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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

AFRICAN AMERICAN GAY MALE ENTREPRENEURS: A STUDY OF ENABLING AND
INHIBITING FACTORS IMPACTING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Floyd H. Hardin, III

July, 2016

Jack McManus, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Floyd H. Hardin, III

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

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DEDICATION

“You don’t change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, you must build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”—

Richard Buckminster-Fuller

Dannan T. Glasper, I dedicate this effort to you. You have been unwavering in your support of me; you have been an incredible example of what truth, authenticity and hard work can produce and you have contributed to my growth and development selflessly with passion and sincere commitment. So much of the man I am and wish to become is because of the woman and friend you are. Thank you for continually empowering me to create my own model of reality, inclusive of specific vision and ensuring that my life trajectory aligns with my goals and passions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Good, better best; never, ever rest, until your “good” is better and your better is BEST.” —

Grandpa’s words of wisdom (Floyd H. Hardin Sr.)

To the faculty at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology I thank you sincerely as you have forever cultivated and enhanced my perspective and approach as a leader and servant of community. My experience at Pepperdine has transformed my life and afforded me a personal freedom and courage I never thought possible. My time at Pepperdine has motivated me to embrace my potential and use my talents, skills and gifts to transform communities. For this, I thank the leadership at Pepperdine University and each faculty member for contributing their passion and investing in the students they teach. I would especially like to thank my committee members, Dr. Andrew Harvey and Dr. Adriel Hilton for their support and willingness to be part of my journey, and most especially, my chairperson, Dr. McManus, for sharing his expertise, captivating stories, time, and continually motivating me to turn my “good” into my “best!” Thank you Dr. McManus!

To my loving family, I thank you for your continued support. Thank you for believing in me and continually pushing me forward. And to my best friend Dannan, this degree is achieved because of you. Thank you for the woman you are, and never letting me settle for “good” but insisting I strive for “best.” It is true, behind every great man is an even greater woman; thank you for consistently inspiring me to be great!

VITA

EDUCATION

- Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership** **2016**
Graduate School of Education, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA
- Master of Arts in Educational Psychology** **2010**
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
- Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Cum Laude** **2006**
Division of Science and Mathematics, Department of Psychology,
Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Assistant Director of Admissions and Manger of Outreach and Inclusion,*** **2013 - Present**
Michigan State University

Under the direction of the Student Services Executive Team, manages and provides leadership to two separate functional areas the Office of Admissions and the Office of Outreach and Inclusion, within the College of Osteopathic Medicine at Michigan State University (MSUCOM). Develops and implements a strategic enrollment plan, facilitates the development of enrollment goals; identifies and implements effective recruiting strategies, prospective student communications, and outreach programs. Serves as the direct supervisor and manager over a comprehensive range of programs and services within the MSU COM for the following areas: admissions and enrollment management, outreach and recruitment, academic advising, student government and clubs, student activities, judicial affairs and student conduct, and career planning and placement, graduation.

- District Coordinator of Minority Male Initiatives/Student Success Programs,*** **2010 – 2013**
Maricopa Community Colleges

Reporting to the Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, worked as a crucial resource for the development of male underrepresented populations across the district (10 college campuses and 2 skill centers). Provided support and guidance to ensure academic and social success while promoting cultural pluralism and dialogue on matters related to minority male development for the campus communities. Additionally, provided program development, outreach and management over early college programs and the Nina Mason Pulliam Legacy Scholars Program, assisting students from disadvantaged backgrounds to obtain resources and financial support in order to successfully complete their college education.

- Community Coordinator, Center Neighborhood Housing,*** **2008 – 2010**
Arizona State University

Served under the Residential Life Director, assisted in the administration of a residence hall system, comprised of approximately 700+ students living in eight traditional and suite-style halls, campus apartments, and houses. Served as an administrator-on-call, responsible for ensuring University procedures are followed. Member of Crisis Management Team responsible for managing policies and procedures and emergency operations activities. Budget oversight for a hall complex of 470 first year students as well as a scholarship house for upper-class students.

Assistant Coordinator Educational Programs, **2007-2008**
Emory University

Assisted in the development and implementation of program initiatives, which included the preparation of briefing materials, reports, correspondence and other documents, performing research, developing and maintaining databases, and developing promotional materials. Communicated with national and potential international program contacts. Tracked program expenditures, and participated in the budget preparation process. Drafted, edited and processed grant proposals. Prepared and distributed reports. Coordinated logistical arrangements for meetings, conferences and travel.

Coordinator of Auxiliary Services and Special Events, **2006 – 2007**
Rio Salado College

Oversaw the planning, coordination, implementation, and logistics of a high-tech conference facility, including the scheduling of 3000+ meeting and special events annually. Designed and coordinated community relationships and special events for the college; developed relationships with external partners to promote community and corporate support for college programs; designed, prepared reports and made recommendations for current and prospective events and official functions that enhanced the mission of the college. Organized a range of special events including, but not limited to: Student Affairs and Institutional activities such as, commencement, convocation, dental student's induction pinning ceremonies, career fairs, student recognition events, employee brunches, statewide and national conferences, community meetings, wellness activities, and annual All Faculty and All Staff Meetings.

Career Services Specialist, Career Services and ReEntry Services, **2002-2003**
Mesa Community College

Reporting to the Director, Career Services and ReEntry, responsible for integrating career assessment and advisement with matriculation, employment, and training opportunities, and organizing the office for optimum service, student goal achievement and success. Assisted in the development, assessment, and implementation of annual goals and objectives for level and scope of services, promoting programs and services, and ensuring that assessment instruments were state-validated and/or valid in connecting students to careers and matriculation, as appropriate. Assured adherence to state and federal regulations concerning confidentiality, HIPAA, client report systems, client files, and other licensing requirements.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Faculty, Psychology, Rio Salado College, Tempe, AZ **2010 - Present**
PSY 101: Introduction to Psychology (online)
PSY 240: Developmental Psychology (online)

Adjunct Faculty, Social and Behavior Sciences, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Chandler, AZ **2010 - 2013**
PSY 101: Introduction to Psychology (lecture)
PSY 240: Developmental Psychology (lecture)

CONSULTING EXPERIENCE

Keck Medical Center, **2012**
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California

In collaboration with Keck Medical Center developed a strategic plan for diversity and inclusion and staff engagement programming and policies.

Robert's Grove Resort, Placencia, Belize **2013**

With a team developed a comprehensive marketing and public relations plan to help drive traffic to the website and created a social media presence for the resort

CLASP International, Dallas, TX **2013**

Worked with a team of consultants in partnership with the organization leadership to develop fundraising strategies to create a development office and augment the operational budget of the organization.

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Serving the Underserved **2014**

The Student National Medical Association, American Medical Education National Conference

Admissions Dean's and Director's Panel **2013**

Pre-Medical/Health Conference for Minority and Multicultural Students

Creating Enterprise Zones **2013**

National Association of Minority Medical Educators

Maricopa Minority Male Int.; Unlocking their futures, Keys to Success **2012**

College Board A Dream Deferred Conference: Future of African American Education

Minority Males: You are the Key to Unlocking Your Future **2011**

WRCBAA Education Conference College of Southern

Educating African American Students **2011**

3rd Annual International Conference on Education, Economy and Society

The Invisible Men; Minority Males and College Success **2011**

National Webinar, MCCCCD

Education in the Community; Success Is What You Make It! **2011**

Southminster Presbyterian Church

Global Awareness in the Campaign for Human Rights **2008**

The Jimmy Carter Center

Financial Aid and College Success Strategic Workshop **2006 -2008**

Mesa Community College

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), lifetime member

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated, member

Valley Christian Advisory Board, Phoenix, AZ, board member

ABSTRACT

Minority and Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) businesspersons are carving out for themselves leadership roles in the world of business as entrepreneurs and CEO's. As they are experiencing much success, and are sought after to help provide unique and necessary perspectives regarding best practices in the areas of inclusion, diversity and strategic planning; they are yet underrepresented in mainstream media and in the business community. This qualitative study explores the enabling and inhibiting factors that select African American Gay Male Entrepreneurs (AAGME) experience throughout their career and ascent into entrepreneurship. The qualitative research includes interviews from ten African American Gay Males, who live in the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area and have owned/operated their organizations for three or more years. The accounts obtained of the AAGME are the primary data reviewed and reported.

Qualitative research methods are used to analyze the data, and the findings are presented in narrative format. The findings are consistent with the literature review and examined elements of enabling and inhibiting factors experienced by other LGBT professionals. The findings suggest that African American gay men considering starting their own organizations may benefit from utilizing a collaborative leadership approach, inclusive decision-making practices, personal and professional flexibility, and expressing humility and authenticity. AAGME aspiring to begin their own enterprises may also benefit from mentorship from an established LGBT businessperson and/or living in, or establishing their company in a geography that is supportive of LGBT persons and conducive to holistic identity expression.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background and History

Business research indicates that over the past 40 years African American and minority-owned businesses have grown more rapidly than anticipated and have also branched into an array of industries and communities that serve diverse populations (Edmond, 2014). Through civil-rights legislation and business reform policies, economic opportunities in the form of corporate advancement and business ownership for minority and marginalized populations are not only emerging, but they are also thriving. Entrepreneurs from marginalized populations (e.g., African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos and women), and specifically members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) community are gaining recognition within the world of business. As LGBT businesspersons become lauded for their innovative endeavors, endorsed for their capacity building potential and sought after to provide diverse perspectives, so too should attention be placed upon the specific demographics that comprise this community (Snyder, 2006). There is little mention of the leadership, economic and entrepreneurial contributions of African American gay males in scholarly literature. Furthermore, the researcher was not able to find any significant research studies that document or account for the career progression, or the lived experiences that have enabled or inhibited African American gay males and their entrance into, and subsequent success in entrepreneurship.

As African American gay males emerge from the shadows of perceptions steeped in promiscuity and pathologies to the realities of promise and productivity it is this group of businessmen that inspire arenas such as community activism, fashion, health awareness, literature and politics (Spears, 2010). As these men advance into positions where they have the power to create positive change, there are no scholarly accounts where one can learn of the

factors that they identify as enabling or inhibiting their journeys to achieving success. Very few studies have examined the impact of African American gay male entrepreneurs (AAGME) and leaders. And it is unclear as to what factors positively influence or negatively affect the success of their business ventures or career trajectories. This dissertation will attempt to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors that either endorse or detract from those African American gay males who have founded and now operate their own enterprises.

This study will allow current AAGME an opportunity to provide a voice to their professional experiences. The utilization and application of research that accurately reports influences of success help to provide privilege to the voices of African American gay male professionals and combat potential deficit theories that may have limited them into specific life experiences (Spears, 2010). This research attempts to capture information that will document a unique narrative that has not been widely accounted for in the business world or in scholarly literature. An additional aim of this research is to concurrently offer insights into the professional contributions and career paths of AAGME. Also, the narratives generated from this research study may influence others and help eliminate barriers to success for future generations of “entrepreneurial hopefuls.”

This study will usher current African American gay male leaders to a reflective space that will help to provide insights in how to eliminate barriers to success and replace those barriers with unlimited opportunity and empowerment. This research in particular is an attempt to address the gap of understanding and investigation of the professional contributions of a minority population. This dissertation will attempt to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors to professional growth and development of AAGME.

Need for Research

The worlds of commerce and business are constantly evolving and economic growth is primarily driven by innovation and strategies that enhance efficiency and maximize productivity. Many innovations we use today and of the last 100 years that have improved processes and buttressed efficiency (e.g., electrification, the railroad, the automobile, the airplane, the computer, etc.) were all created by entrepreneurs (Dearie, 2014). It is the entrepreneurs and their launched ventures who serve as the principal foundation of the innovation that drives financial gains. Similarly, current economic research investigating employment and career trends demonstrate that start-up companies, virtual employment opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures account for much of the new job creation over the past three decades (Dearie, 2014).

Historically, entrepreneurship has been the impetus behind financial sustainability for America, and as various marginalized groups expand their professional roles to take advantage of this economic opportunity, there is a dearth of literature on, and reference to, African American gay male entrepreneurial experiences. Identifying the enabling and inhibiting leadership and personal factors of African American gay males may provide insights as how to influence the career aspirations and career progression of other African American gay males hoping to either explore business career prospects or begin organizations of their-own.

In contemporary society gay men are beginning to emerge as visible contributors to the world of business (Snyder, 2006). The present research will endeavor to address the aforementioned gap of information pertaining to the professional experiences of African American gay males and specifically seek to ascertain the understandings of how AAGME traverse through the world of business. This study seeks to explore that particular phenomenon by investigating the dynamics that influence the career trajectory of AAGME. Providing

insights, collected directly from members of this population, may help counter the negative perceptions and stereotypes placed upon this demographic. Increasing exposure to the narratives of African American gay male businessmen and entrepreneurs will not only depict a more comprehensive account of their cultural and professional experiences, but may also help fill-in the scholarly and literary gap of information that currently exists.

