

**FICTIVE KIN AS CAPITAL: A CASE STUDY ON AFRICAN AMERICAN
YOUTH ASPIRATIONS FOR COLLEGE**

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Dissertation Chair: Catherine A. Lugg, Ph.D.

Low-income, college-aged, African American youth are not always afforded the social or cultural capital that encourages them to aspire to attend college. This dissertation will explore how fictive kin relationships in the family and community can be viewed through the lenses of social and cultural capital theory. For the purpose of this study, fictive kin is the relationship by which extended family and community relationships can grant an individual social capital beyond that defined by socioeconomic status. These relationships serve as networks of support and structure that ultimately help facilitate college admission and stimulate the aspiration to attend college. This dissertation proposal examines how fictive kin is used as cultural and social capital to facilitate college aspirations among African American, low-income, and first-generation students who attend one specific postsecondary educational institution. This examination will include family resources (such as the community) and existing fictive kin (“like family”) relationships that may help cultivate students’ aspirations to attend college. The exploratory component of this case study will allow participants to present their experiences with kin relationships in their family or community that helped develop their aspirations toward college during their formative years.

Low-income, African American students often rely on peers, extended families, or community networks for aspirational or motivational support, given that their parents most likely did not attend or finish college. Precollege programs and community organizations such as the church and mentorship networks help improve access for lower-income and first-generation

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students. Such initiatives in almost every state across the nation have had some impact on improving access and completing college for these students. The participants in this study reveal the impact that their fictive kin relationships via extended family “like family” or in the community have had on their aspiration to attend college. The participants shared their intimate stories on who helped them aspire to college, and the researcher was able to extract important themes that are essential to the college aspirations of low-income, first-generation, African American youth.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father **James H. Whitney Jr.** and my late mother **Catherine Elizabeth Whitney** who, while their lives were not long on earth, as I had hoped, continued to give me faith, hope, pride, and inspiration to be able to complete this research. I know their presence is forever in my heart as they watch over me from above.

I also dedicate this to my mentor and friend **Arrigo O. Rogers**, whose life was cut short due to an illness at a very young age, but his brief time in my life served as encouragement for me to work in higher education, and to do the hard work of supporting youth and working toward creating access and equity for all.

This dissertation is further dedicated to the millions of young people of all races, backgrounds, and incomes who, because of adverse circumstances, may not have the opportunity to attend college.

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“To whom much is given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48 KJV). This quote from the Bible has been a guiding principle and summarizes my journey to this point in my life. For the honor, glory, and faith in GOD who has brought many blessings and has kept me despite many life-challenging adversities. GOD has never failed me and continues to keep me, even when I am not my best, and for that I thank you and love you.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND ORGANIZATION

Background of the Study

African Americans are significantly less likely to earn postsecondary degrees than their White counterparts (Hattery & Smith, 2007). The United States Department of Education documents that between 1990 and 2013, the subcategories of White and Black populations reveal that the gap has widened from 13% to 20% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Students of color including both Black and Latino students from low-income families continue to lag behind every other demographic (Bowen & Bok, 1998). The explanation offered for this discrepancy generally hinges on poverty as opposed to race. Specifically, poor families are blamed for the lack of sufficient resources to invest in the development of motivations, social skills, and behaviors that lead to academic success at a college level (Bowen, Kurzwell, & Tobin, 2005). Indeed, one of the most widely recognized theories suggests that children from higher-income and higher-educated families tend to demonstrate a higher degree of “college preparedness” (Bowen et al., 2005, p. 77) than their counterparts from low-income, relatively uneducated families (Bowen et al., 2005). Consequently, African Americans are less likely to enroll in college (Bowen et al., 2005).

Low-income, college-aged, African American youth are not always afforded the social or cultural capital that encourages them to aspire to attend college. This study explored how “fictive kin” relationships in the family and community can be viewed through the lenses of social and cultural capital theory. For the purpose of this study, fictive kin is the relationship by which extended family and community relationships can grant an individual social capital beyond those

defined by socioeconomic status. These relationships serve as networks of support and structure that ultimately help facilitate college admission and stimulate the aspiration to attend college.

The Merriam Webster dictionary (2013) defines *aspiration* as “a hope or ambition of achieving something” (p. 37). By its very definition, then, aspiration can be considered synonymous with hope. It is difficult to aspire to a hopeless cause. Correspondingly, if African American, low-income students continue to struggle with gaining access to and completing a higher education due to a lack of aspiration, then it could be interpreted as a lack of hope or resources. Most of the barriers that exist for African American youth directly relate to either a lack of preparedness for college from high school, financial assets, or an absence of social and cultural capital.

Despite these disheartening statistics, many low-income, African American students go to college and graduate. The U.S. Department of Education reports that of African Americans who enrolled in four-year bachelor’s degree programs and earned their degree in 2012 (six-year cohort graduation rates), 39.7% completed from public universities and 44.5% from private universities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Although these numbers are low, it is important to highlight the percentage of African Americans who aspire, attend, and graduate college for the purpose of my study.

This dissertation study argues that much of the success in college admission rates for African American college graduates who are low income is because they receive some form of cultural and social capital from their extended family networks (fictive kin) and community organizations. This study concludes that these fictive kin relationships serve as a form of surrogate cultural and social capital, propelling African American youth aspiration to attend

college. Fictive kin relationships work toward these goals because they offset challenges that affect low-income, African American youth such as preparation for college, financial support, and college expectations. Fictive kin relationships provide support, guidance, and motivation to aspire to college. These fictive kin relationships may be found in informal structures such as extended family members who are like family but not biologically related, leaders in the community who serve as mentors, precollege encouragement programs, and community and/or religious organizations. Fictive kin relationships serve as alternative family structures that become a form of social and cultural capital necessary for college aspiration in low-income African Americans.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This dissertation examined how fictive kin is used as cultural and social capital to facilitate college aspirations among African American, low-income, and first-generation students who attend one specific postsecondary educational institution. The research question to be addressed was:

How do fictive kin relationships spur college aspiration among African American, low-income students who are the first generation of their family to attend a postsecondary institution?

This examination included family resources (such as the community) and existing fictive kin relationships (like family, but not biologically related) that may help cultivate students' aspirations to attend college. The exploratory component of this case study allowed participants to present their experiences with fictive kin relationships in their extended family or community that helped develop their aspirations toward college during their formative years.

Two sub-questions explored how fictive kin relationships constitute transferable forms of social and cultural capital that drive a student's aspiration toward attending a higher-education institution:

- (1) What role do fictive kin relationships play in encouraging students to aspire to attend college?
- (2) Do institutions, such as community programs and religious organizations, facilitate fictive kin relationships and/or serve as a significant component of the fictive kin network that instills social and cultural capital to motivate college aspirations in African American, low-income youth?

This dissertation study might be used as a tool to help understand how low-income and first-generation, African American families employ community and familial relationships and/or networks to assist in their children's aspirations to attend college. Families might be able to recognize and assess the intangible resources of social and cultural capital that lie within community networks. The dissertation also serves as a contribution to higher-education literature, further allowing professionals to understand the value of these students' fictive kin networks when preparing for and persevering in college.

Participants in this study consisted of university students and graduates of the university who were enrolled in collegiate access and opportunity programs once they enrolled into college. The study evaluated the fictive kin resources that shape college aspirations and engender long-term support for these low-income, first-generation students. The study addressed each participant's motivation from within their extended families, and assessed whether certain outside community relationships may have provided specific attributes (such as social and

cultural capital) toward their choice to attend college. In terms of a conceptual framework, this study used social and cultural capital theories in an earnest attempt to build on existing literature that addresses fictive kin networks.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study includes five chapters: Background, Purpose, Research Question, and Organization; Review of the Related Literature; Research Methods; Findings; and Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion. In Chapter 2, I acknowledge the complexity of fictive kin relationships may serve as capital for African American students when other resources are not an option. This is followed by a literature review that evaluates the variety of fictive kin relationships in the family or community that can be used as a resource or a form of social and cultural capital. In Chapter 3, the conceptual framework, the research method utilized in the study is offered. In Chapter 4, I provide the findings of the research study, which includes the lived experiences of six participants from low-income and college backgrounds. Chapter 5 concludes the discussion and provides implications for future research, discussing recommendations for community members, policy makers, and those interested in improving the college aspiration of low-income, African American youth.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

According to the research literature, African American families employ familial systems and institutions as well as traditional community relationships as surrogate forms of social and cultural capital to instill academic aspirations in their children, as opposed to the concepts traditionally associated with this theory such as wealth, power, and prestige (Lin, 2001). These complex fictive kin relationships may serve as capital for many low-income, African American students when other resources are not an option.

Literature Review

This review examines the evidence of how low-income, African American families use fictive kin as a capital resource in motivating their young to attend college. Education is touted as the “great equalizer,” responsible for tightening the gap between rich and poor (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002, p. 1). Sadly, this has not been true for every person. Tierney and Hagedorn (2002, p. 1) assert that policies and special programs take on a deficit model “enabling students to overcome with regard to the following; insufficient funds to pay for college, insufficient academic preparation, and an insufficient understanding of the world of higher education.” Despite the efforts of special policies and programs targeted to help first-generation African Americans, these students continue to lag behind their White counterparts with regard to college admission and completion. Tierney and Hagedorn (2002) discuss a range of options that might be applied to supplement existing programs, propose policies that help equalize the socioeconomic gap, and contend that no one program or policy can save every student (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002).

The existing research surrounding elementary and academic achievement suggests that family support in a child's education benefits children's learning and produces positive, future aspirations, such as pursuing higher education (Sacks, 2007). However, low-income and first-generation families struggle to provide such support due to the absence of money and power. These limitations often prohibit access to further resources, such as tuition and the ability to navigate the complex social situations that remain intertwined with academic pursuits and aspirations to attend college. Many low-income and first-generation students aspire to attend college despite the absence of such resources (Freeman, 2005).

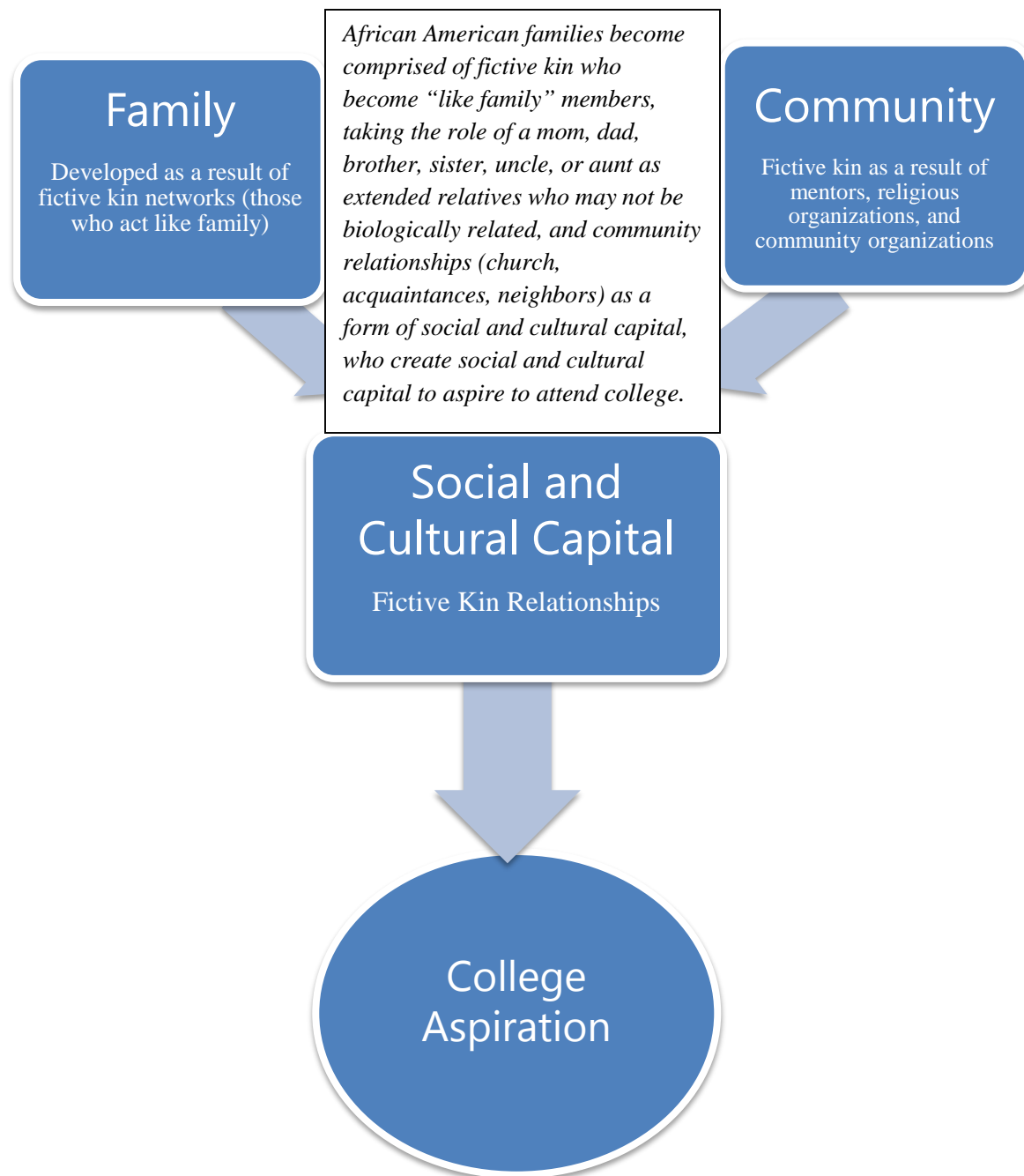
According to Sacks (2007), a "wealthy low-achiever in America has a significantly greater chance of attending a four-year university than a highly accomplished low-income student" (p. 115). Thus, not surprisingly, first-generation and low-income students have lower expectations about college education as early as the eighth grade (Choy, 2001). Poor African American families must rely on nontraditional modes of support for their children, such as siblings, community members, and preparation programs, to achieve access to resources or aspirations for a college education (Freeman, 2005). Furthermore, students' aspirations about college are greatly affected by the amount of encouragement and support received from important people in their lives such as counselors or mentors (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Freeman (2005) asserts that greater attention must be paid to the cultural aspects of the student's environment and how the use of mentoring and role modeling can influence a student's aspiration to attend college.

Often these "traditional modes" such as wealth, power, and status are effective in providing access and resources that are needed for any young person to survive during his/her younger years. Bourdieu (1986) argues that class determines available resources, placing

individuals without a certain level of wealth or status at a disadvantage. The literature reviewed in this study evaluates the variety by which established kin relationships in the family or community can be used as a resource or a form of “capital.”

Conceptual Framework

Network theory of social capital. Lin (1999) describes network theory of social capital as a three-step investment in social relations with expected returns: first, facilitating the *flow of information to the individual*; second, allowing for the *influence* of social ties to the agents responsible for making decisions; and third, the *social-tie resources* that serve as de facto credentials at pivotal points in an academic career. An ample flow of information provides opportunities and choices otherwise unavailable to an individual by means of an agent (Lin, 1999). Examples of this include a fictive kin relationship and involvement with a community or religious organization. Once an individual is connected, the agent can “put in a good word” and facilitate access to the resources available to that individual, such as college admissions. The social tie is the creation of the relationship between the individual and the decision maker, which ultimately becomes the network of social capital. Once the agent “stands behind the individual” (Lin, 1999, p. 31), he/she explains the added resource this person would have should they be admitted to college. Lin asserts that this type of connection provides emotional support and acknowledgment of one’s claim to resources such as college preparation (Lin, 1999).

Conceptual Framework diagram:

Restructured families, extended families, and extensive kin relationships do not constitute a recent phenomenon for African Americans (Jewell, 2003). These varying types of families have existed as a mode of survival for African American families since the time of slavery (Jewell, 2003). They resulted from the overall changes in low-income, African American

families due to high rates of single parent homes, incarceration, unemployment, and disease that constantly threaten the stability of the low-income, Black family (Hattery & Smith, 2007).

African American, low-income families lack continuity and consistency because of institutional systems that favor the affluent (Willie & Reddick, 2010). Heavy reliance on the family and community results from increased limitations on safety nets provided by institutions and generational assets. Help from family members acts as a surrogate for resources, which remains the one constant of low-income, Black families (Willie & Reddick, 2010). One of the most consistent examples of this support for low-income, Black families has been received from “the church” or religious organizations (Willie & Reddick, 2010).

Sociologists often discuss “dominant cultural capital,” a notion associated with wealth, status, and class: “Over the years, scholars, researchers, policymakers, teachers and various lay persons lament how many low-income and underachieving students of color do not have the cultural ‘know how’ to succeed” (Carter, 2003, p. 136). Limited research has established how the Black family in the United States has heightened adaptive strategies, resourcefulness, and stable kin networks to support their families in the face of poverty (Stack, 1974).

