5) Butler and Kern's (2014) PERMA-Profiler. Each assessment seeks to measure well-being in a unique way.

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule seeks to assess pleasant and unpleasant emotions through two 10-item scales measured on a 1-5 scale (Watson et al., 1988). This is the most commonly used assessment to measure positive and negative affect (Diener et al., 2010; Nicolas, Martinent, & Campo, 2014; Thompson, 2007). The PANAS assessment, however, may not reflect feelings accurately due to the inclusion of items that are not considered feelings (e.g., "strong", "alert", "active", and "determined") and the omission of some core emotional feelings (e.g., "bad", "joy") (Li, Bai, & Wang, 2013). Emotions and feelings are not the same. Emotion is an observable reaction to a stimulus while a feeling is a non-observable experience of emotion (Damasio, 2002).

The Satisfaction With Life Scale is a valid and reliable five-item scale that seeks to identify a person's satisfaction with their overall life by rating participant's responses on a 1-7 scale (Diener et al., 1985). Its adaptation, the 15-item Temporal Satisfaction With Life Scale (Pavot et al., 1998) seeks to determine the participant's assessment of their past, present, and future life satisfaction. Items within both scales are positively worded, so higher scores indicate higher life satisfaction (Ye, 2007). These two instruments are narrow in their focus in that they are designed to measure only the cognitive component of well-being (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Diener et al.'s (2010) flourishing scale is an eight-item measurement which describes aspects of human functioning including relationships and feelings of competence to having purpose in life. Items on the flourishing scale are phrased in a positive direction with participants answering questions on a 1-7 scale that ranges from "Strong Disagreement" to "Strong Agreement" (Diener et al., 2010). A higher range of scores in this assessment would indicate that respondents view themselves in a positive manner (Diener et al., 2010). This scale does not separately measure facets of well-being (Diener et al., 2010). The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) is a 12-item scale, evenly split with six positive experience and six negative experience items designed to assess the respondent's feelings on a 1-5 scale (Diener et al., 2010). Diener et al. (2010) describe the SPANE assessment as beneficial due to its ability to assess the "full range of possible desirable and undesirable experiences" (p. 145). The researcher valued both the flourishing scale and SPANE; however, upon piloting surveys for this study, both instruments lacked measurements of the physical domain.

The PERMA-Profiler is a 23-item measure that assesses well-being in the five domains found in Seligman's (2011a) PERMA theory, utilizing a 1-10 scale (Butler & Kern, 2014). The PERMA-Profiler measures positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning,



accomplishment, health, and negative emotion as separate but correlated constructs while maintaining reliability cross culturally (Khaw & Kern, 2014). Diener (1984) suggested that valid well-being measures are subjective and can measure personal experience, including positive measures and a global assessment of a person's life. The PERMA-Profilier achieves all three of these requirements in a self-reported measure (Butler & Kern, 2014).

The comprehensiveness of the five domains measured by the PERMA-Profilier help to identify success in domains similar to other assessments; it also includes elements of health-related measurements, which set it apart. While traditional studies of well-being focus solely on the psychological aspects, Ryff and Singer (2003) indicated the importance of the physical aspects of well-being for successful functioning in adulthood. Ryff and Singer (2003) identified positive physical health characteristics which, “includes not only the absence of illness (e.g., avoidance of disease, chronic conditions, health symptoms, physical limitations) but also the presence of the positive (e.g., functional abilities, aerobic capacities, healthy behaviors—diet, exercise, sleep)” (p. 20).

This study seeks to identify and interview Black males who have achieved success; the PERMA-Profilier was the appropriate tool to complement this study. It was important to identify the general constructs of well-being and how it correlated with success. Additionally, the identification of an assessment to measure one's well-being was critical for the success of this study to further validate the successful nature of the participants.

The first section of the literature review has described what well-being is, how it relates to success, and the tools to measure constructs of success including happiness, satisfaction, and well-being. The processes utilized to achieve this success are described in several achievement theories, outlined in the next section.

## **Achieving Success**

Search terms related to the achievement of success (e.g., success, life success, achievement, striving, goal achievement, accomplishment, and satisfaction) revealed common research relating to each term. These terms frequently revealed research on motivation theory, attribution theory, and goal achievement theory. While these theories are not exhaustive concerning achieving success, they are the most prevalent. As a result, the second section of this review of literature will focus on these theories.

In a 1971 study to interpret the causes of success and failure, Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, and Rosenbaum (1987) reviewed attributional achievement and motivational research and discovered four elements to interpret and predict outcomes of achievement-related activities that combine both consciousness (thought) and behavior (action). The four elements mentioned by Weiner et al. (1987) were ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Ability and effort are two internal attributes with high locus of control and task difficulty and luck are external attributes with low locus of control (Weiner et al., 1987). Covington (2000) stated that motivation, a conscious construct, is necessary for achievement. Motivation is a drive or an internal state, need, or condition that impels an individual towards action (Covington, 2000). Resiliency is an action defined as “manifested competence in the context of significant challenges to adaptation or development” (Matsen & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 206). Motivation and resiliency are prerequisites for achievement identified in attribution theory (Weiner, 1972), motivational theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and goal theory (Covington, 2000).

**Attribution theory.** The attributional approach to success is commonly credited to Fritz Heider (1958) who reasoned that achievement could be determined by one’s ability, in conjunction with the amount of effort to be exerted relative to the difficulty of the task.

Attribution theory has been found to examine social perception and identifies causal explanations when answering “why?” questions (Kelley, 1973). Heider’s (1958) work was expanded upon by Bernard Weiner (1972) to give more clarity concerning causation and described specific attributes that affect achievement. Weiner’s (1972) theory identified three dimensions of attribution that can factor into success or failure:

1. locus or location of the cause (inside or outside of the actor);
2. controllability, what one can control; and
4. endurance or stability or how long an effect may last.

These three factors are generally accepted throughout the research, although Rees, Ingledew, and Hardy (2005) examined a fourth potential factor, globality of the cause. This additional property refers to whether the cause affects a wide range of situations with which the person is faced (a global attribution) or a narrow range of situations (a specific attribution). This additional factor, however, is not as widely accepted as Weiner’s original three factors.

The fundamental error found in the attributional theory was highlighted by Ross (1977). Ross (1977) argued that there was too much emphasis on the role of dispositional factors as opposed to the situational factors that may exist when attributing one’s behavior. As a result of this contention, Weiner (2010) elaborated upon the attribution theory noting that the theory is centered on causes that explain success and failure outcomes rather than specific actions. Some of those specific actions have been explored in educational studies (Anderson, 1983; Cooper & Burger, 1980; Elig & Frieze, 1979; Frieze, 1976; Willson & Palmer, 1983). These studies have utilized college students as well as teachers completing various tasks.

Anderson (1983) conducted a study focused on success and failure within hypothetical situations for college students. A portion of Cooper and Burger’s (1980) research focused on

teacher's expectations of the success and failure of students. Utilizing different methods of attributional measurement for college students, Elig and Frieze (1979) discovered that structured measures including rating scales were able to identify attribution much better than unstructured, open-ended, measures. Frieze (1976) utilized college student participants to identify attributional characteristics utilizing an open-ended format to identify causation. Research conducted by Willson and Palmer (1983) identified undergraduate college student success related to Weiner's (1972) theory of attribution.

Weiner (1986) claimed that the attribution theory linked success to high ability and hard work; failure was attributed to low ability and the absence of trying. In a review of attribution theory literature from 1978 to 1983, Harvey and Weary (1984) determined that in its simplest form, attribution determines factors of causation in which people attempt to get a greater understanding of and control over their environment. This research built upon earlier work by Rotter's (1966) study on locus of control that examined the effect of skill versus chance in task completion. Ability and effort were considered skills that were within one's locus of control whereas chance was an external factor located in the environment. These factors have played a significant role in the expectancy of success or failure in Black youth.

This study seeks to understand how Black men have achieved success and to generate a theory to be utilized as a blueprint, potentially for replication. Attribution theory is present when there are inquiries "to achieve a greater degree of understanding of, and hence control over, their environment" (Harvey & Weary, 1984, p. 428). While attribution theory can assist with individual achievement causation overall, motivation and goal theories help determine achievement through an analysis of continued behavior (Kanfer, 1990).

**Motivation theory.** McClelland et al., (1953) first researched the underlying causes of achievement and determined that they are rooted in the subconscious during childhood. To further develop this thought, Atkinson and Feather (1966) conducted a study concerning achievement-motivation among youth finding that extrinsic forces of motivation can undertake an activity both positively and negatively. Weiner (1986) further developed motivational theory by describing motivation as the balancing of what one can get (incentive) with the likelihood of getting it (expectancy). Covington's (2000) meta-analysis of motivation in academic achievement described motivation as action that gives meaning, direction, and purpose to goals. Covington's (2000) analysis indicated that the quality and intensity of behavior as a result of the motivation will change as the goals change. Motivation can drive individuals in that the hope for success and pride of winning can push individuals towards excellence, while fear of failure can also influence achievement behavior (Covington, 2000). This is consistent with Atkinson and Feather's (1966) early findings on motivation indicating that results stem from the desire to achieve success or avoiding failure.

Kanfer's (1990) review of motivational psychology within organizational settings indicated that motivation is not directly observable; however, one can measure motivation by determining the direction of behavior, whether that's positive or negative, the intensity of the actions, and persistence of the behaviors over time. Ryan and Deci (2000) correlated motivation with successful behavior saying, "Motivation is highly valued because of its consequences: Motivation produces" (p. 69). Kanfer (1990) classified motivation theory into three paradigms: a need-motive value, cognition choice, and self-regulation metacognition.

Need-motive values emphasize personality traits, needs, and values that account for behavioral differences (Alderfer, 1969; Keller, 1983; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 2011;

Maslow, 1943; McMillan & Forsyth, 1991). The combination of motivation and need can affect one's level of success. Alderfer's (1969) research indicated that there are three types of needs that motivate behavior: existence needs, relational needs, and growth needs correlating with safety, love, and esteem respectively. Alderfer (1969) noted that these constructs could act simultaneously; however, individuals frustrated with higher level need may regress to a lower level need. In a cross-cultural study for need motivation, Keller (1983) noted that needs may cycle due to changes in satisfactions and desires. While summarizing motivational theories to develop best practices for motivating college students, McMillan and Forsyth (1991) determined that both needs and expectations are necessary for students to be motivated to succeed. Upon their development of the expectancy-value model, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) found that expectancies and values directly influence achievement choices, performance, effort, and persistence.

Herzberg et al. (2011), while studying job satisfaction, found that two factors, motivators and hygiene, determined satisfaction with one's job. Herzberg et al. indicated that motivators are actions that lead towards satisfaction or the perception of a job well done. Herzberg et al. described hygiene as job contexts that lead to dissatisfaction or demotivators. Maslow (1943) stated that biological and instinctive needs, on a range from lower order to higher order needs, motivate behavior. Maslow's theory indicated that lower needs must be met in order for higher needs to become more important. These need-motive theories give insight into how needs affect motivation, which is in turn linked to achieving a successful life.

In a study of work motivation and job satisfaction, Locke and Latham (1990) found that specific difficult goals consistently led to higher performance than when people were urged to do their best. Covington (2000) described achievement motivation as "the result of an emotional

conflict between striving for greatness and avoiding failure” (p. 173). Through the examination of 10 pertinent studies on the causality of success and failure, Weiner (1986) found that individual interpretations of positive or negative outcomes were important factors of causality of success or failure.

Achievement-related choices are guided by motivation towards one’s goals (Wigfield and Eccles, 2010). Motivation is influenced by task-specific beliefs such as ability, the perceived difficulty of the tasks, and the goals that one sets. Setting and maintaining goals are an important factor in achieving success, and goal-setting theory details the method in which this happens.

**Goal-setting theory.** Edwin Locke pioneered goal-setting theory beginning in the 1960s and continued to develop the theory with other scholars for decades (Locke & Latham, 1994). As goal-setting theory developed, two primary attributes within the theory began to emerge: content and intensity (Locke & Latham, 1994). Content is described as the end goal, or nature of the activity, while intensity refers to the level of importance of the content to the individual (Locke & Latham, 1994). The goal content approach seeks to determine “why” an individual could exhibit motivated behavior (Pintrich, 2000). Intensity, or commitment, determines the level of one’s attachment to the goal (Latham & Locke, 1991).

In Locke and Latham’s (2002) meta-analysis of 35 years’ worth of research on goal-setting theory, they identified four ways in which goals can directly affect performance positively. First, Locke and Latham (2002) indicated that goals serve as a directive function. Direct attention towards goal-relevant activities and away from irrelevant activities can affect actions positively. Second, Locke and Latham (2002) indicated that goals are energizing. In a study of mental exercises for undergraduate female students, Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, and Ratajczak (1990) found that subjects who thought most intensely about how to solve a problem

were most committed to taking action towards solving it. The third way goals can directly affect performance identified by Locke and Latham (2002) was that they affect persistence.

Duckworth et al. (2007) described those who are persistent as “gritty” individuals who are more likely to achieve their goals. Lastly, Locke and Latham (2002) indicated that goals can lead to the discovery of task relevant knowledge. Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, and Ryan (1981) described self-determination and intrinsic motivation as more valuable regarding goal achievement in the discovery of knowledge within the academic setting.

Through their *Taxonomy of Human Goals*, Ford and Nichols (1992) helped individuals identify their cognitive choices concerning goal-achieving practices in relationships and in tasks through the lens of desired consequences for individuals and desired consequences in relationship to others. Cognitive choices help to determine activities and environments as well as one’s effort and persistence through challenges to reach goals (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). In studying cognitive choice among academic and career decisions, Lent et al. (1994), highlighted the importance of self-efficacy appraisals. Self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1986), is the judgment of people’s capabilities to execute actions to obtain certain outcomes. These choices can lead to a life of success.

## **Chapter Two Summary**

As mentioned previously, life success is multifaceted and difficult to define (Griffin & Page, 1996). Due to the complicated nature of defining life success, specifically for Black males, the researcher has examined general constructs of well-being which described individuals who are functioning in a positive manner (Diener, 1984). Functioning in a positive manner in multiple life areas of life (e.g., status, relationships, contributions to society, personal and professional fulfillment, and security) can lead to life success (Parker & Chusmir, 1992). The



ability to measure well-being constructs was an important aspect validating participant's inclusion in this study.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to develop a definition of success to be created by Black males in the Central Virginia region; (2) to identify specific experiences of how this success was derived; and (3) to develop a grounded theory of factors contributing to Black male success to be used as a blueprint for future study. The primary focus of this study was to generate a grounded theory of life success for Black males through the identification of themes from semi-structured interviews of Black males in Central Virginia who were deemed successful by other community members. In order to achieve the purposes of this study, due to negligible amounts of published research in each of these areas, a grounded theory approach was necessary.

#### **Systematic Grounded Theory Approach**

**Research design.** Qualitative research is helpful when attempting to understand causality (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Grounded theory is primarily a qualitative research approach for developing a theory that is grounded in data that has been systematically gathered and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This approach is especially appropriate when information about the studied phenomena is inadequate or nonexistent (Creswell, 2008). Martin and Turner (1986) encouraged researchers to identify descriptions of relevant phenomena and then hypothesize about relationships among them. The gap in literature in terms of Black male success for this study necessitated a systematic grounded theory approach.

Due to limited published research concerning the life success for Black males, a systematic grounded theory approach utilizing semi-structured interviews, helped generate theory concerning how life success has been achieved. The grounded theory research method is most appropriate when the information available for a specific research topic either does not

exist or theories concerned with the topic are too remote or abstract to offer detailed guidance (Martin, 1986).

The development of a grounded theory requires the use of the constant comparative method, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Constant comparative methodology involves four interdependent stages, which are based upon identification, categorization, and comparison of data incidents (Henderson, 1992). Conrad (1975) outlined the stages as follows:

- (a) comparing incidents applicable to each category;
- (b) integrating categories and their properties;
- (c) delimiting the theory; and
- (d) writing the theory.

Conrad (1975) found the constant comparison method a “multi-faceted approach to research designed to maximize flexibility and aid the creative generation of theory” (p. 241). Henderson (1983) stated that grounded theory, “Is developed from direct contact with data; therefore, it fits the data better than deductively derived theories that were imposed from ‘a priori’ premise” (p. 11). While gathering data, themes emerged and thus a theory was created.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data needed for grounded theory development. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to set up a general structure by deciding what main questions will be asked in advance (Drever, 1995). Semi-structured interviews also allow for needed flexibility that give the interviewer license to pursue lines of questioning based on the responding answers to previous questions (Longhurst, 2003). Langdrige (2007) indicated that semi-structured interviews should focus on individual’s lived experiences and how those experiences impact them in the world in which they live.

Interview question design was important to achieve the goals of the research; therefore, both descriptive and structural questions were used. Descriptive questions, “ask people to describe things and may provide insights or suggest areas for query that the researcher might not have considered” while structural questions, “help the researcher understand relationships between things, and to categorize groups of like things or like processes” (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 35). Semi-structured interviews rely on the interaction of the interviewee and the interviewer to allow for informal conversation allowing participants to answer questions in their own words (Longhurst, 2003). This method permitted insight into information, attitudes, stories, and perceptions that were extracted to formulate additional theoretical categories, thus allowing a grounded theory to emerge from the results.

### **Sampling and Participants**

All 14 participants for this study identified as male, Black or African-American, lived in the Central Virginia region, and were between the ages of 25 and 40. Each of the participants was selected because of their perceived status as a successful Black male living in the Central Virginia region. Each participant had earned a high school diploma and at least an associate’s degree. The minimum age for eligibility for the study, 25 years old, allowed participants the opportunity to make an impact on community solicitors to be viewed as successful. The maximum age for eligibility, 45 years old, established a point in one’s life that could be considered their prime (Goode, 1999) with an opportunity for reflection on their success journey.

This study sought a sample size between 10 and 15 Black males in the Central Virginia region in order to generate a theory of Black male success; 14 participants were interviewed for this study. Cooper and Endacott (2007) indicated that qualitative research requires sampling to the point of saturation; therefore, the researcher should recruit until there is no new data.

Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested that grounded theory studies should have a range of 20-30 samples. Cooper and Endacott (2007) indicated, however, that “five to eight participants are usually sufficient for a homogenous sample” (p. 817). Due to the combination of homogeneous participants (recommended five to eight participants) and grounded theory study (recommended 20-30 participants), the researcher determined that saturation could occur between the two suggested sample sizes. As a result, the researcher purposefully sought a sample size of 10-15 participants.

The process of sampling refers to the calculated decision to identify a specific locale according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions (such as time, space, identity or power) which are worked out in advance for a study (Glaser, 1978). Coyne (1996) discussed the strategy of sampling in grounded theory research saying, “The researcher must have some idea of where to sample” (p. 625). Purposeful sampling is a broad term for sampling procedures used in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Schatzman and Strauss (1973) suggested that purposeful sampling is beneficial for the researcher so that participants can be surveyed according to the aims of the research. Coyne (1997) indicated that this style of sampling is advantageous when selecting from a number of categories, “such as age, gender, status, role, function in organization, stated philosophy or ideology” (p. 624). Snowball sampling helped secure Black males who had experienced the life success phenomenon.

Snowball sampling has been utilized in qualitative research to yield study samples for participants who possess characteristics sought for a study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This method identifies participants by soliciting people who know others that generally have identified characteristics who, in turn, know people with similar characteristics (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Chenitz and Swanson (1986) described

this step of the grounded theory process by saying, “the initial sample is determined to examine the phenomena where it is found to exist” (p. 9). This method was necessary for the researcher to find individuals who in-turn helped identify successful Black male participants for the study.

Epstien (1973), who conducted a study on the success of Black professional women, explained the challenge of finding Black successful participants, “a great deal of time was spent simply trying to find subjects” (p. 914). Therefore, in order to reduce the time locating potential participants, the researcher utilized the snowball sampling method to identify individuals within his or her network, henceforth known as solicitors, in the Central Virginia region who identified potential participants for this study. Solicitors were community members in the researcher’s Central Virginia network contacted to recommend successful Black males for the study. A definition for success was not provided for solicitors, by the researcher, so that they were not biased in their selection or predisposed to success criteria prior to soliciting participants.