In 1986, a gay African American Author, Joseph Beam compiled a text inclusive of works from African American gay males; social advocates, academicians, and writers exploring the contributions of many African American LGBT pioneers. The text, *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, was groundbreaking, provocative and an innovative piece of work that gave voice to the accomplishments of African American Gay professionals (Spears, 2010). And while this account of experiences does exist, there is still little academic literature and research available in mainstream culture that discusses the contributions African American gay males as it relates to the shaping of American history and its economy.

Statement of the Problem

There are few studies with pertinent data available that discuss the career paths of African American gay professional men. Yet, African American gay males are leaders in industries most popular to the American consumer (i.e., fashion, cosmetics, entertainment, etc.; Spears, 2010). The researcher was unable to find research investigating the enabling and inhibiting factors that may help define how African American gay male leaders have achieved success. To date very little research has been found exploring how African American gay male leaders have navigated the business world. African American gay males are assuming leadership roles, yet the path of their ascent has not been documented, specifically related to enabling and inhibiting factors.

This paper will address this gap and identify the enabling and inhibiting factors experienced by AAGME.

Much of the research that is conducted on African American gay males is concentrated on health disparities and confines experiences to pathologies and sexual behaviors (Spears, 2010). Identities are a combination of expectations, stereotypes, perceptions and lived experiences. Scholar Dorothy Allison (1992) asserts that identities are shaped by interactions with racism, religious values, socio-economic status and the ideals one internalizes regarding the constructs of masculinity/femininity. Thus, this dissertation serves as an exploration of understanding the professional pathways of individuals connected to these merging constructs. Intersectionality, a framework coined by academician and activist Kimberle Crenshaw helps to set a structure of which to investigate the lived experiences of African American gay male entrepreneurs. The complexities of navigating through and producing professional success notwithstanding these intersecting paradigms has created an identity and an experience not yet researched.

Intersectionality embodies a history of social injustice and discrimination, yet highlights the empowerment and activism that is often produced as a result of enduring this unique experience of marginalization. Intersectional theorists note that the multifaceted processes of piloting across dynamics such as race, class, sexual orientation, culture and geographic location, shape one's every interaction, rationale, and outcome (Brown, 2011). Therefore, an aim of this research is that the narratives presented in this project will help to illuminate the success paths and strategies of an American population that is under-investigated.

Due to the scarcity of research available regarding the career progression of African American gay businessmen it is unclear as to what influences contribute to the success of

AAGME and their organizations. Research is needed to describe the dynamics that contribute to African American gay males' career decisions as entrepreneurs and the success factors identified by those who choose a career in business. Further attention therefore, should be focused on identifying specific factors of success and fostering the sustained success of African American gay male leaders in the business world.

Statement of the Purpose

Across centuries gay men have been quietly documented as leaders in various fields, but it has not been until now (within the last two decades) that preparation, social attitudes and opportunities have collided to provide a space where they can be recognized for their great successes as business leaders (Snyder, 2006). The purpose of this study is to conduct research that identifies and describes the factors that enable and inhibit the success of AAGME. Engaging in scholarly research describing the career path(s), professional and personal experiences and purposefully identifying the enabling and inhibiting factors experienced by AAGME adds to the scholarly body of data that expands the breadth of business research. This study will guide leaders in reflecting upon how their contributions may help lessen discrimination and create an environment conducive for all to pursue careers in business leadership. The hope is this study will provide a perspective intended to identify and address many of the assumed inhibitors to success such as racial, gender and age prejudices that can lead to professional discrimination, which in turn can affect the successes of African American gay male owned businesses.

Research Questions

This study asks the following major research question:

What are the enabling and inhibiting factors impacting the success and career progression of AAGME?

To shape the work of the study and unpack the overarching research question, this study poses the following research sub-questions:

1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males from becoming successful entrepreneurs?
4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males from becoming successful entrepreneurs?

AAGME are in a unique position of creating financial stability and providing access, and a narrative to their demographic that has yet to be scholarly explored. In seeking to describe the phenomenon, or essence of experience, it is hoped that this investigation will reveal opportunities for positive change as well as create additional avenues for further research (Creswell, 2014).

Significance of the Study

There is a need for the development of entrepreneur support programs, the identification of leadership competency deficiencies and training to build leadership skills for aspiring and emerging entrepreneurs; especially those in economically depressed regions and those businesspersons belonging to disenfranchised and minority groups (Hulsing, 2009). This study may have meaningful societal impact by providing a more comprehensive lens of which to view a

particular population of entrepreneur and contribute to a positive influence to the economic growth in LGBT and LGBT-Advocate communities. The dynamics that enable and inhibit the entrepreneurial success of African American gay males are under-investigated. The men who have created and sustained successful enterprises have done so through hard work, ingenuity and dedication to their craft. Greater emphasis on the creation of thriving enterprises should be made and a focus on cultivating a pipeline to empower and engage future generations of African American gay male businessmen should be highlighted. As marginalized populations seize their own power, create economic growth strategies and find ways to integrate those strategies and their yields into a common social structure, the “American Community” is made more powerful.

African American gay male leaders are in a unique position to influence the cultural, social and economic norms related to the ideals of success for mainstream America. There is little known about the success narratives of African American gay males, and few research accounts that document experiences illuminating the public about their career trends and business prowess. This study will help contribute to the accessibility of information focused on exploring the specific factors that encourage the sustained successes of enterprises owned by African American gay males. Furthermore, this investigation includes an intersection of social, cultural, systematic and economic discourses of a population not often profiled in academic business conversations.

Because the presence of successful African American gay male archetypes is limited, they are perceived in many cases to be a non-existent community. The results of this study may have several implications for economists, business researchers, community activists, cultural anthropologists and future entrepreneurs as the aim of this research is to offer an account from an underexplored community and their important professional contributions. In an attempt to

articulate the phenomenon of the African American gay male entrepreneur and their lived experiences in relation to those factors that have enabled or inhibited entrepreneurial success, it is hoped that this investigation will expand the discourse that effective leadership is transcendent of both race and/or sexual orientation, while concurrently unearthing opportunities for future research on this topic.

Operational Definitions

In an effort to maintain consistency throughout the research and for clarity, the following terms are defined.

African American/Black: Individuals of Negroid decent (“African American/Black,” n.d.).

Enablers: Effects of the career development process that enhance one’s career aspirations and expand the range of leadership opportunities available (Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996).

Entrepreneur: One who starts a business; one who organizes, manages and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise (“Entrepreneur,” n.d.).

Entrepreneurial Success/Success: In this study, entrepreneurial success is defined as an independent, business enterprise that has been operating for at least 3 years (Makhbul, 2011).

Gay: Homosexual; Sexually attracted to someone who is the same sex (“Gay,” n.d.).

Inhibitor: Effects of the career development process that hinder one’s career aspirations and restrict the range of leadership opportunities available (Swanson et al., 1996).

Intersectionality: A research framework that analyzes various forms of oppression such as: racism, homophobia, heterosexism, classism, etc., that are intertwined and rooted in

social constructions: gender stereotyping, race, sexual orientation, class, etc. The Intersectionality framework is a philosophy introduced into academia from Black feminist thought leader Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Leader: A singular person who influences a group of individuals (Northouse, 2013).

Leadership: A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2013).

Leadership Enablers: The constructs or conditions that improve the one's state and thus supports the potential of one's positive career progression (Swanson et al., 1996).

Leadership Inhibitors: The innate impediments women face in leadership in regards to disconnect between the gender role of women and the leadership role as well as the outside conditions that make career advancement challenging (Northouse, 2013; Swanson et al., 1996).

Marginalized: Someone or persons in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group ("Marginalized," n.d.).

Perception: An individual's interpretation and conclusion about how one experiences society, an event or an organization (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Personal Motivation: The personal perceived rewards and goals of the entrepreneurial venture can satisfy the needs of one's value system and outweigh the possible risk factors of failure. This is a subjective construct where the individual assess their probability of success with obtaining both intrinsic and extrinsic reward is greater than their probability of failing at the task of an entrepreneurial endeavor (Pihkala, Varamaki, & Vesalainen, 1999).

Transactional Leadership: A leadership style in which the leader promotes a contingent reward system (Northouse, 2013).

Transformational Leadership: A leadership style, which seeks to change and transform individuals and teams. The style focuses on emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals and assesses the way individuals are motivated and ensures that each member is being treated with respect as individuals. There are four components within the transformational leadership theory: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Northouse, 2013).

Key Assumptions

While developing the research topic and formulating the concepts related to the topic, the researcher identified several assumptions listed below:

- Because race and sexuality are dominant factors regarding the behaviors of the participants, there will be similarity in the participants' comments.
- A combination of race and sexuality will dominate the factors affecting the entrepreneurial success of the participants in this study.
- The questions asked during the interview sessions solicited the most important factors influencing the participants' success as an entrepreneur.
- The AAGME interviewed will respond truthfully to the interview questions asked.

As the interview tool will be administered confidentially, this should endorse honest responses from the participants. As sexual orientation and definitions of success can be/are personal and sensitive constructs, there may be anxiety in addressing some of the prompts in the interview questionnaire. To maximize the reliability and validity of the researcher-created survey and research questions, have been academically evaluated and are rooted in the existing

literature surrounding the topic in question. The questions asked are directed to personal as well as professional experiences and characteristics of the participants to create a comprehensive picture of enabling and inhibiting factors that have helped to influence the respondents' career decisions and current status as a successful entrepreneur.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study has constrained external validity as its focus is primarily on African American gay males within a restricted geographic area in the United States of America; Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta has been widely noted as a professional, social and cultural utopia for African Americans. According to the Brookings Institute report (2010) *The State of Metropolitan America*, the city of Atlanta has one of the highest Black populations in the United States. Additionally, it is noted that Atlanta has a thriving LGBT community. Atlanta has received premier recognition because of the large numbers of African American gay men who reportedly reside within its borders (Spears, 2010). These factors make Atlanta an ideal place to conduct research on the experiences of African American gay entrepreneurs. Thus the extent to which the findings will be applicable to other male leaders outside of this racial, sexual orientation and regional demographic is unknown.

The researcher identified the following limitations for the study:

- The population sample exclusively consists of AAGME in Atlanta, Georgia.
- The limited sample population of persons surveyed may not be representative of this particular demographics' experience as a whole.
- Though questions on the interview guide are worded clearly, all of the participants may not interpret the questions in the same manner.

- All the participants in this study may not share common interpretations of the definitions of the outlined for the key concepts such as; success, marginalized, personal motivation, leadership, etc.
- The respondents of the study may be somewhat inhibited to share their unabridged thoughts.
- The researcher will not make any attempt to validate the degree of honesty of the participant's responses.
- Possible misinterpretation of ex-post facto research data could result in erroneous conclusions.

The delimitations include:

- The participants may feel vulnerable because of the research sample size.
- The responses may be specific to the realities of current participants within the study and not applicable to future generations of AAGME.

The small sample size is the principal limitation of this study. The study is qualitative in nature. Thus perimeters are created as to the possibility of interviewing enough participants to make the results produced representative of all AAGME. Therefore, the research data will have to be presented in a manner that articulates the restricted applicability of the information.

Because of the limited scope of this study, the data should be regarded as an illustration of experiences rather than demonstrative for all AAGME. The results of the research also cannot be generalized to the greater United States of America as it is by design, a geographically bounded study. The setting of the research is essential to the integrity of the study.

Chapter Summary

The world famous athlete and feminist Florence Griffith Joyner (“Quotes: Florence Griffith Joyner,” n.d.) once stated that, “The ladder of success is never crowded at the top” (“Quotes” section para. 1), and as we explore the success of African American gay males this sentiment rings true. It becomes evident the ladder of success for this demographic is not readily situated to make neither an easy climb, nor a path outlined as to its location. The existing research conducted on African American gay males’ experiences has indicated that many feel they have been left out or excluded from wealth building opportunities such as; understanding the value of property ownership, exposure opportunities to running businesses and having chances to enhance/grow/perfect their professional acumen (Spears, 2010). It is argued this dearth of professional exposure and accessibility to business opportunities has hindered African American gay men from developing and sustaining capitalistic projects to build up themselves and their communities.

Given the available research and accounts of the African American gay male professional experience, the assumption is the climb to success for this population is not only steep, but also it is susceptible to micro and macro-aggressions that limit the altitude of its climber and many times forces them to remain grounded. While African American gay males have progressed within the business community as leaders and innovators for decades; they remain hidden in the representations of the field. In overcoming societal challenges, AAGME have experienced both enablers to their successes and inhibitors as they maneuver to secure their leadership positions. This study will seek to identify those factors that have influenced their leadership progression.

Chapter One serves as an exploration of events to offer a rationale as to why it becomes increasingly important to direct attention upon this specific demographic. This section of the

document helps to clarify the aims of the research by introducing the topic, stating the research problem and purpose, and outlines the research questions that will guide this study.

Additionally, this chapter describes key terms, operational definitions, assumptions and limitations of the study. The second chapter of this document examines associated dynamics of the problem through providing comprehensive research on the topic in the form of a literature review. Chapter Two covers the background and related literature regarding the history of entrepreneurship, the characteristics of entrepreneurs, the common values found among gay leaders, mainstream perceptions of African American gay males and the significance of Atlanta, Georgia as the setting for the research study. Discussed within the chapter are theoretical frameworks and applicable leadership theories that appropriately address this topic. The frameworks covered within chapter two help to provide context and the importance of the topic as it relates to the business community.