Social and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) both developed the sociological notion of “social capital theory.” Each author explores the importance of social class, but each establishes a slightly different conceptualization (Perna & Titus, 2005). Coleman (1988) identifies the extent to which parental involvement can build social capital from two important relationships. The first relationship focuses on the connection between parent and child, while the second relationship focuses on the connection between a child and other adults in the community where the child resides or attends school. By contrast, Bourdieu (1986) argues

that social capital depends on the individual's membership in a particular group. Bourdieu (1986) believes that social class impacts available cultural resources, including language as well as knowledge of art, music, and other cultural experiences. Family life can provide resources that yield important social profits (Bourdieu & Pierre, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, while both researchers argue that social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structures (Lin, 1999), their conceptualizations diverge. Coleman's perspective stresses the notion that parents play a primary role in promoting status attainment for their children, whereas Bourdieu's approach describes structural barriers in the form of access that vary depending on the institution (Dika & Singh, 2002).

The idea that class and socioeconomic status determine the potential for attainment through access became critical to both Coleman and Bourdieu's arguments. More importantly, "social capital" addresses the wide gap between upper- and lower-class students and their parents' involvement in their pursuit of quality-of-life attainment. Higher-class parents, realizing the importance of education and feeling confident in their right to be involved in the school, may take a more active role than their lower-class counterparts in supporting school programs (Hoover, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987). Bourdieu (1986) has argued that a child's ambitions are the structurally determined products of their parents' capital.

Scholars on capital such as Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Erickson (1996) suggest micro- and macro-level measurements of capital like wealth and power. They have indicated that these measurements can serve as determining factors in a young person's life when looking at long-term outcomes such as college, employment, and overall life satisfaction.

Bourdieu (1986) also states that working-class youth do not aspire to high levels of educational attainment because they have resigned themselves to limited opportunities based on their access to cultural capital. In contrast, upper-middle-class youth internalize their social advantages as expectation for educational successes and stay in school. Much has changed in recent years with regard to family dynamics, including increases in single-parent households and same-gendered parents (Willie & Reddick, 2010). Yet, regardless of the household make-up, race and class remain strong factors in children's educational attainment and aspirations (Bowen, Kurzwell, & Tobin, 2005).

Both Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) evaluate the importance of the family and its influence over a child's future, education, and status. However, it remains evident that these studies are flawed, neglecting to account for any possibility of lower-class people becoming successful in the absence of social and cultural capital.

Dominant cultural capital. Dominant cultural capital is the cultural knowledge, skills, and resources of upper-class socioeconomic groups (Carter, 2003). Conversely, nondominant cultural capital consists of a set of tastes, appreciations, understandings, and preferences that often characterize lower socioeconomic groups (Carter, 2003). In other words, cultural capital varies depending on the subject's socioeconomic status (SES). Access to knowledge, therefore, is limited by value judgments between types of knowledge depending on what can be perceived as "proper" and therefore appropriate (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Unfortunately, the majority of literature on cultural capital theory tends to ignore nondominant forms of capital (Carter, 2003). The danger of the social and cultural capital framework is that for people who are impoverished, the role of educational and social agencies is to help them assimilate into mainstream life (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). The framework rarely takes into account the cultures that students

bring with them as a form of social or cultural capital as Carter (2003) asserts. It is important to understand that nondominant forms of capital come by way of a student's environment and family regardless of race, class, or income (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002).

While maintaining that African American youth largely embrace the dominant ideology, Carter (2003) also suggests that they use dominant cultural capital in a variety of ways to attain status. However, these same youth will use their own nondominant cultural capital to gain status and material within their own socio-ethnic communities. Carter (2003) argues that resistance to "acting white" for many African American students centers on maintaining cultural identity, not on rejecting the dominant standards regarding achievement.

Carter (2003) nonetheless finds that those in the dominant culture do not respond positively toward African Americans' forms and expressions of nondominant capital. The manner in which these students use their home or community capital is often perceived as less than intellectual and unable to contribute to educational institutions such as high school and college. These biases cause some students of color to become disengaged from school and unmotivated about their future. As a solution, Carter (2003) suggests that schools engage some of these nondominant cultural practices to assist students of color in improving their educational outcomes.

Research also explains that dominant forms of capital not only provide access and resources to certain high-status social groups or organizations but also include access to styles, preferences, and tastes in a way that nondominant forms do not (Lamont & Lareau, 1998). Cultural capital has been shown to positively influence high school grades, college attendance, and completion (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Therefore, the traditional formulas

for academic success prescribe that students accrue dominant cultural capital, such as styles of speaking and familiarity with certain books, music, art, foods, and travel-based experiences (Carter, 2003).

Cultural capital also means having the ability to know how to interact with other students and teachers, apply to competitive colleges/universities, and participate in unique extracurricular activities (Carter, 2003). “Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth through at least 6 forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Of these six categories, aspirational and familial wealth evidences itself in many low-income, African American families as fictive kin.

Since slavery, African American families have used a variety of survival methods in the absence of money and power to obtain access to resources such as education (Anderson, 1988). Poor African Americans often rely on members of the community or informal relationships to obtain such access. This concept can be described as “kinship.” Stack (1974), who coined the term “fictive kin,” claims that in poor urban communities, everyday survival often depends on close interaction with individuals and friends in similar situations. This notion is evidenced in numerous success stories of African Americans who have not only aspired to attend college but have also later graduated to become productive members of society by using family resources, despite the economic and political odds against them.

“Fictive Kin” Defined

Until the 21st century, researchers defined a family as consisting of a mother, father, and two or three children (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). The “traditional” family has changed in almost every demographic group, particularly in low-income families, primarily because of its

inclusion of extended family members (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Recently, the terms “parental involvement” and “family involvement” have become interchangeable with the vast change in family dynamics (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005).

Existing literature discusses family as “parents,” but a growing number of studies suggest that minority students receive support toward educational achievement from other family members, such as siblings who may have already been to college (Cooper, 1995). In a study by Freeman (2005), low-income, African American students reported that their parents and extended family encouraged them to go to college and further beyond the current schooling of their parents. Townsend (1957) first proposed that individuals and families have dealt with socially imposed constraints such as oppression and marginalization as well as structural complexities (e.g., divorce, remarriage, step parenting) that have resulted in substitution of relationships. These substitutes are fictive kin relationships that are upgraded to primary roles “like” mother, father, brother, or sister once the structural changes in the family occur.

The roles that families of color play in supporting their children is foundational for student success, but is unique due to the social and cultural locations of these families (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Fictive kin can be seen as “pretend relatives” who play family-like roles (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2011). These relationships serve a purpose or meet a need, whether “affective” or “instrumental” (Allen et al., 2011, p. 1159). This was conceptualized by Carol Stack (1974), who studied how poor Black families survive day to day through an exchange of goods and services. Using Stack’s concept of fictive kin, Johnson (1999) studied 122 African Americans who were age 85 or older and found that 45% of them identified fictive kin in their own lives.

The aforementioned study referenced in the *Journal of Family Issues* sought to analyze perspectives on the roles extended family and fictive kin play in their lives. As a result of the study, the authors identified five strategies under the umbrella of “kin reinterpretation”: kin promotion, kin exchange, nonkin conversion, kin retention, and kin loss (Allen et al., 2011).

Kin promotion, as defined in this dissertation, is the most common form of kin reinterpretation. It is the change in some form of the traditional structure such as death, divorce, residential relocation, or grandchild childrearing due to prison or another unfortunate circumstance. Once the change occurs in the traditional structure because of such a circumstance, the new structure attempts to merge with the old one by making the change as if it were already a part of the traditional family structure. Participants promoted a distant relative to a primary relative, describing a grandson as “just like a son” or a stepsister as a “sister.” The promoted family member’s emotional and structural experiences registered as if they were a part of the traditional family circle. Milestones such as dating experiences, family photos, and special moments comprised at least one aspect of each family’s relationship with fictive kin who had been promoted to the place of another biological family member (Allen et al., 2011).

Kin exchange refers to a reinterpretation of biological relationships, or roles that change places within the generational kinship structure. The relationship is a reclassified family relationship by identifying them as the opposite (Allen et al., 2011). For example, the study discusses how a man promoted his older sister (13 years his senior) who cared for him after his parents died. He indicated she was more like a mother than a sister. As distinct from the aforementioned kin promotion, kin exchange refers to the hierarchical nature of the parent-child system acknowledging that the extended family member has assumed a parental role such as a sister assuming the role of mother (Allen et al., 2011).

Nonkin conversion refers to the practice of turning friends, students, or work colleagues into kin. This phenomenon emerged as another common theme in the study, where the value of perceived closeness and social network elevated a person to the level of kin. This definition differs greatly from casual, friendly, or neighborly relations by describing a bond closer to that of an advisor or confidante. An example from the study includes a 72-year-old African American woman with a friend in Delaware whom she treats like a sister because of the nature of their confidential relationship (Allen et al., 2011). Another example includes an older woman who converted a young couple to be her “adopted kids,” feeling closer to these fictive children than to her four biological children. The couple assumed the responsibilities of an adult child who handled chores and financial matters on behalf of this woman.

Kin retention is when a member is kept in the extended family that separated because of a structural change such as divorce but remains a member of the family (Allen et al., 2011). This perspective recognizes no normative language assignment (e.g., ex son-in-law) but keeps the previous relationship in the family for closeness. Examples in the study include a relationship between a woman’s husband’s first wife and new wife, in which they become the closest of friends and raise children as if she were the biological mother. The children treat them both equally regardless of the divorce. Essentially, exes continue to be tied into a kin structure for support for the family (Allen et al., 2011).

Kin loss is the physical or psychological contact with kin due to death, divorce, or relocation. This type of loss highlights the unpredictability of family relationships and is particularly difficult when making future plans or keeping contact with others because of the loss of kin (Allen et al., 2011). For example, an 83-year-old woman in the study lost contact with two of her grandchildren following the death of her son (their father). She described that she had not

seen the grandchildren of her son in 20 years (Allen et al., 2011). At the time of her son's death, he was separated from his wife. The family structure after the son's death did not allow for the kin relationship to be maintained, despite their living in the same town (Allen et al., 2011).

See explanatory diagram overview below: (Adapted from Allen et al., 2011, p. 1164).

Kin Reinterpretation Typology:



This dissertation allows for the reader to understand the broad scope of how fictive kin can be applied or become a reality for families and individuals. This study offers an explanation of how families have changed based on structural, financial, or relational functions that may be applied or changed based on circumstance.

Fictive Kin: Mentorship and Peer Support Room, Study #1

Alexakos, Jones, and Rodriguez (2011) explored how fictive kinship among high school students of color mediated their resiliency, perseverance, and success in a college-level physics class. The study fundamentally focused on the established friendships, role models, support, and motivation for individuals within the student group. Consequently, the researchers found that the

social relationships created safe spaces, which served as a mode of support in and outside of the physics class. The study also showed that relationships helped with student success, allowing for discussion of the subject beyond the classroom and overall improved success in the course (Alexakos, Jones, & Rodriguez, 2011).

The physics class in this study consisted of 16 upper-class high school students who were almost all African American and Latino. The makeup of the class included students from two inner-city magnet high schools: the King Academy and the Sky Academy. Both schools were highly selective in their admission to the college course, and in particular, the Sky students had already received prior high school classes in physics.

Sky students possessed a higher motivation level due to their high school's emphasis on science (Alexakos et al., 2011). Naturally, King students were more apprehensive about their success in the course, because they had received no prior experience with science courses. Similarly, all students maintained that their academic background was considered "satisfactory" and were in the top percentile in their respective classes. For King Academy students, this physics course was only the second course they had taken in college. They had also taken pre-calculus as a prerequisite for the physics class at the same time as Sky students (Alexakos et al., 2011). Sky Academy students were required to take an "early college" program, as early as 10th grade, which provided students with several college level courses that largely focused on science.

Many of the seniors taking the physics class from both schools accrued up to 40 college credits in advance of attending a four-year college or university (Alexakos et al., 2011). King Academy did not have a history of providing precollege experiences. The study indicated that all

students were of a similar race and socioeconomic background. The authors pointed out that the key separation between the students in the study was the King students' "lack of college experience and a lack of a culture of collectiveness, and kinship when it came to academic success" (Alexakos et al., 2011, p. 855). They noted that Sky students had developed friendships based on kin relationships established outside of the classroom.

The study specifically focused on two students from Sky, Victor and Ned, who forged strong bonds early in high school. They took the train and played football together (Alexakos et al., 2011). Because Sky offered college courses earlier in their high school study, they took classes and studied together. In the study, the two boys revealed that they thought of each other as brothers and were in sync with each other based on their experiences while at Sky. Each referred to himself as his "brother's keeper" (Alexakos et al., 2011, p. 857). As they came from close-knit families that required them to care for their younger siblings, these boys had already learned the concept that collective achievement is superior to the achievement of one person (Alexakos et al., 2011). They applied this concept of solidarity and support to their academic pursuits, bonding together to get through challenging physics problems and maximize their success in this college course (Alexakos et al., 2011).

This study employs fictive kinship as a framework by which to understand the resiliency and success of these friends in the science class. They developed kinship bonds, which allowed for emotional and material support in the same ways that occur in biological families. The study identifies this close kinship bond as the key factor in dealing with issues of doubt and failure in the physics class (Alexakos et al., 2011).

Victor and Ned approached the problem of succeeding in this advanced level class as a collective achievement, exercised through the practice of frequent conversations and interactions regarding physics, which became a part of their private and personal activities. The success garnered by peer support and mentorship through this challenging course established a mutual safety net, which not only helped with Victor and Ned's success in the course but also with their ultimate academic future. The key application of fictive kin to this study is its manifestation as social learning; it provides another learning theory for classroom study and academia concerned with this population (Alexakos et al., 2011).

Fictive Kin Used as Temporary Support

In a study entitled "Stress and Support in Family Relationships after Hurricane Katrina," the authors analyzed interviews of survivors of Hurricane Katrina who dealt with the stress and trauma associated with the hurricane (Reid & Reczek, 2011). Hurricane Katrina was one of the third worst hurricanes on record in United States history, killing more than 2,000 people and displacing over one million in August 2005 (Reid & Reczek, 2011). Their study unveils that fictive kin relationships developed as a mode of survival and support during this time period. Hurricane Katrina survivors created temporary and long-lasting kin relationships with other survivors to offer them support, such as housing and food (Reid & Reczek, 2011). The study found that the kin relationships formed during the storm only increased after the storm for maximum survival and recovery. Respondents in the study discussed how "family" (kin relationships) developed in the shelters during the storm continued through the aftermath of this tragedy to help rebuild what was left of their previous lives (Reid & Reczek, 2011).

One of the interviewees discussed how his family was living in a shelter and took on the care of an elderly woman who was separated from her family. This survivor invited the elderly woman to live with his family and “adopted” her as a temporary “grandma” (Reid & Reczek, 2011, p. 32). The family adopted the grandma to ensure her safety until her family was located. The participant described this relationship as a supportive (kin) relationship because they treated the elderly survivor as if she was their biological grandmother (Reid & Reczek, 2011). This temporary kin relationship provided the elderly woman with support in the most tragic of times.

Other participants reported how fictive kin relationships stemmed from members of their existing community network (Reid & Reczek, 2011). A woman described her story of how she and her “sister” were stranded after the flooding in New Orleans. The two were rescued from the flood but had numerous problems finding housing and support services after the storm. After the interview, the woman in the study confided that the other woman was not her sister but someone she previously cared for due to a mental disability. She treated the woman as her sister to enable both of them to receive the eventual community services. The woman felt it was easier to identify the other woman as her sister, given the problems with disaster relief, thus creating a familial “kin” relationship by which she would get the necessary support needed during recovery (Reid & Reczek, 2011).

Reid and Reczek (2011) explored the temporary kinship experienced by those who suffered tragedy. Unfortunately, many of those impacted by Katrina were low-income African Americans who relied on these new kin relationships that resulted from the tragedy caused by the hurricane. Consequently, the individuals who were once strangers became a family in order to cope with the tragedy. In this case, strangers and disconnected families merged to survive. This description is unique to other explanations of fictive kin because it provides for a “temporary kin

relationship” with the opportunity to disconnect once the mission of rebuilding is achieved (Reid & Reczek, 2011). Overall, the study highlights how fictive kin relationships can be temporary to achieve a specific goal as in the case of survival after Hurricane Katrina. Similarly, often community programs and mentorship services offer temporary kin relationships to achieve critical objectives, such as helping students aspire to attend college.

Pilot Study

Fictive Kin, Family and Community Support: A Pilot Study

Prior to this proposed dissertation, I conducted a preliminary pilot study that focused on the family support of low-income, African American students. During the study, other themes emerged that informed this current research on fictive kin relationships. Through a series of interviews on a similar population of low-income, African American college students it was increasingly evident that mentors, community groups, and religious networks had played a significant role in these students’ aspiration toward college. This pilot study provided a framework for understanding kin relationships. There were many emerging themes that have also been documented in the literature and are evident in the history of African American culture with regard to the family. The study found that the family extends far beyond biological ties for many young, college-bound African Americans who are also low-income, first-generation students. In every case, the community or a “like family” member provided a connection to a resource that resulted in social or cultural capital.