Fifteen solicitors were contacted from the researcher’s network. These solicitors were from six different employment fields: education, not-for-profit/church, local government, manufacturing, health services, and miscellaneous. The industries were chosen due to their variety and prominence within the Central Virginia region. The researcher communicated with solicitors via email to clarify the initial criteria for participant selection (male, identifying as Black or African American, residing in Central Virginia, and between the ages of 25-45) and inclusion in the study. Solicitors were also asked to provide contact information for participants to enable researcher contact. Upon contacting each solicitor, the researcher documented the solicitor’s role within the community, how they were affiliated with the potential participator, as well as solicitor comments concerning each potential participator. Solicitor information was tracked by spreadsheet to identify differences in solicitor characteristics.

Seven total solicitors from each of the six employment industries responded to the initial contact by the researcher yielding 26 unique potential participants. Once the researcher received contact information from solicitors, the researcher contacted each potential participant via email or telephone to inquire whether the potential participant would like to proceed as a possible participant in the study and to confirm that the participant met the previous criteria outlined. Participants were also notified of their solicitor's recommendation and given an opportunity to accept the nomination. The researcher attempted to connect with the 26 potential participants via phone or email. A total of 12 contacts proved to be fruitless. Five of those potential participants did not meet the criteria set forth in the study (due to a discrepancy in the solicitors' perception of the potential participant's age) and seven did not respond to the solicitation. As a result, a total of 14 eligible individuals indicated that they would be willing to participate in the study.

All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity for the study. Table 3.1 identifies demographic information for each participant including their spiritual affiliation, education level, age, and salary range at the time of the interview. Additionally, the table identifies each participant's self-identified socioeconomic status growing up as well as the location for their high school graduation. The information is presented in descending participant order.

Table 3.1

*Participant Demographic Information*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Current Salary Range</b>	<b>HS Location</b>	<b>Spiritual Affiliation</b>	<b>Previous Socioeconomic status</b>
Pablo	Bachelor's	40	90+	Chatham, VA	Christian	Poverty
Tyrone	Terminal	27	75-90k	Chesterfield, VA	Christian	Low-Middle
Lance	Bachelor's	28	45-60k	Moneta, VA	Christian	Low-Middle
Jamal	Master's	28	45-60k	Lynchburg, VA	Christian	Poverty
Malcolm	Terminal	39	90+	Chesapeake, VA	Christian	Low-Middle
Allen	Bachelor's	26	30-45k	Lynchburg, VA	Christian	Middle
Martin	Master's	31	30-45k	Woodbridge, VA	Christian	Poverty
Ali	Bachelor's	33	45-60k	Campbell County, VA	Christian	Middle
Rashad	Master's	30	45-60k	Campbell County, VA	Christian	Low-Middle
David	Associate's	25	45-60k	Amherst, VA	Christian	Poverty
Jackson	Bachelor's	28	30-45k	Bluefield, VA	Christian	Middle
Dixon	Bachelor's	31	45-60k	Lynchburg, VA	Christian	Low-Middle
Alonzo	Associate's	37	45-60k	Lynchburg, VA	None	Poverty
Damian	Terminal	31	60-75k	Amherst, VA	Christian	Low-Middle

Interviews were conducted as participants notified the researcher of their availability through the saturation period. Once a potential participant agreed to participate, the researcher contacted the participant via email or telephone to confirm a date, time, and location for the interview along with the distribution of an electronic consent agreement to be reviewed prior to the interview acknowledging their willingness to participate under the study's guidelines. All participant interviews were completed within a four-week time frame.



## **Data Collection**

Data in this research was collected through semi-structured interviews. Henderson (1996) stated, “the interview situation usually permits much greater depth than do other methods of collecting research data, therefore allowing the interviewer to obtain information that the subject would probably not reveal under any other circumstances” (p. 59). The semi-structure of the interview allowed for flexibility from the researcher and interviewer to ensure topics were explored thoroughly. Borg and Gall (1983) indicated that semi-structured interviews provide a “desirable combination of objectivity and depth and often permits gathering valuable data that could not be successfully obtained by any other approach” (p. 442). These interviews ranged from a minimum of 37 minutes to a maximum of 90 minutes. Each interview was held in a mutually agreed upon location including quiet spaces in public restaurants, office spaces, participant’s homes, and other private spaces. The interview questions were based on the interview protocol developed by Jordan (2014). That interview protocol was amended to ask additional questions utilizing information found in the success research such as: resiliency, support, achievement, and purpose. Additionally, questions specific to success and its barriers for Black men, found in the literature, were added to the interview protocol including: religiosity, discrimination, and Black culture.

At the onset of the interview, the researcher had each participant sign a printed copy of the consent agreement to again verify their willingness to participate under the guidelines of the study. Once signed, the researcher began the audio recording of the interviews with the participant’s permission. The researcher followed the semi-structured interview protocol with standard questions to guide the participants through the re-telling of their personal story of life success while also allowing for conversation to ensue to leave room for participant’s stories and

additional questions. Clarifying questions were asked to allow for in-depth understanding. The researcher took notes following the interview to describe body language or other notable occurrences.

At the conclusion of the individual interviews, a paper copy of the PERMA-Profilers was administered to assess the participant's well-being. The PERMA-Profiler is a valid, self-reporting, measurement of participant's satisfaction with multiple dimensions of well-being (Butler & Kern, 2014). The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016) was selected as the screening device to determine well-being because the profiler has been demonstrated to be a reliable, valid and acceptable means to measure psychometric well-being properties across a large, diverse, international sample (Butler & Kern, 2016). The PERMA-Profiler scores participants on a scale of 0-10 measuring nine different categories including positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, health, loneliness, negative affect, and happiness. This 23-question assessment measures and describes well-being through the multiple dimensions mentioned. The presence of the positive measures, along with the absence of the negative measures, indicates a profile of one who is well. Participant's scores in this study are discussed in Chapter 4.

After the interview process, the researcher then utilized the online transcription service, Temi.com, to conduct the first transcription of the interviews. After the initial transcription by Temi.com, the researcher reviewed and corrected participant interviews two additional times to ensure accuracy. After the second transcription review, participants were e-mailed a copy of their individual interview in order to member-check the results to ensure accuracy as recommended in the qualitative inquiry process (Cooper & Endacott, 2007; Miles & Huberman,

1994). After this member-check, any changes that were suggested by the participants were incorporated for the final transcript.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process by ensuring all identifiable information including consent forms, PERMA-Profiler data, and written interview responses remained locked with researcher access.

### **Data Analysis**

For a qualitative grounded theory study, Elo and Kyngäs (2008) suggest the utilization of an inductive approach when prior knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation is limited or fragmented. Due to the limited nature of prior knowledge for this study of Black male life success, this approach was appropriate as it is generally used in grounded theory research. This inductive approach allows for codes, categories, or themes to be directly drawn from the data (Cho & Lee, 2014).

Saldaña (2015) defines a code as a qualitative inquiry assigned to a summative or essence-capturing portion of data. The researcher coded transcripts utilizing the online software known as Dedoose. This software allowed for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis. This program assisted with the organization of the large amounts of data that the interviews produced including its coding, analysis, and tracking.

Grounded theory coding typically involves three levels: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe each of these coding phases: Open coding allows the researcher to segment data into groups, forming preliminary categories about the phenomenon. During this phase, the goal is to thoroughly dissect each transcript to determine common categories selecting those that are most saturated with information creating the core categories (Creswell, 2007). Transcripts were coded three

times each to ensure the proper information had been documented. This process allows for more familiarity with content (Saldaña, 2015). Axial coding follows open coding to identify themes within the groups. This phase seeks to deepen the understanding of the central phenomenon by refining categories found in the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Both open and axial coding happens simultaneously to data collection. Selective or theoretical coding occurs when the researcher organizes information and begins to articulate an understanding of the grounded theory. Upon the conclusion of coding, theory generation occurs when the researcher can explain a phenomenon at a conceptual level (Creswell, 2008).

Once codes and categories from each participant were identified, the researcher conducted cross-case analysis among the participant codes to determine common themes between them. Saldaña (2015) encouraged researchers to select a limited number of ideas that have emerged to prioritize observations to reflect on their essential meaning. Once the common themes were discovered, the researcher modified and finalized the categories. Themes and relationships were then synthesized into a theory that identifies the definition of life success for Black males in Central Virginia as well as a framework concerning the journey towards life success.

### **Credibility**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most critical technique for establishing credibility in qualitative research designs. The researcher ensured the dependability of this qualitative study by allowing and encouraging participants to member check their transcripts after their interview. To further increase dependability, the researcher also solicited a research auditor to assist in clarifying aspects of data analysis, ensuring the analysis is fully developed and credible (Brown, Steven, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002). Lastly,

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Miles and Huberman (1994) both discuss the importance of an audit trail in qualitative research to ensure reliability. The researcher left meticulous notes throughout this study to increase the credibility of this research.

### **Chapter Three Summary**

This chapter detailed the method by which this research study was conducted. The qualitative, grounded theory design is necessary to achieve the goals of this study due to the lack of information regarding Black male life success. This chapter detailed the grounded theory approach, the sampling and selection of participants, the data collection and analysis, and how the researcher maintained credibility in the process.

## Chapter 4: Results

This study revealed rich and descriptive data concerning the journey towards life success for Black males in the Central Virginia area. The goal of this study was to define life success for Black males. It also sought to describe the journey towards that life success for these participants. Lastly, it sought to detail the most significant aspects of their journey in order to create a grounded theory for Black male life success.

This chapter begins by defining life success for the participants in this study. Next, this chapter identifies the codes and themes revealed during the open and axial coding process which led to the description of participant's journeys as well as the definition of life success. Codes were gleaned directly from the participant interviews. Upon analyzing the coded data, themes illustrating patterns and concepts toward a grounded theory framework emerged during the selective coding stage. Seven themes emerged in the axial coding process: navigating hardships, development of positive relationships, receiving assistance, future orientation, self-efficacy, spiritual attribution, and the local community. These seven themes were divided into two core categories which became evident in the selective coding stage. The two core categories when determining the most important elements in the journey towards life success were external factors to the participant and internal locus of control for each participant, which were tied together by the navigation of hardships. Breaking down the emergent categories by themes and codes assisted with the description of the participant's journeys.

This chapter also examines the relationship between participants and their PERMA-Profiler survey results. The PERMA-Profiler measured the construct of subjective well-being through self-reports of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, motivation, and

achievement. The results from this data set served as an additional measure to validate the successful nature of the participants in the research study.

### **Life Success**

Determining the definition of life success was an important and integral part of this study in order to determine how life success was achieved. To make sense of the journeys and paths participants traveled in order to achieve life success, the researcher had to first determine what each participant's definition of life success was. "What is your definition of success?" was the first non-demographic question asked in each interview. Although the interview process was semi-structured, determining what success was to each participant enabled additional clarifying questions to help shape the definition. After interviewing 14 Black males from the Central Virginia region and synthesizing their definitions of success, life success within this study has been defined as follows: **the act of achieving set goals, influencing goal achievement for others, discovering one's purpose, not falling victim to negative statistics or stereotypes, and/or being content with one's current circumstances.**

When synthesizing data for the definition of life success there were several factors. First, in the 14 interviews, although each participant was asked for a definition in the first question of the interview, there were 37 instances in which participants either directly or indirectly defined what success was to them. Of those 37 instances, ten participants mentioned feelings of accomplishments, five participants mentioned helping others achieve their goals, four participants mentioned finding their purpose in life, three participants specifically referenced not being a stereotype or a statistic, and two participants indicated being content or satisfied with their life circumstance defined success to them. Participants said this about specific elements of the definition:

- Achieving set goals: “...attaining the goals you set for yourself no matter the circumstance and no matter the time. So as long as you do those things and you’ve defined what success means to you, then you’re good,” Dixon.
- Influencing goal achievement for others: “I define it by the people that I help live out their full potential,” Damian.
- Discovering one’s purpose: “Success to me is finding your purpose and growing in that purpose and using your purpose for the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people,” David.
- Not falling victim to negative statistics or stereotypes: “Not being a statistic, not being what society thinks I should be, being something completely different other than what the status quo is,” Alonzo.
- Being content with one’s current circumstances: “Success for me, um, at least at this point is overall happiness, being content,” Tyrone.

The themes found in this definition are consistent with the hedonic and eudaimonic success concepts describing happiness, accomplishment, and fulfillment (Butler & Kern, 2014; Waterman, 1993). Consistency is also found in Whiting’s (2009) scholar identity model of academically successful minority males rejecting stereotypes.

The five topics described in the definition were specifically mentioned when alluding to what success meant to the participant; however, these five topics were not exclusive to defining success. All other definitions and descriptions for life success received only one mention, and therefore, were not factored into the synthesized definition of success.

The creation of this definition took into account that life success is not a destination, it’s a journey. Lance stated, “I wouldn’t say that I am a success. I think I’ve been successful in



certain areas of my life. I think success would mean that it's over." Considering that journey, participants had a different definition of success when they were younger as compared to when they were interviewed. Of the 11 participants who discussed the definition of success when they were younger, eight of them (73%) focused that previous definition on more material accomplishment as compared to the themes found in their current definition of life success. David recalled, "All I really wanted to do was just have a nice car, have a decent place to live and just kind of live a normal middle-class lifestyle. I think that was, that was the goal and it was more materially focused as opposed to more character driven." The transformation of participant's definitions of success occurred during the late teen to mid-20's range. Pablo described the journey by saying,

Success is very dynamic – it has to change as you change. You can't be successful and that's it, close the book! It is something you have to maintain your level of success and then in order to truly be successful you have to keep achieving. You have to keep striving for excellence.

Due to the subjective nature of goal achievement/accomplishment, life contentment, and not falling victim to negative statistics or stereotypes, the end goal of success looked different for each individual. Additionally, each portion of the definition can either be finite or ongoing, meaning, one could dwell in the life success stage, or one could return to their journey of life success after achieving one portion of the definition. Within this study there was a tremendous amount of similarities between participant's recollections of their journeys towards life success. This study enabled perceptions of life success to be broken down into themes and categories in order to determine how these participants were able to navigate this journey effectively. The codes, themes, and categories that were revealed helped shape the grounded theory for this study.

## Categories

The identification of categories was instrumental in creating a grounded theory for life success for Black males in Central Virginia. Scott (2004) states, “relating the categories in grounded theory analysis weaves together all of the unraveled threads of data created during open coding, with the objective of identifying and naming the core category or central phenomenon of the study” (p. 125). This section discusses direct responses from semi-structured interviews indicating attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and perceptions utilized for the creation of codes. The analysis surfaced one core category and two additional emergent categories which are examined within this section. These categories are central to the phenomenon of Black male life success in Central Virginia and are instrumental in the development of a theory for life success.

**Core category: navigating hardship.** The core category, navigating hardships, emerged from the analysis of 1,094 excerpts from the 14 participant interviews. These excerpts were instrumental in describing the phenomenon of life success for each of the participants. Analysis found just over 27% ( $n = 303$ ) of the excerpts were related to the core category of the navigation of hardships. Through open coding, the 1,094 excerpts were analyzed into 101 individual codes, which were analyzed into the core category and two sub-categories. The following codes housed excerpts that led to the creation of the core category: identity ( $n = 111$ ), discrimination ( $n = 95$ ), education ( $n = 44$ ), incarceration and absenteeism ( $n = 27$ ), and socio-economic ( $n = 26$ ). Scott’s (2004) Conditional Relationship Guide helped to effectively understand the relational dynamics of the core category. This guide prompts the researcher to ask six investigative questions which were outlined by previous grounded theory work by Strauss and Corbin (1998) which are described below:

1. *What is the category?* The core category revealed in the analysis was the navigation of hardships. Fourteen of 14 participants (100%) described the navigation of hardships along their journey towards life success. Damian described what the navigation of hardships looked like for some individuals: “Some people can’t get to their dreams despite how hard they work. Now some people say, you know, just pick yourself up by your bootstraps and be self-made. Some people don’t have bootstraps, so they have nothing to grab onto to pull themselves up.”
2. *When does the category occur?* Participants indicated that the navigation of hardships occurred throughout their lived experience from youth through adulthood. Jamal described where he saw hardships originating, “I think the household you grow up in has a lot to do with your success.”
3. *Where does the category occur?* The navigation of hardships occurs in various locations. Participants revealed that hardships can occur in the home, in the community, and at work. Additionally the navigation of those hardships occur both internally and externally to the participant. David described his hardships beginning in his home, “My dad was verbally and physically abusive to my mother. Um, as I got older, the same with me. Uh, it was, it was hell to be honest with you, it was terrible .... I absolutely hated it.”
4. *Why does the category occur?* Participants indicated that the navigation of hardships occurs when one is faced with adversity. Noguera (2003) indicated that Black males are often beset with a number of hardships. The result of the navigation of hardships, however, is determined by both external and internal factors to the participant. Lance described his navigation of hardships by saying: “Even when things didn't go the way

that I thought they would, I still was able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, if that makes sense. And seeing how things would still work out for my good, even though in the middle of it didn't look like it would."

5. *How does the category occur?* The navigation of hardships occurred when participants made decisions regarding hardships. Tyrone has reacted to the navigation of hardships throughout his life. He indicated: "You can't win without losing. And it's the hurdles and obstacles that make the victories feel good. You know? I'm not one of those people that are scared to fail, scared to lose, or scared of the opposition. I don't necessarily like it, but I don't run from it. I buckle down to see what I need to get done. And once I'm passed it, it's a learning opportunity. You don't lose, you learn."
6. *With what consequence does the category occur or is the category understood?* The consequence of the navigation of hardships occurred at the lived meaning for a participant and it is understood by a participant's choice of navigation paths. Martin described the consequence of choice in navigating hardships when he stated: "I would say a lot of the time that success is not necessarily about where we've been or who has given us what, but a decision that we make that no matter what comes my way or no matter what happens if I say that I'm going to be successful, I'm going to be successful. And I feel like every successful person, Black or white, male or female, had to make that decision for themselves."

This study sought to determine how participants were able to become successful in life. Participant narratives revealed that the navigation of hardships was necessary to become successful. The navigation of hardships core category permeated throughout the data and was a

factor for each participant; however, two sub-categories emerged that participants utilized to navigate beyond these hardships. External and internal loci of control were significant sub-categories in the journey towards life success.

**Sub-category 1: External locus of control leading to life success.** Participants consistently mentioned external factors which played a significant role in their journey of life success. Demonstrated in these external factors were a wide range of experiences grouped into three themes: the participant's affirming community, development of positive relationships, and the receipt of support. Malcolm discussed all three external factor themes, the Central Virginia affirming community, the development of relationships, and receiving support when he stated:

...maybe it's because of the spiritual nature here in central Virginia, maybe it's the size, maybe it's both... I don't have to watch my back as much here. What I mean by that [previously] I always felt like somebody was trying to get over on me. You had to be cognizant of somebody trying to pull you down. If you failed at something, someone else is saying, 'Yes, it gives me a leg up,' rather than being sort of a team and trying to help each other build. And so I get that here. Matter of fact, not only do I get that here, I get to foster that here.

This study found that combination of two of the three factors of an affirming community, positive relationships, or the receipt of support were necessary for advancement onto life success.

***Affirming community.*** When coupled with the other two external factor themes, the participant's affirming community served as a significant and positive theme in the life success journey of all participants. All 14 participants (100%) acknowledged the Central Virginia affirming community playing a role in their journey to success. Only four of the 14 participants

(29%) graduated from high school outside of the Central Virginia region. Each participant described the role Central Virginia played in their journey. Some participants believed that the affirming community found in Central Virginia directly attributed to their success. Alonzo, Rashad, and Jamal all graduated from a Central Virginia region high school and determined that their affirming community played a direct role in their success due to the support they received. Alonzo noted, “I think that if I was in another area, I would have not been as successful as I am today.” Rashad stated, “I think my location has a lot to do with me being where I am today.” Jamal said, “[Central Virginia] has loved on me. And I’ll tell you what; there are some solid people in this community who want to see me succeed.”

The four participants who graduated from high school in other regions indicated that the affirming community within the Central Virginia region has been a positive experience. Jackson described the external factors of developing relationships and support in his previous location. He indicated that the relationships in his previous location had deteriorated, support was lacking, and he had to leave in search of opportunity. “I left [my previous region] because I had to get out of that situation...I just had to get out of the situation because I was, you know, I was way high in terms of stress. I wanted to move up the actual career ladder.” After describing an initially rough start for his wife, after taking a new job in Central Virginia, Malcolm noted that the positive family experience within Central Virginia, since that time, has been transformative. He said, “my children are thriving here as well as my wife. If you would ask my wife today, would we go back to [our hometown] the answer is no.”