Also, Chapter Three develops the research design and methodology of the study. In addition to detailing the survey and interview processes; this chapter will describe the method of participant selection and research procedures. Chapter four will supply the results of the conducted interviews. Chapter Five will include discussion, implications for future research and conclusions rooted in the results of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As the acceptance of LGBT professionals in mainstream society and professional spheres has grown substantially, so too has the number of LGBT leaders and entrepreneurs within the field of business (Snyder, 2006). And while the general climate of tolerance and acceptance of LGBT business leaders and entrepreneurs seems to better, there is yet highlights and information specifically regarding the African American gay male professional (and/or entrepreneur) within the LGBT community of businesspeople. Their contributions to the field of business, their career progression and the factors that influence their successes are under-investigated (Spears, 2010).

This study aims to profile AAGME and to identify elements that have enabled and inhibited their pathway(s) within their chosen profession. Instead of contributing to the now exhaustive body of research and discourse referencing disparate disease rates, homelessness, sexual practices and high rates of promiscuity, this body of work looks to obtain insights from businessmen who have done well and maximized their professional experiences. As modeled after Dr. Shaun Harper's (2012) Anti-Deficit model of inquiry; emphasis in this study was placed on understanding how African American gay male professionals managed to gain admission into the world of business, overcome hurdles of race and sexuality that typically disadvantage their peers, and amass experiences that have rendered their enterprises sustainable (Harper, 2012). Therefore, while this study may in fact identify inhibitors to success; the intent of the research is to focus on and reframe the conversation centered on lack, and explore how participants gained various forms of capital that has enabled their success.

The goal of this study is to create a forum by which to expand the discussion regarding the professional experiences of a select group of professional men. Through accounting their

experiences, business leaders and varying professional and social communities may better understand and meet the needs of AAGME so as to receive benefit from their diverse perspectives, expertise and skill sets.

This chapter will review and synthesize research from relevant sources discussing the history and progression of American business and entrepreneurship, profile characteristics of prominent gay leaders throughout America, discuss societal perspectives of African American gay male leaders/entrepreneurs and provide context as to the importance of Atlanta, Georgia as the setting for research on this particular topic. In addition to exploring the leadership approaches of LGBT leaders in business and defining their needs, barriers and professional innovations; this chapter will also discuss the importance of mentorship and community in regards to how those constructs help to influence the building of successful enterprises for AAGME.

Furthermore, using relevant studies and literary sources this chapter will distinguish some of the universal responsibilities, demands and outline characteristics associated with successful entrepreneurs. The applicable literature maintains the construct of entrepreneurial success, is described as an enterprise that has been operational for at least three years (Makhbul, 2011). To understand the evolution of business practices and the importance of entrepreneurship, it is important to identify milestones starting with some of the earliest forms of entrepreneurship. This chapter will explore early instances of entrepreneurship as a field of study and follow the progression through to today's developments and describe how African American gay male business leaders and entrepreneurs fit within this structure. An outline of topics and Frameworks are illustrated using the following chart found on page 18.

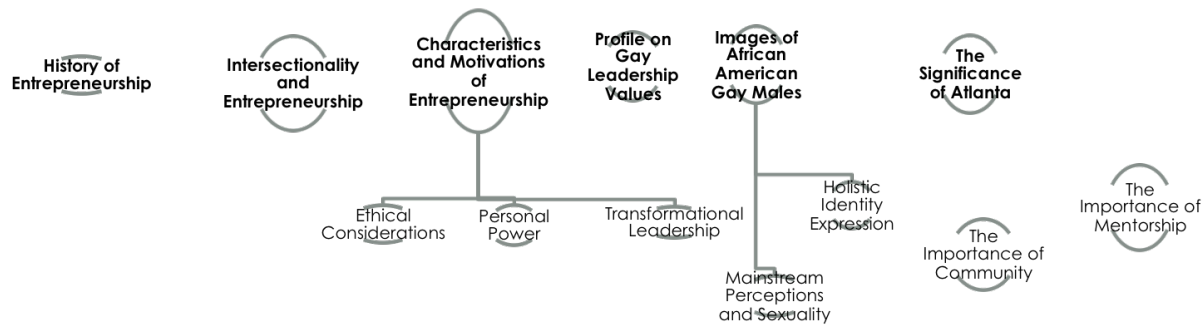


Figure 1. Topics and frameworks discussed in Chapter Two

History of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship as an independent academic field of study does not have a long history. However, the investigation of its dynamics has helped academicians and researchers gain insights as to how this type of business has shape the economic structure of the United States (Ireland, Reutzler, & Webb, 2005). And while there has been recorded observation of business trends spanning the last couple centuries, the official study of entrepreneurship was originally initiated during the 1940s and 1950s. Business historians made important contributions to the field through their research concerning free enterprise and its influence in molding the economies of countries, regions, industries and communities. The “history” of entrepreneurial studies and the actual practice of entrepreneurship are rooted in different motivations and theoretical concerns. Research asserts the trends of entrepreneurship are influenced by the economic, social, organizational, and institutional climates of a specific time period in a society. These dynamics simultaneously interact with individuals and help to shape the motivations of individuals that journey into entrepreneurial endeavors (Ireland et al., 2005).

Sociologists in Germany investigated the influences of religion and social relations toward capitalistic attitudes regarding economic gain and increased financial opportunity (Simmel 1950; Sombart 1982; Weber, 1930). Since the middle of the nineteenth century, historians have documented the evolution of economic structures and their progression (changes)

over time and how these changes shape capitalism and industrialism (Hodgson, 2001). In the early twentieth century historical sociologists became interested in exploring research that further looked at the agency of entrepreneurship. The research was centered on the investigation of personal characteristics such as; motivation factors, a possession and utilization of creativity and innovative strategies toward problem solving, an identification of an internal locus of control and the ability to adapt to economic change. To focus much of the information on entrepreneurship and understanding its effects on economic systems, researcher in the middle decades of the twentieth century examined the career progression of successful entrepreneurs and businessmen of the eighteenth-century, specifically those leaders during the Industrial Revolution. The examination of this business era simultaneously provides understanding of the practices, personal characteristics and leadership styles of prominent entrepreneurs; while helping researchers to understand a phenomenon that shifted and forever changed the American economic system (Ashton, 1939; McKendrick, 1959, 1964; Wilson, 1957).

Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter introduced the idea of the entrepreneur as an agent of both economic and historical change. Schumpeter is credited with bringing substance to, increasing the rigor of and making more formal the study of entrepreneurship by connecting it to a theory outlining economic change. Schumpeter suggested the essence of entrepreneurial activity is anchored in the construction of “new combinations.” These combinations (the manifestation of changes in markets, new technologies available for consumption, and industry changes) interrupt the relevance of existing products and markets available to consumers and offer a competitive addition or alternative (Schumpeter, 1947). This “creative destruction” creates new modes of capitalist economies by disrupting the equilibrium of older economic transactions and providing an innovative substitute (Schumpeter, 1942).

Over the last decade American entrepreneurship has risen to new heights and there has been a dramatic increase in the American populace venturing out to create opportunities for themselves. As America experienced the recession following the 2008 financial crisis many Americans opened their-own small businesses and companies out of necessity. However as the economy has begun to rebound data indicates most new entrepreneurs have begun their own business ventures as a means to pursue ideas and opportunities, rather than business endeavors stemming from a need to provide financially. In 2013 research discovered that seventy-eight percent of entrepreneurs created businesses to explore opportunities to address aspects of their experiences that were either not being addressed or in need of improvement (Kelley, 2012). Associate professor and business researcher Donna J. Kelley asserts, that because people are now seeing a positive environment conducive to entrepreneurship, many are just jumping in and taking advantage of opportunities. Approximately forty-three percent of Americans see opportunities for entrepreneurial success within their given areas of expertise (Wee, 2013).

The recent recession that began in 2008 was a societal vicissitude that threatened the economic stability of the United States. Stability that had been experienced for the greater part of two decades was jeopardized with high unemployment rates, bankrupt corporations and insurmountable national debt. For many Americans who were out of work and frustrated with employment prospects, necessity-driven entrepreneurship was the answer (Wee, 2013). After the banking industry disaster of the late 2000s, as America rebuilds its financial health, the intentionality of entrepreneurship has shifted from necessity-based to opportunity-based entrepreneurship (Wee, 2013). Individuals in the workforce are identifying opportunities to leverage their skill sets to better themselves and their communities, and as such people in greater numbers are taking risks and creating professional situations where they are working for

themselves (Wee, 2013). As the benefits of entrepreneurship have strengthened American financial systems and its implications for economic vitality in local fiduciary systems, communities and cultures, it is scholarly negligent to ignore the nuanced populations that exist within the realm of entrepreneurship. There are many non-mainstream businesspeople that have both abundantly benefited from and contributed to the economy through their leadership efforts via leading organizations and/or creating their-own entrepreneurship (Snyder, 2006).

Today, the scholarship of entrepreneurship is seldom considered a single comprehensive field of study; rather it is considered as part of many different subtopics. In recent decades, economists and business historians have identified the foundation of entrepreneurship as complemented by, and grounded in research indicating how culture and nationality affect the trends of free enterprise. Contemporary business researchers contend that to study entrepreneurship, is to examine the specific social structures and relationships that the entrepreneur encounters, is exposed to and interacts with regularly. Understanding the social structures encountered are necessary to understanding the business decisions of the entrepreneur as those are the dynamics that shape the entrepreneurial motivations of an individual, and thus shape entrepreneurial culture and business trends (Jones & Wadhvani, 2006).

Intersectionality and Entrepreneurship

Kirby (1993) offers that entrepreneurial success in various cultural experiences happen because of effective network creation. It is also asserted that powerful advantages arise from affiliation to a cultural and/or ethnic network, and that finding groups of persons that share personal characteristics do in fact buttress professional ambitions. The role of diaspora networks are important linkages in engendering trust between its members and creating information pipelines to augment and provide access to resources. Diasporic connections facilitate the flow

of useful information that has the potential of reducing barriers and are documented as helping to guarantee the enforcement of contracts among members and within communities (Dobbin, 1996; McCabe, Harlaftis, & Minoglou, 2005;). The creation and use of a particular cultural network provides the specific entrepreneur access to mutual systems of support, access to information, and social and financial capital (the value of one's social networks and interpersonal contacts and the preferential economic benefits one can use as leverage to help gain higher socio-economic status as a result of those social contacts).

As an example of this particular dynamic, Walker (1986) documented the intersectionality of race and class within United States populations and profiled how the influence of strained race relations and systematic, professional inequity bred necessity-based entrepreneurship. With racial discrimination and marginalization many African Americans during the Jim-Crow era (the time period in the United States when racial segregation was practiced) and post-Jim Crow (and in some cases even in modernity) formed their own enterprises to service their communities and create economic stabilities within their families and neighborhoods. Walker illustrates how slavery and institutionalized racism relentlessly limits(ed) economic opportunities for African Americans, but how many African American businessmen and women devise(d) certain types of entrepreneurial responses to combat their imposed inequities (Walker, 1986).

The aforementioned circumstance highlights the importance of the construct of intersectionality. Hancock (2007) describes the intersectionality paradigm as the junction of an existence where identity characteristics linked to intertwining systems of oppression (race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, etc.) are lived either by an individual or a particular group of persons. It is a lived context in which separate categories of disenfranchisement are mutually

experienced and cannot be disentangled (Walby, 2007). Intersectionality is a concept that is used to explain the social order as it currently is experienced by many; and while it is imperfect and variable, it does provide a framework to analyze the socio-cultural, political and psychological implications of contemporary identity formation for particular marginalized populations (Ferree, 2009).

The term originally introduced by scholar Kimberle Crenshaw emphasizes the multidimensionality of the lived experiences of those who are often identified as minority or disenfranchised. Emerging in the late 1980s theorists examining the concept of intersectionality have had particular interest in exploring the paths of gender and race; and the myriad ways these dimensions collide to shape the lived experiences of African American populations in particular (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is the idea that bias is comprised of, and often expressed based on the mutually supporting constructs of race, gender, class and sexuality (Nash, 2008).

Additionally, the concept of intersectionality is connected to the philosophy of "simultaneity." This idea appeared during the 1970s by members of the Combahee River Collective, in Boston, Massachusetts. This pro-feminist group expressed cognizance that their lives were overwhelmingly molded by the concurrent influences of race, class, gender, and sexuality (McCall, 2005). Thus, the discourse of intersectionality has been a backdoor conversation of scholars for decades now; there are some academicians that feel the tragic implications of compound oppression characteristics coupled with the unveiling of those systematic and privileged parties that perpetuate this construct has become too taboo to mention in mainstream academic communities (Crenshaw, 1991). Collins (1986) identifies these multidimensional crossings of social inequity as the Matrix of Domination. In essence, intersectionality is characterized by its analysis of society's attention on personal differences

rather than the similarities that exist between peoples; and a framework in which to discuss the converging vectors of oppression and privilege (Ritzer, 2007). The concept of intersectionality is a framework that provides a lens from which to dissect and respond to the socio-cultural/political consequences that occur as a result when multiple forms of exclusion collide (Mitchell & Means, 2014). Many individuals belonging to disenfranchised and marginalized populations experience multiple forms of exclusion simultaneously.