Hallinan (1988) stated that family involvement is the most powerful determinant of a child’s future. The majority of participants agreed that someone in their immediate family (or an extended family) influenced their aspirations to attend college. The themes that emerged in the

pilot study were consistent with the original hypothesis that families support their children's aspirations to attend or remain in college but lack the necessary resources to make college a reality. College aspirations and support for those enrolled was a combined effort including community, religious, or sibling support. In the pilot study, six first-generation, low-income, African American college students were interviewed. Their interview answers supported this assertion as indicated in the transcripts for this study.

For the purpose of the literature review of this study, I will use two relative themes in the pilot study, siblings and community. Support is used in this study to describe ways in which the participant had stable organizations or persons that provided stability, encouragement, or motivation in the aspiration toward college. The terms "siblings" and "community" are separated intentionally and not linked together under the code of "family" due to the different family circumstances of each participant. I am also using excerpts from the pilot study to help the reader understand the linkage of this study to the value of kin relationships, which were important in this study as the excerpts reveal.

Siblings

Most of the respondents in the pilot study discussed the important roles of their siblings wanting to go to college and how those siblings exercised influence over the participants' aspirations to attend also. In some cases due to the family dynamic, the identified sibling was not actually a biological sibling but filled that familial role. Most participants stated their siblings motivated them to attend college with the following reasons in response to my question, "What factors motivated you to attend college": the need for a better life, the absence of financial needs, and stressful concerns of the parents. The participants used the siblings' influence as a "charge" to go to college for the improvement of the family. Other participants described their aspirational

motivation in response to my question as “kin” as simply their brothers, sisters, step-siblings, or “like family” attending and completing college. For example, per Participant P:

“... she came to college when I was a Freshman, and she showed me that it was okay to be afraid because she was the one in high school that did get all A’s and B’s and stuff. I wasn’t that kind of student, but her coming to college and seeing how she struggled yet at the same time how she succeeded, it just made me realize how it’s okay to fail, it’s okay to do bad, but at the same time to keep going to get where you want to be in life [*sic*].”

From the perspective of the participants, the support of their siblings was significant in their decision to go to college and remain in college (regardless of the fear). In many cases, the participants all agreed that their siblings (even if not biologically related) served as role models or mentors because they had previously gone through the process. Participants noted that additional fears were alleviated because their siblings were able to explain the family dynamics when leaving to go to college. The siblings were able to ease any concerns the participants had about college. The siblings or “kin” relationships with regard to this proposed study served as an overwhelmingly supportive factor in the participating students’ aspirations toward college in this initial study.

Community Programs

The pilot study indicated that community programs, such as sports and precollege preparation programs, played a supportive role in participants aspiring to college. Families often played the important role of connecting the participant with the community or precollege

program. But, once the participant was enrolled, the participant found the community program extremely helpful in altering their aspirations to attend college and giving them skills necessary for college admission. The community programs also filled the gaps that parents or immediate family could not provide because of their lack of traditional capital resources and knowledge about how to navigate the college process. The participants agree that their aspirations would not have developed had they not received the preparation and guidance from these programs.

Coleman (1988) identified the role in which parental involvement can build social capital from two important relationships: the relationship between his/her parents and the relationship between a student's parents and other adults who are connected to resources. In many cases, parents placed their child in a program or the child was enrolled through the school. For example, Participant J gave an account of how the community, specifically the church, helped her. She stated, "People in my church, them being in higher education, help me make those connections." While Participant X gave this account:

"I was in College Club, which basically gave you (it was over a period of time)..., they had different meetings every week that would tell you what you needed to do to get into college, they would give you free waivers for your college applications, they would have old members from your horizons come in and tell you what college is about and basically try to prepare you for what's outside the classroom."

Both of these accounts demonstrate how the community and kin relationships assisted in these students' desires to attend college. This pilot study focused on enrolled students at college to demonstrate evidence that social and cultural capital can be created from such kin relationships.

Limited studies highlight the resources, adaptive strategies, and resilience of poor African Americans. Research does not often highlight or value the positive in African American families. Laws and public policies have also impacted on the negative opinions of African American families for generations such as the Moynihan Report (1965), which focused on African Americans and poverty and concluded that the structure of family life in the Black community constituted a “tangle of pathology.”

Instead there is a longstanding presumption of a culture of poverty defined by inherently negative characteristics, including family disorganization, group disintegration, personal disorganization, resignation, and fatalism (Stack, 1974). “Culture of poverty” is a term that refers to the pattern of life, the set of beliefs, and the typical behavior found among people who live in an environment dominated by economic deprivation (Tischauer, 2012). The concept assumes that the environment found in impoverished communities is built on deprivation, discrimination, poor education, unemployment crime, and drugs, etc., which shape the attitudes, expectations, and behavior of the community (Tischauer, 2012).

Oscar Lewis (1966), an American anthropologist, believed that the values children learn from their parents about how to survive in such desperate circumstances make them less able to move out of poverty. Lewis argued that the values poor people learn do little for educational advancement and the only way out of poverty is for environmental factors to change. This underlying assumption is that the social adaptation of the poor to conditions of poverty would change if the conditions were altered, and that only a small subgroup would be left with no culture of negative qualities (Stack, 1974). The features that characterize the culture of poverty, such as unemployment or earning low wages, are “simply definitions” and do not constitute distinct aspects of a “culture” (Stack, 1974).

Such negative factors are not general characteristics of poor African American families (Stack, 1974). African American families are embedded in cooperative domestic exchanges or organized life-long networks (Stack, 1974). Low-income African Americans have consistently identified the importance of fictive kin since the days of slavery, during which Black families were unable to remain together when sold to different masters (Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011). African American kin networks are comprised of various configurations, most of which include extended aunts, uncles, cousins, and unrelated individuals such as friends who are treated like family (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010).

Among the most important values of American families is the concept of “survival strategies” and “affective strategies” that kin networks provide (Jarrett et al., 2010). Financial resources, loans, direct contributions, food items, food stamps, shared meals, the passing down of clothing, shared housing, and small favors (i.e., rides, running errands, and assistance with child care) constitute examples of resources applied within a fictive kin network (Jarrett et al., 2010). Effective strategies such as listening to each other’s problems, giving advice, and expressing care, comfort, and concern are a part of the fictive kin network within the African American community (Jarrett et al., 2010).

To be part of a particular fictive kinship, individuals have to agree on a particular goal or worldview (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Family and education have been intimately tied together as part of African Americans’ efforts to raise themselves up from oppression (Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011). Families, extended kin, and community elders often assist in the process of promoting interests, the capacity for learning, and setting standards for African American youth (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). African American parents encourage education regardless of income (Hill, 1999), and the Black family in general, which today is often comprised of “fictive kin,”

encourages education as a route toward upward mobility and as a purposeful strategy to help their children overcome oppression (Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011).

When reviewing the literature, it is important to understand that there are a variety of ways that researchers have used or applied the term “fictive kin.” Fictive Kin relationships have been formed as modes of survival for many African Americans in the United States since slavery. Terms that are used to describe kin relationships but are not limited to, are support, mentorship, extended family member, or “like a brother or cousin.”

Summary of Literature Review

This review of the existing research examined evidence that low-income, African American families use fictive kin as a capital resource when motivating their children to attend and succeed in college. The literature examination also concluded that due to life circumstances, networks in the community or like family members are critical to access resources and support. Low-income, African American, college-aged youth are not always afforded the social or cultural capital that statistically encourages aspiration toward a college education.

Fictive kin relationships serve as a community model when displaying the resilience of Black families in poverty (Stack, 1974). Stack (1974), who coined the term “fictive kin,” asserts that poverty alone does not perpetuate the poverty cycle. Stack (1974, p. 129) describes in her book that “when mainstream values fail the harsh economic conditions of poverty force people to return to proven strategies for resilience” such as kin networks. The literature highlights examples of how kin relationships are used in the African American family. Whether it is a mentor relationship to help each other succeed or a temporary supportive relationship as referenced in the review, both complete a desired objective such as survival. For the purpose of

my study, the desired objective is using the resources in the community and nonbiological relationships such as “fictive kin relationships” as a natural resource of capital for low-income, African Americans. The reality is that for this population, aspirations toward college will have to come from other forms of capital such as the community and nonbiological kin members because there is an absence of traditional resources (i.e., wealth and power). Fictive kin is the relationship by which extended family and community relationships can grant an individual social capital beyond those granted by socioeconomic status. The kinship ties may exist with siblings, extended relatives, or be the result of a circumstance (as in the case of those who developed kin relationships during and after Hurricane Katrina). Despite nationally low numbers, African American, low-income youth are aspiring to college, attending, and graduating. This study will uncover the capital that can be found by use of the community and kin relationships to make college aspiration a reality for low-income, African American youth.

CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses an exploratory case study to investigate the use of fictive kin in the community and of extended family members as a form of social and cultural capital. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context (Yin, 2009). This purpose of this research design is to hear real-life circumstances and understand how, despite the lack of traditional resources such as money, power, and wealth, these six low-income and first-generation participants achieve their aspiration to attend college and received another form of social and cultural capital from their fictive kin relationships.

Setting

This study was conducted in a private, eight-person-capacity conference room on a university campus. In the setting, six participants voluntarily participated in confidential 30- to 45-minute individual interviews.

Methodology

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research begins with assumptions, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems that address the meanings those individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The “data” in qualitative research then become people’s interpretations of what happened to them in a given situation or organization (Creswell, 2007).

The methodology employed in this study was an exploratory model using case-study research. As a qualitative method of research, Yin (2009) states that case-study research involves

the study of a case within a real-life contemporary context or setting. Creswell (2007) views this methodology as a type of design that may be the object of study as well as the product of inquiry. Case-study research is an approach through which the investigator explores real-life, contemporary bounded systems (cases) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiples sources of information (Creswell, 2007). The researcher may review a single case or multiple cases within a study (Creswell, 2007). This study drew from existing data on African American families, fictive kin, and community, but primarily sought to identify the unique cases of low-income, first-generation, African American college students who have received the necessary social and cultural capital as a result of kin relationships in their communities or extended family members. Participants in this study were six low-income, first-generation African Americans who completed at least one semester of college and were admitted to college via a collegiate access program.

The physical interview site used was a common area conference room on a university campus. The conference room is reserved, private, and confidential. The room is generally used for educational purposes for meetings and conducting research.

Role of the Researcher

In my role as a researcher, I worked to identify students who met the criteria as well as were independent from my role as University administrator. On student consent, I collected the data through six, 30- to 45-minute interviews. I was directly responsible for correspondence, setting up interviews, and providing the resources associated with this research to gather data. Transcriptions of information were recorded, transcribed, and filed by me personally. As the

study developed, I was the sole person developing the research to conduct this study. The only support provided to me for this study was from my committee chair and program advisors.

Data Collection

I selected students first by sending out an email to those who (a) were African American, first generation, and low income and (b) who completed at least one semester of college. (See Appendix A.) I had contacted directors of access programs who would be likely to facilitate such communication by using a database filter to identify those who met the study criteria. The database filter applied helped to obtain a sample group. In the email communication, I indicated that I was looking for six students for a dissertation study that would be used for educational purposes only. I had the sample of participants complete a form that lists their name, race, income, gender, and semester in college to verify the data as it appears on the student's file indicated on the filter. The form also had a consent form attached if they were interested and allowed for permission to continue with the study. Once the verification of eligibility was complete, I selected six students to interview. The constant in this study was that the student would be African American, first generation, and low income. This study examined six participants who had completed at least one semester of college.

Patton (2002) describes qualitative interviewing as allowing the researcher to get information to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view. Patton (2002) describes three varieties, but for the purpose of this study, the standardized, open-ended interview has been used. This approach consists of a set of carefully worded and arranged questions for the purpose of minimizing variation in the questions posed to the interviewees

(Patton, 2002). This type of interview allows for some spontaneity and flexibility while providing a thorough assessment of each respondent (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were the constructed protocol to complete the study as defined by Patton (2002). The interviews focused on themes related to motivating factors toward college aspiration such as extended family and community relationships. (See Appendix D.) Prior to each interview, I informed the student of the purpose of the research and the length of time of the interview. Interviews lasted about 30 to 45 minutes and were documented via a digital recorder.

The interview consisted of 10 questions, five of which were structured questions about the participant, his/her family, extended networks including the community, and those the participants considered to be family. Each question provided an opportunity for the participant to discuss how his/her aspiration to attend college was achieved. The questions also provided the opportunity for me as the researcher to understand if the “like family” role was present in each participant’s decision to go to college. Each of the questions helped to develop and gather data to create the case study associated with family and college aspirations.

Questions as seen in Appendix D were asked of participants to help understand: How do the fictive kin of African American, low-income, and first-generation college students support, aid, or facilitate college aspirations? One of the main objectives of this study was to understand how these African American families can use resources such as the community and fictive kin relationships to develop student aspirations to attend college and provide support once they are enrolled.

Data Analysis

During each of the interviews, physical and emotional responses to the questions were documented, including any key words and themes that were received by the participants during the interviews. Once the interviews concluded, I evaluated the responses and transcribed the interviews via a digital tape recorder. The data were analyzed using microanalysis. Microanalysis is a detailed line-by-line analysis at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories and to suggest relationships among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Once this level of analysis was complete, I applied both inductive and deductive analysis during initial coding and theme developing. Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in data, and deductive analysis can be used in the final confirmatory state of the content of the inductive analysis (Patton, 2002).

Using these methods, codes were derived and grouped into the themes associated with the research question. A code is a “word or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some general analysis issues” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 146). Codes were clearly defined by using the concepts derived from the literature review and the conceptual framework for this study, a method suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). I used “descriptive coding” for ease of interpretation of the reader and analysis of this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes in the existing framework certainly became associated with capital and kin relationships, as this was a major framework of the study, as well as the literature to inform this study.

After the codes were grouped and assigned under the associated theme, I reviewed each transcript using the Microsoft office reviewer, color-coded commenting function and applied a code to each of the responses in the comments. After the first codes were applied to each line on

each transcript, I placed each of the quoted responses on a separate document for the relative code I assigned. Each quoted response was highlighted manually followed by the commenting function for accuracy. After all the responses were grouped from each transcript under one code, they were regrouped under each theme derived from the framework that began my final analysis and writing of my findings.

As I conducted the data analysis, I drew on other approaches and techniques used for case-study analysis. I analyzed my findings using prescribed strategies for case-study suggested methodology by Yin (2009). Analyzing case-study evidence is often seen as difficult because the techniques are not as defined as in other methods (Yin, 2009). Yin suggested that in order to overcome this challenge, every case-study analysis should follow a general analytic strategy by defining priorities for what to analyze and why (Yin, 2009, p. 126). The best analysis of case studies depends on the investigator's rigorous empirical thinking, sufficient presentation of evidence, and careful consideration of alternative interpretations (Yin, 2009). All of the above I did as the investigator in this study to find the best data for the proposed theory.

I employed the first strategy of relying on theoretical propositions. Yin (2009) states "The original objectives and design of the case study presumably were based on such *propositions*, which in turn reflected a set of research questions, reviews of the literature, and new hypothesis or propositions" (p. 130). The propositions shape the data collection and give priority to relevant analytic strategies (Yin, 2009). The prior propositions in which I designed this study were critical in analyzing the data collected in this proposed study.

Another technique relevant to this case-study design is the use of an individual logic model. The logic model stipulates a chain of events over extended periods of time, staged in a cause-and-effect pattern (Yin, 2009). The logic models consist of matching empirically observed

events to theoretically predicted events (Yin, 2009). An example for my study is the motivation (cause) from a fictive kin relationship (cause) to the later aspiration (effect) of college aspiration of a low-income, African American youth. The more complex the link in the logic model, the more definitive the case study can be analyzed to determine if a pattern match has been made between the cause and effect (Yin, 2009). Using more than one method to mine, the data have helped with triangulation and validity for this study (Patton, 2002).

Limitations of the Study

Yin (2009) states that using case study remains one of the most challenging of social science endeavors (p. 3). Engagement, enticement, and seduction are unusual characteristics of case studies (p. 190). Therefore, it was important for me in my role as the researcher to understand this limitation when conducting the study. The major limitation in the study was the sample size, as I am certain this study could have extended to the hundreds of thousands of youth who are first-generation, low-income African Americans.

However, the sample provided by these extraordinary six participants gives insight into the role of fictive kin relationships in the community or by extended family. Although not necessarily a limitation, the narrative could expand questions that deal with issues of college retention and degree completion for low-income African Americans who have fictive kin relationships. The existing stories provide evidence that family is not limited to biological members in this African American community and the power of like family members, community, and religious organizations are effective resources for helping youth aspire to college.

CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The study forming the core of this dissertation focused on how fictive kin relationships utilized as cultural and social capital spurred college aspirations among African American, low-income students who are the first generation of their family to attend a postsecondary institution. As an overview, definitions for terms used in the findings of this study can be found in Appendix E.

Cultural capital refers to nonfinancial assets that promote mobility beyond financial means. Examples can include education and exposure to experiences, like museums and travel.

Social capital is the value of “networks” (groups of interconnected people) and the reciprocity these networks provide for support and upward mobility. In this context, it is important to note that the term “capital” applies to wealth in the form of money or assets owned by a person or organization (Bourdieu, 1986). In this traditional form of capital, money is mostly used for the purchase of goods, services, experiences, education, and preparation for college, which is relative to this study (Bourdieu, 1986).