Others described the Central Virginia region’s size and lack of Black male success stories as a reason for their perceived success. Pablo, who grew up in the Central Virginia region, acknowledged that this area has played a role in how he is perceived due to the limited number

of successful Black males, “I think this area played a role in me being viewed as being successful, but I don't really see myself as a success.” The region’s size served as a positive factor for Martin who did not graduate from a Central Virginia region high school, “As much as I hate [Central Virginia], I know for sure that if I was in a bigger pond, I might not have been afforded some of the opportunities that I’ve had since I’ve been here.”

While the affirming community within the Central Virginia region, coupled with other external factors, played a positive role in each participant’s journey, the affirming community, in general, has a role in the core theme of navigating hardships. Several participants noted that there are commonalities for being a Black man in various localities. Tyrone revealed that he had traveled extensively, grew up outside of the Central Virginia region, and described the affirming community as an arbitrary factor for Black males. He shared:

To some degree the things that, you know, Black males would live or face in one area of the country are pretty much the same that they’ll face in other areas of the country....You can share, almost to some degree, no matter where you come from, what side of the tracks to come from, you’ll have the same stories...It’s going to be similar, maybe not one on one, but in the grand scheme of things, if the sample size is large enough, you’ll find common denominators.

Independently, the affirming community was not the strongest factor in assisting participants in their life success journey. However, the affirming community coupled with either of the other two external themes, development of positive relationships and receiving support, was a significant factor in the assistance of the participant’s journey towards life success.

***Development of positive relationships.*** The combination of the affirming community within the Central Virginia region and the development of positive relationships within the

locality played a prominent role in 13 of the 14 (93%) participant's road to success. The 13 participants who indicated that they had impactful positive relationships in the Central Virginia region described significant contributions from these relationships towards their life success. Participant interviews revealed that these positive relationships were primarily found in the form of male mentors at work and members within the community. These relationships were found in the early stages of participant's lives into adulthood.

Male mentors were prevalent for several participants. Mentors in the workplace were mentioned by 29% of participants. Malcolm discussed interacting with his future supervisor upon interviewing for his position prior to arriving to Central Virginia saying,

I was on an interview and this gentleman had some empathy and compassion that I knew was real from the first time I met him. And then from an intelligence standpoint, I saw this gentleman give a speech, where I thought I was at church somewhere. And then I talked to people who knew him. It was just the greatest compilation of skills and compassion and empathy that I had ever seen in a leader. And I said, yeah, that's what I wanted to be.

Alonzo recalled the man who introduced him to his current profession, "He taught me how to be strategic in my thought process...he helped me start toning down my rhetoric and my attitude towards stuff and helping me think a little bit about what I'm going to say before I say it."

Positive relationships with males within the community played a role in several participants' journeys as well. Ten of the 14 participants (71%) discussed positive community relationships with males. Lance discussed his pastor's role in his development,



I would consider [him as] somebody who has been very influential in my life because not only did I see him as a man of God, but I also saw him as a man who truly, truly wanted to do right by the world. Um, he was involved in so many boards and organizations here that tried to take care of people and I always stated that as something that I wanted to do.

Martin described, at length, the persistence of another male pursuing a positive relationship with him. This relationship, which initially started out as a player/coach relationship, began to transform into something more. Initially this transformation was not appealing to the participant due to the spiritual overtones of the conversations. This participant recalled his initial avoidance but upon developing the relationship further, it turned into the catalyst that changed this participant's life trajectory. As he recalls, this positive male relationship helped to develop this participant's life direction. He remembered,

He would always invite me to church [saying], 'Man, you want to want to come to church with me to Bible study?' or 'We got something with the men going on.' I'd say, 'Na man, I don't know.' But, he'd always invited me, always invite me. And um, after I got my heart broke and I was sleeping on the couch, I had my trash bags, I didn't have nothing. Um, it was New Year's Eve. All my friends were gone. I didn't have nothing to do, I didn't have no money to do nothing. And that same coach hit me up and said, 'We have a New Year's service at church, you want to come?' And I was like, 'Nah man, I'm all right man.' And he, he kind of just had a real talk with me and was like, 'Look what's going on with you.' Like he was like, 'Look what you have going on, look at where you are. You ain't going nowhere. You ain't doing nothing tonight. All your friends are gone. What do you really have to lose by going to church?' So, he came and picked me up, went to church. Um, that same night I gave my life to the Lord or

whatever and I'm not too long after that I was I got baptized and then I think that's what started my path towards making those right decisions and being, and having the strength to make those changes and things like that for me. And I started to actually have people that would really invest at a time into my development, like [the] Bishop. I credit him a lot with, not just my spiritual growth but my growth as a man. I'm learning how to control my emotions, learning how to be a husband and learning how to be a father, learning how to do all that, you know, just spending time, his time invested in me more above than what most pastors would probably do for their members and stuff like that. So, I feel like that's where it began for me.

Positive relationships within the community were also formed with females. Dixon recalled his positive relationship with one member within his church. He said,

One person in particular I would like to shout out if I can is [positive female church relationship] who I've always seen as my church mother, um my spiritual mother, she's always been somebody who through the years has, has looked out for me, has encouraged me. She, she kind of reminds me of my [deceased close relative], she has encouraged me through the thick and thin.

Community members found within the Central Virginia region played a role in the advancement of participant's life success as well. Some of the positive relationships among community members filled voids in participant's lives. Pablo recalls a positive relationship with a community member that filled a void in his life. He remembered,

At the apartments that I grew up, like I said, there were a lot of kids, but there were no dads, at all. [Positive male figure] was an older guy. He used to kind of sit up on a front porch of an apartment on top and on the corner so he could just sit back there and watch.

We've got this big parking lot so we used to play tackle football right out there on the damn concrete. And then we had a little bottom down there where we used to play basketball and softball and everything. And [positive male figure] is just kind of sitting up there but he was like the father figure to a lot of us. So, when somebody got to fighting, [positive male figure] would come down and break us up.

Positive relationships developed in the Central Virginia region, whether male or female or within the community or within the work environment, provided a much-needed connection to help participants within this study to thrive. These relationships not only served as positive connections, but they also, at times, doubled as support structures for the participants. Support was the final external factor playing a significant role in participant's life success.

***Receipt of support.*** The external factor of the affirming community, combined with positive relationships and additional support, provided the strongest foundation for the study's participants. Support was a consistent theme referenced for each of the 14 participants. Support was often received from immediate or extended family, friends, or community members spanning participant's childhood years through adulthood. Although tangible resources were not substantially referred to as contributing factors in participants' life success, most participants consistently acknowledged a lack of tangible resources while describing support they received on their journey to life success in the form of encouragement and availability.

The lack of financial resources was evident for participants. Eleven of the 14 participants (78%) self-reported growing up below middle class with families supporting them the best way they knew how. Alonzo reflected, "I grew up in a single parent household, so I was privy to a struggling mom working two jobs." Pablo remembered, "I grew up, you know, section-eight

housing. I grew up in an apartment my whole life. We weren't welfare recipients but we were about as close as you can be without being that."

Support from parents for most participants had its limits, due to a lack of knowledge. Jamal stated, "We went as far as my family could take my sister and I. We got to college and um, and I remember getting dropped off like, this is the best I can do. Fly, you know? Soar." David said, "I think that my dad had great intentions and didn't want me to be like him growing up, but, you know, it's hard to teach somebody how to be a man and how to, you know, navigate this world as a dad when you've never had that for yourself." Damian, who now has a terminal degree as an educator, vividly remembered his dad's teaching techniques:

For example, some of the things, he would make me do is just like write a sentence a hundred times every day trying to work on my penmanship and just getting used to writing. He would make me read a book and do a summary report. Um, you know, just some random math problems and things like that. But I would just stay in my room until I finished those. Then I could go out and play. Now I know the pedagogy behind some of that and it was just really surface level stuff it wouldn't have a whole lot of rigor. But he was doing the best that he could do.

Alonzo remembered the lack of support he received financially and educationally saying:

I want to say this in the most respectful way. My mom, she was also ignorant to how the world worked and how money worked, credit and home ownership and all these different things. So, I think my mom was supportive, um, of me being happy, but I don't know if she, if she was able to be in a situation where she was able to support me financially, educationally.

Receiving support in the form of encouragement and availability from family members, friends and colleagues was extremely important. Allen credited much of his success to encouragement by his father, “My dad wouldn’t let me fail. He is my biggest critic, but he’s also my biggest fan, he motivates me.” Ali described his role in sports as a major factor in his success. He explained that his parents were an instrumental part of his journey towards life success through their availability during that time, “I mean, just being there for me, being able to come to all my games and just travel and just support. It wasn’t so much of, I guess words maybe, but just showing it, just being there for us, just going everywhere to support us.” Encouragement and affirmation also came from siblings. Tyrone remembered, “My brother always made me feel cool. My brother was cool, like cool, cool. And so, you know, I always looked up to him and it’s like, um, you know, he always talked to me as though I was just as cool as he was.” While in adulthood, spouses played critical roles in supporting participants. Alonzo acknowledged his wife by saying, “She has encouraged me to keep going even when I’ve been knocked down she’s been encouraged me to step back up and keep moving forward.” Damian stated, “[I have] a wife who really believes in me and encourages me.”

Support from outside of the home was also instrumental to the journey towards life success. When Dixon was down on himself, he described his supportive relationship with his supervisor helping him through, “I was always encouraged by my supervisor. My supervisor really encouraged me to always be [myself] that fun-loving person [who] was interacting with people, talking to people.” Jackson discussed his defiance in school. He credited a teacher who helped propel him on his journey towards life success in 10th grade. He recalled beginning to change his attitude in school because of this teacher, he stated it happened because, “Basically

she believed in me.” Alonzo recalled a support received from a positive relationship that was developed on the job. He recalled:

One time when I was on a call a few years ago, I was riding the medic unit, an ambulance with a friend of mine and with another co-worker who responded to a call a guy is having difficulty breathing. And so we walked into his house. He has a swastika on his wall...and the first thing he said was, ‘I don’t want that nigger in my house.’ I was caught off a little bit because, once again, I’m providing the service to you, right? But what happened is my partner, actually ended up saying something to him and said, ‘Hey look, if you don’t want him in here, you don’t want me either. We can leave.’ So that felt great.

Despite the verbalization of the lack of support pertaining to tangible resources, the support received in terms of encouragement and availability along the journey contributed was mentioned by 100% of participants.

External factors contributing to the successful navigation of hardships towards a successful life were extremely important. However, the affirming community, the building of positive relationships, and receiving support along the journey are low locus of control (Weiner et al., 1987). Internal factors leading to life success have a high locus of control and were an extremely crucial factor in the journey towards life success.

### **Sub-category 2: Internal locus of control leading to life success (Success Mindset).**

Factors deemed to be within one’s control played a significant role in the journey towards life success for the participants. These internal factors were analyzed and reduced to one primary heading with three sub-themes. The primary heading identified was a “success mindset.” This success mindset can be attributed to three sub-themes consistently found in participant’s

journeys: future orientation, self-efficacy, and spiritual attribution. In his study of Black male achievement within schools, Whiting (2009) described both future orientation and self-efficacy for Black males. Whiting (2009) described them as individuals with an understanding that their current behaviors and decisions influence future outcomes, and who are not concerned about immediate gratification, and who are less likely to blame poor performance on others, taking responsibility for their own success. In another academic study, while conducting interviews with self-identified Christian Black males who were first generation college students, Asplund (2009) discussed the power of spiritual attribution saying that faith in Christ empowered students to persist and succeed. The participants in this study revealed their inner thoughts on spirituality, self-efficacy and their future orientation through their respective interviews. This study revealed that two of the three pillars in this category were necessary to advance along the life success journey.

***Self-efficacy.*** Believing in oneself is a key element of achieving goals (Bandura, 1986). In Whiting's (2009) Scholar Identity Model he described self-efficacy for students as those who consistently reject stereotypes imposed on them because they deem themselves to be intelligent and talented. While Whiting's (2009) study identified scholars within the academic arena, this study sought to identify the origin of some of that self-efficacy through the retelling of their journey. Participants revealed that their self-efficacy mindset originated with the positive and supportive relationships in their life while simultaneously rejecting negative stereotypes imposed on them.

Tyrone talked about his mother's role in instilling his current thought pattern into him, "She was the type of mother that would pray over me before I was born. She would put her hands on her belly and just pray. Ever since I was little, she would always tell me, 'You're going

to have your name in lights one day,’ or to do great things.” He went on to talk about negativity today, “If it’s a person, they can’t get to me. Like they can’t get to me, it’s like a force field around my mind. Protecting my mind and my heart, you know?”

Both Rashad and Allen had similar messaging from their fathers. Rashad remembered his father saying,

My dad always preached to me as a young man, especially young Black man, I’m to always be the leader...he said, ‘don’t ever do just what the crowd does.’ And that’s one of the main things that always stuck with me. You know, always do what you think is best. And don’t just wait for anybody else to try to steer you in a way that they think is right for you. Always be a leader.”

Allen received similar tutelage in his household, “My dad told me, look what I’ve been through. You can do anything. Nobody has ever told me I can’t do anything. And if they did, I don’t recall because I don’t listen to it, because I know I can I do anything I set my mind to.”

In some cases, motivation was found through the navigation of the hardships that are inevitably faced. Pablo said,

I come from that mentality of, you know, white people think Black people are dumb and they think we ain’t this and we ain’t that. You know what I mean? So, I’ve got to show them. So then I had to have a personal goal every class I was in, I was just telling them, Hey I’m the best damn student in this class, period. And that’s just how I wanted to carry it. So that kind of changed my mindset and I was successful at that very early on.

Dixon recalled several hardships that he had to overcome which helped to develop the belief in himself. He recalled:



I tried my best never to give up, you know, you feel defeated at times, you do. You might feel like the world is throwing you a bad hand, but you have to keep picking yourself back up and keep fighting to the top. And for me, that's one of the things that I did, no matter what might have been said to me, conveyed to me, I always tried my best to work my hardest to make everyone around me better, make myself better, but make all those around me better too.

Participants indicated that it is not easy believing in yourself due to constantly having to battle negative stereotypes perpetuated by others. Pablo reflected, "You have to break from the norm. I think you really have to be aware of what it means to be Black and what it means to be a Black man. You have to be aware of that, but you can't live in that. You can't dwell in that." Several participants described developing their positive identity through the desire to be the opposite of the negative statistics or stereotypes. Damian stated, "I feel like I have to represent like all African Americans every time I go out. Like, I can't mess up, I can't say something or I can't go off. I have to be perfect because if I don't then people want to label African Americans bad." Alonzo further elaborated on the rejection of stereotypes by saying, "I like challenging the status quo and giving you an opportunity...to prove you wrong. To prove that hey, we're not all the same type of person and I'm not a representation of my whole culture." Lance spoke even more specifically saying,

I didn't want to be a statistic. I didn't want to be a Black male to go to jail or to sell drugs or to drop out of high school. I didn't want to be that statistic of going out and gang banging and different things like that. So, knowing that that's how people deemed Black males sometimes when they see us because of the things that we wear, or how we

carry ourselves, we're automatically deemed as being aggressive or angry. So, I didn't want to be that statistic. I didn't want to fall into that category.

Allen, like Damian, indicated that his self-efficacy comes from upholding values that are evident to the public. He stated, "I think that's where a lot of people see that I'm a success because I followed a certain path. I haven't been locked up, I'm not out here selling drugs. I don't have four kids by different women. I'm out in the community doing work. So, I think that's what people see." Tyrone discussed the hardships and how they affect his self-efficacy by saying, "From a young age it was already instilled in me that I was gonna be someone. So, when the negative came some of it might sting a little bit, but it rolls off your back. My mind was already set." Rashad summed up his thoughts succinctly, saying, "It's all about your mindset."

A contributing factor to the success mindset is the element of self-efficacy. This belief in oneself is significantly more effective when combined with future orientation. This study found that participant's belief in their ability to achieve combined with the development of future goals contributed to the successful life journey.

***Future orientation.*** The prospect of the future played a significant role in the internal thought process for 100% of participants in this study. Ali considered the importance of focusing on goals for the future by stating, "If I don't set a goal, more than likely I'll get distracted by something. So at least when I have a goal I'll know what the end looks like, so the little things help to reach that goal." Consistently, participants described a focus on the future when describing their journey towards success. Participants consistently set goals, created expectations, or set individual development milestones for the future that they aspired to reach. The thought of reaching these goals motivated participants to continue along their journey despite the hardships that may have come their way.

Participants considered the future when making decisions along the journey towards life success. Participants described their goals in life when they were younger up to the present. Aspirations from childhood to high school included wanting to be a pediatrician, a doctor, a rapper, an NFL player, an NBA player, a state trooper, a business owner, a father, and an NCAA Division I athlete among other things. The researcher asked participants to reflect on their journey towards life success; however, several chose to reveal their future orientation and ultimate goals. Some of these goals reflected things they hoped for, other times clarity came from knowing what they didn't want. David described the future life he dreads,

I don't want to...live this middle aged, middle class lifestyle. And I'm not talking about money. I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about where, you know, you go through, you get a job, have kids, you get married and you do all this other stuff, don't do anything to really give back and you gotta wait 'til you're 65 'til you retire and all this other crap. That is the most depressing thing I've ever heard in my entire life. I don't want that.

Lance looked beyond retirement age towards the ultimate ending considering what his final goal would be when he said, "In my obituary, I won't be there, but I will want bullet points to say, 'This Black man was successful.'"

Some goals were more specific and time oriented. Allen indicated, "I want to own my own business. That's probably my biggest goal for this year. I want to start that. I want to start that by the end of this year." Even with specific goals during time periods in their lives, participants frequently thought about how the goals at specific times of their lives could correlate with their future. For Tyrone, who had earned a terminal degree, that specific educational achievement was not the goal itself. He was looking for what was to come beyond the shorter-

term goal. He described, “For me, it wasn’t about the title or the prestige of the degree; it was about the end goal. It was a means to an end. I want to do what I want to do. So, my education prepared me for that.” The ability to do what one wants to do was not always possible, especially after navigating hardships. Martin recalls, “When I squandered away my opportunity with college, I set a personal goal for myself to make sure I finish what I started.” Martin went on to say that the birth of his first son became that motivation to finish what he started, “Because I knew that now I had someone that’s looking at me. He’s going to make his life choices based off what he sees me do and that alone I feel like is what really made me find that fight within myself to say that I have to finish this, I have to do this.”

Motivation changed during various seasons of participant’s lives (i.e. previous definitions of life success). As participants moved into adulthood, knowledge combined with motivation allowed for long term life success plans to be in place for future goals. Motivation served as a driving force towards life success. All participants were motivated by some aspect of the definition of life success that was developed through this study. When participants described what motivated them, they frequently correlated that with their definition of success. So, while their motivation was of significant importance to them, their rationale for their motivation could be attributed to their definition of success.

For example, Alonzo connected his motivation with his definition of success by saying, “the reason why I say my kids man, because I wanted to show my kids that it was cool to be Black.” Alonzo’s definition of success was not being a statistic; not succumbing to negative stereotypes. Similarly, Damian stated that his definition of success was to help others reach their potential. He explained his motivation to help others achieve their goals after sharing a story about a youth who had such promise, but was unable to fill his potential, “So that’s what really

drives me. And I think about that almost every day. Somebody has to be here for these kids.”

Allen’s definition of success was to accomplish personal goals. Later he explained his motivation behind his definition, “I’m tired of someone else signing my check. I want to write my own. That’s a big motivation for me. I want to be able to do what I want to do.”

Jackson defined success as the fulfillment of a calling. He described his motivation, I kind of almost wonder if I’m also going to be a preacher, and I think if that happens, I think I’ll definitely be satisfied because I’d be doing something that’s not just worthy here on earth, but will also have eternal consequences, you know? Because [my current profession] is really not going to matter once I die and the people have died around you.

Each participant’s motivation created expectations for their future orientation. They were driven, wanted to reach a successful life, and saw what that should look like in their world.

Damian discussed what he envisioned his family life to be like, “I don’t want my kids looking to someone else to be their superhero. I don’t want them to see somebody else be their role model. I should be that and I want to be that for them I don’t want them to search for someone else to get that from.” Dixon looked up to his grandfather and thought he was a great man. To achieve a successful life, Dixon said, “This is one of my idols, and in order to be like him, I have to do certain things like him. I have to be at work, I have to be here for my family and all that kind of stuff.”

Future orientation was critical to participant’s life success. Participants were clear about what their future was to look like as they recalled their journey to success. Goals were set, which created individual motivation for each participant to have expectations for goal achievement. Participants did not expect to succeed only through future orientation and self-efficacy; they also attributed much of their success to their Christian spiritual affiliation.