In recent scholarly investigations exploring identity formation the concept of intersectionality has become a catchphrase for researchers; however for those scholars who have identified, studied and lived race, gender, sexual orientation, sexuality and class disparities; intersectionality has been an omnipresent force (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality maintains the traditional understandings of oppression within society such as racism, sexism, religion and homophobia are forms of bigotry, which more often-than-not, do not act independently of one another; but interrelate to create a system of suppression that mirrors the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination. And so, when we explore the stories of businessmen occupying this specific juncture we must consider within that exploration how various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and any other axis of identity interact to inform and influence career decisions and trajectories.

Thus, in order to fully understand the success or deficit narratives of a marginalized or otherwise oppressed group of persons, one must investigate the ways in which racialized structures, social practices, and cultural representations are shaped by gender, class, and sexuality; and how those representations affect the values, outlook and self-efficacy of personifying the idea of becoming human capital (Meyer, 2012). Therefore, intersectionality is an important part of the conversation and cannot be eliminated from the analysis of looking at

the successes of any person belonging to (a) marginalized group(s). It is a relevant discussion point as it holds insights to that individual's security in their social and cultural standing, feelings of political agency, authority, and voice, and their personal expectations of employment success (Ferree, 2009).

In recent years, business researchers have used biographical data on successful businesspersons to aid in understanding how religion, nationality, and social group connections influence the professional achievements of entrepreneurs. In the United States, researchers and business historians dedicate much effort to examining patterns of entrepreneurship by specifically investigating access to resources based on such constructions as race, ethnicity, and gender (Kenzer, 1989; Olegario, 1999). The attitudes and belief systems of persons are formed through environmental observations and experiences. Attitudes and beliefs are elements that shape the entrepreneur's perception of potential achievement and are linked with entrepreneurial career development. The values and attitudes that entrepreneurs hold to be true for themselves are primary factors of their professional career trajectory.

It is a critical pillar of business research to uncover how people define themselves as entrepreneurs as well. Part of this self-definition comes from access to resources and possible exposure to platforms espousing opportunities that help to endorse their occupational successes (such as mentorship, coaching and professional development). Also a part of the self-definition process is to identify the relationships between the constructs of identity, attitudes and intentions and their impact on potential entrepreneurial success (Vesalainen & Pihkala, 1999). Albeit important, traits, values and attitudes do not comprehensively explain all facets of entrepreneurship. However, the values and attitudes entrepreneurs regard toward achievement and success influence the initial comparisons they make between taking advantage of capitalist

opportunities versus non-entrepreneurial or traditional occupation alternatives (Huuskonen, 1992).

Characteristics and Motivations of Entrepreneurship

Interactionism is an approach used to describe entrepreneurial behavior as a combination of personal characteristics and environmental conditions (Chell, 1985). Among the characteristics of ambiguity and creativity, the most widely used traits to describe successful entrepreneurs are the need for achievement (McClelland, 1961) and locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Individuals intending to launch a business differ from many people in the workforce with regard to their abilities to apply and control their skills of management and risk-taking. Bird (1988) stresses, the individual assuming the role of entrepreneur must be skillful in creating enterprise-driving visions and moving through business processes with intentionality when engaging in entrepreneurial pursuits.

Launching a company is no easy feat and is done so with intention and specific vision. Although there can be a leadership team in place, ultimately there is one person responsible for oversight of organizational sustainability and to guarantee forward movement toward the vision of the enterprise. As the Chief Executive Officer of a start-up company, the entrepreneur must create a balance of personal and professional accountability while concurrently encouraging the growth of and promoting relationships within a team. Though there are “assigned” roles for each person within the leadership team, it is important that the entrepreneur realize that he/she will often be called upon to serve more than one key function within the team. It is vital to the success of the establishment that the entrepreneur is willing to engage and execute both menial tasks associated with project implementation and provide overarching organizational direction. The creation of a successful enterprise is done so through shaping a culture of engagement and

continual learning. An organization with an interest in learning is one that creates the capability of growth and expansion and can cultivate immunity to external resistance factors. This augmentation occurs through reflection and evaluation of implemented projects and deeper commitments to fully engage in those projects that are pending (Senge, 2006).

Rath and Conchie (2008), assert that when you lead a team to focus on their strengths and execute tasks within that/those domain(s) there is an increased, 73% chance of employee engagement. When employees are authentically engaged with assigned tasks, ownership of the task(s) ensues. With this ownership, an internal need to drive tasks to completion in a successful manner is created and greater investment in the enterprise is produced. As the motivation for adults is internal, it is vital that the leader align organizational goals, objectives and duties with the personal skill sets, talents and interests of the collective organizational body (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Intentionally constructing an organizational blueprint that lends itself to operating in the staffs' strengths not only bolsters current employee acumen but also helps to strengthen increased competency levels. As Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005) outline, the leader of an organization must continually endorse team member autonomy, allow the leadership team to draw from—and weave into the organization their previous experiences. The organization leader should also create projects and learning situations where the processes of learning tasks and the outcomes of those tasks are relevant and applicable to each team member. Additionally, establishing a baseline expectation of all employees to express gratitude and respect to other team members regardless of circumstance is also a way to engender trust and partake of communicating a clear message of how the organizational culture is to be shaped (Schein, 1996).

Research on motivation and team building indicates that adults need to be engaged with the “why’s” and “how’s” of a task. Often, employees need to understand the “why” behind a vision and/or the purpose and expected outcomes of a task before they can focus on learning the skills needed to engage in the task and implement/use the information yielded from that particular assignment (Knowles et al., 2005). Being attentive to the needs, talents and skill sets of employees helps the leader/entrepreneur choose a complementary leadership team. Seeking to understand the motivations of the members of the immediate leadership team helps the leader/entrepreneur not only better assign tasks and roles, but also engender trust and inspire a shared vision within the team. Communication that aligns with employee skill sets and experiences is an effective tool to empower persons with the motivation needed to maximize their impact within the enterprise (Knowles et al., 2005).

An effective organizational leader focuses his/her efforts on continually pushing the leadership team (or themselves depending on the type of business) to achieve new heights and strives to reach and refine goals to experience sustained success. Introspection, reflection and emotional intelligence are all characteristics that help the entrepreneur in the quest for continual professional/organizational development. In addition to operating with emotional intelligence, studies show that an entrepreneur that has been successful is one whose leadership is supported with the constructs of intrinsic motivation, self-discipline and the ability to engage in appropriate social interactions (Goleman, 1998). Furthermore, an effective leader is not so firm that he/she is unyielding to processes and particular protocol, but they can adapt to growth and change. Effective leaders can use a variety of strategies to produce results that are both reflective of and benefit from changes that are currently taking place (Goleman, 2000). It is the mark of a good

leader to be consistent in ethical decision making, yet flexible enough to make relevant decisions to specific situations as they arise.

Ethical considerations. To practice ethical leadership is to be an active participant in the belief articulated by world-renowned civil rights leader and humanitarian, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963), in his powerful “I Have a Dream Speech” delivered during the March on Washington “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” (cited in King, 1992, p. 85). The truth is singular and free of versions; in fact, forms of the truth are the direct antithesis to truth. Therefore, ethical leaders live within the truth and make decisions as such no matter the surrounding circumstances. The trustworthiness of a leader promotes the efficient functioning of the organization, increases internal organizational engagement and inspires external followship (Robbins, 2011). The Director of the Heyman Center on Ethics, Public Policy and Professions at Duke University, Joel Fleishman professes that one of the greatest threats to the success of an organization is the betrayal of public trust, deflating the confidence of the public with regard to the organization and its operating procedures and leadership team. It becomes increasingly important that integrity is conveyed at every level within and throughout the organization. Robbins and Judge (2010) refer to integrity as; honesty truthfulness, and the impeccability of statements made aloud. Thiroux and Krasemann (2009) characterize trust as the foundation for work relationships. Robbins and Judge (2010) identify three characteristics that prompt people to believe an individual is trustworthy: integrity, benevolence, and ability (the process for which one can produce results in his/her given field of expertise). Trust is the primary attribute associated with effective leadership.

Establishing a culture of morality and decency will support the occurrence of ethical decision making as a commonplace act. Creating an organization where all people do the right thing and accountability is the expectation, breeds respect and loyalty. Operating within an organizational design that embodies ethical decision-making practices yields contagious positivity and is reflected amongst internal and external customers; the integrity perceived would be the integrity received.

It is important for entrepreneurs to weave into the fundamental designs of their operations the characteristics of unwavering accountability and transparent communication. Unwavering accountability is described as having the ability to “own” mistakes made and to then have a willingness to produce a solution to help correct the wrongs that are (have been) done. Transparent communication is achieved through honest and respectful articulation of issues and engaging in considerate inclusiveness when expressing topics of concern or messages that affect the masses. These are the ethical tenants with which the entrepreneur will have to govern their actions, not only so as to set the example for their own leadership team, but it also builds credibility for the external stakeholders with whom they interact (Robbins & Judge, 2010). If an entrepreneur is to build a company that is to grow, survive and thrive; employees and operational leaders within the organization must be persuaded to dismantle their individual agendas. The leadership team within the company needs to function as a cohesive unit to develop the organization and move it toward vitality. The vision for the enterprise should be a result of collective work and efforts executed in tandem. The intention of employee actions should uphold the identified mission of the organization as well as create a space that will maximize the benefit for all employees and customers (both internal and external).

Entrepreneurs at the helm of organizations construct collaborations and manage the outcomes of people's experiences. Therefore, team members must be inspired to act with the utmost of personal and professional integrity to ensure the success of the organization. Successful entrepreneurs' personal ethics indicate loyalty and integrity: they must be able to create within their organizational culture accountability with respect to completing project tasks within the timeframe determined and trust their peers to do the same as the leadership team moves through various projects in order to drive sustainability. A vital component of an enterprise's success is contingent upon the professional and personal work ethic of the leadership team. Ultimately, entrepreneurs who have built successful companies assume the role within the system as the safeguard, ensuring that the actions executed focus on the good of the whole and maintain fidelity to the identified mission (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2009).

Personal power. Successful entrepreneurs have taken inventory of their worlds and/or (if different than their own immediate worlds) the worlds of their businesses' target population(s). They have engaged in purposeful exploration of self and have gained insight as to how they operate within the world, and more specifically how they perform as a leader. Cooper (1982) describes the occurrence of entrepreneurship as understanding the varying degrees of deliberate planning, development of contacts and strategic resource allocation that happens with creating an enterprise.

Business history has shown that the idea of personal power is an invaluable resource to the entrepreneur. Northouse (2010) describes the concept of personal power as the authority one can exert through being perceived as knowledgeable, likeable and possessing the capacity to influence others' beliefs. As an entrepreneur it is important to use one's specific talents to build a brand consistent with the mission of the organization and to build a guiding coalition that

creates a vision for change. Thus, personal power in this instance includes enacting a leadership strategy centered on inspiring investment where the collective strives to manifest the vision offered, and an environment is created that endorses company success. While the entrepreneur is at the helm of initially establishing that vision; in order for the business to grow and become sustainable, the owners needed to pass that vision on to their employees (Nave, 2005). As entrepreneurs move into the CEO/President (organizational leader) role it is important for him/her to be mindful of personal power and to ensure they are exemplifying the traits they wish reflected of the staff and of the company (Kotter, 1996).

Research has connected traits such as enthusiasm, passion, the ability to motivate and create great partnerships and alliances as qualities of successful entrepreneurs. Ronstadt (1984) refers to traits such as these as the “right stuff,” and asserts that a motivated individual having these characteristics will find a path to entrepreneurship regardless of environmental conditions. These leaders often seek to transform their communities and generate institutions that will positively shape or lessen disparities within populations or circumstances they regularly encounter. Leaders of this nature are referred to as Transformational Leaders. Transformational leaders believe and practice their code of ethics and use their personal power to influence stakeholders in a socially constructive way to serve others (Robbins, 2010).

Transformational leadership. The concept of Transformational Leadership began with the work of Burns (1978) and included the notion that both leaders and followers work in tandem to increase motivation toward an idealistic goal. This idealistic goal is established by the enterprise leader and accepted by the general body (Nave, 2005). The identified goal is one of which the aim and aspirations of both the leader and followers are united into one vision. Transformational leaders invigorate and motivate followers as they treat employees as

individuals without confining the range of their basic needs and tempering their contributions. Consequently when leaders address the higher order needs of their employees, they create stakeholders of their employees, and in turn, these (now) “stakeholders” demonstrate more loyalty to the company (Nave, 2005). Transformational leadership is a process that inspires and changes people for the better; it is effective leadership because it delivers results by motivating stakeholders to achieve a common goal.