The study’s participants were low-income, first-generation, African American college students who completed at least one semester of college. The participants were candid about their family life and whom they believed helped them develop aspirations to attend college. Important to the research was to find evidence of nonbiological family members, extended family, and community and/or religious organizations serving in this role. Many participants expressed having a mentor, a “like family” member, and community resources largely found in

precollege programs or church as a form of social or cultural capital that drove their aspiration to attend college.

The study was conducted in a private, eight-person-capacity conference room on a university campus. In this setting, six participants voluntarily participated in confidential 30- to 45-minute individual interviews. Each participant answered background information questions, which are listed in Appendix D. As indicated in Table 1, to protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study, official names were concealed and aliases provided.

Table 1.
Participant Identification

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Financial admission status at time of college admission	Degree (highest completed)
Allison	Female	24	African American	Low income, first generation	Bachelor's degree
Bishop	Male	19	African American	Low income, first generation	High school
Keyon	Male	18	African American	Low income, first generation	High school
Jason	Male	25	African American	Low income, first generation	Bachelor's degree
Jada	Female	27	African American	Low income, first generation	Master's degree
Sabrina	Female	25	African American	Low income, first generation	Bachelor's degree

Note. This table yields the following information: three females, three males, all identifying as African American, and at time of college admission determined to be financially low income and the first within their family to attend college, ranging in age from 18 to 27 years. Currently, two have completed a high school degree, three a bachelor's degree, and one has completed a master's degree.

Table 2 provides information on each study participant's degree concentration and their occupation.

Table 2.
Participants' Degree Concentration and Occupation

Participant pseudonym	Degree concentration	Occupation
Allison	Education	TRIO program coordinator
Bishop	Music	Undergraduate student
Keyon	Music	Undergraduate student
Jason	Political Science/Africana Studies	Recent graduate/administrator religious organization
Jada	Education	Director, Upward Bound program
Sabrina	Community Health Education	Nonprofit professional

Table 3 shows the current low-income levels in the United States. Low-income levels are based on the size of families, which determines the eligibility in most cases for governmental services, assistance programs, and in particular, precollege preparation programs, as it relates to this study. The figures shown under family income represent amounts equal to 150% of the family income levels established by the Census Bureau for determining poverty status (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Table 3.
Current Low-Income Levels in the United States

Size of family unit	Forty-eight contiguous states, DC, and outlying jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$17,655	\$22,080	\$20,325
2	\$23,895	\$29,880	\$27,495
3	\$30,135	\$37,680	\$34,665
4	\$36,375	\$45,480	\$41,835
5	\$42,615	\$53,280	\$49,005
6	\$48,855	\$61,080	\$56,175
7	\$55,095	\$68,880	\$63,345
8	\$61,335	\$76,680	\$70,515

Table 4 provides a list of terms for the reader with an understanding of how students in the population defined are generally categorized in the United States. Students are admitted to college and are eligible for community programs such as precollege programs like Upward Bound and Gear-Up based on family income.

Table 4
Key Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
First generation	An individual who is the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education; neither parent has attained education at or above a Bachelor's degree (From Office of Postsecondary Education-TRIO programs, 2015).
High-need children	Students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, i.e., living in poverty, attending high-minority schools (as defined in the Race to the Top application), far below grade level, left school before receiving regular high school diploma, at risk of not graduating with diploma on time, homeless, in foster care, incarcerated, disabled, or English learners (From U.S. Department of Education website ed.gov, 2015).
Low income	An individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount (From Office of Postsecondary Education-TRIO programs, 2015).
Underrepresented	Historically racial and ethnic groups traditionally at a disadvantage; underrepresented groups include African American/Black, Hispanic (Latino), American Indian/Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander, and other (From Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015).

Note: From U.S. Department of Education (2015) and U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education (2015).

Students are generally identified as first-generation, high-need, and/or underrepresented groups in higher education as presented in the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], or admission documents to college or the community programs. At the time of the study, participants indicated they identify or fit all of the definitions and low-income status at the time of admission to college.

PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUNDS

For the purpose of this study, it is important that each participant's background is discussed to provide contextual information. The background information of each participant will provide the reader the context by which the individual arrived at their aspiration to attend college. The background provides a summary of presenting information at the time of the interview, which informed the findings of this study.

Allison

Allison was a 24-year-old, African American female and program coordinator of a federally funded precollege program at a higher education institution. Allison had completed at least one semester of college, received her bachelor's degree, and is currently enrolled in a graduate program to receive her master's degree. Allison grew up in a nontraditional family. Her biological mother was not her primary parent due to drug addiction. Allison moved around a lot to live primarily with extended family members who served like family (fictive kin) and who were influential in her life.

Allison resided in her aunt's home along with her aunt's best friend. The status of this relationship other than friends is unknown at the time of this study. The aunt and her best friend lived in a traditional two-family home, and neither Allison's mother nor father was present in this home. At a young age, Allison's mother was sent to live in New Jersey with her sister. Allison's biological mother was born in Brooklyn, New York, and her mother's parents (Allison's grandparents) were abusing drugs during the 1970s.

Despite spending some time away from one another, Allison's biological mother came into her life around her early teens. Allison's mother continued to raise her in New Jersey, while

allowing her to spend summers in Brooklyn: "... [I] spent my summers in Brooklyn, my least favorite summers in the world," said Allison. Allison's father was not present when she was growing up, but she had mentors who were nonrelated to fill this parental void.

The thought of attending college for Allison was never a reality given her family situation, which was inclusive of several drug- and alcohol-addicted family members, including her biological mother. Allison was a mediocre student who did not take school seriously. Although she knew college was important, it was an unclear path on which she would embark. Her godmother completed Allison's paperwork for a summer bridge program. On acceptance she completed the summer program, followed by securing academic and financial assistance to complete an undergraduate degree. If it were not for Allison's godmother she would not have applied for college, or to the Educational Opportunity Fund in her state, which later helped her gain admission and graduate college.

Bishop

Bishop was a 19-year-old, first-generation, low-income, African American, male college junior. He had completed at least one semester of college and is greatly involved in community programs and his church, along with both his mother and grandmother who were regular attendees of their church (located around the corner from where they lived). Among those who attended the church, many were alums of his current university—or they knew of someone who attended college.

A prominent figure in Bishop's life, Uncle T, who was known in the gospel music industry, knew Bishop wanted to pursue music, yet insisted school was a priority. Uncle T, as Bishop describes him, is a down-to-earth and easy-to-talk-to individual. It was Uncle T's belief

that once Bishop obtained his degree he could do anything moving forward. Uncle T was a true motivator for Bishop.

In Bishop's early teens, his church pastor, Pastor B, offered him his first opportunity, to play as a musician and later placed him on the payroll for the church. It was then that Bishop discovered his passion for drumming, and so his pastor gave Bishop the church keyboard for practice as a gift. Bishop considered Pastor B to be like family, as he was a fundamental component in the person whom he has become. Pastor B always offered encouragement to the youth, especially young men, to strive for excellence.

It was not only Bishop's church and family that steered him on the path toward college but also the Upward Bound program, which is a federally funded precollege program that helps prepare high school students for college. In the Upward Bound program, college preparatory resources are provided during the academic year, as well as tutoring, seminars, participation in cultural activities, graduate school tours, community service, and a precollege summer institute. During the summer (June–August), high school students such as Bishop had the opportunity to live on a four-year college campus and take academic courses for college credit that aided their preparation for the next grade level. Summer resident mentors, who resided on campus with the high school students for the duration of the summer program, served as supervisors, guides, and resources to the students. It was a resident mentor who gave Bishop the motivation and desire to reach his goals. The program contributed to Bishop's overall character and acculturation.

For Bishop, involvement with his church and the Upward Bound program was critical to his college aspiration. Bishop's relationship with Pastor B helped develop his gift in music, and in general, both the church and the community provided continuous support for his education. As

well, Upward Bound provided the college preparatory resources he needed to successfully complete high school and gain college entry.

Keyon

Born and raised in an urban, low-income town in New Jersey, Keyon was an 18-year-old, African American, male immigrant from Jamaica who was a college freshman. He had completed at least one semester of college and was majoring in music at the time of this interview.

As an infant, Keyon became interested in keyboards and began to play in church by age four or five years. By age 12 years, Keyon became the musical director for the church he attended. When Keyon's mother or father were at work, he would frequently spend his time at his pastor's house. The time he spent with his pastor was significant; although the pastor had two biological sons, he treated Keyon like his own son. Keyon had a special talent that, along with the pastor's guidance, helped Keyon aspire to attend college.

Keyon's pastor was present at nearly all his events, including engagements, competitions, and even his high school graduation. His pastor truly was one of Keyon's biggest supporters for anything that he needed. It was his pastor who served like family as he took on the role of father for Keyon. At Keyon's high school graduation, his pastor gave him a trombone as a gift, and later helped him purchase personal drum equipment. From grammar school through high school, Keyon received private music lessons at school and then was referred to the band director at church by the pastor. It turned out that he was able to learn for the first time the genre of Jazz, with constant practicing day in and day out. This consistent learning and practicing aided

Keyon's audition and acceptance as a music major for college. Keyon's biological family and nonrelated pastor, however, were only two of three cultivating factors in Keyon's endeavors.

For some high school students after graduation, the options are: do not attend college, attend college, obtain a job, or take a year off ("gap year"), and then go to college. In the case of Keyon, he believed that he would earn his high school diploma and go directly into the work field, but that was not the case. "And if it wasn't for Upward Bound, if it wasn't for my extended family, if it wasn't for my church family, I would not be able to get to where I am today," said Keyon.

Jason

Jason was a 22-year-old, African American, male student who recently received a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Africana Studies. At the time of this interview, Jason was an administrator of a nonprofit religious organization. Jason aspired to attend college to become like the mentors in his life so that he could be a resource to someone else.

Jason went to a low-performing high school located in what was formerly known as an *Abbott district* in New Jersey. Abbott districts are public school districts in New Jersey covered by the Supreme Court ruling in *Abbott v. Burke*. This ruling, based on the finding that public education provided to children in such designated urban areas was inadequate and unconstitutional, mandated that these students receive a thorough and efficient education (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2015; Education Law Center, 2015). Despite Jason's lack of preparedness in early education, he became involved in sports, such as tennis, during high school and had the support of his biological family, friends, community, and those like family, such as coaches, church pastor/members, and teammates.

“Boys to Men” is a program held at Jason’s church that caters to young men of the community. The program helps boys understand self-identity and the importance of self-esteem and education. It includes lessons on etiquette, dating, and relationships. It was the one program that mentioned college as being possible, and it was here that Jason saw a future for himself. His pastor and *first lady*, of the church (the pastor’s wife), were huge advocates of receiving an education to improve one’s quality of life. These individuals were very involved in Jason’s knowing about college options and understanding his own life. Whatever Jason wanted to pursue, he was motivated to make it happen.

In high school, Jason’s guidance counselor made it a point to guide him toward high school graduation, including being on track for the SATs. It was this guidance counselor who referred him to the Upward Bound program, a precollege program for high school students. The Upward Bound program was the “pinnacle” as Jason mentioned in his interview. This program made college seem attainable, providing the necessary tools and resources (i.e., summer institute, college courses, Saturday sessions) to successfully graduate from high school and gain entry into college, which is exactly what occurred. Jason received a bachelor’s degree and is now an administrator at a nonprofit religious organization that works with inner-city, low-income children.

Sabrina

Sabrina was a 24-year-old, African American female and full-time employee working as a social services manager at the time of the interview. As a first-generation, low-income individual raised in an urban neighborhood, Sabrina explained that the limited resources and access to “anything” helped her aspire to college. Sabrina did not have the mentorship and

support to cultivate her choices and direction at an early age. She was not the best high school student, as she displayed poor behavior, a rebellious attitude, and poor academics.

Sabrina grew up in a single-parent household without any connection to her biological father. Her family was not close, and she did not allow anyone to get close enough to her to become her friend. Sabrina's family of origin was comprised of her mother, grandmother, and younger brother. It was not until she was introduced to the Upward Bound program (again, a college preparatory program) that things began to improve. Her family situation and outlook about college was so grim that even the Upward Bound program did not motivate her until her final year of high school, a change which she mainly attributes to a new staff member who served as her mentor and remains in her life to this day. It was this mentor who influenced her future prospects. In her senior year of high school, Sabrina's life took a new direction as she became adamant about attending college. She applied, obtained admission, graduated, and now is gainfully employed with the ability to support her and help her mother as well.

Jada

A successful director at one of the top U.S. institutions of higher education, Jada, a 27-year-old, African American woman, who has earned not only a bachelor's degree but also a master's degree in five years, had come a long way from being a low-income, first-generation student of a low-performing school district. Jada lived in a single parent household with her mother as primary support and she was also located within a close-knit community. On their block, her family knew the neighbors both to the left and right of them, and even those living across the street. Jada summarizes her upbringing by using the African proverb now part of the community celebration of Kwanzaa: "It takes a village to raise a child."

The woman who lived directly across the street from Jada's home was someone who watched out for children in the neighborhood and intervened as needed. The woman who lived next door (to the left) was a nurse who had attended college. Jada and other community kids would go to the nurse's home for assistance with science projects. A married couple lived on the other side (to the right) of Jada's home, and the wife, who worked at the school Jada attended, provided her with a ride to school when she was unable to get to school otherwise. As to Jada's house, it was the home where people within the community could come to have a good cooked meal, find a babysitter, or get help with homework.

As Jada became older, she was even more involved in activities within the community. Some of these activities related to church, whereas others related to college preparatory programs (i.e., Upward Bound) and high school activities. Growing up, because her mother worked at least two jobs, she wasn't able to take Jada to every activity in which she wished to participate. So, the community played a great role in helping Jada attend these events and care for her in the absence of her biological mother. It was her neighbors and friends of the family who provided rides for Jada when her mother was unable. Jada was continually supported not only by her family but also by her community as she reached adulthood. Perhaps without this close-knit community, she would not have made it to where she is today. Allison, Bishop, Keyon, Jason, Jada, and Sabrina are all low-income, first-generation, African American students who used a variety of fictive kin relationships in the community such as mentors, organizations, and extended nonbiological family members that provided the social and cultural capital necessary to motivate their aspiration to attend college. These fictive kin relationships served as a form of social and cultural capital and have helped the participants to be successful, as they are enrolled or have graduated college.

EMERGENT THEMES AND FINDINGS

Based on the six individual participant interviews, the researcher thoroughly reviewed audiotapes and transcriptions to code information, finding three distinct themes that emerged consistently among all the confidential interviews. Following the transcription of each interview, the researcher reviewed, highlighted, and compared the commonalities in statements and language that appeared from the participants' responses to the questions asked using microanalysis. The researcher paid close attention to particular words and phrases used in the interviews that pointed to the emergent themes. The data in qualitative research then becomes each individual's interpretation of what happened to them in a given situation or organization (Creswell, 2007). In the interviews, participants were able to express their individuality through their response to the questions without any interference.

The researcher in this study used a case-study design. The methodology employed in the findings allowed for exploration of real-life situations based on participants' interviews. Thus, from an in-depth analysis of the interviews, three themes were distinctively identified after detailed assessment and review of them, coding or terms, themes, and statements (Table 5):

Table 5.
Major Themes of Study

Theme	Definition
I. Fictive kin or “like family”	Individuals in the community, church, or precollege program who acted as a biological parent, sibling, or immediate family who facilitated a participant’s aspiration to attend college. These relationships were found in each participant’s own story in precollege programs, community organizations, church, and mentors in neighborhood.
II. Mentorship	Individuals in the precollege, community, or church who served as a role model that a participant looked up to, followed, used as a resource to make it through difficult problems, prepare for college, and/or rely on as a sounding board in the absence of biological family members who lacked the knowledge about college or the resources to help the participant aspire to college.
III. Community	This theme includes community and subcategory of church/religious organizations, i.e., individuals, precollege programs, and church connections that served a variety of roles to build social and cultural capital for each participant. These community organizations provided financial, moral, and mentorship support as well as resources (financial, cultural and social capital) to aid in the aspiration for a participant to attend college.

Similar to human capital and physical capital, social and cultural capital are resources that may be invested to enhance profitability (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), productivity (Coleman, 1988), and facilitate upward mobility (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Low-income communities of color can use networks, experiences, and fictive kin relationships as an alternative to improve social and cultural capital of youth in the absence of financial resources. Table 6 includes the following significant definitions of capital:

Table 6.
Forms of Capital as Defined by Study

Forms of capital	Definition
Cultural capital	Cultural capital refers to nonfinancial assets that promote mobility beyond financial means. Examples include education, cultural excursions, taste, style, values, attitudes, college tours, college preparatory activities (e.g., museums and travel), learning instruments, application of community and Kwanzaa principles.
Social capital	Social capital is the value of “networks” (groups of interconnected people) and the reciprocity these networks provide for support and upward mobility. Examples include precollege and support programs that provide networks that help participants aspire to college, e.g., Upward Bound, TRIO programs, Educational Opportunity program, church, Boys to Men organizations, as well as networks and resources provided by mentors, church pastors, and community organizations.
Capital	Capital traditionally includes money, power, wealth, and assets, which participants of this study do not have given their low-income and first-generation background. The findings prove that fictive kin and community relationships (e.g., precollege programs, religious organizations) provide nontraditional forms of capital found largely in social and cultural capital filling this traditional capital gap. These forms of capital helped participants aspire to college in the absence of money, power, and wealth. Literature suggests that those who have access to traditional capital have an increased chance of getting into college and completing their studies.