*Spiritual attribution.* Thirteen of the 14 participants (93%) in this study identified as Christian. For Black males who practice their spirituality regularly, the church has been a place where they can receive support and guidance (Robinson, Jones-Eversley, Moore, Ravenell, & Adedoyin, 2018).

Many of the participants spoke in-depth, not only about the support they have received due to their spirituality, but also how their faith guides them along their journey. Lance indicated that much of his journey is attributed to guidance from God, “I pray to Him about everything. Whether it’s for me to apply for any job or for me to move on to the next step with anything that I do, I talk to Him about it. If He gives me confirmation then I know that it’s a goal from Him, I look to Him for direction every day.” Similarly, Tyrone stated, “[My faith] has shaped my worldview, so all the decision making going on with my life and things of that nature it’s all been shaped around my faith.” Damian said, “My faith in God drives who I am and the decisions that are made and how I treat people.”

Although many participants recalled being in church, not every participant grew up following their faith. However, a shift in regard to the life success journey happened once they began to take their faith seriously. When asked about the importance of his faith, Martin said,

I think that was the starting point for me getting on the right track for making the right decisions. Of course, I grew up in church, like most African American children you get drug to church, you don’t really have a choice. You sit in the back and mess around with your friends or you see stuff going on in church but you don’t really pay attention to it.

David recalled the beginning of his journey of faith and its impact on his life, “Back in 2012 or so, that’s when I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior and my life just completely changed drastically.”

The drastic change allowed participants to navigate hardships. Jackson succinctly attributed his navigation of hardships by saying, “The good Lord looked after me.” Ali elaborated on his spirituality allowing him to overcome hardships saying, “I just believe in God and just having faith that things are gonna work out even when it seems like it doesn’t.” Allen said of his faith, “it’s kept me believing in a lot of things. It’s kept me believing hard that some things can change.” Dixon recalled a difficult time in his life after losing a close loved one. He said, “as time progressed and all of these [positive] things were happening, I saw it as nothing but God working His way in my life. And so for me it was, you have this calling on your heart is this great sense of somebody who’s watching over you.”

The calling that Dixon referred to also translated into purpose for many participants. Damian said, “I believe that I have a God-given purpose to fill, so that comes with responsibility.” Malcolm found his purpose when he began taking his faith seriously, “When I finally let go of chasing the dollar and started trying to engage in becoming spiritually everything I could be for everyone else, that’s when my career took off!” Jamal attributed Christian values to determine who he was in God’s eyes. He said, “This is how I act, this is how I conduct myself as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. And I would say that shaped me as well towards my success.”

Other participants attributed much of their success to God as well. David said, “God has changed my life drastically. I’m not supposed to be doing the things that I’m doing. I’m not supposed to be living the life I’m living. Had it not been for Christ, I think that I’d still be back in [my old town] doing God knows what.” Pablo said, “I was blessed. I’ve made as many mistakes as most people I know. But I was blessed that my mistakes didn’t define, or I didn’t

make big enough mistakes that would have caused me detriment that I couldn't overcome.”

Additionally, Malcolm added:

At this point in my life, I don't know how I would survive without having some deep spirituality before. I don't get it. We talked about resiliency. Man, my strength comes from the one who gives us strength. I know I get tired, I know I'm weak, but I also know that I will be strengthened and it happens every day.

Both the internal and external factors described in this chapter were instrumental in the journey towards life success. In this study, participants were asked to describe in one word how they achieved life success, five of the 14 (36%) indicated that their spirituality was the sole reason for their success. Seven of the 14 participants (50%) attributed other internal factors such as resilience, perseverance, and endurance as the reason for their success. Lastly, two of the 14 participants (14%) directly attributed external factors as the reason for their success, identifying the love and support of others.

### **PERMA Validation**

Butler and Kern's (2014) PERMA-Profilier has been utilized in this study to measure Seligman's (2011) PERMA theory which is a multidimensional approach to well-being and flourishing. Seligman (2011) suggests that five well-being constructs: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment can be utilized to determine well-being. This study utilized the PERMA-Profilier to validate the well-being of the participants. After the semi-structured interviews were conducted, the participants took a few moments to fill out the 23-question survey. While all 14 participants were administered the assessment, one participant only partially completed the assessment. Therefore, the PERMA-Profilier results report on 13 of the 14 participants.



Figure 4.1 describes the results for the seven individual constructs within the PERMA-Profiler for each participant. Each construct pertaining to the PERMA theory, Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, was averaged and rated on a 10-point scale. Participants responded positively in 95% of those categories indicating a high value of well-being among participants. The PERMA-Profiler was designed as a multidimensional tool to also measure Negative Emotion and Health. Four of the 13 participants (31%) indicated an above average negative emotion level. Additionally, three of the 13 participants (23%) self-reported below average health. In the figure below, each participant's results are displayed for all five constructs of PERMA including the additional Negative Emotion and Health constructs as provided by the Profiler.

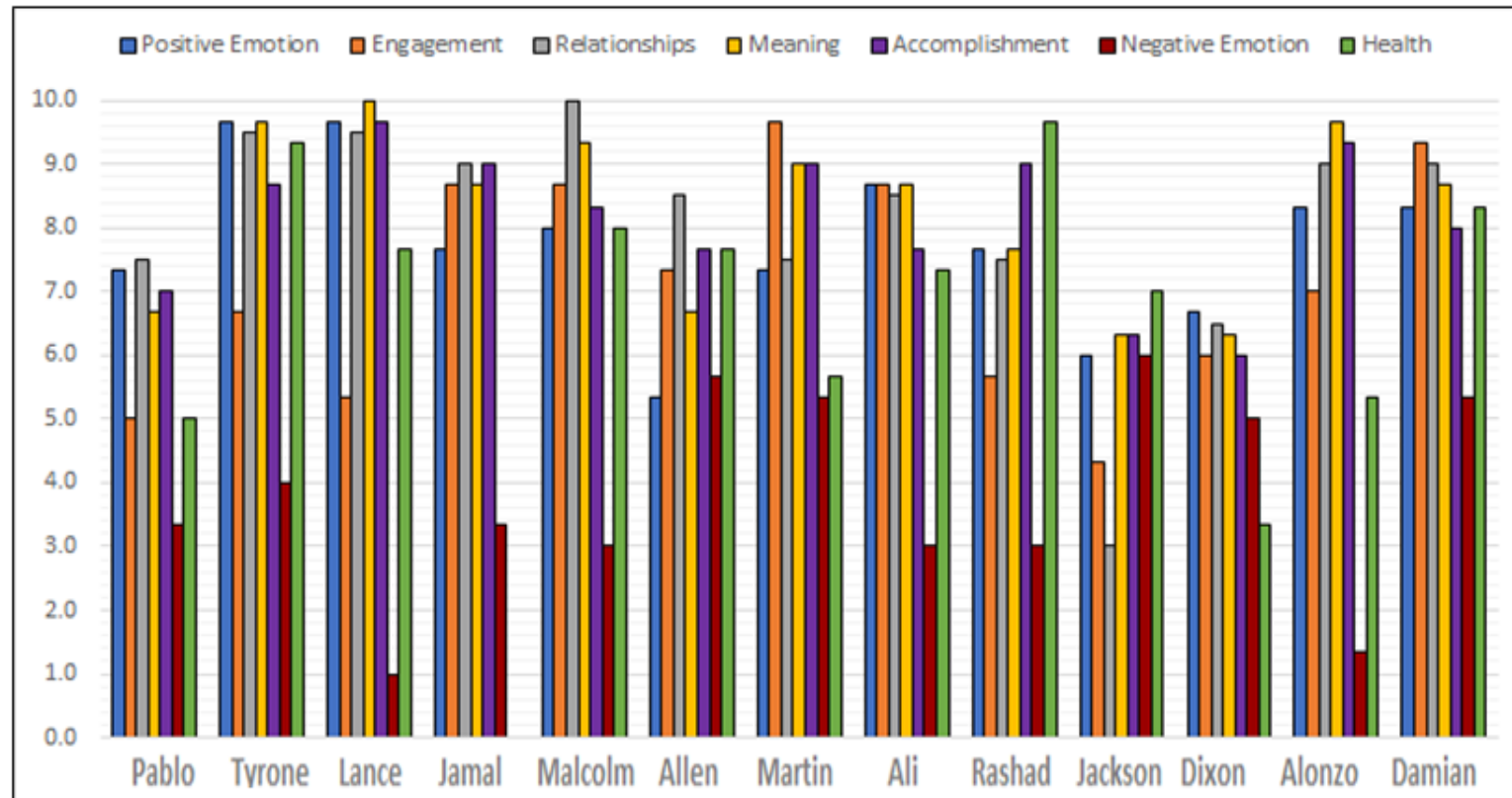


Figure 4.1. PERMA-Profiler Participant Results.

Butler and Kern (2014) indicated that the PERMA-Profiler was specifically designed to be multidimensional in nature so that one could identify specific domains of well-being. All 13 participants, in totality, scored well above average on every positive construct. Additionally, participants scored below the average on negative emotion indicating that, generally, participants do not hold on to negative feelings. Malcolm discussed his philosophy regarding focusing on the negative,

If I were to key in on anything, it's what you decide to focus on...if I accentuate and focus on the bad...it's nothing but a distraction holding me back. And so when there's something blatant in front of your face, you have to address it, don't look for the bad in everything. Look for the good accentuate it.

Jackson's assessment revealed the lowest scores on several constructs. He scored below average in relationships and engagement. During his interview he admitted, "My greatest area of weakness is probably my strong personality and if it's not, if it's not genuinely that, introversion. Yeah, I've always been introverted." Jackson self-reported the highest negative emotion of all participants. He indicated that he did not feel like he fit in and that sometimes he felt this personality was off-putting.

Pablo was the only other participant who did not score above average in a particular PERMA category. He rated average in engagement. In his interview, he mentioned his success being relative to others, which is how he believes others see him. In terms of being engaged, he stated,

I used to be a real people person. I used to be a coach, used to be a mentor. I used to do a lot of things community wide, uh, I used to care about people more than I do now. Not that I don't care but you know what I mean. I used to be willing to give more of myself

and more of my time to help other people to achieve. I don't have a lot of that time anymore.

Negative emotion and health were two constructs in the PERMA-Profiler that surfaced the least in the interviews. Due to the focus on what and how participants could achieve success, most responses did not veer in the direction of negative emotions or health. There were, however, a few notable instances discussing both. Martin referenced a scene from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* to discuss the root of some of his negative emotions recalling,

...not having my mother around and going through that experience where you don't understand why parents can't be together or you don't understand why one parent isn't trying as hard as the other parent or when you grow up and you want to see your mom. Or you have expectations of seeing her but all she has are excuses for, why she can't be there or why she can't, whatever. And um, it was like that episode of the *Fresh Prince* where Will was trying to figure out what was going on with his dad and how he just wanted to hang out with him.

While negative emotion was rarely discussed, 11 of the 14 participants (79%) acknowledged health's importance when asked directly about its role in their journey to success. Several (57%) spoke about actively seeking a healthy lifestyle. Lance stated,

I recently started to, um, be more prepared about as far as high blood pressure, diabetes and having a healthy heart. Just knowing that those things run in our family as far as diabetes and heart attacks and different things. So, I want to make sure that I watch what I eat, watch what I'm intaking, watch what I'm doing, staying active.

The PERMA-Profiler was selected to evaluate participants due to its multidimensional nature. All constructs within the PERMA-Profiler are important in determining the well-being of

participants. Table 4.1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics for all participants in the data set.

Table 4.1

*PERMA-Profiler Descriptive Statistics*

	<b>Positive Emotion</b>	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Accomplishment</b>	<b>Negative Emotion</b>	<b>Health*</b>
Mean	7.7	7.1	8.1	8.3	8.1	3.8	7
Median	7.7	7.0	8.5	8.7	8.3	3.3	7.5
SD	1.27	1.77	1.82	1.36	1.15	1.60	1.87
Minimum	5.3	4.3	3.0	6.3	6.0	1.0	3.3
Maximum	9.7	9.7	10.0	10.0	9.7	6.0	9.7

\*The construct of health was measured by 12 of the 13 participants.

As a group, participant's scores indicated that they would be considered well in each PERMA category, as well as health, with a below average score on negative emotion, also indicating well-being. A Pearson's correlation test was utilized to identify similarities in PERMA data and other demographic data gathered during the interview process. The researcher investigated relationships between all PERMA-Profiler constructs (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, negative emotion, and health) and the demographic information collected including participant age, salary, marital status, years married, and children. The researcher did not utilize Pearson's correlation for religious affiliation due to a relatively homogeneous sample for religion. While most categories did not yield a correlation, there were a few strong correlations between the selected demographics and

the PERMA-Profiler constructs. Table 4.2 identifies the weak, moderate and strong correlations found.

Table 4.2

*Correlations Between PERMA Constructs and Demographic Data*

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Years Married</b>	<b>Children</b>
Age		0.64	0.08	0.59	0.54
Health	-0.39	0.01	0.03	-0.05	-0.20
Negative Emotion	-0.38	-0.58	-0.19	-0.26	-0.08
Accomplishment	-0.08	0.09	0.39	0.25	-0.08
Meaning	0.08	0.25	0.43	0.42	0.00
Relationships	0.18	0.46	0.47	0.39	0.08
Engagement	0.07	-0.13	0.71	0.59	0.28
Positive Emotion	0.11	0.50	0.24	0.18	0.01

Table 4.2 reveals five moderate correlations, as indicated by .5 and above, and one strong correlation, as indicated by .7 and above. The first set of correlations are in the salary column. The first moderate correlation is between salary and age. This would be a fairly common correlation when individuals advance in their careers; as they age, they typically increase in salary. The second correlation in the salary column is the moderate negative correlation between salary and negative emotion. The third correlation in the salary column indicates moderate

correlation between positive emotion and salary. Salary was rarely discussed in the context of emotion in any of the interviews; a moderate correlation here is not explained with the qualitative data.

The final two moderate correlations can be found in the years married column. There was a moderate correlation between age and years married, and engagement and years married. Age and years married tend to go hand in hand, so this correlation is not surprising. Concerning engagement and years married, Alonzo, who had the second longest marriage of participants interviewed described engagement with his wife, saying, “My wife has been very supportive of me. She’s been in the community along with me. We’ve been here together. I’ve never done anything alone. She’s always been by my side. I’ve always supported her. She’s always been supportive of me.”

The lone strong correlation was found between engagement and marriage. Of the nine participants who were married at the time of their interview, eight of them had positive things to say about their spouses in terms of engagement. Dixon said of his decision to marry, “It was probably one of the best decisions I’ve ever made simply because it’s no feeling like having somebody who supports you, who stands behind you in the difficult times.”

Participant selection was conducted by solicitors who used arbitrary means to identify participants for this study. Neither the solicitors nor the researcher could predict if participants would identify as well. The PERMA-Profilier and the data it provided was an appropriate validation tool to ensure that participants had an above average level of well-being. The interviews confirmed participant’s success journeys and the PERMA-Profilier confirmed their well-being. These findings will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to answer three questions. First, this study sought to determine what attributes Black males in Central Virginia use to define life success. This was revealed in the data gathering process with semi-structured interviews. A definition of life success was derived from attributes described by the participants of this study. The study also sought to determine how the participants could achieve life success. To do so, an additional question had to be answered – how do Black males describe their journey towards life success? The details of participant's journeys towards life success were found in the qualitative research enabling the researcher to determine a theory addressing the third research question: what experiences were most important to obtaining life success?

When considering what experiences were most important to obtain life success, the researcher analyzed the data presented. Data emerged from open and axial coding revealing a singular core category with two sub-categories. The core theme, as described earlier in this chapter was the navigation of hardships. In their description of their journey, it was evident that Black men in Central Virginia achieving the phenomena of life success had navigated hardships. The two sub-categories of internal and external factors were instrumental in overcoming hardships to achieve life success as well. External locus of control factors towards life success was external to the participant including the affirming community, positive relationships, and support received. The internal locus of control factors toward life success were factors that were within each participant's control allowing for choices towards life success to be made in each situation. These factors were self-efficacy, future orientation, and spiritual attribution.

Due to the limited amount of data concerning life success for Black males, a grounded theory was necessary to define life success and to describe this journey and destination. This



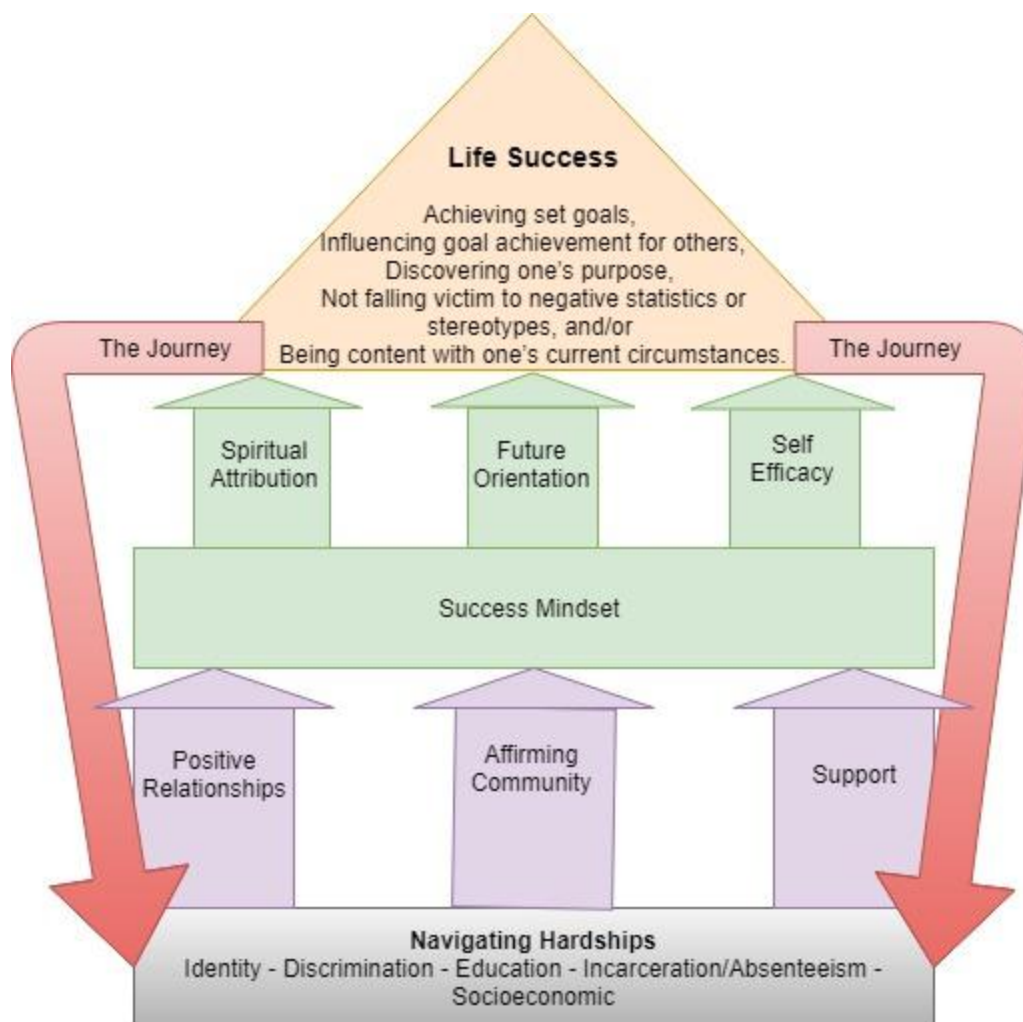
study sought to develop a positive narrative concerning the participant's navigation towards life success. As a result of the categories revealed in this study, in Chapter 5, the researcher presents additional research concerning these categories as the development of a theory emerged.

## Chapter 5: Interpretations, Recommendations, and Discussion

The “Cool Pose” was a significant work describing dilemmas of Black males within the United States. The “Cool Pose,” coined by Majors and Billson (1992), stated that Black males achieve success through visibility, empowerment, competence, and control. Although the work of Majors and Billson is more than two decades old, this current study found that there is still truth in those attributes as solicitors identified participants for this study who exhibited similar characteristics. Solicitors used terms such as, “important, active, great, accomplished, and involved” to describe the participants for this study. There were differences, however, in the way Black males see themselves in this study as compared to the “Cool Pose” which may be attributed to the Central Virginia culture. Deaner and Suh (2000) stated that culture influences how individuals feel and think about their lives. As evident by the PERMA results, participants, as a whole, exhibited positive emotions ( $M = 7.7, SD = 2.4$ ) as compared to reporting negative emotions ( $M = 3.8, SD = 1.8$ ).