Transformational leaders help others to develop their strengths; teach and coach those with whom they work to achieve tasks based on their skills-sets and abilities (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leaders serve their followers; they empower their supporters, provide for them a sense of motivation, and address their needs in relation to goal actualization—all while concurrently compelling the collective to embrace and move toward a shared vision.

Transformational leadership is cataloged into four distinct categories (otherwise known as the Four I’s of Transformational Leadership). The categories of transformational leadership are:

- idealized Influence,
- inspiration,
- intellectual Stimulation, and
- individualized consideration.

Idealized Influence is achieved through charisma, confidence and charm. The leader is able to provide a vision and instill within the population a duty to embark on the mission of actualizing that vision—he/she instills pride within the population and engenders trust. Followers are inspired because the goals and expectations are communicated in a way that is relevant to them—they are connected to the organization and have investment in seeing the plan

come to fruition. Intellectual stimulation is the quadrant that promotes critical thinking and endorses notions of group unity. Lastly, individualized consideration is satisfied through the leader giving their time to coach, teach and work through situations on a personal basis.

As the entrepreneur assembles his/her leadership team he /she must be acutely aware of defining roles so as to identifying and cater to the strengths and personal potential of each specific employee. It is important to continually engage in individualized consideration when working with team members, so as to guide their interactions with organizational projects in a manner that guarantees assignments are being addressed from employee/team member strengths perspective and maximizing their efforts. Encouraging innovation and critical thinking from each team member helps to bring daily improvement to the organization and is an essential part the entrepreneur's role as the organization's principal leader (intellectual stimulation). To combat anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed, the leader must continually infuse a sense of team spirit toward the commitment of the overarching vision. The leader must calm storms of discord and redirect unproductive efforts to achieving the goals of increase growth for the enterprise inspirational motivation (Northouse, 2013).

The culture, success and perception of the organization all start with the entrepreneur leading the organization. Successful entrepreneurs understand that the values and attitudes, culture creation and organizational expectations must start to be constructed from the very beginning. The the most successful entrepreneurs must learn to embody Indian leader and civil rights philosopher Mahatma Gandhi's famous quote, (as cited in Albion, 2000) "be the change you wish to see in the world." This means the changes requested and communicated must be observable to others with regard to the leader's actions and ktransparent communication styles. This transparency from the company's inception can construct the foundation for members to

engender trust of other members within the organization and form a mutually productive culture from the onset. And, it is quite essential for the entrepreneur to be an exemplary role model for internal associates and external patrons alike. The entrepreneur serves as the example of how to initiate and implement change, by acting as a change agent within the organization. When the leadership team and members of the organization are able to embody those qualities and create external “buy-in” they too act as change agents throughout the community and promote enterprise culture beyond its immediate physicality (Northouse, 2013). The transformation starts with and is sustained by the entrepreneur/leader.

Profile on Gay Leadership Values

Entrepreneurship is the ability to create community around a need that has yet to be met and then build an organization around that need. “Good entrepreneurs see connection where others see disconnection” (Snyder, 2006 p. v). Successful entrepreneurs have the ability to create an enterprise through connecting their observations of deficits in the “world of work” and then use that gift of noticing discord as an opportunity to produce or offer something better. In his book the *G-Quotient*, Kirk Snyder (2006) identifies the characteristics and values gay leaders have embraced that enable them to become effective leaders. Snyder asserts that while corporate America is experiencing a decline in employee engagement and professional satisfaction, those employees under the management of gay leaders are the exception. According to his research Snyder found, those organizations with non-closeted gay leaders have an organizational culture with greater rates of inclusion, a commitment to professional excellence and a greater connection to, and engagement with the leadership structure and the organization itself.

Snyder credits the acceptance and visibility of today’s gay businessmen to the historic efforts of the Mattachine Society. The Mattachine Society is the earliest documented homophile

(gay rights) activist organization in The United States. Founded over fifty years ago, social pioneer Harry Hay began the covert organization as a gay support group. The membership of the Mattachine Society grew slowly from 1948 to 1952, but was augmented in 1952 due to the highly publicized legal case against co-founder of the Mattachine, Dale Jennings. Co-founder Jennings was arrested in a Los Angeles park and accused of “lewd acts.” Rather than discretely handling the case the group widely publicized the proceedings and received unrestrained support socially and financially among other gays and their allies (D’Emilio, 1983). As the group grew in popularity, Founder Harry Hay often professed gay men to be “spirit people” who with heightened senses and awareness strive to serve the greater good (Snyder, 2006). And today as a collective, Snyder alludes that it is gay men who represent the fundamental skills that successful executives use in contemporary business settings; adaptability, intuitive communication and creative problem solving (Snyder, 2006).

It is Snyder’s position that the success of gay male leaders centers around being in, and navigating through the world in a “different way.” He asserts there is a level of triumph and personal accomplishment about being an “out” gay male and leading change in a sphere that historically has been dominated by heterosexism. Most successful gay leaders have come to realize that authenticity breeds success. Research has discussed that the suppression of one’s sexual orientation in an attempt to conform professionally and/or socially to society’s constructed norms of heterosexism can lead to emotional stresses and diminished health both physically and with regard to career aspirations. It has been observed that closeted gay men do not have the same commitment to authenticity and truth that those men who are “out” display. It also seems that there is a direct correlation between authenticity and career success. Working and living in authenticity and truth has a positive effect on employee engagement, the ability to engender trust

amongst peers, company work culture and daily job satisfaction and efficiency (Snyder, 2006). One can argue that “out” gay leaders are succeeding in business at much higher rates than their closeted counterparts due to the fact that research has substantiated that gays employed in inclusive work spaces typically earn 50% higher salaries (Snyder, 2006).

As a result of their authenticity, ability to adapt, communication strategies and problem solving skills, Snyder (2006) identifies seven core principles that gay male leaders utilize to drive results and yield success. The seven principles are an emerging paradigm for successful leadership and management strategies of corporations and business leaders not only belonging to the LGBT experience, but across all professional spectrums. The Seven principles identified by Snyder that enables a gay leader to form and sustain a career in business include the following:

- Inclusion
- Creativity
- Adaptability
- Connectivity
- Communication
- Intuition
- Collaboration

The first principle of inclusion, speaks to the ability of the gay leader to inspire employees and team members to become engaged in their work and invested in the mission and goals of the organization. Employees in a culture of inclusion feel that they are being treated fairly and feel valued as an individual. The second principle of creativity is discussed as being inclusive of three content points: concepts, possibilities and people. In this model, creativity is thought to be the primary facet of moving an organization forward. Identifying new concepts,

exploring their possibilities and using people as the driving force of improvement is how these three focus points are linked together to produce innovation as an organizational product.

The third principle in this concept is adaptability. It is described as creating an organization with the ability to adequately and appropriately respond to economic, social and political change in such a way so that the organization will be able to remain competitive. Adaptability is about shaping an enterprise and its employees that has the capacity and willingness to perform in the face of ambiguity and/or readily take advantage of new opportunities. The fourth principle is connectivity. Connectivity is defined as engaging in the process of external networking and interacting with internal awareness. Connectivity is thought of as the mechanism that keeps both leaders and their employees in touch with organizational and industry movement. Principle five is communication, and it is effective communication that is the foundation of trust and authenticity. Free-flowing communication endorses cohesiveness and promotes candor. These elements contribute greatly to a workplace that encompasses professionalism and both internal and external credibility.

The final two principles are intuition and collaboration. Intuition is the ability to reflect on one's "gut instinct" and navigate through the environment in a way that is productive and purposeful based on their perceived truth and anticipation of needs. Utilizing intuition with regard to talent selection and placement often lead to better employee-task matches. As a result, employee engagement is promoted and workplace harmony increases. Similarly to the benefits of using intuition, collaboration also helps to promote harmony. Collaboration is honoring the contributions of those throughout the enterprise and taking full advantage of the potential within the employee group. Gay executives who build organizational cultures of collaboration also construct an environment where employees feel their success is dependent on the talents and

successes of their teammates and not at their demise. The following chart outlines Synder's seven leadership traits and accompanying characteristics associated with each trait.

Table 1

Desirable Qualities of LGBT Leaders

Leadership trait	Characteristics of the leadership trait
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting equality in thoughts and ideas offered • Focusing on giving all employees equal support to succeed within the organization • Acts and behaviors that endorse the idea of the organization operating as a meritocracy (employees succeed based on individual abilities and initiative)
Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing an organizational culture that encourages imagination • Looking beyond the immediate goals and circumstances and imagining what can be achieved. • Placing importance on affirmative language that helps to create a positive work environment, supporting abstract and innovative ideas
Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately responding to change • Understanding that stagnation is not sustainable • Being open to accepting ambiguity as clear-cut answers are not always available

(continued)

Leadership trait	Characteristics of the leadership trait
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire new perspectives • Expand organizational network • Increase internal and external awareness
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurtures interactions • Supports trust • Increases organizational candor
Intuition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using past experiences and encounters to make current decisions that are relevant and productive • Identifying undesirable influences and recognizing those dynamics that can be useful to accomplishing organizational goals • The ability to connect with others, read between the lines and decipher cues using non-verbal communication strategies
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the importance and value of sharing authority • Eliminating personal ego to arrive at the best possible solution for organization-wide challenges • Understanding each team member's motivation and how he/she defines their professional value to the organization.

Note. Adapted from “The G quotient: Why gay executives are excelling as leaders-and what every manager needs to know,” by K. Synder, 2006, p. 99. Copyright 2006 by Jossey-Bass.

Images of African American Gay Males

While some of the accepted notions and ideas of homosexuals in professional settings have changed dramatically over the last century (and especially within the last few decades), there is still disconnection of some of the cultural nuances within this community. A lack of understanding and misappropriated perceptions are still present concerning the image and value of the contributions (or assumed lack there-of) of the African American LGBT populace within the larger LGBT community and specifically African American gay men (Spears, 2010). For decades this particular group within the general LGBT experience has gone unnoticed, overlooked and under-considered. Often, when the experiences of African American gay men are acknowledged they are diminished to all-encompassing conversations of health disparities, homelessness and erotic encounters. Scholarly research on African American gay men and their experiences navigating majority culture seemingly shrink their capabilities to an overwhelming experience of living in closeted conditions and/or perpetuating the epidemic of HIV/AIDS (Spears, 2010).

This group of individuals has been reduced to pathologies and promiscuity. Much of the media attention given to this population, endorses the notion that its members are entrenched in sexual racism, highly promiscuous acts, and living with their-own self-hate/homophobia. Media relies heavily on the misrepresentation of African American gay men who attempt to achieve social acceptance through becoming the “effeminate hair stylist,” the “sneaky (or catty) comedian” or the confused “hyper-masculine” guy who at any moment regains his “straightness” (Nero, 2005).

There is little literature and research available in mainstream professional and popular culture that discusses the relevant contributions brought to American society by this group of

people. Highlights of the contributions African American LGBT professionals (and especially African American gay males) have made to literary and social movements; to art, music and business remain relatively unheard. This group has shaped some of the major eras in African American and American history alike, and much of their influence can still be encountered today. It was the personal narratives and emotionally charged writings of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen that shaped the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s; it was the essays, plays and poetry of Langston Hughes that inspired sexual and social revolutions of the 1960s, and it was the strategic alliances and diplomatic endeavors of Mr. Bayard Rustin (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s primary political advisor) that molded the American Civil Rights movement.

In 1986, a gay African American author, Joseph Beam compiled a text inclusive of works from African American gay males; social advocates, academicians, and writers discussing their challenges with intrinsic-homophobia, familial ties and mainstream perceptions. The writers within this text examined their-own influence and explored the contributions of their iconic predecessors. *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, was groundbreaking, provocative and an innovative piece of work that gave voice to the accomplishments of African American gay professionals (Spears, 2010). Thus, it is important to recognize that there are generations and a long history of the contributions of gay African American males, albeit underground and contained within very limited frameworks, it does exist.

Because the presence of the successful gay African American male archetype is limited, it is thought not to exist. Role models for, and within this demographic are not readily visible; and because of this happening the idea of young, Black, successful and gay as a viable contributor to society is disregarded within the larger American structure. And, yes; while homophobia, promiscuity and health disparities are ever-present themes within the African

American Gay community the realities of the persons who occupy this experience are not limited only to those circumstances.

As a social group African American gay men have been underdetermined in academic research; and as a professional group their complexities have been limited to satirical images (Nero, 2005). The complexities of African American gay male leaders and entrepreneurs have been de-emphasized and under-explored in scholarly discourse. The extension of research that lends accuracy (and maybe even in some instances privilege) to the experiences of African American gay males over theories and deficit model paradigms is vital (Spears, 2010).

Therefore this research will seek to explore the perceived advantages and possible inhibitors that African American gay males may experience throughout their career progression and within their role as Entrepreneurs and business leaders. By identifying success enablers and inhibitors, this research may help to increase the knowledge needed to develop strategies for potential training and mentoring programs designed for future African American gay males seeking to be leaders in business and/or to create their-own institutions. Also, future researchers may find this data useful in assisting with efforts aimed at the recruitment, retention and creating access to opportunities for African American gay males with regard to business and independent pursuits. Understanding the dynamics surrounding the business decisions and career trajectory(ies) of this populace, provides awareness as to the financial power and the economic potential this demographic actually possesses.