The use of participants’ responses to the questions posed to them in the study interviews brings clarity to how fictive kin is used as cultural and social capital to facilitate college aspirations among African American, low-income, and first-generation students who attend one specific postsecondary educational institution.

Although there has been an increase by 43% of African Americans attending college, they continue to be *underrepresented* as undergraduates at 10% and recipients of baccalaureate degrees at 7% compared to their White counterparts (Perna, 2000). It was in the interview spaces that these individuals’ experiences, relationships, and perceptions were brought forward to address their motivation from extended family and community contributions (e.g., social and cultural capital) in the aspiration choice to attend college.

Theme I: Fictive Kin or Like Family

The fictive kin or “like family” theme emerged throughout the interviews given the relationships the participants shared about people in their lives, who served as quasi-biological family members (i.e., served roles resembling immediate biological family members such as mom, dad, brother, sister, grandmother, or grandfather). “You know, our families are very close. Therefore, we just consider each other family,” states Bishop. This statement by Bishop summarizes the like family theme throughout the interviews, which describes fictive kin relationships. Participants of the study describe a variety of individuals who were like family and facilitated their aspiration to attend college, providing support and mentorship, which is another emergent theme discussed subsequently.

Since slavery, African American families have used a variety of survival methods in the absence of money and power to obtain access to resources such as education (Anderson, 1988). Studies of low-income African Americans have consistently identified the importance of extended family relationships (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010). African American kin networks consist of several configurations that include unrelated friends or fictive kin who are treated like family (Jarrett et al., 2010). The concept of fictive kinship developed by Carol Stack in 1974 argues that these like family relationships are critical to the survival of African American, low-income youth. Stack goes on to explain that these relationships are “essential kin,” in which there is a mutual exchange of obligations toward one another within the community. Stack’s study is based on nonbiological relationships developed in the community during the 1930s and 1940s as African Americans moved to the flats in Chicago. Stack (1970, 1974) provides one of the only detailed studies on fictive kin in literature that noticed the cooperation of support through the

exchange of goods and services among the low-income Black community as they migrated north after the Great Depression. This informed her study of coping strategies for dealing with poverty.

First-generation college students continue to lag behind with regard to attending and completing a college education. Just consider that less than 10% of all degrees awarded in 2010 were African American compared to 65% of White students (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). College attendance and completion for African Americans remain less than their White counterparts. Additionally, low-income, first-generation students lack traditional forms of capital such as money and other economic or social resources to pay for college. In a country based on capitalism, wealth, and power, it is often difficult for low-income African Americans to build or gain financial means, because this is not available generationally (i.e., passing down) as it is for upper-class, non-African Americans in the United States who have never had to deal with the legacy of slavery and institutionalized segregation in education (Coates, 2014). Poverty in the African American community is the legacy of both ancient brutalities, past injustice, and present prejudices (Coates, 2014).

My study findings underscore a similar argument to that of Stack's, only with the focus on using relationships and organizations within the community rather than goods to deal with college aspiration for low-income, African American youth. Fictive kin relationships among extended family members and community organizations and mentors from those organizational members are critical to the participants' lives and aspirations to attend college in the absence of legacy resources from previous generations such as money, power, wealth, and ownership.

My findings show the participants' fictive kin or those they consider to be like family were critical to their development, support, and aspiration toward a college education.

Participants were asked to describe all relationships they consider to be like family who were not biologically related to them (fictive kin). Their stories provide examples of survival strategies for low-income African Americans who do not have the financial assets or biological family members to give support for a variety of reasons. The majority of the participants' biological parents were absent or single, and in nearly all cases by which the participants lived with their biological parents, the parents worked at least two jobs to provide basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Unemployment and underemployment are significantly connected to the likelihood of living in poverty (Wilson, 1996). Work is essential for low-income families, as their survival is often based on the money received from their paychecks to pay for basic necessities. Many of the participants noted their families lived "paycheck to paycheck." Their experience of underemployment and unemployment are a part of a much larger national debate, as African Americans make up the highest level of unemployment in the United States, being at 10.4% compared to Whites only at an estimated 4.2% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Due to the serious financial and adverse circumstantial burdens at home, the participants' parents struggled to maintain daily needs. College aspiration and attendance was more of a dream than a potential reality for participants.

This study highlights six low-income, African American youth who eventually aspired to college despite the historical family odds placed against them. The biological families helped their children connect to community organizations despite being absent from their children's lives due to work, structures of the family, or incarceration.

Bishop, a first-generation, low-income, African American male, who has completed at least one year of college, described four significant fictive kin relationships he considers to be like family, which are in addition to his biological family. The four relationships include his

pastor, church community, Uncle L, and Uncle T who were family friends in the church and influential in the Christian music industry. Bishop believed these relationships were the reasons why he aspired to attend college, completed a year of college, and became motivated to pursue a career in the music ministry. Bishop openly discussed the importance of the influence of his church pastor, followed by the broader church community, Uncle L, and Uncle T. Uncle T, as Bishop explained, helped him craft his gift of music and cultivate his aspiration to attend college.

Bishop stated:

“My community, my church, as far as my pastor. It just always encourages to go for greater and strive [*sic*] for excellence. We actually have a very close relationship. Umm, church is literally right around the corner from my house, and he gave me the first opportunity to play as a musician and be on salary and be on payroll. And that, and that was at a young age around 12 or 13 years old. And then as I started, umm, growing my passion for drumming, he gave me the church keys so I can, umm, practice at any time. [*sic*] So that just helped out a lot as far as crafting my gift.”

Bishop relied on his church pastor for advice as one would an older brother and father. His pastor motivated his passion for music, which Bishop hopes to be his career after college. He explained that this relationship of support included not only his pastor but also his entire church community. The extended family support system of African Americans is an ongoing pattern across U.S. neighborhoods, not to mention across the world and different religions (McAdoo, 2007). The presence of fictive kin who are close and operate like family in the church is very

common and is a reinforcement of this fictive kin relationship (McAdoo, 2007). Bishop has this same like family relationship with both his pastor and Uncle T. Church involvement often creates a shared function of helping to socialize and rear children and share resources (McAdoo, 2007).

Bishop did not have the privilege of having a middle- to upper-class biological mother and father who were able to finance his travel, provide him with money beyond basic needs, or pay for his instruments. Bishop's fictive kin relationships motivated his aspiration to attend college, helped him craft his talent, and provided him with the resources since he was age 12. As Bishop stated:

“So, you know, just that whole encouragement and that support system at church, umm, that helped my character grow. And then the last person is, umm, my Uncle L. Before it was like more of an, umm, like a worship group, conference-type thing, but, umm, he would have the conference every year and he would have different people from different industries like music, video, audio, and umm (pause)... to encourage you to go to college and graduate” [*sic*].

Motivation, while not a theme of this study, emerges as an attribute of the strength of these fictive kin relationships. Narratives of the participants revealed that these relationships provided encouragement and support, which is invaluable to a youth when the odds are not in his/her favor regarding socioeconomic status and family circumstances like Bishop's. Bishop's pastor, church fictive kin family, and his like family members (his uncles) provided that motivation, consistency, and resource to help Bishop stay focused during his adolescence and

teen years, a time that is very stressful due to body changes, on important values and/or outlook on life changes.

Effective strategies such as listening to each other's problems, giving advice, and expressing care, comfort, and concern are a part of the fictive kin network within the African American community (Jarrett et al., 2010). These strategies are often the work of the traditional and/or biological family model, but as Bishop mentioned, in his case it was the role of his pastor, church community, and those uncles who were not biologically related. Bishop had this support to rely on, which he explains was the most valuable in regard to his quest toward college. Because his mother worked, other responsibilities in his network of fictive kin relationships served that role in her absence. When his mother was not around, he could talk with or lean on the church, his pastor, and his uncles to listen, provide advice, and help him transition into young adulthood. Bishop also relied on his Uncle L to connect him to other resources, not only those financial but also those that helped him craft his aspiration of becoming a musician and applying for college at the same time. Bishop explained further:

“Yeah, so just, I’ll go back to my Uncle L. He has many connections and, and, and [*sic*] in gospel music and even outside the gospel music, in, in [*sic*] education. So if I ask him as far as, you know, I, I, I [*sic*] need an internship because they are starting to do internships or I need, umm, just help as far as, you know, doing this for my school, applying for this, or need help with this application, like I’ll ask him, and he will connect me.”

Bishop not only had the pastor and his church but also the man who was like an uncle as a result of the church community connecting him to other resources that initiated motivation

toward his future gift and ultimately his will to aspire to attend college. Uncle T, another individual Bishop mentioned who was like family as a result of the church, encouraged his passion for music. This like uncle, also a minister, attended college, so he was helpful in assisting Bishop prepare for college in a way the participant believed a father would do. Again, fictive kin substitution proved successful for what was missing in the absence of Bishop's father and family circumstance.

Another participant, Keyon, was a child of immigrants. He relied on the church pastor and his wife (first lady) as one would parents for support and preparation for college, because his biological parents were rarely around given their demanding work schedule. Keyon stated in his interview that his pastor gave him a sense of support spiritually, financially, and emotionally. Among the most important values of African American families is the concept of "affective strategies" that kin networks provide (Jarrett et al., 2010). Financial resources, loans, direct contributions, food items, the passing down of clothing ("hand-me-downs"), shared housing, and small favors (i.e., car rides, errands, child care assistance) constitute examples of resources applied within a fictive kin network (Jarrett et al., 2010). This concept is aligned with Stack (1970), who discussed the importance of the exchange of tangible goods such as food, clothing, and housing. Keyon's access to these "goods" was limited given his biological family's own limited financial means. His kin networks served as a resource to obtain support and ultimately helped Keyon become a college student. Keyon speaks directly to his kin relationship. Keyon stated:

"Umm, [*sic*] you know my pastor was the one every time my mom was at work. I would always be at [*sic*] my pastor house and he would, you know, [*sic*] feed me, you know, we all would drive all

over the place and stuff like that. And then I would always have my god brothers, god sisters... He was like another father. So it was like ever since I, I [*sic*] graduated high school. He bought me a trombone.”

Keyon later explained that his church friends, whom he refers to as his god sister and god brother, are nontraditional relationships, as these are not those that occur when your parents assign you godparents at birth but rather are relationships that were devised by the pastor as a result of being raised together in the church (like family or father figure) and that operate like a real family. Keyon explicated the relationship he has with his god brother D and his god sister MD:

“My sister, MD. Uh, D, he is my god brother. I look at him as a brother to me because we grew up from like diapers and stuff like that. Even though he is older, he is [*sic*] always been a big brother, umm. [*sic*]”

Keyon and Allison referred to substitute relationships, which literature describes as kin relationships that have been upgraded to primary roles, like mother, father, brother, or sister. Allison states:

“I have a nonfamily member grandmother that I consider, umm, like my mom’s best friend in high school, as a mom and she like is my grandmother. [*sic*]”

Keyon describes what some researchers of the literature reviews of my study depict as “pretend relatives” who play family-like roles (Allen et al., 2011). These relationships serve a purpose or meet a need, whether “affective” or “instrumental” (Allen et al., 2011, p. 1159),

which Stack (1974) explains is critical to how fictive kin relationships function through an exchange of goods and services, as the pastor, god brother, and god sister do for Keyon. It is important to re-enforce the purpose of kin relationships with regard to a god brother and god sister. It is their relationship that has them operate as if they are biological brother and biological sister, often providing support, encouragement, and aspirational support toward college.

These fictive kin relationships that Keyon describes fill a gap of absent resources, affective and effective strategies needed for a youth to be successful academically, socially, or emotionally. Keyon's community functioned as an extension of his biological family. The fictive kin networks provided a social, emotional, and stable support for Keyon while his biological parents worked to deal with the daily stressors of being an immigrant, earning low wages, and caring for other family and children.

The remaining participants continued down a similar path with slightly different variations, but their responses enhanced the importance of the fictive kin or like family theme by providing an expanded understanding of roles.

Jason discussed his church family as like family, but extends his kin network to his coach and precollege preparation program that he considers to be like family, which has been foundational to this study:

“Well, family doesn't always necessarily mean biological, of course, so I would say my church family is a huge, umm, huge part of my family, umm, my childhood friends that I met in other programs because there was the Upward Bound program that I consider to be family. [*sic*]”

Jason added:

“My pastor and first lady of my church, umm, they are huge advocates of going to school. I mean, they give out scholarships every year and I was the recipient of that scholarship, umm, before I went away to college. [sic]”

Jason’s responses adhered relatively close to the literature of what is described as *nonkin conversion*, which is the practice of turning friends, work colleagues, or others into kin. This phenomenon emerged in my pilot study (Whitney, 2010; Allen et al., 2011) as was found in my findings, based on my interview with Jason. The nonkin conversion relationship is the perceived closeness and social network, which elevated the coach, pastor, first lady, and friends Jason met in the precollege program known as the Upward Bound program. Justin felt very passionate about these programs, having participated all through high school. Many of these individuals became advisors whom he trusts like family:

“Like I said before, like you know, my coaches and my spiritual advisors, and, umm, church saints’ friends there, [sic] they definitely aren’t biologically related to me, but we are family in a sense. The mentor in Upward Bound also family. [sic]”

Unlike Bishop and Keyon whose fictive kin networks were intertwined within the church and extended family network, Jason had a variety of fictive kin networks that served a variety of purposes. Jason identified his like family members in different segments of his life.

Jason’s mom was a single parent who raised him and his sister. She worked multiple jobs to support both children. His relationships were assigned based on his involvement. Jason’s pastor and first lady served as advisors on his future, spirituality, and his transition into young

adulthood. His precollege program mentors and advisors helped him to prepare for college by providing him with tangible social capital and resources to encourage his college aspirations.

These combinations of reassignment of fictive kin relationships were essential to Jason's development, as he assigned someone to help him in each area and that combined ultimately to assist him to attend and aspire to college. Jason's relationships not only fueled his aspiration to attend college but also provided him with the social and cultural capital he needed to succeed in college in the absence of limited financial resources and complicated family circumstances.

Sabrina's mentor and later friend filled the role of an older brother (nonkin conversion) who motivated her to aspire to attend college. However, Sabrina's "like family roles" were limited, and so she heavily relied on the precollege program as a family rather than identifying anyone other than her mentor, later friend, as a source of family. Sabrina's absent father and mother, as well as challenging financial circumstances, reduced her motivation to do well in high school as well as to aspire to attend college. Even with the eventual enrollment in a precollege program, her desire or aspiration to attend college was absent, because so many years had passed without any family resources or encouragement to motivate her.

Sabrina believed growing up that she had no resources or encouragement until a person in a precollege program gave her the outlet she needed to be heard about her feelings. Effective strategies (Jarrett et al., 2010) were applied by the fictive kin relationship, which allowed Sabrina to be truly heard about her future desires and aspirations. Once this bond between Sabrina and the mentor was established, a like family role was assigned that included support, encouragement, and access to the necessary resources to prepare for college.

Allison, like Sabrina, also used fictive kin relationships that helped change her circumstances and eventual outcome of college graduation. Allison received no support at all from her biological family during her upbringing and solely relied on her great aunt, whom she is not sure is related to her, and her godmother, who by way of chance was a supportive neighbor. These kin relationships for Allison served like family and are an example of kin promotion, whereby a non-biological kin becomes a closer kin. (See diagram, p. 18.) The unfortunate circumstance is that Allison does not know her father, her mother has been out of her life due to drugs, and the grandmother goes in and out of her life.

Allison stated:

“As far as people that raised me and got me to where I am she is,
umm, I would say, like my aunts, definitely my godmother.

But if we are talking about extended family, I have a nonfamily
member grandmother that I consider, umm, like my mom’s best
friend in high school, as a mom and she like is my grandmother.

[sic]”

The godmother was “promoted” to grandmother status given the absence of the biological member and father of Allison’s immediate family. In this case, Allison was left to raise herself and had almost no resources. The findings in Allison’s interview revealed that Allison needed fictive kin relationships to help her survive daily, which is another attribute of these relationships. A similar circumstance occurred shortly after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2006, when strangers or neighbors were reassigned roles due to the absence of biological family because of natural disaster, death, or displacements (Reid & Reczek, 2011).

Fictive kin plays an important role in the lives of African Americans, especially those who are plagued by financial circumstances or the reality of the absence of legacy resources passed down from generation to generation. Literature describes fictive kinship in two ways: those that involve unrelated individuals such as friends and those that become unrelated individuals who become extended family and are called “aunties and uncles” (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994). This extends to like brother, cousin, etc. As Stack (1974), Jarrett et al. (2010), and Alexakos et al. (2011) show, this study asserts emotional and financial support such as taking care of each other’s children and meeting daily needs are part of this important network that fictive kin relationships provide and have been successful in doing. Fordham (1987) asserts that fictive kin relationships are a symbol of cultural and social identity, whereas my findings assert that these relationships are absolutely essential for the protection, daily survival, and college aspirations of low-income, African American youth.