### **Interpretation**

The interpretation of the information discovered in this study is found in this chapter. The current study found that Black males achieve success through support, positive relationships, the affirming community, spiritual attribution, self-efficacy, and future orientation. These constructs allowed participants to overcome inevitable hardships faced by Black men. To describe these participant’s journeys, a framework has been developed to assist with describing Black male life success titled the Black Male Life Success Theory (BMLST). The BMLST framework seeks to interpret how life success was achieved for Black males between the ages of 25 and 40 in the Central Virginia region. Figure 5.1 shows a visual representation of the BMLST framework.



*Figure 5.1.* Black Male Life Success Theory Framework.

This framework's central theme, pictured at the base, describes the list of hardships including identity, discrimination, education, incarceration/absenteeism, and socioeconomic hardships which were an ever-present factor in the success journey for the Black males of this study. The navigation of hardships serves as a foundational element during participant's life success journey. The set of purple pillars identifies the external factors to life success which include the affirming community, positive relationships, and support. These constructs found, in combination, were contributing factors for a success mindset. The green section of the structure, attainable by building on the purple external factors, represents a success mindset made up of the

three internal factors found in this study leading to success. These factors are future orientation, self-efficacy, and spiritual attribution. Building upon the navigation of hardships, combined with external factors, at least two of the internal factors were present in each participant's journey towards life success. The orange triangle represents life success which is the act of achieving set goals, influencing goal achievement for others, discovering one's purpose, not falling victim to negative statistics or stereotypes, and/or being content with one's current circumstances. The red arrows positioned on the outside of the orange triangle indicate the journey that takes place once the non-finite attributes of life success are achieved. These arrows take participants back to the base of the framework, navigating hardships.

The BMLST framework and each of its components are detailed further in the interpretation section below. It is important to note that there are similarities in the narratives of thriving young Black males in the academic systems, within high school and higher education, and the narratives of the participants in this study. This is significant due to the role Black male academic and life success have on the greater community. Rolland (2011) stated that academic success for Black students is important due to the eventual impact on the economics and welfare of communities. Rolland (2011) further describes that academic success, in the form of retention and successful graduation rates, increases life chances for Black students (Rolland, 2011). This study found parallels when comparing academic constructs and life success constructs. These similarities are discussed further below.

**Navigating hardships.** Chapter one discussed the problem, background, and purpose of this research. The core category found in this study related directly back to the problem statement that life success can be difficult to attain for Black males due to the hardships they face. These hardships described by participants included discrimination in the workplace

(Cornileus, 2010), community struggles (Sampson, 1987), incarceration (Maur & King, 2007), economic challenges (Shapiro, Mashede, & Osoro, 2013), and educational struggles (Jackson & Moore, 2006).

An additional theme mentioned by 12 of the 14 participants (86%) was overcoming negative stereotypes, an identity factor potentially leading to discrimination. The strength of these modern stereotypes derives from centuries of slavery and bigotry (Fredrickson, 2015). As a result, dark skin color evokes negative stereotypes (Blake & Darling, 1994). Black males have often been categorized and labeled as uneducable, dysfunctional, lazy, immoral, dishonest, and dangerous (Hare & Hare, 1984; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Taylor-Gibbs, 1988; Tyler, 2014). Because of these depictions, Black men are susceptible to encounter gendered racism, meaning they are subjects of prejudice, negative stereotypes and oppression because they are both Black and men (Mutua, 2006). Guy (2014) indicated that, “in spite of the growing number and high visibility of Black males with celebrity status, most Black men struggle daily with the burden imposed by racism” (p. 20). The descriptions of this group of individuals create increased hardships for life success. Alonzo stated,

Plain and simple, success to me, man, is being able to be 37 years old with no incarceration records, not having a bunch of children running around, not being in your status quo African American male - what society puts on us.

Many of the experiences quoted in this study are consistent with experiences of Black men on higher education campuses as cited by Rolland (2011). Rolland (2011) noted academic hardships facing Black males, including inadequate academic preparation, combating negative stereotypes, lack of encouragement from school, parents, and the community, and a lack of positive male role models in the home. Each of these themes were mentioned by the participants

in this study as either hardships to overcome or opportunities for support that were taken advantage of in order to achieve life success. In addition to navigating these constructs, Howard (2008) indicated that it is necessary to recognize that race, racism, and discrimination are still forms of oppression for Black males.

***Discrimination.*** So often the hardships faced in regard to Black male life success begin with the inability to thrive due to the effects of discrimination and racism. Cornileus (2010) describes racism as, “a system of structural domination in that it differentiates power and access to privilege based on race” (pp. 44-45). While 100% of participants referenced discrimination, only 10 of the 14 (71%) acknowledged actually being discriminated against, that they could remember. Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) stated that in recent years many acts of overt discrimination have dissipated with more prevalent forms of racism being found in microaggressions. Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) described this new form of racism:

microaggressions are subtle acts or attitudes that are experienced as hostile, and that fit a history and pattern of personal racial slights and disregard. They act as status reminders by their implicit suggestion of unworthiness, and have a leveling effect on the recipient (i.e., — “Stay in your place!”). They promote — “defensive thinking” ...and force the individual to remain vigilant in order to preserve personal dignity and self-respect (p. 36).

Jamal recalled sharing a situation dealing with microaggressions to his co-workers,

I remember one time being in the projects...visiting a friend of mine and a police car drives by, comes back, starts harassing us. He’s like, ‘Hey what’s going on here? What’s happening are y’all fighting or something?’ We are just talking, literally. The officer looks at me and goes, ‘You got a problem with me? Are you trying to fight me or something?’ We tried to play it cool, but our hearts are beating hard but I don’t even

want to show that I'm afraid. 'No officer, we just hanging out.' He questioned my friend, 'What's your name? You live here? You live in these apartments, is this your neighborhood?' And when they were leaving they said, 'Are we done here?' I said, 'We were just talking, just hanging out.' 'All right, let's keep it that way,' he said. And it made my blood boil. I share some of these stories with some, some of our white colleagues and they don't think race is an issue. I share that story they say, 'But you're an employee at [company], what do you mean?' 'Listen man, the color of my skin and neighborhood I was in, [to them] I'm a gang member, I'm a drug dealer. I'm a detriment to society.' I mean their jaws hit the floor. 'This is not possible! I can't believe this happened to you! Maybe some of those animals and in Baltimore who don't keep the pants up maybe. Maybe the thugs. But not you!' This is [my] reality.

Historical discrimination and acts of microaggressions in more recent years within the United States have created inequity. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, 2006) found, "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States [and this fact] is easily documented in the statistical and demographic data" (2006, p. 12). Additionally, Majors and Billson (1992) held:

The statistics show a clear disadvantage to being born Black and male in America: Black males have higher rates than white males on mental disorders, unemployment, poverty, injuries, accidents, infant mortality, morbidity, AIDS, homicide and suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, imprisonment, and criminality; they have poorer incomes, life expectancy, access to health care, and education (p. 12).

As a result, this information continues to paint a picture of the Black male as an individual unable to produce for society. Lance recalled,

So just being Black...they automatically deem you as, 'Oh you're gonna be angry' or 'You're going to be upset, you're going to be mad, you're going to be confrontational, you're not gonna want to do different things....Are you going to drop out?' So different things like that. So being able to...change the perception of how people viewed me as being a Black male on that campus.

This consistent message of inferiority decreases chances of life success for Black males, unless they are resilient (Keyes, 2009), which sometimes results in the coping mechanism of avoidance or repression of these difficult memories (Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000) as evident by one participant. When attempting to recall an instance of discrimination, Jackson confirmed the study by Diener et al. (1999) regarding not ruminating on bad events, by saying, "This is going to sound silly, but I've had so many experiences, I actually can't remember a single one." To which the researcher replied, "I understand, I'm Black, I understand."

Although Alonzo stated that he could not recall being overtly discriminated against early in his interview, later in the process he began to recall instances of bias. After reflecting on specific examples, he said, "Being a Black male is also barrier within itself, man, because you do get passed over for opportunities."

The opportunities that Alonzo discussed referred to vocation, but Black boys experience discrimination leading to a lack of opportunities in schools as well. In a study of NCAA athletes, Cooper (2012) found that Black athletes perceive there to be less leadership opportunities than for whites due to discrimination. Prelow, Mosher, and Bowman (2006) found that discrimination was common in their sample of 198 African American college students, with 98.5% of this sample reporting having experienced a discriminatory event in the past year. As a result of this



discrimination, successful Black males in school employ a “prove-them-wrong coping mechanism” (Kim & Hargrove, 2013, p. 302).

***Educational hardships.*** Jackson and Moore (2006) discussed the importance of education in terms of its access to mobility, “education is arguably more important than at any other time in American history. It determines, in large measure, the degree of social mobility one has or will have in American society” (p. 202). Rolland (2011) stated that there is a high correlation between Black males’ experiences at school and their economic conditions during adulthood. Although each participant in this study was able to successfully retain to degree completion, they had to overcome hardships along the way. In this current study, 14 of 14 (100%) participants received a degree beyond high school, which could have attributed to their upward mobility towards life success, as evident in Table 5.1. Seven of 14 participants (50%) articulated hardships in this area.

Education played a role in participant earning levels, reporting their individual salary at a level that would be considered at least middle class as defined by data from the Pew Research Center (Amadeo, 2018). Only one participant, due to the number of members in his household, if his wife did not work, could potentially fall into the low- to middle-class category. Table 5.1 describes participant’s reported education and salary range.

Table 5.1

*Participant Education Level and Salary Range*

	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's	Terminal
■ 90k+		1		1
■ 75-89k				1
■ 60-74k				1
■ 45-59k	2	3	2	
■ 30-44k		1	2	

Although the participants within this study were able to obtain degrees beyond high school, leading to at least a middle-class lifestyle, it was not without struggle. Within education, Black males are often relegated to special education classes and programs while being labeled as developmentally delayed, mentally incapable or untrainable (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012). Matza (1969) describes the labeling process as intentional and potentially self-fulfilling saying, “to be cast as a thief, as a prostitute, or more generally, a deviant, is to further compound and hasten the process of becoming that very thing” (p. 157). This intentional labeling process has manifested through disproportionate tracking of Black males and through a lack of positive role models within the educational system (Blake & Darling, 1994). Jamal recalled his experience in class as a Black male,

I was like, I’m going to start learning this stuff so whatever lesson we were on I just studied. It was a foreign language class. So, she’s asking and I’m just answering everything and when we get to a quiz and I’m answering everything and she docks me points and writes a little note on it and she goes, ‘Hey, I know you cheated on this, stop cheating in my class.’

Black male’s failure in school has implications not only for them within the educational system, but more disturbingly, the widespread failure has a direct correlation with the quality of life they face after an unsuccessful school experience (Howard, 2008). Because of this, Rolland (2011) says that educators must increase the opportunities for academic success among Black students because this educational success can impact the welfare of communities as well as increase life chances for Black students. Allen described the power in increasing the success rate of other Black males just by being present. He said:

I went to [a school in the community] because I was mentoring there. And uh, this is when I had dreads. I walked in...there was a student to my left as soon as you walk in the door. And when I walked in, I heard “he looks just like me” and it broke me and made me mad. But it inspired me all the more.

The men in this study were fortunate enough to achieve an education. As a result, these men are viewed by their community as successful.

***Incarceration/absenteeism.*** Parallels in the academic realm and life can also be made in terms of incarceration and suspension which lead to absenteeism. Although suspension cannot be compared to being in a confined state, like incarceration, it is removing a person from the public hence leaving an absence. In both arenas, Black males are hypercriminalized (Rios, 2006) which has influenced disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates (Bell, 2015). These suspensions and expulsions are due to the perception that Blacks, in general, commit more crime. A study by Steffensmeier, Ulmer, and Kramer (1998) determined that young Black males have been described as “troublemakers” as the group was identified by the court system as the “dangerous class.” The dangerous characterization of this group is an inhibitor of their growth (Steffensmeier et al., 1998). When the Black male identity is under scrutiny, people often unconsciously tap into long-established stereotypes of them (Brown, 2005). Because of this dangerous class label, Black men are more likely to experience suspensions and expulsions (Brown, 2007) and mass imprisonment (Brown, 2005).

Life success for Black males who have experienced the effects of absenteeism due to incarceration, expulsion, and suspension is reduced. Suspensions and expulsions have been found as a contributing factor in the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the process in which students move

systematically from the school system into the prison system (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015). Suspension, expulsion, and incarceration all lead to absenteeism at various stages of life, which subsequently lead to a decreased probability of life success. Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2005) found that suspension is associated with lowered academic achievement in middle and high school students including both lower grades and higher drop-out rates. Brown (2005) theorized that expulsion leads to reduced positive relationships and limited trust in authority figures. Petit and Western (2004) described a normal life course for an individual, which could lead to social success. This life course, “involves moving from school to work, then to marriage, to establishing a home and becoming a parent” (p. 154). This normal course of life is damaged through the absenteeism created by expulsion and suspension. As a result, Roberts (2004) notes that, “prison is now a common and predictable experience for Black men in their twenties” (p. 1274).

While Black students’ chances for life success are reduced due to the possibility of removal in school through suspension or expulsion, Black adults face reduced chances for life success due to the increased possibility of incarceration. Travis, Western, and Redburn (2014) indicated that as of 2012 there were 2.2 million inmates within the United States. Thirty-three percent or approximately 745,000 of these inmates were Black males. In 2007, Blacks were incarcerated at nearly six (5.6) times the rate as the next highest population (Mauer & King, 2007). Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that in 2010 this trend continued to grow as “Black men were more than six times as likely as white men to be incarcerated in federal and state prisons, and local jails.” Life success for Black males is difficult to achieve when Black males are incarcerated at rates significantly higher than other groups (Mauer & King, 2007). The Black male incarceration epidemic influences the family as well.

Coates (2015) indicates that paternal incarceration's association with behavior problems and delinquency among boys is undeniable. Time in correctional facilities results in absenteeism, which weakens connections to work and family diverting those incarcerated from the usual path followed by young adults (Petit & Western, 2004). The inability to grow due to imprisonment breeds both moral and social barriers to success. "Mass imprisonment damages social networks, distorts social norms, and destroys social citizenship" (Roberts, 2004, p. 1281). This damage can be difficult to overcome, leading to underwhelming rates of Black male life success. David described the instability he endured due to an incarcerated family member,

after my mom [was taken away], my dad was kind of struggling trying to keep the house we were living in...so, my mom went to jail and the mental institution at the same time...I lived with my grandparents and that was all good and fine and dandy...until, you know, my grandfather passed away. And um, so that created some tension between me and my grandmother. So, I went back to go live with my dad and again, and that's when the abuse really started.

Western and McClanahan (2000) found that "the penal system is eroding the fabric of family life in poor minority communities" (p. 17). This erosion leads to a cycle of behavior that does not lead to success. Adverse effects of incarceration are an increasingly important determinant of Black employment outcomes (Raphael, 2006). Travis et al. (2014) stated, "incarceration is strongly correlated with negative social and economic outcomes for former prisoners and their families. Men with a criminal record often experience reduced earnings and employment after prison." Blake and Darling (1994) state that, "when the Black male has no job and no income, he may become involved in street crimes that can lead to a lifelong career of crime and transitions in and out of prison" (p. 408). When a person has a pattern of being in and

out of prison, employers are much less likely to hire the person when compared to other groups of comparably skilled workers (Holzer, Offner, & Sorensen, 2005). While two participants indicated having gotten “in trouble” with the police, half of the participants had direct experience with incarceration and absenteeism within their immediate families. Only one participant, however, revealed spending time in jail himself. Damian recalled what led to his incarceration:

In college I got a speeding ticket, rightfully wrong, going way too fast. I was going 91 in a 65. Officer pulled me over and told me I was speeding. I was polite and respectful. The officer said he wouldn't send me to jail but if I was going nine more miles over, I would've been driving with intent to kill so I had to go to court. And so, I went home and told my dad. I was sophomore in college and had never been in trouble before. I was thinking he's going to kill me. Then after I said everything he just sat back and said, 'OK.' That kind of freaked me out. I was like, 'why aren't you mad about it? Am I going to get grounded?' Even though I'm in college, you know, [I was thinking] 'what's the deal?' And he said, 'Son there is nothing I can do to you that's going to be worse than what the court is gonna do to you.' He knew. He was a police officer. He was a police officer, he knew what was about to happen. So, when I went to court, um, it was one of the toughest traffic places to get a ticket. But I went there and this one lady, she was about 35 miles per hour over in a school zone, white lady, um, she got a \$500 fine and um, that may have been it. I thought, 'This sounds okay, that's good.' Then another guy, gentleman, white gentleman there, he was going about 30 or 40 miles over. Um, he got a fine and a had to pay court costs and do like 20 hours of service. So, I was [thinking] 'Okay, that's not terrible.' This other guy who's on his third DUI, so he kinda got tagged. Um, he had maybe six months in jail or something like that. But I remember

thinking like, 'Wow, for your third DUI that's not terrible.' Because he had just gotten out of a coma and had to come straight to court. So, I got up there and um, you know, tell them a story that dad coached me to say I'm throwing myself at the mercy courts, 'I'm guilty your Honor, I was in the wrong,' Yada, yada. I had shaved my beard, had a tie on and I'm going to college. I had good grades. I'm not a problem kid, grew up in the lap of the law, the whole nine yards. So, um, the judge said, 'Well, I'll take into consideration everything. I'm going to give you a \$1,500 fine, we're gonna suspend your license for a year, you're going to have 35 hours community service, and I am going to give you 10 days in jail suspended.' I was like, 'You're talking about jail time when you're talking about taking my license for a year?!' This is my first offense, I understand I was going fast but...So I went to turn in my license and everything. Then my dad went out and immediately got a lawyer, because he knew what to do and then he came back and um, I got to keep my license. I went back, he appealed to my lawyer, has lunch with the judge that my appeal was with, and worked everything out over lunch. And so when it came back to court I didn't say anything. I stood up there and they still kind of tagged it to me. I got to keep my license, but I still had ten days in jail suspended. And I was on probation for nearly two years. And I had a hundred hours community service. And I think I had to pay about \$2,500 in court and legal fees for a speeding ticket. When I sat and watched, white people get up there and get lesser sentences. And then I come through as a college student, you know, dad is a police officer and just get tagged.

[Shaking head] I remember the judge looked at me and said, 'Son if you so much as run a stop sign in the next two years you're going to go straight to jail for 10 days for traffic.'

So I've realized like, that could have been a huge barrier, you know, and then create a lot

of problems for me. If I didn't have my dad to kind of overcome some of that injustice...like I said, I was in the wrong completely in the wrong. But it wasn't just to watch what I watched [with] the other people's sentences versus what I had.

***Socio-economic hardships.*** In the United States, increased income has a strong correlation with life success when compared to those who have lower incomes (Cheung & Lucas, 2015). Cornileus (2010) indicated that, "being able to provide for self and others is central to how African American men conceptualize their manhood. Employment is the means by which African American men can establish opportunities for self-sufficiency" (p. 37). Cornileus (2010) also noted that without the ability to obtain fair and sustainable income, Black males are severely challenged. Such challenges not only happen while attempting to find a job, but when they hold a job. Moss and Tilly (1996) found that over half of managers and employers interviewed in their study had negative views of Black males as employees. Moss and Tilly (1996) indicated that the negative views derived from perceptions and experiences grounded in peripheral activities were not a direct result of interacting with Black males in the workplace. Martin recalled his struggles with obtaining employment.

I think that goes back to what we was talking about earlier, which has probably been my biggest frustration for the lack of opportunities because I know for sure when you look at society, there are a lot of Black people who are in positions of power that can make change or can create opportunities for other Black people and they don't or they don't make the effort to do so.

This quote reflects the larger more systematic blocks to Black male opportunity for success while at work. Black males who are unable to attain consistent employment cannot attain life success. Shapiro et al. (2013) stated, "The evidence points to policy and the configuration of both



opportunities and barriers in workplaces, schools, and communities that reinforce deeply entrenched racial dynamics in how wealth is accumulated and that continue to permeate the most” (p. 5).