In addition to serving as a resource contributing to the design of future leadership development interventions, this body of work may also help to provide direction for future research on this topic. The research presented in this study can serve as an initial baseline for others to expand on research and report findings about this demographic. This information can

be used as an impetus to inspire further investigation regarding the social and economic contributions African American gay male professionals. The data can be used help inform social and business entities alike of an experience that falls outside the mainstream ideas of businessman/entrepreneur. And, maybe even result in a more complete depiction of experience rather than relying on the existing negative stigma of businessmen within this underrepresented group.

Mainstream perceptions and the sexuality of African American gay males. “I suggest that we create a culture that destigmatizes homosexuality and bisexuality so that men within these realms of sexual identity will not feel the need to enter into duplicitous relationships” (Boykin, 2005, p. 148). Often, social norms mandate behaviors that are deemed appropriate for men and women. When these “gender-norms” are violated (i.e., an individual acts outside the parameters of what is considered socially/culturally acceptable for their visible gender orientation) individuals are often cast-out of communities and regarded as sexual deviants. For men who do not express masculinity in a fashion consistent with culturally defined norms; they are often perceived as feminine or assumed to be gay. This marginalization for alternative masculinity expression can be damaging and inhibit success for those wishing to excel in mainstream society (Sallee & Harris, 2011).

At a conference hosted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) author and African American gay cultural researcher, Keith Boykin addresses the state of affairs regarding perception, promiscuity (and the negative sexual stigma) and the pathologies attached to African American gay males. The cultural research offered by Boykin suggests that there is a preoccupation within mainstream communities that highlights health disparities (particularly HIV/AIDS and the wide-spread infection rates of the virus—and the epidemic being attributed to

African American gay males) which demonizes African American gay males, thus detracting from their cultural and social contributions and jeopardizing the productivity of the group as a collective.

Society has constructed a very rigid definition of what it means to be an African American male. This definition of maleness does not always extend to include men who are also gay and/or bisexual. This narrow definition of masculinity often forces African American queer males to choose between their race or sexual orientation because these constructs are seen as mutually exclusive identities. In contemporary society there are few spaces that promote the ability to live within the intersections of these social conditions simultaneously (Mitchell & Means, 2014).

Boykin's research offers recommendations for helping to bridge the divide that has been created as a result of ignorance and stereotypes. One of the recommendations Boykin suggests is anchored in community comprehension of the perception that is prevalent about the African American gay community. He asserts, that it is important to know what is perceived about "us" so that "we" can ensure truth narratives can be offered to the greater public. He also stresses the importance of understanding the difference between identity and behavior. Boykin offers, HIV transmission is not spread through identity but through behavior; and regardless of whom you encounter sexually, it is important to engage into the exercise with caution, protection and the awareness that the methods of which one engages in sexual activity does not define the person or solely account for their identity (Boykin, 2005). The work done by Boykin substantiates the sexual practices of same gender loving males, and actually attempts to take it out of the medical context urging the African American LGBT community to look at sexual behavior from a social context and not a medical pathology. His work, therefore does not seek to deny the existence of

unhealthy sexual practices within the African American gay male population; what it does do is provide a vehicle to expand the conversation to move out of a medical stigma and discuss it as a social issue. In fact, Boykin asserts that when this is done, we (African American gay males in particular) no longer push homosexuality into the closet, but can engage in discourse that explores personal and communal attitudes around trust, understanding, tolerance, and sexuality (Boykin, 2005).

There is still a defaming status that surrounds LGBT “sexual” identity and because of this it is important to support those that come out of the “closet.” The disclosure process can consume one with fear and in some cases can have damaging consequences (Mallon, 2005). By revealing one’s sexuality it is possible to risk the security and safety of family, community and religious units. Families with strong religious ties may condemn homosexuality, thus making it a hostile environment should a member of that unit decide to come out (Herman, 1997).

Social scientists examine how African American gay males manage their religious and church affiliations in relation to the exploration and declaration of their sexuality identity (as cited in Ward, 2005). This is of particular interest because of the social and communal discord that exists within the African American Church experience. For many African Americans, the “Black Church” functions as a space of empowerment and deliverance (Billingsley, 1992). In many respects, the Black church is a pillar of the community as it serves as an important system that guides and brings together African American communities. Yet simultaneously, the Black Church is the same place theological doctrine denouncing homosexuality and scripture-driven homophobia and heterosexist sermons are orated (Fullilove & Fullilove, 1999). As many African American gay men come to understand their sexuality and navigate the conflicting themes presented within this system that is a central pillar of their existence, there is potential

that psychosocial fractures can develop in forming a holistic identity.

In a study conducted in 2007, 10 African American gay men were surveyed and asked about their religious experiences. Miller (2007) asked 10 African American gay males (these males were also HIV positive) about their religious connections and how they navigated the structure of the Black church. The participants revealed the Black church is a conglomeration of phobias, and though there is some value of attendance (respondents of the study mention that through their church going experience they learned to pray, received an introduction to gospel music and learned lessons from the Bible). The Black church going experience for African American gay males is not always conducive to healthy identity formation. The participants recount experiences that actually seem to inhibit healthy perceptions of self and self-worth. The participants in the study claim homophobia to be an ever-present construct in their church experience and felt the church ostracized them due to their sexuality and health status. As a result of constantly encountering messages of shame and damnation the participants report that they eventually discontinued their church membership.

The participants experienced homophobia as demeaning and painful. They described it as “diminishing their humanity and dignity.” However, the religiously sanctioned homophobia was not the only factor that extinguished their church affiliation; the churches response to the AIDS crisis made all the men sever their church affiliation. (Miller, 2007, p. 57)

Comprehending how African American gay men navigate their church-going experiences has implications to understanding how African American gay men manage the realities of having conflicting identities and what this means for their eventual personal and professional successes (Sherkat, 2002). Racial minority individuals sometimes encounter more tension and

apprehension regarding the coming out process than do their Caucasian counterparts (Mallon, 2005; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). LGBT individuals of color encounter compound minority status and are often forced to face and endure the fears of loss of familial and community support; and for some, leaving this “conditional security” is too high a price to pay to live authentically (Johnson & Keren, 1998). Hershberger and D’Augelli (2000) note that the decision to disclose is as complex as navigating the multiple layers of identity and it is important to investigate the consequences of disclosure and consider both the positive and negative ramifications and the impacts this action can have on future success and quality of life.

The worth and definition of the African American man (or any man for that matter) should not be centered in his sexuality, but rather affixed to his deeds, character and contributions to family, community and society (Byrd, 2001). Discourse that defines manhood, masculinity or projects success based upon sexual orientation becomes problematic and perpetuates negative stereotypes. In essence, sexuality should not be a determinant of success...but it does often influence it. Sexual identity, sexuality, behavior, character and identity are all different constructs and no one dynamic is responsible for the complete make-up or success-potential of a human being. Therefore, when it comes to the African American gay male experience, it is vital to separate sexual behavior and sexuality as the idea of total identity and not use the specific sexuality construct as a pre-determination of success or potential career trajectory. The sexual experiences of some African American gay males should not be universalized and explained as if this behavior is a verifiable science, but rather considered on an individual and specific basis with no bearing on the implications of success (Spears, 2010). Understanding the perceptions and prejudices around and about the African American gay male community make it even more important to rally together and find spaces of strength and

empowerment to collectively combat the negative images rooted in sexual behavior and sexuality stereotypes.

Holistic identity expression. The topic of relating to understanding and accepting the diversity that lies within sexual orientation continues to create great contention in much of American society. It is asserted that as a minority culture the LGBT population may be more discriminated against and encounter oppression at higher rates than perhaps any other racial or ethnic minority population (Canino & Spurlock, 2000; Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Cooley, 1998; Mallon, 2005; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Over the past 20-30 years research has been conducted analyzing various cultural differences among minority and marginalized LGBT groups and recognize the serious need for specific support services for various group experiences within the broader LGBT community (Fuertes & Brobst, 2002; Sue & Sue, 1999). Of particular importance is engaging in research promoting an awareness of specific racial and cultural issues that are applicable to LGBT populations. There is a need to expand the current discourse on LGBT issues and include within the research, the viewpoint of multiculturalism. Information regarding the lived experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic persons within this community continue to be absent in contemporary literature (Carroll et al., 2002). In an attempt to fully understand the experiences of LGBT communities, researchers must consider the influences that gender, economic status, and sexual orientation can have on LGBT persons and their trajectories for success. Also included within this proposed expanded scope, should be an exploration of additional constructs such as one's race and ethnicity, as these too can have lasting effects on professional paths and career experiences (Pope-Davis & Coleman, 2001). As these dynamics are considered, they will help to paint a realistic, relevant and inclusive perspective about the issues pertinent in LGBT communities and the true experiences of the people there in.

Research investigating the intersection of race and sexual orientation helps to better understand the possible constraints and/or enablers experienced by a group. Comprehension of those influences provides insights as to how that group navigates mainstream society. In Atlanta, Georgia; social scientists Graham, Braithwaite, Spikes, Stephens, and Edu (2009) conducted a study researching the influences leading to mental health issues and to the successful social adjustments of African American gay males. The results of this study indicated that African American gay males experienced compound discrimination; they experienced prejudices for being both Black and gay. According to the study these ostracizing experiences created challenges for these men to self-actualize and develop healthy identities, not only within their own cultural groups, but also in finding a place in majority culture (Graham et al., 2009). African American gay men are forced to decode contradictory messages about how to be both “Black” and “gay.” Research has shown that due to a lack of support, composite discrimination and a dearth of healthy archetypes of which to model after; African American gay males experience higher incidences of mental health issues (such as anxiety and depression) than any other LGBT group. This disequilibrium also creates challenges for them in identifying roles and purpose within the larger social context (Graham et. al., 2009).

As African American gay male leaders and entrepreneurs seek to interact in community, personal and professional spheres, they are often required to choose an identity (or aspect of their total consciousness). African American gay males move through spaces with multiple consciousness and are all too often prohibited to indulge in the luxury of embracing and enacting in their multifaceted nature. In Gregory Conerly’s (2000) article, “Are you Black First or are you Queer?” he offers a historical perspective of how African American LGBT people navigate the often-conflicting identities of sexuality and race. Conerly’s article provides understandings as

to how homophobia in African American communities (and in general, the culture as a whole) tends to activate tension between the two identities (LGBT and African American). This identity-clash essentially forms two groups of African American LGBT people, those who recognize and identify with their sexuality or those who place a higher value on their African American culture. Conerly contends in this instance identity becomes segmented and is mutually exclusive. Ultimately his point is, African American LGBT people have several levels to their identity, including (but not limited to) race, sexuality, and gender. These identity elements are complex, inseparable and essential to one's make-up. The article asserts that by segregating identity personal agency is lost and complete belonging to a group, community or cultural experience can never really occur. This is because the individual in question is only disclosing a singular part of them, and thus only contributing partially and obtaining partial fulfillment (Conerly, 2000).

In Gil Gerald's (2005) article, "The Trouble I've Seen," he recounts his experience as the executive director of the National Coalition of Black Gays (NCBG). Gerald's work highlights disconnects that can happen concerning African American identity and community. In his article, Gerald discusses the opposition he faced trying to include African American LGBT community groups in the 20th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington. Gil Gerald's work speaks to the resentment that is often associated with regard to African American queer people by their heterosexual cultural counterparts. Often within the African American community, LGBT issues are not considered civil rights issues and in fact are dramatically separate from "Black issues." It becomes oxymoronic to have to justify African American LGBT issues to canonized civil rights leaders who seemingly fight for equality for all (Gerald, 2005).

Scholar and academician, Earl Ofari Hutchinson, a self-identified African American heterosexual male, suggests that African American men in the United States, have embraced the warped view that they are less than men, and in an effort to assert their refused masculinity they mirror America's traditional hatred of homosexuality (Hutchinson, 2000). Hutchinson (2000) discusses his observations of the impact of homophobia on African American males and sheds light on the African American gay male experience in his article, "My Gay Problem, Your Black Problem." Hutchinson challenges African American men to respect the intricacies and nuanced differences of "male experiences" and to engage in discourse that incorporates each other in political, professional and communal efforts that work together to support African American communities and cultures as a whole.

Honoring the idea of holistic identity expression; feminist, author and activist Audre Lorde (2007) best articulates this construct by offering the sentiment, "If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive" (p. 136). It is vital to self-actualize and endeavor to weave together those elements that bring holistic happiness. In this present study, AAGME are assumed to interface with a conglomeration of identities and forced to identify pathways in order to navigate environments that may not readily recognize or honor the uniqueness of their experiences. As indicated in the literature, steering through professional spaces with authenticity is the primary characteristic of successful gay leaders (Snyder, 2006). This study seeks to explore the factors that have enabled and/or inhibited AAGME as they maneuver through definitions of self and success that have been potentially created for them; and as they experience society and come to understand varying cultural distinctions in order to fully self-express to achieve success on their own terms.