Theme II: Mentorship

First-generation students tend to be less engaged than other students about the experiences and activities associated with college (Pike & Kuh, 2005b). They are also more likely to listen to peers and others who have attended college than their biological parents who have not. My findings in this study reveal that mentorship played a critical role for their aspiration to attend college. Participants had a variety of fictive kin in their lives that served like-family roles and also served the role of mentor. Having mentors who have had similar experiences as the participants and providing guidance and direction toward future goals is a vital source of social capital.

Alexakos et al. (2011) explored how fictive kinship among students of color mediated their resiliency. The study also demonstrated the success of role models for student support and

motivation. Community programs like TRIO Upward Bound and GEAR UP often have mentors as a part of the “going to college” culture, which the literature suggests works for students enrolled in these programs, as is evident for participants in this study. Emphasis on mentoring, college awareness, building self-esteem, and providing role models are often goals of TRIO and GEAR UP programs, which help one’s aspiration toward college (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Perna, 2000). Support and encouragement from a mentor or member of the community can play a critical role in aspiration or college enrollment for students from low-income families (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996).

Each of the participants explained how their mentors provided the social capital they needed to aspire to attend college. Bishop described his experience:

“Well, I know, uh, another one of the ministers, he went to the same university I want to go to. So, he, he [*sic*] would, umm, he would personally help me with applying and he would personally help me with scholarships and stuff like that.... He served a mentor role.”

The minister, who also was like a family member, mentored Bishop on the application, scholarship, and process to get into college. The minister attended the same institution Bishop wanted to attend and had insight into the admission process, not necessarily something his mother or biological family could do, because they never attended college. Bishop would be the first. Bishop continued to discuss the role of mentors who have helped him aspire to attend college. Another was an older peer who served as his resident mentor during his time in the TRIO precollege program. Bishop stated this mentor served as a source of encouragement and support toward college aspiration:

“And he, he always encouraged me, (chuckled) I remember. So he (the mentor) would always encourage me. I remember I was, umm, we had like I guess our one-on-one thing. And I was, umm, telling him how I got all A’s and then usually he would give me like a certain amount of study bucks. But like he gave me like so much more.”

Bishop spoke about the encouragement he received from his resident mentor during his time in the TRIO precollege program in regard to his academics and college pursuits. Bishop noted that one of the most valuable forms of encouragement was when his resident mentor rewarded him with “study bucks” for each grade of an “A” he received, which increased his motivation. The resident mentor was a senior-aged college student, a peer who not only became a big brother figure but also a motivational figure and built the participant’s self-esteem during this summer experience in the community. Bishop’s minister added the personal touch as the facilitator of information on the college process, having completed a degree himself. The resident mentor, a peer, served as a big brother who was essential to Bishop’s self-esteem:

“They influenced it. I would just say all of those [*sic*] built my character and my, kind of like molded and shaped my, my hunger and my, and my (pause) I’m trying to think of the word but...my *desire*, they kind of like built it up, shaped it, and crafted it up and made it all like one big desire to go and pursue my dreams.”

The statement is evidence of the power of mentoring and the influence it can have on college aspiration. Bishop’s statement reinforces how social capital was transferred from the minister and resident assistant’s experiences and cost no money to do, but meant the entire world

to Bishop as he aspired to college. Keyon found mentorship in the form of institutional members, in the TRIO Upward Bound precollege program, and in high school. In Keyon's case, he relied heavily on guidance and teaching personnel who served as mentors. They were not like family and only involved in Keyon's collegiate planning process, but Keyon was mentored by them on how to obtain college admission. Although social capital resources are available in school institutions, including teachers, guidance counselors, and principals, they must be sought out by families and students. In Keyon's case, institutional leaders, such as the guidance counselor, took a liking to him and served as a motivator to help him succeed. My findings showcase the importance of access to institutional leaders in urban, low-income neighborhoods, specifically in schools, who serve as valuable assets to students and families.

Keyon stated the following:

“My guidance counselor was my mentor. She uh got the uh info for college, stuff like that, sent it out to all the schools. As a guidance counselor, as a friend kinda. [*sic*] And she would always ... be my inspiration. Upward Bound literally like was the main thing that drove it all.”

Keyon, who is the first member of his family to attend college, a child of immigrants, and a low-income student, had little to depend on, but valued and cherished the mentorship received from Mrs. N and the TRIO Upward Bound precollege preparation program. While these programs and the school guidance office have a role in helping students prepare for college, Keyon found mentorship, friendship, encouragement, and a driving force to add to his social capital assets. As he has stated, both “drove it all,” admission to a college of his choice and the completion of one year of college. Early intervention, college access programs are student-

centered initiatives that have proven to serve as a strategy for ensuring success in high school and aspiration to attend college (Tierney & Hagadorn, 2002). Mrs. N and the Upward Bound program served as an early intervention to drive Keyon's aspiration to attend college. Rather than just being another entity, these served as a critical part of his success and future. Near the end of Keyon's interview, he explained the importance of these beneficial relationships and how he continues to remain in contact with his prior guidance counselor and the Upward Bound program, both a reminder of why he is in college and has future hopes of paying it forward to other immigrants and young Black men who come after him.

Sabrina was not at all motivated to attend college. She had an unstable upbringing, and Sabrina and her mother did not see eye to eye on most matters, including college. Sabrina discussed that she lacked support from her guidance counselors, family, and friends emotionally, spiritually, and academically. Sabrina indicated that partaking in a precollege program for four years was influential, and it was not until her last year that she connected with the precollege program director, motivating her toward preparing and attending college. Sabrina explained during her interview that the director also served as her mentor in the absence of a father and other male figures that may have served in this role. As an institutional figure, the director in the precollege program shared his social capital experiences with Sabrina. Sabrina's established relationship with the director allowed her to open up, become encouraged, and seek her path to eventual college admission. The mentor relationship developed over time and was essential in her life as she transitioned into young adulthood.

Sabrina stated:

“And we talked because he was like, you know, what do you like to do? What do you see yourself really enjoying, you know, after high

school? When it came to my senior year, he was the only one who was very instrumental in making sure that I got enrolled into a college, and not only got enrolled but went and stayed. Until this day [we] still have a mentor–mentee relationship that was very helpful.”

Sabrina’s account of her relationship with the precollege program director who served as her mentor then and now is critical to my findings. Despite the limited time of the relationship, for the first time in Sabrina’s 11 years of education there was a sense of motivation, increased self-esteem, and support. This mentorship relationship became something that Sabrina is not only proud of but also touts as the basis for her success in achieving a college degree, which she completed in a four-year time span with a major of her choosing. This may not have happened if she did not have the “mentor–mentee” relationship, which provided her with the necessary social capital to become a college graduate.

Unlike the other participants who spoke of precollege, church, or institutional figures, Allison had a mentor who was a local politician in her neighborhood. In an unlikely occurrence, the local politician took a liking to Allison and decided to transfer some of his social capital to help Allison. Allison grew up in a poor, dangerous, urban community and was not likely to find many role models. Given her family’s situation and living circumstance, research suggests that someone from such a background would not be likely to serve in this capacity. One theory suggests that more affluent communities produce better role models (Jarrett, 1997).

Allison’s experience reveals that even in the worst of communities and the most adverse of circumstances there is someone who can help struggling, low-income, African American youth. My findings reject the notion of dominant culture; that only rich or middle-class

neighborhoods have the best mentors, best students, and that in these neighborhoods every one is a good role model. Solid, tangible encouragement and guidance from a local elected member of her community as Allison experienced helped to change the course of her difficult circumstances and motivated her aspiration toward college.

The willingness for one to serve as a mentor to underprivileged youth can provide a foundation and help youth aspire to college regardless of social status or background. Allison's town is one of the worst in the state in which she resides, yet that local politician later became a source of support. Allison became a higher education administrator herself in an opportunity program and now "pays it back" and is thankful. The mentor not only taught her public speaking skills but also took her to college and served as a source of motivation for her to work with youth in similar circumstances like hers. Allison later discussed how she would associate herself with other mentors like the one who was responsible for giving her the necessary social and cultural capital tools to have the success she has now.

Allison stated:

"My mentor is like listen, just tell them we're moving, this is what we are going to do, and I didn't realize how important that was just to have that support system. "and that's who was [the mentor] teaching me how to, ho, ha, [*sic*] excuse me, how to public speak and how to, you know, learn that craft, but now that I'm in education and higher ed, I need other people that will bring me up here like he did. So, umm, [*sic*] yeah, I think that..."

Mentoring is a trusted relationship and a meaningful commitment (Metros & Yang, 2006). Mentoring relationships range from formal to informal, where a mentee learns from

observation, example, experience, and perspective (Metros & Yang, 2006). The participants in this study gained perspective through the experience the mentor provided and the inspiration to aspire to attend college, which has proven successful for their lives. Alma Powell, Chair of America's Promise Alliance, which is the largest network devoted to improving the lives of young people states:

“Without a vision for where you are headed, it is easy to lose your way. This is especially true today when many young people are faced with overwhelming challenges like poverty and poor schools. Helping more African American youth excel requires a community filled with dedicated adults who young people can engage with and learn from” (Powell & Mims, 2012, pp. 1-2).

The mentors of the participants in this study served as role models and as a social, emotional, and at times, financial resource to help with their aspirations to attend college despite adverse biological family circumstances. The mentors served the role of fictive kin relationships that provided the participants in the study social and cultural capital to aspire to college. The findings demonstrate the value mentors have and their ability to provide social and cultural capital to low-income, African American youth in the absence of money, power, and wealth.

Theme III: Community

Enrollment and graduation rates suggest that odds for attendance and completion are stacked against first-generation students with regard to college (Baum & Payea, 2004). Researches on effective schooling for low-income students cite the importance of support among teachers and school personnel who can be essential ingredients to improve aspirations (Noguera, 2008). Unfortunately, many low-income and first-generation students are not enrolled in schools

in which this is the case (Noguera, 2008). This has allowed for parents to turn to local churches and community organizations to provide this support (Noguera, 2008). While community resources continue to be limited, their impact on students has proven to be effective.

Community organizations such as churches and precollege programs can make up for instances when public education fails young, Black, low-income students. For too many low-income, first-generation students though, while college access has increased for this population, the opportunity to successfully earn a college degree, especially the bachelor's degree, has not increased (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These community organizations add capital and compensation for young people by providing role models and social support to serve as a buffer for young people from the adverse circumstances in their schools and local communities (Noguera, 2008).

In my initial pilot study (Whitney, 2010), community was identified as a major theme, and it emerges in this study in greater detail. It was shown how the community played a major role in providing assistance toward an individual's aspiration to attend college and served as a support system for students while they were in college. Support is used in this study to describe ways in which the participants received it from organizations or persons that provided stability, encouragement, or motivation in their aspiration toward college.

The community has been an historical part of the Black family since before the days of slavery. In fact, it was a part of African culture that Blacks worldwide have continued to use as a part of their present-day support structure. African tribes often used the involvement of elders (older community or religious leaders) as a tool for passing down knowledge and experiences in African communities (McAdoo, 2007). *Eldership* is a practice of unity that is one of the core communitarian values of the Kwaiaida philosophy, or the *Nguzo Saba*, and the core of Kwanzaa, which are beliefs that are practiced often in the African American community in the United

States (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). The Nguzo Saba was developed as an Afrocentric value system that has seven basic principles (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). *Unity*, being the first, is celebrated during Kwanzaa, which is a celebration of family, community, and culture (Karenga, 1998, p. 44). Although this study is not about Kwanzaa or its values, it is important to understand the role historically and presently that community programs and leaders play in the lives of youth, which is important to those who continually remain low income or lack traditional modes of capital such as money, power, and wealth. The valuable concepts used in Kwanzaa have historic significance and are used as guiding principles in the Black community.

This study revealed that their community has had a powerful impact on the lives of the participants. Although the term “community” is broad and large in scope, this study was able to narrow community into an aspirational motivator for college that served as a fictive kin that transferred into social capital, because without it these participants would not have aspired to college. The study found two important modes of community involvement: church and precollege programs. Also, the study supports existing literature on the power of precollege preparation programs and activities such as Upward Bound and GEAR UP that provide social and cultural capital to participants.

Keyon described two community organizations where he served as an ambassador (an authorized representative or messenger) to help others, and in exchange, the program helped Keyon stay out of trouble, motivating and preparing him to attend college. The program steered Keyon to be a role model for other youth who may have been going down the wrong path. Another program, a federally funded TRIO precollege program (i.e., Upward Bound) has been preparing students for college since 1968 (as part of the Higher Education Act of 1968) to assist

with problems of equity and preparation for college of low-income, first-generation youth (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). As Keyon commented:

“Oh ... Upward Bound was the main, main [*sic*] source that really like help me out, with the personal statements, umm, with, umm, [*sic*] networking with uh, just, just... [*sic*] Umm, let me see, let me see, let me see, let me see (nails tapping on table). Uh (long pause), I mean they kinda help. [*sic*] What they would do, they would put me in certain things that would like boost my, umm, admission into college everything.”

Keyon described how the Upward Bound precollege program, which is a federally funded national program at over 1,000 locations across the United States, drove his aspiration to attend college. He stated that not only did it drive “everything” but also it provided him with a form of capital like networking, which has proven to be beneficial to his college success and then aspiration. Students in Upward Bound are four times more likely to earn an undergraduate degree (Porowski, Gdula, Basta, Decker, & Fernandez, 2009, p. 2). Students with the lowest educational aspiration tend to benefit the most from these times of precollege encouragement programs (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). These programs provide the social capital and understanding of the college environment in advance of going to college. Here is Keyon’s response to what resources the precollege program provided that helped him to prepare for college:

“...they would keep us on top of which, with the whole FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] stuff with, umm, tracking down colleges.to be honest, I probably would have

been like the average high schooler, you know, get my high school diploma and just work. Work for the rest of my life and pursue my dreams that way, but it's not even that. And if it wasn't for Upward Bound, to get me where I am today, to be honest I would not be in this position. I would not be as talented as I am or gifted as I am. And I would not be the person I am today."

Keyon's participation in this program was essential to his success. The types of social and cultural capital he received in preparation for college, including assistance and encouragement, helped drive his college aspiration through his community program involvement. It was a resource that proved to be effective, impactful, and goal oriented as he planned; something that his biological family could not provide due to their lack of knowledge and social capital resources.

In this context, community serves as a fictive kin relationship to fill the void that first-generation and low-income, African American families may not be able to obtain given their economic circumstances. Community programs like Upward Bound and churches provide a significant resource to motivate youth like Keyon toward college. Generally, for affluent students, there is no resource void, due to their families' higher levels of socioeconomic status and financial capital. The social capital provided by these fictive kin relationships, which are also community organizations, result in a community effort to raise a child that again proves to be an intangible needed resource for this population. Although there were many factors in kin relationships that motivated Keyon's aspiration to attend college, the precollege community program Upward Bound served as a vital factor in his aspiration and success.

Jason shared details of how two local organizations helped him: one being a precollege program like Upward Bound and the second a “Boys to Men” community group. He recalled:

“Boys to Men, they did things like working with me to talk to me about the importance of self. The Upward Bound program I was able to figure out who I was, I was able to grow, and I was able to kind of find my own niche for what I wanted to do early [*sic*] than a lot of my counterparts. The Upward Bound program was pinnacle. [*sic*] It made it more real and made college an attainable goal.”

Jason discussed the importance of Boys to Men and the Upward Bound program, but noted his frustration about his school district and what would have happened if he had not participated in these preparation and community programs: “[T]hey [the high-school personnel] don’t really prepare the students to graduate high school or prepare them for college.” Again, it is important to showcase the encouragement, motivation, and preparation that the programs provided. It was a powerful fictive kin relationship between him and the community organization.

Jason initially lacked drive and passion, and his environment made him believe that attending college was nothing more than a false dream. The summer bridge program, a component of the Boys to Men and Upward Bound programs, had trips and activities that Jason believed added to his social capital and helped him aspire to college and later facilitated his attendance to and completion of college. This was equally powerful, and as a result of the capital provided, these community programs helped Jason’s aspiration to attend college.

The separation between rich and poor, Black and White, continues to be a problem for many young African American youth like Jason and the other participants. As per the participants' interviews, these needed community organizations, serving impoverished areas in their variety of fictive kin roles successfully help low-income, first-generation, African American youth achieve that dream.

Jada participated in the precollege program and currently serves as the director of the program. She reveals how motivated she was to attend college, but also years later, she exemplifies how her role can provide capital in the community to African American youth. Jada revealed how the community not only provided cultural and social capital by motivating college aspirations but also by providing unforgettable experiences that were useful and created the capital that she needed once in college, such as traveling to another state, visiting other university campuses, and more.

Jada stated:

“Honestly, the biggest resource (short pause), I’m going to say Upward Bound in particular because, umm, it’s just as a resource in general because you, you don’t realize what you’re doing or how impactful it is to your process until somebody else is going through it. But what I truly liked at 14, the summer program, everyone went on a college tour. So literally by the time I graduated high school I can say I’ve been to 15 different states, visited so many different colleges and university across the country and I have friends who can’t say that. You definitely got cultural experience from the program.”