There are unseen factors that inhibit Black men from making similar income to other races in America. Black men must realize their success in the world of work is often tied to their ability to assimilate their values, behaviors, appearance, and lifestyles into what the White culture deems legitimate (Parham & McDavis, 1987, p. 26). This assimilation, in order to avoid negative stereotyping, can lead to a loss of one’s identity as a Black male, as mentioned earlier. To what extent one is willing to assimilate can have socio-economic impact.

A crucial factor for Black males to understand in order to be successful in the employment world is how to “play the part” to interact with both Blacks as well as other races for acceptance without showing a significant amount of distance from other Blacks to avoid being seen as a “sell out” (Orbe, 1994). This double consciousness, the feeling of a divided identity (Du Bois & Marable, 2015), can induce a significant amount of additional stress. David identified with having to “play the part” saying, “You get around White people and you know, you’re kind of like the good little nigga boy that they would use, ‘Oh, he’s well-spoken and he’s this and he’s that.’”

Black men must navigate hardships throughout their lives in various communities, with different people, and with varying levels of support. The men who participated in this study, however, have discovered methods to transition into a successful life. This was completed through an affirming location, the building of positive relationships and the receipt of support. These three external factors contributed to the positive mindset internal factors of self-efficacy, future orientation, and spiritual connectedness.

**The affirming community.** Understanding how Black men engage with their social and cultural environment to live productive lives is critical (Noguera, 2003). The Black men in this study consistently described their affirming community as an enabling factor contributing to their success. Studies confirm that a supportive environment is necessary for Black male success both inside the academic realm and out. Keels (2013) stated that campus communities serve as important environments for resources, support, and information to increase academic success.

Research has found that Black communities suffer from a multitude of devastations including drug abuse, disease, poverty, and crime (Ratcliffe, 2015; Sampson, 1987; Western & McLanahan, 2000). At the forefront of the negatively depicted Black communities are the Black males. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) described the fallacies of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's depiction of the destruction of the Black community. Moynihan said it was due to, "A deficit of employed Black men of strong character. He believed that this deficit went a long way toward explaining the African American community's relative poverty" (p. 62). Coates (2015) goes on to quote Moynihan to say, "in essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male..." (p. 63). Moynihan's assertions were challenged by many civil rights leaders. However, the matriarchal society he spoke of was evident in this study as well. Thirteen of the 14 participants (93%) grew up with their mother in the home while only eight of the 14 (57%) grew up with their father in the home. As a result, the Black community is in a constant state of disarray. Sampson (1987) indicated, "Black communities are characterized by disproportionately high rates of drug addiction, welfare dependence, out of wedlock births, teenage pregnancy, and families headed by

females” (p. 348). Lance recalled hardships with his mother on drugs, in jail and leading a single parent home giving advice saying,

To do as she says, not as she does. Not repeating what she’s done. My mom was addicted to crack cocaine when I was younger and in and out of prison. And just staying with my grandparents a lot of my early childhood and her being able to turn her life around, but she always would tell me to do as she’s telling me to do and not that she’s doing. Because she wants her kids to be better than what she does.

The participants in this study clearly attributed the Central Virginia region, which would not be considered a Black community due to a non-white population of approximately 22% (Virginia Community Profile Region 2000/Central VA - LWIA VII, 2018), as a reason for their success. Four participants grew up outside of the region and three of the four specifically recalled not receiving the same affirmation or support while in their previous location. Tyrone described the support he received in his affirming community by saying, “it has been people and organizations shaping me and pouring into me.”

All ten participants who grew up in the Central Virginia region attributed the region as having a positive impact on their journey towards life success. Bush and Bush (2013) described the importance of location in their African American Male Theory explaining that community factors such as parent’s place of employment or larger societal factors such as culture and systems play a role in the success for the Black male.

The attributes of an affirming community parallel the school environment for young Black boys. Strayhorn (2015) described a sense of belonging in their environment as a necessary attribute for Black males persisting in STEM. Additionally, Cokley (2003) discussed how an encouraging academic environment shapes Black student’s motivation to persist and achieve.

This affirming community is important as participants in this study indicated that they may not have been successful in other localities. Navigating hardships in an affirming community that is not conducive to building supportive, positive relationships may not lead to life success.

**Positive relationships.** Positive relationships have been a staple for the success of Black males within academia. When considering students' navigation through educational institutions in the STEM fields in a study by Fries-Britt (2017), she discovered, "they credit these relationships for making all the difference in their success" (p. 11). In an earlier study, Fries-Britt (1998) discussed how high-achieving Black males can, at times, experience isolation. Seven of the 14 participants (50%) specifically referenced feeling a sense of isolation while in school due to their color and elevated status in their sport or academic program. Tyrone recalled this sense of isolation and how it affected his thought process, "I was the only Black one there. So, psychologically it plays on you. The first [thought] is, 'Why aren't there more people like me out here?' Because I know I'm not the only one qualified to be here. The second [thought] is, 'Man, this is lonely,' because there's a cultural difference." In the academic realm, these relationships are necessary. Kim and Hargrove (2013) stated that in higher education, successful Black men often find ways to leverage relationships to their advantage.

Positive relationships are necessary for success not only academically, but personally as well. Eight of the 14 participants (57%) interviewed discussed times of feeling isolated and desiring personal relationships that would help propel them to their goals. Pablo recalled a previous relationship which was not negative and its effect on his journey, "But, [negative] personal relationships are definitely a huge hindrance to success because if you're not on the same page, if they're not on same level that you are professionally, if your ambitions aren't singular, it becomes a huge deterrent."

Professionally, positive relationships are also sought by Black males. Alonzo spoke about building professional relationships most often, saying,

I'll walk into a room to network with people; I'm usually not on talking about myself out. I'll ask you about everything about you, what you do for living, how are you, what's your family like that? That sort of stuff, because people will enjoy talking about themselves, right? I wanted to have an opportunity to not only talk to you about you and get a connection and a relationship built. And then also again, I gave you a chance to talk about yourself because that's what people like to do.

In her study of corporate culture, Cornileus (2010) discovered that Black men's

ability to build and leverage key relationships was cited more often than any other structure as a method for navigating around the destructive impact of racism to achieve positive career development. The relationships mentioned most often were family, mentors/sponsors, and other African American role models – several of whom were Black male role models. Through these relationships, the men established their identities, developed their agency and work ethic, learned about corporate culture, defined their value systems, and garnered support and guidance to navigate their careers (pp. 255-256).

Twelve of the 14 participants (86%) discussed role models in their lives. Malcolm recalls the beginning stages of a positive relationship with a Board member, at his place of employment, which began with a positive message, "I remember him coming to one day being in tears. I didn't know who the gentleman was [then]. He said, 'I've been praying for you for a long time. Someone who was articulate, had the skill, and belonged here.'"

In this study, positive relationships, mentioned by 11 of the 14 participants (79%), were found to propel participants forward as opposed to hindering them on their journey towards life

success. Participants described having to abandon relationships that were not positive along their journey. As a result, the framework is specific about the necessity of positive relationships to help participants develop the positive mindset necessary for life success.

**Receiving support.** The receipt of support was a common and significant factor for all 14 participants. The support received looked very different for participants based on the support required and the time of need. Blake and Darling (2000) indicated that African Americans experience a higher quality of life when they show each other support through the giving of the resources of “love, status, services, goods, information, and money. As the level of perceived resources exchanged increased, so did the quality of life. It should be noted that the resource with the highest level of exchange was love” (p. 424). Jamal described the support he received from the region, “Being Black in [this region], I tell you what they show so much love, like with some of the stories I shared earlier. So, I don’t feel like just my family, but my community as a whole, um, I feel like helped me out.”

Support in the form of information from colleagues and the community was also very important. Alonzo stated, “It took me just being around those guys being in those situations, listening to what they’re talking about, learning about different types of equipment, learning about different types of machinery, learning about what a two by four was for... I felt like, you know, these are the things that I need to be able to teach my kids.” After facing challenges finding a job, Martin found support from the unlikelyst of places after not receiving support from a fraternity brother:

Surprisingly, and unfortunately for me, all of the opportunities that I have been afforded have come from someone White saying I believe in what you’re doing. Or they’re going to take the time to sit down and talk to me and understand aside from how I looked that

there's something else on the inside of me that is worth the risk to them or whatever.

And they say, 'I'm going to take a chance on you.'

To achieve academic success on campuses, Black males also need support. Jones and Williams (2006) reported that without supportive relationships on campus, Black students will not achieve academic success. Support is not just in the form of positive relationships, but also support dealing with other hardships such as coping mechanisms to racism (Utsey et al., 2000), identity support (Rogers & Mason, 2008), financial support (Cameron & Heckman, 2001), and family support (Harper, 2012). The receipt of a variety of support was a contributing factor to the development of a positive mindset which ultimately led to participant's life success.

**Future orientation.** Embedded in the interviews of the 14 participants was a sense of the future. Each participant saw the future as a place they are looking forward to. This positive outlook is due to the support, positive relationships, and the resiliency that participants had experienced throughout their life whether in school or in the community. The grit scale determines resiliency, a factor in reaching goals for the future. Individuals who have grit are described as individuals who can persevere and press towards one's goals (Duckworth, 2007). Bush and Bush (2013) indicated that "Black boys and men are born with an innate desire for self-determination" (p. 8). Strayhorn (2014) researched grit's correlation between Black males and academic success. Strayhorn (2014) found that, "grit is positively associated with academic outcomes such as grades in college for Black males" (p. 7). Additionally, Singh and Jha's (2008) study found that there is a correlation between grit and happiness and life satisfaction.

Tyrone embodied this resilience, this grit, when reflecting,

you can't win without losing. And it's the hurdles and obstacles that make the victories feel good, you know? I'm not one of those people that are scared to fail, scared to lose,

or scared of the opposition. I don't necessarily like it, but I don't run from it. I buckle down to see what I need to get done. And once I'm passed it, it's a learning opportunity. You don't lose, you learn.

During the interview process, all participants stated that they exhibited resilient characteristics and 13 of the 14 participants indicated that they are goal-oriented. The one participant who was no longer goal-oriented said, "Me? I'm coasting. I found happiness and contentment before I found success and that was kind of good enough for me." Additionally, only five of the 14 participants indicated that they're currently satisfied with their life, implying there's more to be done. Ali said, "I feel like I'll always have something I can improve on. Um, I'm grateful for what I have, but I just feel like there's more I can do, and that's more that I could do for my family. So, I'm always hungry to improve."

Looking to the future, striving to accomplish goals, and seeking to improve oneself are attributes of future orientation. These traits consistently led to life satisfaction among participants in this study.

**Self-efficacy.** Confidence has proven to be successful in helping Black males achieve life success. Within the framework of the educational system, Whiting (2009) indicated that, "Black males with academic self-confidence believe that they are strong or excellent students" (p. 229). Whiting (2009) continued to describe the importance of self-confidence for Black males, "most importantly, they do not feel inferior or inadequate in academic settings and challenging classes; nor do they feel the need to camouflage, negate, deny, or minimize their academic abilities and skills" (p. 229). Confidence in self was evident in Pablo's academic career. He stated, "I was the best student in every class for the most part, in every class I cared about." Pablo continued:



So, from there, that's when I kind of transitioned from, if I just put my mind to it and if I do what I gotta do, then, shit, I can make it out where can't nobody touch me, you know what I'm saying? That's just how I felt. Regardless of how they look at me or what they think about me, I can prove them all wrong because there's nobody here that's got anything on me. So, I kinda walked around with that chip on my shoulder from the beginning.

These attitudes are consistent with academic achievement for Black males as well. Kim and Hargrove (2013) found that, "through an amalgamation of coping strategies, and drawing on strong self-efficacy, these men persist, achieve, and attain" (p. 308). Strayhorn (2015) conducted a study concerning academic achievement of Black males in the STEM fields finding that those who persisted often cited confidence, endurance and positive attitudes towards their outcomes. The attitudes exhibited derive from personality traits which are important aspects of believing in oneself. The researcher noted some of the personal traits observed of individuals in this study. The traits observed that were consistent with self-efficacy were resiliency, ambitious, driven, determined, and proud. Participants in this study also described themselves as being, "adaptable, a leader, arrogant, and controlling."

**Spiritual attribution.** Participants credited their spiritual roots and specifically their Spiritual Attributions with success. Religious involvement directly contributes to African Americans' well-being, life and family satisfaction, optimism and stress management (Mattis et al., 2004). Malcolm credits his connection with God to his ability to be well and to help others thrive as well. He said, "So the ability to physically, mentally, and emotionally encourage and support people that I have the opportunity to be in their lives looks like success to me."

Blake and Darling (2000) stated that the Black church can be viewed as a center of social life, communication, entertainment and amusement in the Black community. Taylor and Chatters (1986) spoke about religion as a very important component within the Black community as a contributor to life success. Taylor and Chatters (1986) suggested that members of the Black community who frequent their church receive support necessary for life success; as a result, altruism is prevalent. That altruism was evident for many participants. In this study, Damian believed, "I'm in a position where I can make a difference. I can do things differently that can shine a light and be an example and a role model. So I feel like it's always going to be a responsibility that I have placed on myself to do those things for the community." Individuals motivated to behave altruistically towards social groups do so out of the belief in the vulnerability of particular social groups and a desire to counteract what the altruist perceived as society's apathy toward the plight of those social groups (Mattis et al., 2009). When individuals concern themselves with the needs of others over the needs of themselves, their life success levels increase.

Although the codes of altruism and faith intersected seven times within the study, the most important factor was the connection that the participants had with their spirituality. The 13 participants who expressed that they were Christians, all attributed their success to their close connection to their faith as opposed to being a Christian in title only. Many Blacks, who are religious, have the perception of optimism and a healthy spirit (Holt & McClure, 2006). Rashad demonstrated this perception of optimism by saying,

I was about 20, 22, maybe 23...and I could just feel the change...as a man, spiritually, I could feel the change. Things that I used to like to do, I just didn't really care to do it no

more. Places that I used to go hang out and I was having fun, didn't feel like fun no more. You know, [it] just changed my perception, my perception on a lot of things.

Spiritual connectedness was a factor for participant's life success in this study, and studies show that it is also a factor for academic success. Palmer, Wood, Dancy, and Strayhorn (2014) indicated that a key factor to the success of Black men in higher education is their level of spirituality. Not only is the spirituality of Black males important but also the level of spiritual support that they receive (Herndon, 2003). More specifically, Asplund (2009) found that Black males utilizing the Christian faith attributed Jesus to empowering them to overcome and achieve against insurmountable odds.

## **Recommendations**

The developed framework for the Black Male Life Success Theory and the interpreted results from this study share consistency with literature regarding Black male achievement in the academic arena. Therefore, recommendations reflect opportunities to shape the structure and context in which Black males live. This study found that the external factors of the affirming community, the support received from others, and the positive relationships built, combined with at least two of the internal factors of self-efficacy, future orientation, and spiritual attribution are significant factors in the Black male journey towards life success.

The next step would be to replicate this study while generating a quantitative survey to measure the BMLST, administering it to a larger sample size outside of the local Central Virginia community along with additional demographic variables. Due to the similarities found within the results of this study in conjunction with Black male success research in the K-12 and higher education industries, the researcher believes that the BMLST would have consistent findings with new demographic variables if this study were replicated. If the BMLST does hold

true, similarly to the intentionality towards Black male success in an academic setting, communities can dedicate time and resources to develop structures conducive to building supportive relationships with Black men through the sharing of culture.

## **Discussion**

This study recognized that the hardships faced by Black men in Central Virginia were not unique to the area; therefore, the interpretation of how to achieve life success may also not be exclusive to the area. The subcategories of external and internal factors play a role in both life success and academic success, as the research supports. Achievement attained in the academic realm through shaping the environment gives support to Black males, increasing both retention and graduation. Similarly, this study shows life success can be attained through a positive environment which gives Black males the necessary support to overcome hardships to persist in the achievement of life success.

**Limitations of study.** This study's design was to find a homogeneous sample of Black men who had experienced the life success phenomenon. While the study was successful in finding a homogeneous sample, there were several limitations within that sample. Due to sample sizes and populations, qualitative studies often offer "limited generalizability of findings" (Creswell, 1994, p. 158). This study made observations about 14 respondents who all resided in the Central Virginia region. Of the 14 participants, only four graduated high school outside of the Central Virginia region; due to the confined area of participant participation when generating a theory, there could have been geographical significance to Black male success. Although coincidental, each of the 14 participants had earned at least an associate's degree, creating a more homogeneous sample. Additionally, 13 of the 14 participants identified as Christian, which

may have played a significant role in the findings. Due to the homogeneous nature of the sample, this study's findings are limited in their generalizability.

An additional limitation of this study is that the researcher identifies as a Black male currently residing in the Central Virginia region. While the researcher was cognizant of this potential bias throughout the research process, this distinction could have potentially provided bias in the semi-structured interview questioning for the participants. Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicated that the researcher should not begin research with a mind devoid of knowledge of the field, but not to allow preconceived theory "dictate" the research.

Goode (1999) found that age 45 is the prime of a male's life. This was the reason for selection of participants in the 25 to 45 age range, giving participants an opportunity to reflect on their journey to their prime. This age range for participants was another limitation of this study. Participant's ages ranged from 25 to 40 for this study, indicating that not one participant had reached their prime, yet. This was indicated in many of their responses concerning not having attained life success, describing it as more of a current journey. An increased initial age range may have yielded Black men beyond their prime for reflection purposes.

**Future research.** The BMLST considers the impact of several internal and external factors on the life success of Black men who currently reside in Central Virginia. This grounded theory framework will hopefully serve as the first of multiple studies conducted to transform the deficit narrative for Black male life success. Future research opportunities for the modification of the BMLST are plentiful. First, as mentioned in the discussion session, this study could be replicated in different localities to see if the affirming community aspect of the BMLST holds true. The Central Virginia region is made up of rural areas, towns, and a small city. Duplicating

this study outside of the mid-Atlantic region in a more densely populated area would provide additional data to build upon the theory.

Second, the expansion of the sample size for the study would benefit the BMLST. The age range for future research could be expanded upon greatly to ensure that the “prime” of a Black male’s life is captured within the narrative. Receiving data from participants who are in their 50s, 60s, and 70s could yield different results. The selection of a much more heterogeneous sample of Black men that includes a wide range of religions, places of birth, education levels, and socio-economic statuses would enhance the BMLST.

Several underrepresented populations, such as Latinx males, Latinx females, Black females, and other marginalized racial groups could also be studied, individually, in future research, utilizing the BMLST. Overall, the future research could focus on the sharpening of the model to become more generalized in nature.

Lastly, a quantitative survey to measure the BMLST could be administered in various locations and a much wider demographic range to generate a stronger framework and theory.

## **Conclusion**

Life success for Black males is achievable. This study sought to create a theory that demonstrated how Black males currently located in Central Virginia were able to achieve that life success. While their stories were unique, many commonalities were found among them. Black males within this study consistently overcame hardships in order to achieve their life success. Their affirming community, the positive relationships they developed, and the support received from others helped to propel them to a successful state. But, it wasn’t without the success mindset of self-efficacy, future orientation, and spiritual attribution that the men in this study achieved success.

Community members deemed the men in this study to be successful based on observable traits or attributes such as job held, perceived salary, education, perceived esteem within the community, and overall visibility. However, the Black men of this study deemed success as reaching their goals, helping others reach their goals, finding contentment, not falling victim to stereotypes or negative statistics and finding their purpose in life. While these traits and attributes, in some cases, are not quite as observable as the traits that the community members used, that does not mean that these Black men were not successful. These successes should be acknowledged, specifically for Black boys, to change the deficit narrative for Black men.

Life success for Black males is possible. The BMLST has the potential to provide a roadmap to that life success. Continued research that seeks to change the prevalent negative narrative for Black males in today's society is needed to shift more Black males into the success mindset, a factor in achieving life success.

## References

- Alderfer, C. P. (1969). An empirical test of a new theory of human needs. *Organizational behavior and human performance*, 4(2), 142-175.
- Amadeo, K. (2018). Are You in the Middle Class? Retrieved May 13, 2018, from <https://www.thebalance.com/definition-of-middle-class-income-4126870>.
- Anderson, C. A. (1983). The causal structure of situations: The generation of plausible causal attributions as a function of type of event situation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 19, 185-203.
- Asante-Muhammad, D., Collins, C., Hoxie, J., & Nieves, E. (2017). *The road to zero wealth: how the racial wealth divide is hollowing out America's middle class*. Institute for Policy Studies and Prosperity Now. Retrieved from: [https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/road\\_to\\_zero\\_wealth.pdf](https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/road_to_zero_wealth.pdf).
- Asplund, L. K. (2009). Understanding the role of faith in decisions to persist in college for first-generation Black male students. *Christian Perspectives in Education*, 3(1), 1.
- Atkinson, J. W., & Feather, N. T. (Eds.), (1966). *A theory of achievement motivation* (Vol. 66). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Baker-Fletcher, G. (1996). *Xodus an Black male journey*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.
- Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Bell, C. (2015). The hidden side of zero tolerance policies: The African American perspective. *Sociology Compass*, 9(1), 14-22.
- Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological methods & research*, 10(2), 141-163.