The Significance of Atlanta as the Setting for the Research Study

Much of the research on this topic is influenced by the construct of community and elements found within the framework of The Sociocultural Learning Theory. This theory offers that behaviors of success and ideas of positive societal contribution (the ideas of educational advancement, workforce readiness—the activities that people engage in to become human capital-societal contributors) are learned within an interpersonal context and not just within an academic environment. This theory suggests that learning happens through social interaction, cultural and societal connectivity, observational learning, modeling; and reward and punishment as the consequences of executed behaviors. Many of the constructs in question are factors influenced by culture and community. Therefore environmental factors that either enable or inhibit learning processes and successful outcomes should be considered when investigating the assumed achievements of a person or demographic (Berk, 2010).

The city of Atlanta has one of the highest African American populations in The United States, second only to New York and it continues to steadily increase (Brookings, 2010). Similarly, popular culture and news sources have increasingly noted Atlanta as a gay metropolis and more applicably a “Black Gay Mecca” (Spears, 2010). With regard to business and employment opportunities, Atlanta is an incredibly prosperous metropolis with no signs of slowing. There is a close alliance between Atlanta’s elected officials and their business community. In the 1950s and 1960s Atlanta created distance from the region’s racist history by famously labeling itself as, “the city too busy to hate” (Brookings, 2010, p. 33). Because of its tolerant attitude, Atlanta has attracted a high rate of external business investment and numerous international business opportunities that continue to increase its economic and social affluence.

Also, the social culture of Atlanta has unequivocally responded to the presence and needs of African American gay males. Additionally, because of the socio-cultural demand for group specific personal outlets and venues; Atlanta has numerous entertainment companies and social club locations that cater to this population. According to their promotional materials, companies like Wassup-in-ATL, Rockstar Productions, Coco-Dorm, and stand-alone clubs like Bulldogs, Mixx and Chaparral, offer African American gay men a social vehicle every night of the week. Atlanta's tolerant climate helps to create not only a thriving nightlife experience, but also an accepting place to grow socially, professionally and academically for the large number of African American gay males who live within the metropolitan area. Furthermore, as Atlanta has shown a history of implementing programs and services that build community for, cater to, and support and celebrate the African American gay male experience; it is a socially accepting culture and an ideal geography to research the enabling and inhibiting factors of the entrepreneurial success of African American gay males.

The influence of community. Woods and Judikis (2002) describe community as people who have a common purpose or a shared responsibility and acknowledge their connectedness. As life is a dynamic structure composed of experiences, events, persons, and situations; it is important that we are able to rely on community and connect to others not only over shared circumstances, but for support as new ventures are encountered. Human beings are naturally social beings and belonging to a culture and/or group is what helps us as individuals construct our identities and helps us to find our purpose. Without a community or culture to call our own we essentially are lost. African American gay males are longing for a celebrated and supportive space of their own.

I cannot go home as who I am. When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community: the Black press, the Black church, Black academicians, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where is my reflection? I am most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or am tolerated if I am silent or inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply. (Beam, 1986, p. 180)

The images of African American gay males in mainstream literary and scholarly resources are acutely negative and seemingly rooted in a deficit model approach in dissecting their narratives. The acknowledgement of African American gay male businessmen in mainstream research is minimal. Furthermore, there is little literature that discusses the career paths, and the enabling and inhibiting factors of AAGME. Identifying the community of practice within this group, might bridge the information gap that presently exists.

Research notes self-efficacy as a characteristic of entrepreneurial success. Self-efficacy is described as one's personal judgments of how well he/she can execute courses of action required to successfully complete prospective situations (Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy is the feelings and anticipated control that people have to produce and regulate certain events in their lives and have successful outcomes. People's judgments of their capabilities influence their thought patterns and emotional reactions during anticipatory and actual transactions with the environment. Those who judge themselves as inefficacious in coping with their environmental demands tend to dwell on their personal deficiencies and imagine potential difficulties as more formidable than they really are (Beck, 1976; Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Meichenbaum, 1977; Sarason, 1975). Conversely, individuals having positive experiences and interactions with models or similar tasks have a probability of succeeding at the prospective task.

Consequently, seeing another individual (or seeing several individuals) with characteristics akin to the learner (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious affiliations, physical or learning disabilities, etc.) successfully execute a task can raise efficacy expectations in observers who determine they too possess the capabilities to master similar activities. The implications for business and entrepreneurial success then, is that those who are not necessarily familiar with the resources or challenges of this particular professional field, in fact can, through observational learning not only gain exposure to resources but can identify ways to use the resources to master and excel. It is critical; therefore for entrepreneurial pioneers to realize the importance of how modeling behaviors can lead to success. Making visible the pathways of the “learned other(s)” either formally or informally creates opportunities for the new learner to observe and internalize their successes. This indirectly helps to create a mentor/mentee relationship and the new learner is creating a bond with a content expert, and engraining him/herself into a community of practice. Becoming a member of this specific community of practice will help to provide resources that will support professional success.

The importance of mentorship. The changing culture in the field of business and entrepreneurship mandates leadership that enables innovation, empowers strong communication skills, and endorses exceptional listening skills. It is essential for contemporary leaders to capitalize on, and enhance existing networks while continually building fresh linkages through constructing new relationships, creating connections and shaping communities (Snyder, 2006). Effective leaders understand the importance of coaching and articulating a shared vision. As leaders ascend to the top of the ladder of success they must be able to educate, mentor, teach and quintessentially touch the lives of others. The ability to engage in purposeful mentorship creates key succession planning and expands exposure opportunities within the field. Additionally,

mentoring is influential in generating career satisfaction, producing opportunities to engage in projects showcasing specific talent, and garnering discipline, institutional and personnel support (Snyder, 2006).

Although LGBT leaders are entering the business field and pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors at increasing rates, there is little visibility of African American gay males that progress onto the paths of becoming successful entrepreneurs. Race, sexual orientation and gender differences in mentoring and leadership succession planning have been identified as key barriers to career advancement. However through identifying the success enablers and inhibitors mentoring programs can be developed and training modules created that will increase the knowledge needed to cultivate strategies that grow professional networks aiding in upward mobility for African American gay males. Mentorship and the professional care of young African American gay males is essential in making sure they become successful (Spears, 2010).

The transformational leader establishes high standards for organizational conduct through modeling expectations, engendering trust and establishing credibility through their own personal actions (Northouse, 2010). These leaders articulate a vision for the organization clearly and institute blueprints to achieve the confirmed vision. Through purposeful mentorship and empowerment, leaders gain the confidence of followers, thus creating stakeholders in the enterprise and for its related goals (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Transformational leaders provide a mentorship space that is conducive to honoring hard work and promoting innovation where those being mentored feel secure in fully contributing their ideas (Northouse, 2013). In addition to exposure opportunities in learning how to navigate the systems of business, the mentorship process allows mentees to cultivate, refine and develop their skill sets. This type of succession

planning breeds organizational sustainability and creates an intrinsic investment into the enterprise (Northouse, 2013).

Synthesis of Significant Findings from Relevant Studies

Gay males have overcome barriers and realized roles of leadership and power. They have done so by utilizing the ability to identify commonalities between seemingly different entities and make effective connections through hard work, advocacy and building coalitions (Snyder, 2006). By continuing the legacy of professional gay male pioneers, many gay leaders of today are able to contribute a unique perspective to the field of business and entrepreneurship; and lead with awareness and tools unique to their experiences. The contributions of gay leaders in the business world are distinct from those of their heterosexual counterparts. It has been observed that gay male leaders tend to work successfully in teams, exercise effective listening skills and remain positive during professionally adverse situations. Additionally, it has been reported that gay male leaders are particularly skilled at creating inclusive environments by ensuring that appropriate credit is given where credit is due and through taking purposeful interest in employees and stakeholders to make them feel part of the organizational vision (Snyder, 2006).

LGBT leaders attempt to enhance the self-worth of their co-workers through authenticity and endeavoring in participative management. This leadership style provokes contribution and encourages the sharing of information. Information sharing allows organizational power to freely flow throughout the institution, and when the movement of organizational power is experienced among inter-professional teams overall employee performance is enhanced and organizational productivity increases. When individuals feel good about themselves and the tasks they undertake; loyalty to, and investment in the organization is created (Snyder, 2006).

Contemporary professional teams must employ a participative and inclusive leadership style where varying perspectives and worldviews are included in solutions. As the modern world of business is now a global community whose members are accustomed to immediacy and who are digitally savvy, there is a growing demand to respond to varied needs. Leadership teams that represent diverse perspectives have a greater likelihood to move in a direction that reflects the needs of a larger and more diverse consumer base (Northouse, 2013). Diversity improves performance, and the quality of decisions through leveraging various perspectives helps to increase an organization's relevance to a wider audience: this nurtures an enterprise that positions itself as viable and can accommodate change.

Because of experiencing marginalization and forms of discrimination, gay male leaders are exceptionally situated to offer employees and teammates characteristics such as compassion, transparency, and empathy. These are traits that help to endorse teamwork and increase effective communication across the institution. As the world of business continues to facilitate organizational cultures that promote diversity, it becomes salient to honor the multiple identities and experiences that comprise LGBT leadership.

Within the discourse of leadership and business the literature discussing the enabling and inhibiting factors of African American gay male leaders and entrepreneurs is underdeveloped. This lack of attention results in contributions going unnoticed and a scarcity of in-depth understanding of their experiences. Mainstream images of African American gay males are not generally positive but rather depict them as sexual and social deviants, synonymously linking them to HIV/ AIDS (Johnson, 2003; Nero, 2005). Social scientists have made interesting connections between the lived experiences of African American gay males, their resilience and possible projections of their success (Cochran & Mays, 1994; Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, &

Soto, 2002). As roles of leadership and success pathways/stories of entrepreneurship are explored, the socio-cultural influences experienced by these entrepreneurs are important factors to understanding their journeys to career success.

Contemporary literature and research regarding LGBT leadership should incorporate within its analysis social movements that encompass the framework of intersectionality. There are many minority and marginalized individuals whose oppression is multidimensional. Often accompanying the construct of race is racism, with concerns of gender comes heterosexism/homophobia, and with religion comes religious intolerance; intersectionality is a theoretical lens in which to view systems of oppression. This perspective helps to digest, understand and acknowledge the realities of marginalized peoples whose holistic identity is inclusive of more than one identity-construct that has historically been oppressed (Mitchell & Sawyer, 2014).

Racism and sexual orientation discrimination are difficult paradigms to quantify, as they are often resistant to reason. These constructs are not rooted in scientific research, but are based on anecdotal thoughts, abstract ideas and loosely defined and misidentified concepts of equality and supremacy. Racism and homophobia are frequently expressed from deeply internal emotions of disgust and the perceived value differences that are believed to be embodied in “those people” labeled as “the other” (Mead & Morris, 1934). Social psychologists George Herbert Mead and Charles W. Morris (1934) assert these assumed ideas and acquired ethos, transforms inaccurate messages into acts, and from these acts, a behavior pattern of oppression begins to develop. Eventually intentional, automatic and exclusionary behaviors of oppression are the result of these deeply held thoughts and the false sense of supremacy over other cultural groups (Mead & Morris, 1934).

Not all discrimination is easily quantified or blatantly obvious (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Thus, to procure the most complete knowledge of enabling and inhibiting factors relating to the successes and challenges of minority groups; the talents and perspectives of contributors working in tandem from both within the minority population(s) in question and the dominant culture are required (DuBois, 1903; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 2001). Twenty first century, agents of change recognize the need for inclusion and appreciation of divergent realities to devise innovative solutions that address both historical ills and the challenges of modernity. Effective twenty-first century business leaders understand the assumed traits and the thought processes of Mead & Morris's theory that yield oppression and bigotry which are counter-productive to creating sustainable ventures in today's diverse economy.

While business leaders may hold personal perceptions and/or ascribe to certain stereotypes, research concludes that the ability to suspend judgment and interact independently of social propaganda is the most effective tool in creating prosperity practices and sustainable business models. Successful entrepreneurs must possess outstanding decision-making qualities that support the goals and mission of the enterprise (McClelland, 1961). Good decision-making and communication skills equip the business leader with the tools necessary to combat any odds that may arise during the creation of a new enterprise (Cox & Jennings, 1995). Previous research has identified additional characteristics of successful entrepreneurs to include such features as high self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, perseverance and social skills (Markman & Baron, 2003). These skills help to support the principle of connectivity; which in its application helps not only in creating internal and external organizational and consumer awareness but also various forms of interpersonal sensitiveness among professional working teams (Snyder, 2006). The ability to connect various types of realities within and outside of the organization maximizes

overall effectiveness and endorses the organization's operational longevity (Snyder, 2006).

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined literature on business and leadership, entrepreneurship and the socio-cultural intersection of African American gay male leaders. This particular section provided framework to help deliver context and a better understanding of how geography, observational learning, mentorship and modeling, and a very specific set of characteristics can influence success. In addition, this chapter provided relevancy as to the need to augment the research on the enabling and inhibiting factors of African American gay male success, but also to make clear the setting of the study. To date no research has been conducted to determine those enabling and inhibiting factors that impact the entrepreneurial success and career trajectory of AAGME.