Keyon, Jada, and Jason each spoke about community programs, primarily Upward Bound and others in their surrounding communities. The precollege programs and the church provided resources, mentorship, and guidance that positively influenced the participants and their families.

The African American family tends to be multigenerational and is comprised of all types of ongoing patterns in social classes, regions, and religions (McAdoo, 2007). Often, church relationships reinforce fictive kin relationships and serve as a pillar of the “Black Community” for a social support system (McAdoo, 2007). Participants in this study revealed what the church provided for them in their aspiration toward a higher education. The community became a fictive kin relationship that was made up of many unrelated relatives who provided invaluable social and cultural capital received from the involvement and support of the church in their lives. Their responses are included in detail here to convey to the reader the importance of this affiliation, not only for the participant but also for the family and the motivation toward college.

Keyon discussed his church’s support:

“My pastor and first lady of my church, umm, they are huge advocates of going to school. I mean they give out scholarships every year, and I was the recipient of that scholarship, umm, before I went away to college. [*sic*] Umm, even the youth pastors because they were very critical [*integral*] in making sure that I was to and from my college programs. [*sic*] They made sure I was in the know about what I wanted to do with my own particular life.”

The church plays an integral part in these participants’ experiences. For Allison, without the support and encouragement to prepare for college from her biological family, her “like family,” the church community made a life-changing impact:

“So church is like that’s the closest thing I have to a community preparing me for college. A collection pot at church; they believe in me. They, that, that day changed my life.”

Allison revealed the financial support the church provided for books and her years of college through church collections as well as the information to understand why college is important and the need for such support. Financial support remains one of the primary factors of capital needed by students to prepare for and stay in college (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). The church in Allison’s case was willing to make an additional sacrifice with community members to collect funding for items required for success in attending and remaining in college.

Jada provides her direct account of how church was a form of academic college preparation, which again is a second major deficiency for low-income youth when preparing for college (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002):

“So Sunday school; because of me, Sunday [church] school turned into college prep Sunday school. So in the morning, Sunday school is about 8 o’clock before the traditional service. We will have our traditional Sunday school, but at like 10 o’clock we would go into college lingo and college words.”

Students who are the first to attend college in their family usually calls for celebration in many cases, but these students also feel an overwhelming sense of pressure to succeed for their families. Family members who have not experienced college may provide encouragement but not support and do not understand the problems these students experience. Parents who have not attended college also may not understand that the time pressures of college may interfere with the performance of family obligations (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Phinney, Ong, & Madden,

2000). Certainly, this was the case for Jada's family members who did not understand the complexities and stresses of college. Getting into college is one thing, but being there is a completely other challenge. Jada explained about her pastoral support:

“....the church helped when times are stressful because college is hard and when you are one of the first people in your family to go away to college not everybody understand the way you like for them to. When you say classes are hard, they say ‘No, you will be fine.’ ...and you’re like ‘No, this class is really killing me, this writing paper.’ And with church has done, with my pastor was the secretary at our church. There was an assistant secretary who, umm, who, she knows when I was stressed about school and class. And she, I gave her a copy of my syllabi, her daughter was in one of my classes so every, umm, every time we had an exam we had a prayer circle the night before at...in our church to pray that we pass (chuckle).”

Aspirations and family support foreshadow student success (Perna & Titus, 2005). Planning for college as early as eighth grade increases the prospects for completing college (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). Teachers have the ability to negatively influence student aspirations based on what they believe of specific groups, specifically lower-income groups of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Low-income, African American students often rely on peers, extended families, or community networks for aspirational or motivational support given that their parents most likely did not attend or finish college. Precollege programs and community organizations such as the church and mentorship networks

help improve access for lower-income and first-generation students (Hossler et al., 1999). Such initiatives in almost every state across the nation have had some impact on improving access and completing college for these students.

Levine and Nidiffer (1996) concluded that support from a mentor, community member, family, or extended family member is critical for college enrollment from students from low-income families. Religiously sponsored programs and federally funded programs that are operated by institutions of higher education like Upward Bound have proven to be an effective bedrock for college aspiration attendance and completion as evident from the six participants in this study.

The church in the Black community often acts as a school, bank, benevolent society, party hall, and spiritual base as one of the few institutions owned and operated by African Americans (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). A series of coping strategies such as food, meals, housing, and serving in parental roles for youth are all examples of how extended fictive kin networks manage poverty and provide support in communities (Jarrett et al., 2010). The community organizations such as the church and precollege programs like Upward Bound served in the role of a fictive kin relationship that aided the six participants in a range of social and cultural capital deposits, such as access to college preparation, financial resources, mentorship, encouragement, and the development of their aspiration to attend college.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Social and cultural capital provides individuals with the ability to “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” in society (Carter, 2003, p. 138). For low-income, African American youth who are the first to attend college, they may not have access to either, based on a set of circumstances

that they or their biological families cannot control. Participants in this study discussed the challenges that they faced growing up with a lack of traditional resources such as money, power, and wealth. They also discussed at length the sacrifice their biological parents, often single parents, had to make in order to provide basic food, shelter, and support. The participants acknowledged in great detail, as evident in the study, the desire for a better life but at times were unable to see the end in sight.

The “like family” members described in this study as fictive kin served a surrogate role in the absence of their biological relatives to provide them with support, stability, and repeated encouragement to aspire to attend college. The fictive kin also prevailed as mentors at different junctures in their youth in school or in the community and built a supportive network in which a bright future seemed tangible. The communities largely in precollege and church programs were local community organizations that served as a happy medium between the financial burdens at home, the environmental devastation in the schools and the neighborhood, and their aspirations to attend college. The community programs, the mentors, and like family members were resources that provided a bank of social capital that allowed for financial support, moral assistance, and encouragement, and most of all their motivation to aspire to attend college, as the primary outcome of these findings (Table 7):

Table 7.*Fictive Kin Relationships That Drove Aspiration and Outcomes*

Participant pseudonym	Fictive kin relationships Form of social and cultural capital	Outcome at time of study
Allison	Godmother, local politician (mentor), church	College graduate with master's degree working with precollege program as a youth coordinator
Bishop	Uncles T, Uncle L, Pastor B, Upward Bound, church community, resident mentors	Completed second year of college and is in his music career and works as a mentor to other youth on a college campus
Keyon	Pastor, Upward Bound, peer mentors	Completed first year of college and is in music and working as a mentor on a college campus to other youth
Jason	Guidance counselor, church, Upward Bound, Boys to Men community organization	Recent graduate, now a director of a community youth program at a local church
Jada	Church community, Upward Bound	College graduate with a master's and teacher's certification now a director of the Upward Bound program she attended in the local community
Sabrina	Upward Bound director (mentor)	Recent college graduate with pursued degree she discussed with her mentor and is a clinical professional in local social service organization for youth

All participants in this study had enrolled in a college of their choice. In the case of Allison, Jason, Jada, and Sabrina, all completed college on time (within four years) and are working in sectors of society repaying the capital back to others, who were in similar circumstances to themselves. Bishop and Keyon continue to be enrolled in college and rely on the mentorship and continued support from their fictive kin community to stay in college. Jason observed, “My number one reason why I aspired to go to college, honestly, it’s because I wanted to become one of these people, that I wanted to become like the mentor who supported me.”

Allison, Bishop, Keyon, Jason, Jada, and Sabrina developed fictive kin relationships and community networks that provided social and cultural capital in the absence of traditional financial resources that ultimately aided in their aspiration to attend college. Each participant told

the story of how a fictive kin relationship found in an extended family network or the community provided their aspiration to attend college. The participants acknowledged that they love their biological families, understood their sacrifices, and accepted the adverse circumstances in their lives.

Due to the successful transfer of social and cultural capital from fictive kin relationships established by those who served as mentors, like family (Uncles and Aunties), and community organizations like Upward Bound, Boys to Men, and the church, these six participants were successful by the time they enrolled in college. The participants serve as examples that can reject deficit models of low-income, African American's college attendance and completion. The findings also provide evidence that there is an abundance of social and cultural capital in low-income, African American communities that can be used to help youth aspiring to attend college when traditional capital (money, power, wealth) does not exist.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine how fictive kin is used as cultural and social capital to facilitate college aspirations among African American, low-income, and first-generation students. The research question, “How do fictive kin relationships spur college aspiration among African American, low-income students who are the first generation of their family to attend a postsecondary institution?” followed by two sub questions: (1) What role do fictive kin relationships play in encouraging students to aspire to attend college?; and (2) Do institutions, such as community programs and religious organizations, facilitate fictive kin relationships and/or serve as a significant component of the fictive kin network that instills social and cultural capital to motivate college aspirations in African American, low-income youth?

The qualitative method used by the researcher was an exploratory case study to understand the individual experiences of those who identified in this group and completed at least one semester of college at one postsecondary institution. The conceptual framework applied was the network theory of social capital. Lin (1999) described the network theory of social capital as a three-step investment in social relations with expected returns: first, facilitating the *flow of information to the individual*; second, allowing for the *influence* of social ties to the agents responsible for making decisions; and third, the *social-tie resources* that serve as de facto credentials at pivotal points in an academic career. All of these occur in the participants’ relationships in this study with their “like family” members (fictive kin), community agencies, (church and precollege programs), or their mentors that eventually led to their aspiration to attend college.

The primary literature for the basis of this study is centered on Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory and Stack's (1974) concept of fictive kin to understand the use of community, mentors, and extended family networks in low-income, first-generation, African American communities. This study does not reject any existing theories on social capital, rather it adds to the concept by showcasing how community networks and resources can be used for this community in the absence of "traditional modes of capital" usually applied to middle- or upper-class families of college graduates like money, power, or wealth. The experiences of the participants contribute to a positive outcome and gain model of low-income, African American youth who aspire to attend college and complete it, as compared with much of the existing extant literature that speaks to this population in a deficit model.

The experiences of Allison, Bishop, Keyon, Jason, Jada, and Sabrina are evidence that fictive kin relationships mold aspirations toward college. The findings of the study revealed three important themes: *fictive kin or like family*, *mentorship*, and *community*. The themes emerged from a fictive kin relationship either by circumstance, adversity, or participation then converted into a form of social capital that was used through the participants' youth to aspire to attend college.

Social capital is a resource used to engage communities in working toward shared goals (Orr, 1999). As the community is engaged, the goal of improved educational outcomes increases the stock of social capital (Orr, 1999). Each participant described the value that the "like family" member, mentor, or community played emotionally, financially, and socially as they prepared for college. Many factors contributed to the aspirations toward college attendance for the participants, such as life lessons, access to varying networks, and navigation of the college planning process.

The participants, most of whom had completed their first year or have graduated, remained successful at the time of the study and continued to rely on the advice of their fictive kin relationships. Participants also noted the continued support and relationships they have with those who helped them aspire while in college or after they graduated. Participants answered the questions of how fictive kin relationships via extended families or community organizations, such as the precollege programs and religious organizations such as church, spur college aspirations among low-income and first-generation African Americans.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Engle and Tinto (2008) conducted a comprehensive study entitled “Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first generation students.” They found that low-income, first-generation students face a number of challenges that make it difficult for them to be successful in college. First-generation and low-income students are less likely to be engaged in academic and social experiences (social capital building) that foster social experiences and often lack academic preparation for college due to a less-than-rigorous high school curriculum (Engle & Tinto, 2008). There are an estimated 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). This population is four times more likely to leave college after the first year than those without these factors (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Public schools in the United States have been known to be racially and socioeconomically isolated with continued lack of resources for low-performing students. Typically in low-income, high-poverty neighborhoods, the schools are likely to have instructors who are less qualified than their wealthier peers. For example, according to the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U; 2015), by the fourth grade, 82% of low-income

students are not proficient in reading compared to 52% of their higher-income peers. By the eighth grade, 81% of low-income students are below grade-level proficiency in math, compared to 53% of higher income students. It is evident in lower student achievement on standardized assessments that there are higher student-to-counselor ratios as compared to wealthier, suburban schools (Haskins, Holzer, & Lerman, 2009; Lewis & Manno, 2011; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). These early educational disparities are compounded by further inequalities in high school (Witham, Malcom-Piqueux, Dowd, Bensimon, 2015). These systemic factors were present in all six of the participants' experiences during their K through 12 journey.

Although a small sample, the participants within the study are examples of beating adverse educational and circumstantial factors. This may not have been the case if not for the existence of fictive kin relationships, created as extension of the family or support from the community. This study was meant to reveal tools for practice and policy that are most important for the parents of these students who struggle due to limited or not known resources and who thus may feel that their child cannot have a chance at college. The researcher arrived at the following recommendations for practice and policy, which can be used for all, particularly parents and those assisting parents in local schools or community organizations. It will also be important for local and state governments to ensure facilitation of access to resources. As an indicator to demonstrate financial need, government "free and reduced lunch" programs at schools are used in admission criteria for community programs, such as Upward Bound and Talent Search, for which 40% of African American and Latino students are generally eligible (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). If policy makers target this population and apply these principles toward low-income, African American youth, they may have a greater will or aspiration to attend college, as have the participants in this study.

Precollege Preparation

Policy makers and community leaders should provide resource catalogs about the community programs that are aimed at preparing youth for college in their state, municipalities, or districts and make them easily available to low-income families the same way they send out information on sports programs or tax notifications. These programs attempt to engage the youth as early as possible. Furthermore, many of these are free programs that have proven successful as is evident in this study and existing research literature. For example, Federal TRIO programs such as Talent Search and Upward Bound are in communities throughout the United States in which most low-income families are eligible but unaware of their existence. According to recent data collected by the Department of Education, 79% of Talent Search participants were admitted to postsecondary institutions (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). Additionally, 77.3% of all students who participated in Upward Bound programs immediately went to college in the fall following their high school graduations. Resources, cataloging, and providing connections to the following services that these programs provide will improve awareness and access to parents, guardians, and educators who identify as lower-income populations. To improve social capital and increase college aspiration among low-income, first-generation students, the following listing is beneficial (e.g., if recreation centers, community programs, and religious organizations can provide such services with increased resources like funding and support):

- Increasing Head Start programs and preschool programs
- Visits to college or university (not easily accessible)
- Tutoring and college planning and advising
- Test preparation (SAT, ACT, and State Assessment Test)

- Cultural trips and excursions that build social and cultural capital (i.e., Broadway shows, historical landmarks, museums, attendance at venues to see famous speakers).
- Access to range of mentors and advisors to help motivate youth toward college and to do well in high school
- Career shadowing and exploration activities

Parents and guardians can connect to these programs and/or services where available, and policy makers can direct resources, catalogs of information, and funding toward increasing these services. Policy makers can choose to have these services long term or short term to meet the demanding needs of the working community in which many of these students' families are members. It is important that policy makers work with families and local school districts as well as leaders in the community to develop the infrastructure (e.g., transportation) to help them access the resources that they seek. The participants in the study who used all of the above resources as result of participation in community or precollege programs were successful because they had or found access to these resources.

Parental Involvement

Although the emphasis of this study was on fictive kin relationships by the extended family or in the community, the participants revealed the adversity or struggle of preparing for college given their circumstances at home. Whereas many parents and guardians of this population may feel they are not prepared to assist, their engagement can be essential to the success and aspiration of youth, especially when coupled with support from community programs and/or religious organizations.

Parents and guardians can increase assistance by attending programs at school about college and requesting additional meetings at the high school or a community organization. Parents and guardians can sit down with their youth and inquire about what is being learned and discussed about the challenges in the school that may be solvable (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Parents can continue ongoing communication and praise for academic achievements and pursuits (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002) and helping youth to be organized with studies and enforcing practices such as homework completion and teacher follow-up.

They can also add value, as did extended members and community, by encouraging postsecondary pursuits in spite of existing financial or environmental factors. Parents/guardians may consider that effective and affective strategies in the study by fictive kin members by like family members or community organizations provided support, encouragement, and parental support in the absence of a biological parent or guardian. A few examples that can drive aspirations and provide support are:

- Allow youth the opportunity to discuss feelings about school and social issues that may arise with friends.
- Follow up with teachers and school administrators about your children's school progress, grades, involvement, and/or challenges to show your involvement in their education.
- Voice consistent praise and celebration of achievements in class, sports, and extracurricular activities to show your support and encouragement.
- Exhibit enthusiasm and support for youth's interests and encourage ways to explore how to achieve such interest.

- Help your child understand that there will be different points in their life when they will apply the learned capital they have received from fictive kin, community programs, mentors, or values instilled at home (transferrable capital).

Although not an exhaustive list, these strategies can be used for all ages and require no traditional forms of capital such as money, power, or wealth. Parents of any income bracket or race can apply these methods to support and motivate their children, which will allow for immediate results in a child's long-term social and cultural capital as well as aspiration toward college. The fictive kin or like family members, community programs, or mentors of participants in this study all played a role in facilitating these behaviors. If parents and guardians can practice these techniques coupled with community support, aspirations toward college will improve as has been evident in this study. The study also highlights the use and application of encouragement and support, which is pivotal when preparing for and attending college.