- Blake, W. M., & Darling, C. A. (1994). The dilemmas of the Black male. *Journal of Black Studies*, 24(4), 402-415.
- Blake, W. M., & Darling, C. A. (2000). "Quality of life: perceptions of African Americans." *Journal of Black Studies* 30.3 (2000): 411-427.
- Borg, W. R., & Gall, M. D. (1983). *Educational research; an introduction* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.
- Bostock, J. (2014). *The meaning of success: Insights from women at Cambridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bradburn, N. M. (1969). *The structure of psychological well-being*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Brown, S. C., Stevens, R. A., Troiano, P. F., & Schneider, M. K. (2002). Exploring complex phenomena: Grounded theory in student affairs research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(2), 173-183.
- Brown, T. (2005). Allan Iverson as America's Most Wanted: Black Masculinity as a Cultural Site of Struggle. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*: 34(1), 65-87.
- Brown, T. (2007). Lost and turned out: Academic, social, and emotional experiences of students excluded from school. *Urban Education*, 42, 432-455. doi:10.1177/0042085907304947.
- Burrell, T. (2010). *Brainwashed: Challenging the myth of Black inferiority*. New York, NY: Smiley Books.
- Bush, L., & Bush, E. C. (2013). Introducing African American Male Theory (AAMT). *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 4(1), 6-17.
- Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2014). *The PERMA-Profiler: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing*. Unpublished manuscript.

- Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2016). The PERMA-Profilers: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(3), 1-48. doi:10.5502/ijw.v6i3.1.
- Cameron, S. V., & Heckman, J. J. (2001). The dynamics of educational attainment for black, hispanic, and white males. *Journal of Political Economy*, 109(3), 455-499.
- Chenitz, W. C., & Swanson, J. M. (Eds.), (1986). *From Practice to Grounded Theory: Qualitative Research in Nursing*. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cheung, F., & Lucas, R. E. (2015). When does money matter most? Examining the association between income and life satisfaction over the life course. *Psychology and Aging*, 30(1), 120.
- Cho, J. Y., & Lee, E. H. (2014). Reducing confusion about grounded theory and qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(32), 1.
- Christle, C. A., Jolivette, K., & Nelson, C. M. (2005). Breaking the school to prison pipeline: Identifying school risk and protective factors for youth delinquency. *Exceptionality*, 13, 69-88. doi:10.1207/s15327035ex1302\_2.
- Coates, T. N. (2015). The Black family in the age of mass incarceration. *The Atlantic*, 316(3), 82.
- Cokley, K. (2003). What do we know about the motivation of African American students? Challenging the “anti-intellectual” myth. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(4), 524-558.
- Connell, J. P., Spencer, M. B., & Aber, J. L. (1994). Educational risk and resilience in African-American youth: Context, self, action, and outcomes in school. *Child Development*, 65(2), 493-506.
- Conrad, C. F. (1975). Toward a grounded theory of academic change. (Doctoral dissertation. University of Michigan, 1976). *Dissertation Abstracts International*. 36. 3436A.

- Cooper, H. M., & Burger, J. M. (1980). How teachers explain students' academic performance: A categorization of free response academic attributions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 17, 95-109.
- Cooper, J. N. (2012). Personal troubles and public issues: A sociological imagination of Black athletes' experiences at predominantly White institutions in the United States. *Sociology Mind*, 2(03), 261.
- Cooper, S., & Endacott, R. (2007). Generic qualitative research: a design for qualitative research in emergency care? *Emergency Medicine Journal*, 24(12), 816-819.
- Cornell, S. (1987). American Indians, American dreams, and the meaning of success. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 11(4), 59-70.
- Cornileus, T. H. (2010). A critical examination of the impact of racism on the career development of African American professional men in corporate America. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*). The University of Georgia, Athens.
- Covington, M. V. (2000). Goal theory, motivation, and school achievement: An integrative review. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51(1), 171-200.
- Coyne, I. T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(3), 623-630.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research. Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Deci, E. L., Schwartz, A. J., Sheinman, L., & Ryan, R. M. (1981). An instrument to assess adults' orientation toward control versus autonomy with children: Reflections on intrinsic motivation and perceived competence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 73, 642–650.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 542-575.
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 34.
- Diener, E., & Diener, M. (2009). Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem. *Culture and Well-Being* (pp. 71-91). Springer Netherlands.
- Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49(1), 71-75.
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective Well-Being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(2), 276-302.
- Diener, E., & Suh, E. M. (Eds.) (2000). *Culture and subjective well-being*. MIT press.
- Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D. W., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 97(2), 143-156.
- Drever, E. (1995). *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research. A Teacher's Guide*.
- Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087.

- Dyke, L. S., & Murphy, S. A. (2006). How we define success: A qualitative study of what matters most to women and men. *Sex Roles, 55*(5-6), 357-371.
- Elig, T. W., & Frieze, I. H. (1979). Measuring causal attributions for success and failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*, 621-634.
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(1), 107-115.
- Epstein, C. F. (1973). Positive effects of the multiple negative: Explaining the success of Black professional women. *American Journal of Sociology, 912-935*.
- Ford, M. E. (1992). *Motivating humans: Goals, emotions, and personal agency beliefs*. Sage Publications.
- Franklin, A. J., & Boyd-Franklin, N. (2000). Invisibility syndrome: A clinical model of the effects of racism on African-American males. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 70*(1), 33-41.
- Fries-Britt, S. (2017). It Takes More Than Academic Preparation: A Nuanced Look at Black Male Success in STEM. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 8*(1).
- Fries-Britt, S. (1998). Moving beyond Black achiever isolation: Experiences of gifted Black collegians. *The Journal of Higher Education, 69*(5), 556-576.
- Frieze, I. H. (1976). Causal attributions and information seeking to explain success and failure. *Journal of Research in Personality, 10*, 293-305.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978) *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

- Glenn, C. L., & Johnson, D. L. (2012). "What they see as acceptable:" A co-cultural theoretical analysis of Black male students at a Predominantly White Institution, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 23(4), 351-368. DOI: 10.1080/10646175.2012.722817.
- Goings, R. B. (2015). The Lion Tells His Side of the (Counter) Story: A Black Male Educator's Autoethnographic Account. *Journal of African American Males in Education (JAAME)*, 6(1).
- Gollwitzer, P. M., Heckhausen, H., & Ratajczak, H. (1990). From weighing to willing: Approaching a change decision through pre- or post-decisional mentation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 45(1), 41-65.
- Goode, E. (1999). New study finds middle age is the prime of life. *The New York Times*, Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/16/health/new-study-finds-middle-age-is-prime-of-life.html>.
- Grayman-Simpson, N., & Mattis, J. S. (2013a). "If It Wasn't for the Church..." Organizational Religiosity and Informal Community Helping among African American Adults. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(3), 243-252.
- Grayman-Simpson, N., & Mattis, J. S. (2013b). Doing Good and Feeling Good Among African Americans Subjective Religiosity, Helping, and Satisfaction. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 39(4), 411-427.
- Griffin, A., & Page, A. L. (1996). PDMA success measurement project: recommended measures for product development success and failure. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 13(6), 478-496.
- Guy, T. C. (2014). The (end)angered Black male swimming against the current. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2014(144), 15-26.

Hare, N., & Hare, J. (1984). *The endangered Black family*. San Francisco, CA: Black Think Tank.

Hargrove, D. (2014). *This is How We Did It: A Study of Black Male Resilience and Attainment at a Hispanic Serving Institution Through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory*. Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs).

Harper, S. R. (2012). *Black male students in public colleges and universities: A 50-state report card*. Washington, DC: Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

Harrell, M. C., & Bradley, M. A. (2009). *Data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups*. RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA.

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Keyes, C. L. (2003). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup studies. *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*, 2, 205-224.

Harvey, J. H., & Weary, G. (1984). Current issues in attribution theory and research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 35(1), 427-459.

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2011). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. Guilford Press.

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Henderson, V. (1992). Factors affecting success of African-American male graduate students: a grounded theory approach. *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*, Paper 9834.

Herndon, M. K. (2003). Expressions of spirituality among African-American college males. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 12, 75-84.

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (2011). *The motivation to work* (Vol. 1). Transaction Publishers.

- Holt, C. L., & McClure, S. M. (2006). Perceptions of the religion-health connection among African American church members. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(2), 268-281.
- Holzer, H. J., Offner, P., & Sorensen, E. (2005). Declining employment among young Black less- educated men: The role of incarceration and child support. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 24(2), 329-350.
- Howard, T. C. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of Black males in pre-K-12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 110(5), 954-985.
- Howard, T., Flenbaugh, T., & Terry, C. (2012). Black males, social imagery and the disruption of identities: Implications for research and teaching. *Educational Foundations*, 26(1/2), 85-93.
- Huppert, F. A., Marks, N., Clark, A., Siegrist, J., Stutzer, A., Vittersø, J., & Wahrendorf, M. (2009). Measuring well-being across Europe: Description of the ESS well-being module and preliminary findings. *Social Indicators Research*, 91(3), 301-315.
- Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 837-861.
- Hutchinson, E. O. (1997). *The assassination of the Black male image*. Simon and Schuster.
- Jackson, J. F., & Moore, J. L. (2006). Black males in education: Endangered or ignored? *Teachers College Record*, 108(2), 201.
- Jones, J. D., & Williams, M. (2006). The African American student center and black student retention at a pacific northwest PWI. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 30(4), 24.
- Kalet, A. L., Fletcher, K. E., Ferdman, D. J., & Bickell, N. A. (2006). Defining, navigating, and negotiating success: The experiences of mid- career Robert Wood Johnson clinical scholar women. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 21(9), 920-925.



- Kanfer, R. (1990). Motivation theory and industrial and organizational psychology. *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 1(2), 75-130.
- Katz, F. M. (1964). The meaning of success: some differences in value systems of social classes. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 62(1), 141-148.
- Keels, M. (2013). Getting them enrolled is only half the battle: College success as a function of race or ethnicity, gender, and class. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83, 310-322.
- Keller, J. M. (1983). Motivational design of instruction. *Instructional design theories and models: An overview of their current status*, 1, 383-434.
- Kelley, H. H. (1973). The processes of causal attribution. *American Psychologist*, 28(2), 107.
- Keyes, C., & Magyar-Moe, J. L. (2003) The measurement and utility of adult subjective well-being. In S. Lopez, & C. Snyder (Eds.), *Positive Psychological Assessment: A handbook of models and measures* (pp. 411-425). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Keyes, C. L. (2002). The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 207-222.
- Keyes, C. L. (2009). The Black–White paradox in health: Flourishing in the face of social inequality and discrimination. *Journal of Personality*, 77(6), 1677-1706.
- Khaw, D., & Kern, M. (2014). A cross-cultural comparison of the PERMA model of well-being. *Undergraduate Journal of Psychology at Berkeley, University of California*, 8, 10-23.
- Kim, E., & Hargrove, D. T. (2013). Deficient or resilient: A critical review of Black male academic success and persistence in higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(3), 300-311.

- Kunesh, C. E., & Noltemeyer, A. (2015). Understanding disciplinary disproportionality: Stereotypes shape pre-service teachers' beliefs about black boys' behavior. *Urban Education*, 0042085915623337.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (2006). Toward a critical race theory of education. In A. D. Dixson & C. K. Rousseau (Eds.), *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song* (pp. 11-30). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Langdrige, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and methods*. London, England: Pearson.
- Latham, G. P., & Locke, E. A. (1991). Self-regulation through goal setting. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 212-247.
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79-122.
- Li, F., Bai, X., & Wang, Y. (2013). The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE): psychometric properties and normative data in a large Chinese sample. *PloS one*, 8(4), e61137.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Establishing trustworthiness*. Naturalistic inquiry, 289, 331.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1994). Goal setting theory. In H. F. O'Neil, Jr. & M. Drillings (Eds.), *Motivation: Theory and Research* (pp. 13-29).

- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 705.
- Longhurst, R. (2003). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups. *Key methods in geography*, 117-132.
- Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.lynchburgregion.org/pages/visionmission>.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success?
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111.
- Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1992). *Cool pose: The dilemmas of Black manhood in America*. New York, NY: Lexington Books.
- Martin, P. Y., & Turner, B. A. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 22(2), 141-157.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370.
- Mattis, J. S., Eubanks, K., Zapata, A. A., Grayman, N., Belkin, M., Mitchell, N. J. K., & Cooper, S. (2004). Factors influencing religious non-attendance among African American men: A multimethod analysis. *Review of Religious Research*, 386-403.
- Mattis, J. S., Hammond, W. P., Grayman, N., Bonacci, M., Brennan, W., Cowie, S. A., Ladyzhenskaya, L., & So, S. (2009). The Social Production of Altruism: Motivations for Caring Action in a Low- Income Urban Community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 43(1-2), 71-84.

- Mauer, M., & King, R. S. (2007). *Uneven justice: State rates of incarceration by race and ethnicity* (pp. 1-23). Washington, DC: Sentencing Project.
- McClelland, D., Atkinson, J., Clark, R., & Lowell, E. (1953). *The achievement motive*. New York, NY: Appleton–Century–Crofts.
- McMillan, J. H., & Forsyth, D. R. (1991). What theories of motivation say about why learners learn. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 1991(45), 39-52.
- Merriam-Webster (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solicitor>.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Moss, P., & Tilly, C. (1996). Soft skills and race: An investigation of Black men's employment problems. *Work & Occupations*, 23(3), 252–276.
- Mutua, A. D. (Ed.) (2006). *Progressive Black Masculinities?* Routledge.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2017). Latino Achievement in America. Prepared by the Education Trust. Retrieved March 11, 2017 from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde>.
- Nicolas, M., Martinent, G., & Campo, M. (2014). Evaluation of the psychometric properties of a modified Positive and Negative Affect Schedule including a direction scale (PANAS-D) among French athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15(3), 227-237.
- Nichols, A. H., Eberle-Sudré, K., & Welch, M. (2016). Rising Tide II: Do Black Students Benefit as Grad Rates Increase? *Education Trust*.

- Nicholson-Crotty, S., Birchmeier, Z., Valentine, D. (2009). Exploring the impact of school discipline on racial disproportion in the juvenile justice system. *Social Science Quarterly* 90, 1003-1018. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2009.00674.x.
- Noguera, P. A. (2003). The trouble with Black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of Black males. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 431-459.
- Noguera, P. A. (2008). *The trouble with Black boys: And other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Oishi, S., Diener, E., Suh, E., & Lucas, R. E. (1999). Value as a moderator in subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 67(1), 157-184.
- Oliver, W. (2006). "The Streets" An Alternative Black Male Socialization Institution. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36(6), 918-937.
- Orbe, M. P. (1994). "Remember, it's always whites' ball": Descriptions of Black male communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 42, 287-300.
- Page, H. E. (1997). "Black Male" Imagery and Media Containment of Black Men. *American Anthropologist*, 99(1), 99-111.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533-544.
- Palmer, R. T., Wood, J. L., Dancy, T. E., & Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). *Black Male Collegians: Increasing Access, Retention, and Persistence in Higher Education: ASHE Higher Education Report*, 40: 3. John Wiley & Sons.

- Parham, T. A., & McDavis, R. J. (1987). Black men, endangered species: Who's really pulling the trigger? *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 66, 24-27.
- Parker, B., & Chusmir, L. H. (1992). A comparison of men and women managers' and nonmanagers' perceptions of success. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 3, 73-84.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (1993). Review of the satisfaction with life scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 5(2), 164.
- Pavot, W., Diener, E., & Suh, E. (1998). The temporal satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 70(2), 340-354.
- Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (2008). The Satisfaction with Life Scale and the emerging construct of life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3(2), 137-152.
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. (2013). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. In *the exploration of happiness* (pp. 161-173). Springer Netherlands.
- Pettit, B., & Western, B. (2004). Mass imprisonment and the life course: Race and class inequality in US incarceration. *American Sociological Review*, 69(2), 151-169.
- Pieterse, A. L., & Carter, R. T. (2007). An examination of the relationship between general life stress, racism-related stress, and psychological health among Black men. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(1), 101.

- Pintrich, P. R. (2000). An achievement goal theory perspective on issues in motivation terminology, theory, and research. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 92-104.
- Prelow, H. M., Mosher, C. E., & Bowman, M. A. (2006). Perceived racial discrimination, social support, and psychological adjustment among African American college students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 32(4), 442-454.
- Raphael, S. (2006). The socioeconomic status of Black males: The increasing importance of incarceration. *Public Policy and the Income Distribution*, 319-358.
- Ratcliffe, C. (2015). Child poverty and adult success. Washington, DC: *The Urban Institute*, 1-15.
- Rees, T., Ingledew, D. K., & Hardy, L. (2005). Attribution in sport psychology: Seeking congruence between theory, research and practice. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 6, 189-204.
- Rios, V. M. (2006). The hyper-criminalization of Black and Latino male youth in the era of mass incarceration. *Souls*, 8(2), 40-54.
- Roberts, D. E. (2004). The social and moral cost of mass incarceration in Black communities. *Stanford Law Review*, 1271-1305.
- Robertson, R. V., & Mason, D. (2008). What works? A qualitative examination of the factors related to the academic success of Black males at a predominantly white college in the south. *Challenge (Atlanta): A Journal of Research on Black Men*, 14(2), 67-90.
- Robinson, M. A., Jones-Eversley, S., Moore, S. E., Ravenell, J., & Adedoyin, A. C. (2018). Black Male Mental Health and the Black Church: Advancing a Collaborative Partnership and Research Agenda. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57(3), 1095-1107.

- Rolland, G. (2011). Black Male Students' Perceptions of Factors That Contribute to Their Academic Success. Electronic Theses & Dissertations. Paper 386.
- Ross, L. (1977). The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: Distortions in the attribution process. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 10:1 74-220.
- Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monograph*, 80(1), 1-28.
- Ruffins, P. (2013). Challenging Stereotypes. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 29(26), 10.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 141-166.
- Ryff, C. D. (1995). Psychological well-being in adult life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 4(4), 99-104.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (2003). Flourishing under fire: Resilience as a prototype of challenged thriving. *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*, 15-36.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications.
- Salili, F., & Mak, P. H. T. (1988). Subjective meaning of success in high and low achievers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12(2), 125-138.
- Sampson, R. J. (1987). Urban Black violence: The effect of male joblessness and family disruption. *American Journal of Sociology*, 348-382.
- Schatzman, L., & Strauss, A. L. (1973). *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.



- Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015). *Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 state report on public education and Black males*. Cambridge, MA: Author.
- Scott, K. W. (2004). Relating the categories in grounded theory analysis: using a conditional relationship guide and reflective coding matrix. *The Qualitative Report*, 9(1), 112-126.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011a). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011b). *Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. *Policy*, 27(3), 60-1.
- Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410.
- Shapiro, T., Mashede, T., & Osoro, S. (2013). The Roots of the Widening Racial Wealth Gap: Explaining the Black-White Economic Divide. *Institute on Assets and Social Policy*.
- Sheldon, K. M., & Elliot, A. J. (1999). Goal striving, need satisfaction, and longitudinal well-being: the self-concordance model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(3), 482.
- Shin, D. C., & Johnson, D. M. (1978). Avowed happiness as an overall assessment of the quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, 5(1-4), 475-492.
- Siedlecki, K. L., Salthouse, T. A., Oishi, S., & Jeswani, S. (2014). The relationship between social support and subjective well-being across age. *Social Indicators Research*, 117(2), 561-576.
- Singh, K., & Jha, S. D. (2008). Positive and negative affect, and grit as predictors of happiness and life satisfaction. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 34(2), 40-45.

- Small, J. (2017). Mentoring Black Males: Discovering Leadership Strategies That Improve Their Future.
- Smith, T. B., & Silva, L. (2011). Ethnic identity and personal well-being of people of color: a meta-analysis.
- Steffensmeier, D., Ulmer, J., & Kramer, J. (1998). The interaction of race, gender, and age in criminal sentencing: The punishment cost of being young, Black, and male. *Criminology*, 36(4), 763-798.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: an overview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* (pp. 158-183). London, England: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). The role of supportive relationships in facilitating Black males' success in college. *NASPA Journal*, 45(1), 26-48.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). What role does grit play in the academic success of Black male collegians at predominantly White institutions? *Journal of Black Studies*, 18(1), 1-10.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2015). Factors influencing Black males' preparation for college and success in STEM majors: A mixed methods study. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 39(1), 45.
- Tate, W. F. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, 22, 195-247.

Taylor, R. J., & Chatters, L. M. (1986). Church-based informal support among elderly Blacks.

*The Gerontologist*, 26, 637-642.

Taylor, R. J., Mattis, J., & Chatters, L. M. (1999). Subjective religiosity among Blacks: A

synthesis of findings from five national samples. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 25(4), 524-543.

Taylor-Gibbs, J. T. (1988). *Young, Black and male in America: An endangered species*. New

York, NY: Auburn House.

Thomas, S. P., Thompson, C., Pollio, H. R., Greenberg, K., Conwill, W., Sall, A., Klukken, G.,

Davis, M. W., & Dias-Bowie, Y. (2007). Experiences of struggling Black students at a predominantly White university. *Research in the Schools*, 14(2), 1-17.

Thompson, E. R. (2007). Development and validation of an internationally reliable short-form of

the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS). *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 38(2), 227-242.

Travis, J., Western, B., & Redburn, F. S. (2014). The growth of incarceration in the United

States: Exploring causes and consequences.

Tyler, K. M. (2014). *Identity and Black men: Exploring the content of our characterization*.

Lexington Books.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015). Health, United States, 2015. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health/us15.pdf#015>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017). What is Mental Health? *Mental*

*Health.gov, Let's Talk about it*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health/index.html>.

- U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2011). *Correctional populations within the United States, 2010*. Retrieved from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus10.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). *Usual weekly earnings of wage and salary workers, first quarter 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>.
- Utsey, S. O., Ponterotto, J. G., Reynolds, A. L., & Cancelli, A. A. (2000). Racial discrimination, coping, life satisfaction, and self- esteem among African Americans. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78(1), 72-80.
- Virginia Community Profile Region 2000/Central VA (LWIA VII) (2018). Labor Market Information. *Virginia Employment Commission*. Retrieved from [http://virginalmi.com/report\\_center/community\\_profiles/5115000447.pdf](http://virginalmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5115000447.pdf).
- Waterman, A. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 678–91.
- Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 1063-1070. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063.
- Weiner, B. (1972). Attribution theory, achievement motivation, and the educational process. *Review of Educational Research*, 42(2), 203-215.
- Weiner, B. (1986). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. In *An attributional theory of motivation and emotion* (pp. 159-190). US: Springer.
- Weiner, B. (2010). Attribution theory. *Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology*.

- Weiner, B., Frieze, I., Kukla, A., Reed, L., Rest, S., & Rosenbaum, R. M. (1987). Perceiving the causes of success and failure. In *Preparation of this paper grew out of a workshop on attribution theory held at University of California, Los Angeles, August 1969*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Western, B., & McClanahan, S. (2000). *Fathers behind bars: The impact of incarceration on family formation* (pp. 309-24). Princeton University.
- Whiting, G. (2009). Gifted Black Males: Understanding and Decreasing Barriers to Achievement and Identity, *Roeper Review*, 31:4, 224-233, DOI: 10.1080/02783190903177598.
- Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy–value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 68-81.
- Willson, V. L., & Palmer, D. J. (1983). Latent partition analysis of attributions for actual achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 20, 581-589.
- Wyatt, M., & Silvester, J. (2015). *Reflections on the labyrinth: Investigating Black and Minority Ethnic leaders' career experiences*. *Human Relations*, 68(8), 1243-1269.  
doi:10.1177/0018726714550890.
- Ye, S. (2007). Validation of the temporal satisfaction with life scale in a sample of Chinese university students. *Social Indicators Research*, 80(3), 617-628.

## Appendix A: Solicitor Message

Dear [solicitor's name]  
I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Aaron Smith, I am a doctoral student at Lynchburg College working with Dr. Sally Selden on research concerning Black male life success. I am currently seeking participants for my research on Black male life success in my study entitled: "This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach for Black Male Life Success." This research aims to determine and define what success is for Black males in Central Virginia, and it also seeks to identify commonalities among participant's stories to form a theory concerning how life success was achieved for these Black males. I believe this research is important not only to create a narrative for the research participants, but to provide a potential blueprint for Black male life success for further study.

If you would like to participate, your role in this research would be to serve as a solicitor. As a solicitor, you would provide contact information (first and last name, phone number, e-mail address) of Black males who you perceive to be successful within the Central Virginia region. These potential participants should identify as Black or African American and fall between the ages of 25 and 45. If you're unclear of their ethnicity or age, but believe they could fall into either category, and still want to pass their information along, please do so.

Once you have supplied the contact information, I will follow up with the individual(s) to give them further information about the study. I will notify the potential participant of their nominator. It's my hope that your potential participant will qualify for the interview portion of the study.

If you agree to participate as a solicitor, please respond to this email with the names of up to 5 Black males in the Central Virginia region who meet the criteria in the second paragraph along with a sentence to describe why you think they're successful. Additionally, for record keeping purposes, please provide your contact information (same as in paragraph two) including the company you work for.

Your help is tremendously appreciated.  
I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

~Aaron Smith, M.Ed.

Appendix B: Participator Message

Dear, [potential participator],

Hello, my name is Aaron Smith, I am a Lynchburg resident and a doctoral student at Lynchburg College. I'm e-mailing concerning your possible participation in research I'm conducting for my study entitled "This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach For Black Male Life Success."

The study seeks to identify a definition of success for Black males in the Central Virginia region. It also seeks to determine what experiences were important to your success, and ultimately this study hopes to create a theory that may be studied further identifying common factors found in Black male life success stories.

You have been identified by [solicitor name] as a successful Black male, and thus are a potential candidate for this study. If you're interested in participating, please reply to this message and I will follow up with you within 48 hours with more information.

If you have additional questions, feel free to contact me.  
If you do not wish to participate, you may reply "No Thanks."

Thank you for your time.

~Aaron Smith, M.Ed.  
Lynchburg College  
Ed.D. Candidate

Appendix C: Participant Rejection Message

Dear [potential participator],

I truly appreciate your willingness to participate in the research of Black male success, “This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach For Black Male Life Success.”

Unfortunately, you did not qualify for this study due to not meeting one of the following criteria

1. Male
2. Identifying as Black or African-American
3. Between the ages of 25-45
4. Residing in Central Virginia

I want to thank you sincerely for your willingness to participate, and I encourage you visit the Lynchburg website for more information about the conclusion of this study.

Sincerely,

Aaron Smith, M.Ed.  
Lynchburg College  
Ed.D. Candidate



## Appendix D: Participant Interview Message

Dear [potential participator],

I truly appreciate your willingness to participate in the research of Black male life success in Central Virginia. The research entitled, “This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach For Black Male Life Success,” will be important in shaping the definition of success for Black males in this area. Recently, you indicated that you’re interested in being interviewed for this study. Thank you.

I’d like to set up a time to interview you to discuss your path to success, to determine how you did it. If you’re available in the coming week on (Day) and (Time) to meet at a location of your choosing, that would be great! This interview will take no longer than an hour-and-a-half.

Please reply to this email to indicate if you’re willing to continue with the interview portion of this study. If you’re interested in continuing, please confirm a day, time, and location. Also, please view the the attached consent form. I will ask you to sign the consent form before we conduct the interview.

Your story will be instrumental in developing a grounded theory for Black male life success in Central Virginia that may be used for future research studies.

I’m looking forward to your response, and hearing your story.

Sincerely,

Aaron Smith, M.Ed.

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol (adopted from Jordan, 2014)

**Demographic Questions:**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your current age range: 25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45?
3. Are you currently employed?  
If so, where?                      What position?                      How long have you been there?
5. What is your current salary range?  
\$20,000-29,999                      \$30,000-44,999                      \$45,000-59,999                      \$60,000-74,999  
\$75,000-89,999                      \$90,000 +
6. What is your educational history from high school (location) to the present?
7. What ethnicity do you identify as?
8. Are you married, separated, divorced? If so, how long?
9. Do you have children? If so, how many and what age?
10. Do you have spiritual affiliation? If so, what?

**Open-ended interview questions:**

1. How would you define success?  
a. From now on, we'll use your definition of success within the questions.
2. How were you able to achieve success?  
a. Probe: If not, what would it take to achieve that definition?
3. What did success look like as you were growing up? How did this change over the years as you've aged?
4. Talk to me about your family growing up.  
a. Probe: Who in your family was most supportive of you?  
b. Probe: What was your father's occupation? Educational level?  
c. Probe: What was your mother's occupation? Educational level?  
d. Probe: Tell me about your siblings.
5. What messages did you receive from your parents/guardians? Did they encourage you?  
a. Probe: Positive Messages? Negative messages?
6. Who were/are your most influential role models? Why?  
a. Probe: real people  
b. Probe: celebrities  
c. Probe: males
7. How would you describe your personality? What are your most profound traits?  
a. Probe: How has it contributed to your success?
8. Others see you as a success, why do you think that is?  
a. Probe: Why would your colleagues say this?  
b. Probe: Why would those close to you say this?
9. What has motivated you?  
a. Probe: professionally?  
b. Probe: personally?
10. How has discrimination played a role in your success?  
a. Probe: If it has, when was this a factor?
11. Do you consider yourself a success?  
a. Probe: Why or why not?

12. How and why did you make the decision to:
  - a. Live in Central Virginia?
  - b. Pursue the career you have?
  - c. Get married/have a family?
  - d. Pursue your spirituality?
13. Has your \_\_\_\_\_ played a role in your success?
  - a. Location
  - b. Immediate family
  - c. Spirituality
  - d. Education
  - e. Health
14. How would you describe Black culture?
  - a. Has it played a positive or negative role in your success?
15. Describe the personal sacrifices you've made to obtain your success.
16. What has been the biggest barrier to your success?
  - a. Probe: When and how?
17. What has been your biggest accomplishment?
  - a. Probe: How were you able to achieve this?
18. In the past 5 years what group(s) of people have been your biggest supporters?
  - a. How about 15 years ago?
19. In the past 5 years what group(s) of people have been your biggest critics?
  - a. How about 15 years ago?
20. How do you think Black men in Central Virginia differ from Black men in other areas of the state? Nation?
21. Has the media affected your ability to be successful?
22. Do you have a number of Black male peers who are successful?
  - a. A little, some, or a lot
23. What is your greatest area of success? Why?
24. What is your greatest area of weakness? Why?
25. I have a series of statements for you. Would you consider yourself:
  - a. Happy
  - b. Healthy
  - c. Motivated
  - d. Resilient
  - e. Goal Oriented
  - f. Spiritual
  - g. Satisfied
26. Based upon your experience, do you think success is attainable for Black males in Central Virginia?
27. This study is about being able to define success as a Black male, which you've done, and determining how you were able to become successful. In one word, how would you say you did it?
28. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your success?
29. Now that we have discussed your journey, would you change your definition of success?
30. We have come to the conclusion of this interview. Would you be willing to answer follow-up questions if the need arises?

Appendix F: Follow-up Email to Participator for Interview

Dear [Participator],

Thanks for agreeing to participate in a one on one interview tomorrow, [day], [date] at [time] at [specific location].

Again, my name is Aaron Smith. I'm excited to meet with you to hear your story.  
If for some reason you're unable to make it, please e-mail me or leave a message at 540-327-0264.

Thank you very much, [Participator].  
I'll see you at tomorrow at [location] at [time].

~Aaron Smith  
Lynchburg College  
Ed.D. Candidate

## Appendix G: Informed Consent Agreement

**Please read this consent agreement or listen carefully as it is read to you before you decide to participate in the research study. You are being given a copy of what you read or what is read to you – keep your copy.**

**Project Title:** This is How We Did It: A Grounded Theory Approach of Black Male Life Success\_\_\_\_\_

---

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is to identify a definition for success for Black males in the Central Virginia region. It also seeks to determine what experiences were important to your success, and ultimately this study hopes to create a theory that may be studied further identifying common factors found in Black male life success stories.

**Participation:** You are being asked to participate in this study because you are:

1. Male
2. Ethnicity: Black or African-American
3. Obtained a High School Diploma or GED
4. Between the ages of 25-45

This study will take place in an agreed upon location. You will be asked to share your story about your path to success and take the PERMA-Profil assessment.

**Time Required:** Your participation is expected to take no more than two interviews spanning no more than one-and-a-half hours each.

**Risks & Benefits:** The potential benefits and risks associated with this study are the opportunity to share an unheard story about Black male life success. This collaboration could help begin a trend of discovering methods to Black male life success. The interview will be conducted casually and participants will not be forced to discuss areas of their story that they wish to keep private. If participants experience anxiety due the nature of sharing their story, participants should share that with the researcher, the interview can be terminated. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study so that participants feel free to share their personal experience, which could help others.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for participating in this study

**Voluntary Participation:** Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and/or answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. You also have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. If you want to withdraw from the study please tell the researcher or a member of the research team who is present during your participation. The researcher reserves the right to end your participation for falsifying information. You will not be penalized if you do not participate.

**Confidentiality:** Your individual privacy will be maintained throughout this study by members of the researcher. In order to preserve the confidentiality of your responses, we will keep participant information such as your PERMA-Profiler and your interview information locked in a file cabinet on the fourth floor of Hall Campus Center on the Lynchburg College Campus.

**Whom to Contact with Questions:** If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact Aaron Smith at [smith.a@lynchburg.edu](mailto:smith.a@lynchburg.edu) you can also contact my faculty research sponsor, who is the Principal Investigator (PI) for this project and is supervising my work on the study, Dr. Sally Selden at [selden@lynchburg.edu](mailto:selden@lynchburg.edu). The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. This IRB currently does not stamp approval on the informed consent/assent documents; however, an approval number is assigned to approved studies – the approval number for this study is LCHS1718088. You may contact the IRB Director, Dr. Alisha Walker Marciano, through the Office of the Vice President and Dean for Academic Affairs at Lynchburg College at 434.544.8266 or [irb-hs@lynchburg.edu](mailto:irb-hs@lynchburg.edu) with any questions or concerns related to this research study.

**Agreement:** I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research study answered. By signing below I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study described above and verify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

---

## Appendix H: PERMA-Profiler

[http://www.peggykern.org/uploads/5/6/6/7/56678211/the\\_PERMA-Profiler\\_101416.pdf](http://www.peggykern.org/uploads/5/6/6/7/56678211/the_PERMA-Profiler_101416.pdf)

**The PERMA-Profiler Measure**

#	Label	Question	Response Anchors
Block 1	A1	How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals?	0 = never, 10 = always
	E1	How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?	
	P1	In general, how often do you feel joyful?	
	N1	In general, how often do you feel anxious?	
	A2	How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself?	
Block 2	H1	In general, how would you say your health is?	0 = terrible, 10 = excellent
Block 3	M1	In general, to what extent do you lead a purposeful and meaningful life?	0 = not at all, 10 = completely
	R1	To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it?	
	M2	In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile?	
	E2	In general, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in things?	
	Lon	How lonely do you feel in your daily life?	
Block 4	H2	How satisfied are you with your current physical health?	0 = not at all, 10 = completely
Block 5	P2	In general, how often do you feel positive?	0 = never, 10 = always
	N2	In general, how often do you feel angry?	
	A3	How often are you able to handle your responsibilities?	
	N3	In general, how often do you feel sad?	
	E3	How often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?	
Block 6	H3	Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?	0 = terrible, 10 = excellent
Block 7	R2	To what extent do you feel loved?	0 = not at all, 10 = completely
	M3	To what extent do you generally feel you have a sense of direction in your life?	
	R3	How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	
	P3	In general, to what extent do you feel contented?	
Block 8	hap	Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?	0 = not at all, 10 = completely

## Appendix I: IRB Approval



**LYNCHBURG**  
C O L L E G E EST. 1903

**Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board  
for Human Subjects Research  
Research Study Determination Letter**

Date: January 4, 2018  
To: Dr. Sally Selden  
From: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Review Reference No.: LCH51718088  
LC IRB Approval No.: LCH51718088  
Project Title: This is How We Did it: A Grounded Theory Approach of Black Male Life Success  
Final Determination: Approved  
Approval Date: January 4, 2018  
Expiration Date: January 4, 2019

Thank you for your recent submission to the Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. Your request for review of your research project listed above has been completed. The proposal and related study comply with the standards set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 CFR Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects, and all applicable federal, state, and institutional policies. If a member of the research team is affiliated with and/or if there is an affiliated research site from which participants are recruited and/or data are gathered, then your study may necessitate review from another entity. It is the responsibility of the PI to inquire at other site(s) and with other IRBs regarding reviewability and, if necessary, secure approval from other site(s)/IRB(s) prior to the collection of data.

Please remember that if any modifications are necessary, these changes need to be approved by this Board. The IRB website includes detailed instructions and forms for this process. Investigators must report any adverse events involving subjects to the IRB Director as soon as possible but no later than three working days after the discovery of the occurrence. Approval for this proposal is for **one year**; the expiration date is listed above. Investigators must submit a closure form or a renewal request form to the IRB Director following the instructions provided on the IRB website\* at least 30 days before the end date of the approval period as stated in the most recent approval letter for the study. While the LC IRB makes an effort to send reminder correspondence 60-90 days before the end of the approval period, it is ultimately the responsibility of the PI and research team, not the LC IRB, to ensure that this deadline is met. This deadline will allow adequate time for the IRB to review the form so that a decision can be made before the research proposal approval expires. Please feel free to contact me at [irb-hs@lynchburg.edu](mailto:irb-hs@lynchburg.edu) if you have any questions.

\*The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board website is located at <http://www.lynchburg.edu/institutional-review-board-irb-human-subjects-research>; use menu on left of page to navigate to Submission Instructions and Forms page.



## Appendix J: Codes

- 1 Accomplishments
- 2 Adapting
- 3 Admiration
- 4 Barriers to Success
- 5 Being Influenced
- 6 Mentor Influence
- 7 Peer Influence
- 8 Black Culture
- 9 Negative influence in Black culture
- 10 Positive Influence in Black Culture
- 11 Character Development
- 12 Communication with Others
- 13 Competition
- 14 Courage
- 15 Definition of Success
- 16 Other's Perception of Success
- 17 Previous Definition of Success
- 18 Despair
- 19 Discipline
- 20 Discrimination
- 21 Education Factor
- 22 Expectations

- 23 Faith/Spirituality
- 24 Family Information
- 25 Goals
- 26 Ambition
- 27 Growth
- 28 Health Factors
- 29 Sleep
- 30 Weight
- 31 Helping Others
- 32 Community Service
- 33 Encouraging Others
- 34 Generosity
- 35 Influence
- 36 Isolation
- 37 Belonging
- 38 Lack of Knowledge
- 39 Lack of Support
- 40 Legacy
- 41 Location
- 42 Maximizing Potential
- 43 Messages from others
- 44 Lessons Learned
- 45 Negative messages

- 46 Positive Reinforcement
- 47 Schoolwork (focus)
- 48 Mindset
- 49 Motivation
- 50 Obstacles
- 51 Overcoming obstacles
- 52 Resiliency/Determination
- 53 Occupation Information
- 54 Decision for occupation
- 55 Opportunities
- 56 Lack of opportunity
- 57 Parent Education
- 58 Parent Occupation
- 59 Peer group information
- 60 Personality Traits
- 61 Humility
- 62 Purpose
- 63 Relationships
- 64 Reputation
- 65 Responsibility
- 66 Provider
- 67 Role Models
- 68 Male Role Models

- 69 Lack of male role models
- 70 Sacrifices
- 71 Satisfaction
- 72 School Performance
- 73 Self Confidence
- 74 Intentional Focus
- 75 Self-Perception
- 76 Slave Mentality
- 77 Socioeconomic Status
- 78 Speaking Truth
- 79 Status
- 80 Stereotyping
- 81 Media induced stereotyping
- 82 Self-perception
- 83 Status Quo
- 84 Support
- 85 Community Support
- 86 Extended Family Support
- 87 Friend Support
- 88 Mentor Support
- 89 Parent Support
- 90 Doing the best they could
- 91 Sibling Support

92	Spousal Support
93	Structural Support
94	Supervisor Support
95	Teacher Support
96	Taking Chances
97	The Process
98	Time Factor
99	Tokenism
100	Understanding the system
101	Work-Ethic