Mentoring

Solid, tangible encouragement and guidance from someone who has experienced college like an older peer, a recent college graduate, or elder or leader in the community can be critical for a youth aspiring to attend college. There are a variety of programs such as American Promise established by Alma and Collin Powell (former Secretary of State) and the My Brother's Keeper initiative (2015) recently established by President Barack Obama that will engage community mentors and allow for healthy relationships to help young, low-income African Americans who may not have the access to social and cultural capital.

President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. Through this

initiative, the White House is joining with cities and towns, businesses, and foundations. President Obama's initiative takes important steps to connect young people to mentoring, support networks, and the skills they need to find a good job or go to college and work their way into the middle class (The White House, 2015). The program attempts to meet six milestones, which are consistent with findings in this study (My Brother's Keeper, 2015). These are policy recommendations that all policy makers should continue to embrace and implement and families should attempt to follow:

- "Getting a Healthy Start and Entering School Ready to Learn" allows children to enter school ready cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally.
- All children should be able to read at or above grade level by the third grade.
- All youth should be able to graduate from high school ready for a career.
- All youth should complete college or training after college.
- Every American should have the option to attend postsecondary education and receive the education and training needed for the quality jobs of today and tomorrow.
- All youth should be able to enter the work force.
- All youth and young adults should be safe from violent crime. Individuals who are confined should receive the education, training, and treatment they need for a second chance (My Brother's Keeper, 2015).

Mentors are able to sign up for the President's initiative that is occurring now and will be one of his principal objectives when he leaves office in January 2017 (The White House, 2015). Allison, Bishop, Keyon, Jason, Jada, and Sabrina had fictive kin relationships that served as mentors who provided many of the directives from President Obama's initiative through their

relationships. My Brother's Keeper is an attempt to create a national discussion and policy that can serve as a mechanism to encourage more mentors like the ones the participants had who ultimately helped them aspire to college.

The willingness for one to serve as a mentor to underprivileged youth can provide a foundation, which is something readily available in a religious or community organization that parents of low-income, African American students should embrace and allow. Within my study, all of the participants identified a mentor in whom they confided and helped them make the choice to pursue higher education (Scott, 2011).

DISCUSSION

First-generation students begin to struggle as early as eighth grade with regard to preparation for college, and then if they are successful, this persists while in college (Engle, 2007). There is a general lack of social and cultural capital that first-generation students have as they navigate college (Banks-Santilli, 2014). Bowen and Bok (1998) explain the basic dilemma for low-income and first-generation students as a variety of precollege limitations such as quality of high school preparation and environmental and biological family background circumstances. First-generation students are more likely to be a member of an ethnic minority such as African American (Banks-Santilli, 2014).

Continued barriers such as limited college knowledge, limited family support, and low expectations for self and from others, are demotivating factors that contribute to the issues for this population. In fact, each of the participants before establishing a fictive kin relationship that served as a mentor or linked them to a community organization like church or precollege programs shared these issues. Critical to the success of these participants was the network or

resources that the fictive kin relationships provided that helped alter some outcomes that led to college aspiration and later admission to college.

Effective strategies such as listening to one another's problems, giving advice, and expressing care, comfort, and concern are a part of the fictive kin network within the African American community (Jarrett et al., 2010). Each participant discussed this topic in his or her own way, yet tied it back to the fictive kin relationship, which was often in the form of support, motivation, or encouragement. Bishop not only had the pastor and his church but also the man who was like an uncle as a result of the church community, which connected him to other resources initiating motivation toward his future gift and ultimately his will to aspire to attend college. Keyon relied on his church pastor and wife (first lady) as parents for support and preparation for college, because his biological parents were rarely around given their demanding work schedules. Jason's pastor and first lady served as advisors on his future, spirituality, and his transition into young adulthood. His precollege program mentors and advisors helped him to prepare for college by providing him with tangible social capital and resources to encourage his college aspirations.

Sabrina's mentor and later friend filled the role of an older brother who motivated her to aspire to attend college. Sabrina's absent father and unsupportive mother, as well as challenging financial circumstances, reduced her motivation to do well in high school. This eventual relationship, in her opinion, "saved" her or altered what would have been a negative outcome had she not gone to college. Allison was left to raise herself with few to no resources. Her godmother and mentors were motivating factors that provided tangible resources such as shelter, food, and clothing, and the mentor facilitated her motivation to aspire to college. Allison revealed the church's financial support as well as the information to understand why college is

important and the importance of success in college. Jada provides her direct account of how church was a form of academic college preparation. Research suggests that a lack of college preparation is the second major deficiency for low-income youth when preparing for college (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Jada's aspiration came from her academic preparation from the church and precollege programs, which were necessary for her later success as a first-generation and low-income student. Table 8, adapted from the table "The privileges of cultural capital: A comparison of a first-generation college student's experiences with a non-first-generation peer" (Banks-Santilli, 2014, p. 25), describes some of the differences that need to be addressed and gaps that can be filled between these different perspectives of these participants.

Table 8.

Experiences: First-Generation College Student & Non-First-Generation College Student

First-Generation College Student	Non-First-Generation College Student
Attends substandard high school with no or few advanced placement courses	Attends high-quality high school with advanced placement courses
Unprepared for start of classes; has to wait for financial aid check to be disbursed to buy books and supplies	Purchases books and supplies prior to start of first class from preset bank account (debit card) designated for expenses
Struggles academically in college course work and is referred to academic advising and support services; drops out of one course	Decides to overload by taking one additional course beyond what is required to complete college degree in less time; parents arrange for tutor to increase grades in math
Relies extensively on financial aid, high-interest bearing loans that parent must take out, and minimum wage earnings from summer to pay for college	Relies on college fund to pay for all or some of the cost of college; subsidizes costs with earned merit scholarship and grandparents' support
Does not consider participating in semester abroad or international service learning programs due to limited finances	Studies abroad and/or participates in international service learning programs; family plans vacation to semester abroad site to visit student
Graduates but is unsure about how to enter workforce in field of study; doesn't interview well or dress appropriately for professional interviews; struggles to find work	Graduates a semester early and relies on family's professional contacts and prior internship experiences to obtain employment in related field; buys professional suit for interview and practices with parents

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was conducted at a large research public institution. This research protocol could be expanded to others at private institutions or those in high school to understand the impact of fictive kin relationships. The study could also be conducted to other underrepresented groups who make up a large population of low-income students such as Latinos or Native Americans.

Future research would expand this study to look at the impact of fictive kin or “like family” members and community organizations on high school graduation, college retention, and college graduation as a tool to engage the community surrounding public schools and institutions of higher education. This may help institutions have another valuable resource to help retain and graduate more students of color who are first-generation and low-income students. Evaluation of other specific community organizations rather than church or precollege programs would be another consideration for future research using this protocol. Any available support would prove to be useful to institutional leaders and biological parents of this population given the current landscape of limited financial aid and struggling preparation in K through 12 public schools who serve this population.

CONCLUSION

Despite much of what national statistics present and the deficit model that often plagues low-income African Americans hoping to attend college, many are successful. The Council for Opportunity and Education (2016) reports that while nearly 67% of high-income, highly qualified students enroll in four-year colleges, only 47% of low-income, highly qualified students enroll. While I agree that this number is not where it should be, as the United States of America, we should evaluate why the 47% enroll in college and use these gains to increase statistics that improve access for low-income students. I would argue as evident in this study that the social and cultural capital received from fictive kin relationships in the community by extended families or “like families,” mentors, and precollege programs are powerful in improving aspiration. I recognize that there is no one solution and those financial resources continue to remain an important factor for access and preparation for college. This concept revealed in this study can be used as a resource to tackle the problem of college preparation, attendance, and completion of African American, low-income youth in the United States of America.

“Now, as a nation, we don’t promise equal outcomes, but we were founded on the idea everybody should have an equal opportunity to succeed. No matter who you are, what you look like, where you come from, you can make it. That’s an essential promise of America. Where you start should not determine where you end up” (The White House, 2015).

– Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States of America

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APPENDICES**Appendix A****Recruitment Email to Volunteers for Study**

Dear participant: My name is James H Whitney III, and I am a doctoral student in the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. I am looking for students who are African American and are first generation and low income. If you are interested, I would only need one hour of your time for an in-person confidential interview for my study.

The purpose of this study is to understand from the perspective of African American, low-income, and first-generation participants who have completed at least one semester of college how do fictive kin relationships spur college aspirations to attend a postsecondary institution.

This dissertation proposal examines how fictive kin is used as cultural and social capital to facilitate college aspirations. This examination will include family resources (such as the community) and existing fictive kin relationships that may help cultivate students' aspirations to attend college. The exploratory case study will allow participants to present their experiences with fictive kin relationships in their family or community that helped develop their aspirations toward college during their formative years. Sub questions that will be investigated in the study include:

- (1) What role do fictive kin relationships play in encouraging students to aspire to attend college?
- (2) Do institutions, such as community programs and religious organizations, facilitate fictive kin relationships and/or serve as a significant component of the fictive kin network that instills social and cultural capital to motivate college aspirations in African American, low-income youth?

If you are interested, please contact me at jhwiii@echo.rutgers.edu or 848-445-4006.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

I, _____ (**participant's name**), give my consent to participate in the research entitled **Fictive Kin as Capital: A Case Study on African American Youth Aspirations for College** by James H. Whitney III at 848-445-4006, or jhwiii@echo.rutgers.edu. James H. Whitney III is a doctoral student in the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if I do not participate. I can withdraw my consent at any time and have my participation data removed from the records.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. **The reason for the research** is to investigate how fictive kin relationships spur college aspirations among low-income African Americans who are the first generation of their family to attend college. The dissertation will investigate if fictive kin relationships are used as a type of cultural and social capital to facilitate college aspirations. By interviewing low income and first generation who have completed at least one semester of college, families will understand what they can do to motivate their children's aspirations to attend college regardless of economic resources.
2. **The research procedures are as follows:** Student or alumni volunteers will be invited to interview individually, and the meeting will take place in the conference room of Lucy Stone Hall on the Livingston Campus. Interviews will last no more than one hour. Interviews will be recorded. Participants will also be asked to answer a few brief optional demographic questions as part of the data question protocol.
3. **There are no known risks to participation in this research.** In the event that participants exhibit or express any psychological distress, the researcher will provide referrals to counselors or other appropriate adults.
4. **The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my consent unless required by law.** Confidential means that the research records will include some personal information, such as your name and discipline. All references to these names will be replaced with pseudonyms; only the primary investigator will have access to codes that link pseudonyms with real names. The researcher will keep this information confidential by limiting individuals' access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The researchers and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only pseudonyms and group results will be stated, to prevent you and your answers from being personally identifiable.

If you have any questions about the study procedures, or if you want a copy of the research report at the conclusion of the project, you may contact the principal investigator, James H. Whitney III, at

Rutgers University
Lucy Stone Hall; Room A323, Piscataway NJ, 08854, 3rd Floor, 848-445-4006 or
jhwiii@echo.rutgers.edu

Participant's initials: _____

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-9806
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

I consent to participation in this research:

Participant's name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Audio Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: “**Fictive Kin as Capital: A Case Study on African American Youth Aspirations for College,**” conducted by James H. Whitney III. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio record as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study. The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the researcher. The recording(s) will not include the subject’s name or any other identifier. The recording(s) will be stored on a password- protected computer accessible only to the researcher. Files will be linked with a code to subjects’ identities. The files will be destroyed upon publication of study results. Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above- referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

I consent to being recorded in this research:

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-9806
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D**Data Collection Questionnaire**

- 1) Please indicate your race and your educational status.
- 2) Describe all relationships that you consider to be family.
- 3) Are there any members you consider to be family who are not biologically related to you?
- 4) When did you first become interested in attending college?
- 5) Did anyone in your family or community encourage you to attend or aspire to want to go to college?
- 6) Did you participate in any precollege, community, or religious organizations/programs that helped you aspire to attend college?
- 7) Did anyone in your family or extended family place or connect you to getting involved in the precollege, community, or religious organization?
- 8) Tell me about a time when someone outside of your immediate family or an extended relative became involved in your education.
- 9) What resources did you receive that helped you aspire to attend college?
- 10) How would you say the extended family or community/religious networks influenced your aspiration to go to college?

Appendix E

Definitions in This Study

Abbott school districts	Abbott districts are 31 schools districts in New Jersey that are provided remedies to ensure that their students receive public education in accordance with the state constitution. They were created in 1985 as a result of the first ruling of <i>Abbott v. Burke</i> , a case filed by the Education Law Center. The ruling asserted that public primary and secondary education in poor communities throughout the state was unconstitutionally substandard.
Achievement gap	Any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as White students and minorities. (Glossary of Educational Reform)
Aunt	Elder female, nonrelated family member (this study)
Boys To Men	A religious community group for young men (From Findings, “Community Organization”)
College enrollment	The enrollment in college of students who graduate from high school. (U.S. Department of Education)
College prep	Preparation for college before college entry
Community	The people living in a certain place (as a village or city); a natural group living together and depending on one another for various necessities of life (as food or shelter) (From Merriam Webster)
Community capital	The natural, human, social, and financial capital from which a community receives benefits and on which the community relies for continued existence.
Cultural capital	A collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, material belongings, credentials, mannerisms, etc., that one acquires through being part of a particular social class.
Educators	All education professional and paraprofessionals working in participating schools, including principals or other heads of a school, teachers, other professional instructional staff, pupil support services staff, other administrators, and paraprofessionals. (U.S. Department of Education)
Educational Opportunity Fund Program	Generally, a state-administered program that provides academic and financial assistance to low-income and first-generation college students. For example, New Jersey has a program established in 1968 entitled EOF that provides this support to its residents.
Extended family	A family that includes not only parents and children but also other relatives (such as grandparents, aunts,

	or uncles) (From Merriam Webster)
Federally funded	Funds provided by the U.S. government
Fictive kin	Is the relationship by which extended family and community relationships can grant an individual social capital beyond those defined by socioeconomic status.
First Lady	Refers to a church pastor's wife; term used in predominantly Black church (TheBlackChurch.org)
Gear Up	Discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education)
God brother	A male who acts as a biological brother
God mother	A woman who acts in the absence or in support of the biological mother to the child
God father	A male who acts in the absence of support of the biological father to a child
God sister	A woman who acts as a biological sister
High school	A school that typically comprises grades 9-12, attended after primary school or middle school
Imani	To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle. (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Kawaida philosophy	An ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Kin exchange	Biolegal ties are "exchanged" in the kin hierarchy (Allen et al., 2011)
Kin loss	Potential for relationship or reinterpretation is lost (Allen et al., 2011)
Kin promotion	Nonbiolegal kin are "promoted" to a closer kinship (Allen et al., 2011)
Kin reinterpretation typology	Comprised of the following: kin exchange, kin retention, kin loss, nonkin conversion, and kin promotion. (Allen et al., 2011)
Kin retention	Close kin ties are "retained" despite divorce (Allen et al., 2011)
Kujichagulia	To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Kuumba	To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Kwanzaa	A week-long celebration that honors the values of ancient African cultures (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)

Low-performing school	Schools that are in the bottom 10% of performance in the state, or who have significant achievement gaps, based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on the assessments required (U.S. Department of Education)
Multigenerational	Of or relating to several generations
Nguzo Zabw	The Seven Principles; Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination); Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility); Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics); Nia (Purpose); Kuumba (Creativity); and Imani (Faith) (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Nia	To make a collective developing and building of the community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness. (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Nonkin conversion	Friends and others are “converted” to closer kin (Allen et al., 2011)
Nontraditional family	A nontraditional family is outside a traditional family, typically comprised of a mother, father, and their children, who all live in the same household.
Persistently lowest-achieving schools	<p>i. Any Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that (a) Is among the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state, whichever number of schools is greater; or (b) Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60% over a number of years; and</p> <p>ii. Any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that (a) Is among the lowest-achieving 5% of secondary schools or the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the state that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, whichever number of schools is greater; or (b) Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60% over a number of years.</p> <p>iii. To identify the lowest-achieving schools, a state must take into account both (i) The academic achievement of the “all students” group in a school in terms of proficiency on the state’s assessments under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA in reading/language arts and mathematics combined; and (ii) The school’s lack of progress on those assessments over a number of years in the “all students” group. (U.S. Department of Education)</p>
Precollege Encouragement Program	A college preparatory program that encourages student to apply for postsecondary education by providing academic services and resources

Precollege program	A college preparation program, before college entry
Resident mentor	A mentor that lives on campus (in-hall/dormitory) with students, and provides support, guidance, mentorship, and oversight
Social capital	A collective network of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively
Support	To promote the interests or cause of; assist, help
Support system	A network of people who provide an individual with practical or emotional support
TRIO	Is a set of federally-funded college opportunity programs that motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their pursuit of a college degree (From Council for Opportunity in Education)
Ujamaa	To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Ujima	To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Umoja	To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race. (From Dr. Maulana Karenga)
Uncle	Elder male, nonrelated family member for this purpose of this study (From Merriam Webster)
Upward Bound	A federal grant funded program that provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance (U.S. Department of Education)
Youth pastor	Serve as minister of the gospel with a focus on youth support and assistance. Works under lead or senior pastor of church.