It is important to note that African American gay males have progressed through their careers and achieved leadership positions at the helm of organizations in the face of obstacle experiences. A review of the existing literature, found no specific research studies that examine the enabling and inhibiting factors experienced by AAGME; thus, this topic is an appropriate matter for study. The literature at present mostly covers experiences of gay leaders in a broad context. Chapter three will review the research methodology to be used to investigate the enabling and inhibiting factors of AAGME and discuss the human participant considerations for the proposed study.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This study explores and provides an account of the lived experiences of selected African American Gay Male Entrepreneurs. This chapter discusses the research methods employed in this study. The purpose of the research contained within this dissertation is to investigate the factors that enable or inhibit African American gay males in their career progression to becoming an entrepreneur, launching, and successfully operating their own enterprises.

Included within this chapter are the study's rationale, assumptions, and the research design for this phenomenological case study. Also, this chapter will discuss the plans to propose the study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pepperdine University. Additionally, this chapter examines the selection of participants for the research and the rationale for interviewing select participants. Also, the instrument proposed for data collection is described. Further, discussed are the strategies for assessing the validity and reliability of that data collection instrument. In addition, the research methodology and its rationale are discussed in detail. Lastly, this chapter presents the proposed data analysis process.

Restatement of Research Questions

The overarching research question explored in this study is as follows:

What are the enabling and inhibiting factors impacting the success and career progression of selected African American Gay Male Entrepreneurs in Atlanta, Georgia?

Also, this study more specifically attempts to explore the following research sub-questions:

1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enabled the selected African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enabled the selected African

American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibited the selected African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibited the selected African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

Rationale for Research Methodology

This study seeks to be descriptive and analytical in nature. Utilizing a qualitative approach to research the phenomenon of the enabling and inhibiting factors perceived among AAGME is the ideal method to garner a rich and in-depth understanding of the participant(s) experiences. Rudestam and Newton (1992) maintain that experimental and quasi-experimental procedures cannot do justice in describing phenomena and obtaining self-identified viewpoints and experiences. This study specifically aims to investigate the lived experiences of individuals belonging to a particular demographic with a certain set of experiences (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, a phenomenological case study is the appropriate research approach for the study in question.

The phenomenon under examination in this research is the factors that enabled and inhibited entrepreneurial business success among AAGME. The researcher collected data from AAGME in Atlanta, Georgia, who have experienced the phenomenon of creating their own businesses and still hold key leadership roles within that enterprise. Because of the professional and social progressions of the city, metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia, that city has become a location that both African American and LGBT communities have experienced prosperity (Spears, 2010). As Atlanta is a documented space where both African American and LGBT peoples have thrived, situating the study within this location provided access to both a relevant

audience as well as understandings of a socio-cultural experience that can accurately articulate enabling and inhibiting factors of success for members within this specific demographic.

The researcher has shared in the phenomenon to be studied, and therefore bracketed himself out of the study to avoid bias and to better focus on the experiences of the participants. The phenomena will include internal and external enablers and inhibitors to the participants' success and a combined description of perceptions will develop as a result of the inquiry. The researcher has a working knowledge of this phenomenon and is concerned with obtaining the data from the research study participants' vantage point rather than assuming and/or influencing outcomes. This study will apply Moustakas' (1994) practice of transcendental phenomenology, which includes identifying the phenomenon, bracketing the researcher's experiences, and collecting data from those who have participated in the experience being investigated.

Although assumptions regarding the factors that enable and inhibit the success of AAGME do exist, an approach rooted in phenomenology requires that all judgments are suspended until established on a certain basis without pre-judging outcomes (Creswell, 2013). There are three assumptions that reinforce the viability of this research as a phenomenological study:

- The researcher will be able to understand the lived experiences offered by those in the study and remove himself in order to objectively focus on the participants. The researcher's previous experience living and working as an African American gay male in Atlanta has provided the opportunity to fully appreciate and relate to the experiences that will be offered. The researcher's own bracketing and study of entrepreneurial leadership will assure sufficient objectivity.

- The second vital assumption is that the participants in the study will be comfortable disclosing their lived experience concerning the enabling and inhibiting factors that have contributed to their success as entrepreneurs. The IRB protections for this study will allow participants to share experiences in a setting free of punishment or reprisal.
- The phenomenological method to research assumes the researcher will accurately represent the experiences of the study to the public. To address this criterion, the researcher will use non-technical language to categorize participants' responses so as to ensure the integrity of the participants' original intent and meaning.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach. The qualitative researcher uses the case study method to gather in-depth information and grow an intimate knowledge based on one, or a few selected cases concerning a specific phenomenon. Gay (1992) describes case study research as an in-depth investigation of an individual, specific demographic, or institution to identify factors that have resulted in the current behavior or status of the subject within a certain study. As the nature of qualitative research is informative and revealing, the researcher is typically involved in a sustained experience with participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher often immerses him/herself within the culture(s) and experience(s) of the participant(s) and develops an intimate familiarity with the participants' specific circumstances. As the researcher looks for patterns, actions and factors that contribute to the status being explored the researcher also receives insights into his or her own biases, values, and personal background. The qualitative researcher must suspend those personal constructs so as to not falsify or directionally shape his or her interpretations of the data yielded from the study, but to report the information as it is presented. Phenomenological research requires a procedural process that is rooted in subjectivity

and context. The study must place emphasis on the phenomenon itself through the perspectives of participants experiencing the phenomenon. Grounded theory is the qualitative method used to produce theories derived from the analysis of the data collected through participant interviewing (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenological researchers use a slimmer range of sampling strategies than do other research methodologies (Creswell, 2013). This qualitative approach is grounded in uncovering the intimacy and nuanced complexity that exists within a particular occurrence. This self-report, qualitative methodology will provide insight into the patterns, actions and circumstances that have influenced the entrepreneurial success of African American gay males. More specifically this study investigated the factors enabling and inhibiting success of a demographic of professionals within the LGBT community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender).

Ultimately, a phenomenological research study must have meaning for both the researcher and the academy (Creswell, 2014). In this particular instance, the researcher had often been exposed to many African American gay males who have expressed their experiences as they formed and operated their own enterprises. In an effort to suspend bias and lessen the occurrence of influencing ideas, the researcher abstained from offering personal opinions and accounts of previous experiences. The researcher maintained a neutral attitude and transactional communication with all participants. The researcher only asked questions that were written within the interview guide and document only the answers or themes offered by the research study participants.

The target population consisted of AAGME within the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta was the focal location for this study because of the established social, academic and professional systems that support both African Americans and LGBT persons within that

space. There are many community and societal resources located in Atlanta that support the multifaceted dimensions of African American gay males (Spears, 2010). The target population for this study was persons who self-identify as African American (racially and culturally as “Black”), as Gay (same gender loving) and also as male (having the sex organs of male and gender orientation as male also). Additional criteria for participation in this study were those African American gay males who are also entrepreneurs. The latter criterion will be noted by those whom have had three years’ experience or greater at the helm of their enterprise. Entrepreneurs will be identified as those who have founded their own businesses, foundations, non-profits and/or community advocacy enterprises. By consistently adhering to these specifications regarding participant selection, the researcher ensured a consistent baseline of experience and controlled for possible demographic or experiential variables that could serve as contaminants to the study.

Data Sources

This study seeks to uncover and explore the factors that enable and inhibit the success of AAGME. Thus, the sources of data for this particular research were individual, self-identified African American gay males who are also entrepreneurs living in the Atlanta, Georgia. Therefore, the data sources were human subjects and interaction with them occurred through an interview process.

Data Collection Process

Participants for this research study had to meet three criteria:

- Participants must be African American males
- Participants must self-identify as gay (or same gender loving)

- Participants must be entrepreneurs (participants in this study must have started their own enterprise and the organization must be in operation for three years or more)

The participants were acquaintances of the researcher and/or personal contacts given to the researcher from his existing professional and personal networks. The AAGME were recruited through an introductory email invitation to participate in the interview. Included in the electronic correspondence to the prospective participants was documentation detailing the goals of the study and as well as the informed consent document. Participants who agreed to join the study confirmed their understanding of the purpose and parameters of the study as well as the participant's rights and risks of participation. After acknowledging the informed consent document, participants completed a short demographic survey used to confirm their gender, their current professional role as an entrepreneur and identify their education and leadership experiences.

As recruited participants confirmed their intent to participate in the study, the researcher arranged a mutually convenient time for a 60-minute interview. Because this study is focused in a specific location (Atlanta, Georgia) the researcher met with each participant in person at a neutral venue space convenient for the participant (coffee shop, bookstore, etc.). The researcher provided the interview questions to participants prior to the interview for their review. At the time of the interview a copy of both the informed consent document (Appendix A) and the interview protocol (Appendix B) were provided for the participants' review.

The interviews for this study were administered as a one-time, 60-minute interview session. Interviews were semi-structured, as the use of an open-ended format allow participants to articulate their distinctive experiences and perceptions regarding their career trajectory. The researcher monitored the progress of the interview and if signs of discomfort or wariness arose

and a participant decided to discontinue the interview, the researcher concluded the exercise immediately and discarded the data of that particular interview from the final results. At the close of the interview, those participants who completed the interview process were asked for recommendations for additional, potential subjects to participate in the study (snowball sampling). The data yielded from the successfully completed interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), effective sampling continues until the researcher recognizes information redundancy. Because qualitative research typically consists of large amounts of detailed information from a select numbers of participants, the data should be rich and consistent themes amongst participants eventually emerge (Neuman, 1997). For the purposes of this study, saturation occurred after ten successful interviews were conducted.

There was much enthusiasm for the study, with more than ten data sources identifying intent to participate in the research project. The researcher strategically selected participants from the existing pool of volunteers. While there is a number of compounding socio-cultural characteristics that could cause this group of participants to be categorized as marginal, the selection criteria for participants will more closely reflect the technicalities identified from the existing literature regarding entrepreneurial success. In response to the literature, the criterion for the selection of participants was the number of years in business beyond three. As identified by Makhbul, (2011) entrepreneurial success is defined as an independent, business enterprise that has been operating for at least three years. Thus the selection criteria was longevity. The researcher used the demographic survey firstly administered, to identify entrepreneurs who have been operating their business the longest and moved forward with data collection from those specific entrepreneurs.

Participant Considerations

Participants for this research study were selected from the large urban city of Atlanta, Georgia. All participants chosen were AAGME residing in and/or having ownership of organizations within the metropolitan Atlanta area. As the researcher has familiarity with the professional and social culture of which the study is situated, the ten names of individuals of whom participation was solicited was readily available to the researcher. Subjects invited to participate were drawn from a convenience sample of researcher acquaintances and professional associates. Therefore, the participant group for this study is defined as a purposive sample group.

While the characteristics of the businessmen participating in this study may not be exactly akin to most other businessmen or entrepreneurs, they are not atypical. The selected participants of this research represented an existing group of marginalized businessmen. Their marginality categorization comes from the fact that they represent an intermingling of racial and sexual constructs that resist mainstream norms (Walcott, 2007). The subjects in this study share the same ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and similar career position.

As this study centers on the interactions of human subjects, it was important to meet the federal requirements for research. Every participant in this study was provided with information outlining the purpose of the study and his participant rights and responsibilities. The identity of the participants will not be shared in any published materials. The researcher provided an explanation regarding the confidentiality of this study and communicated to participants that information given will be kept private and safe on the researcher's electronic device (laptop), which is password-protected. The researcher engaged in transparent conversations with the participants and informed them that their involvement in the study is voluntary, and they may

withdraw from the interview process at any time and without consequence.

It is important to find a balance between constructing genuine rapport with respondents and maintaining professional “objectivity.” Additionally, while it is important to dive into the “truth” of the respondents’ stories, the researcher must ensure respect be administered to each participant’s specific, personal and professional boundaries. Therefore, I sought to present the objectives of the study and my-own personal actions as candidly as possible to find the space between “passive observer” and “active participant” (Millar-Wood, 2008). The researcher conducted member checks with each participant during the final ten minutes of the interviews to ensure the participant was comfortable with the characterization of their responses in the transcripts. During the member checks, the researcher described his overall impressions and takeaways from the participants’ responses. At this time the participant were invited to either correct the recorded data or elaborate on areas that he felt were insufficiently explained. In an effort to ensure accuracy, after the recording of the interviews and upon the conclusion of analyzing the data, the researcher conducted one last member check session to guarantee the precision of messages conveyed by the participants during the interview sessions.

Incentives were not provided to the study participants. Additionally, there were no known conflicts of interest and deception was not part of the data collection processes. There was no risk of physical harm to the participants as they engaged in the study. As the researcher constructed the questions for the demographic the survey and interview process; copyright clearance or licensing was not needed. The researcher applied to, and obtained from the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exempt status for the purposes of conducting research for this study.

Instrumentation, Reliability and Validity

Kerlinger (1973) asserts that the best method of research regarding information gathering is through personal interview. Adhering to Kerlinger's notion, this study too, utilized the methodology of survey and personal interview as a means to address the overarching research question driving this study: What are the enabling and inhibiting factors impacting the success of African American gay entrepreneurs? The central inquiry of this study was the consequence of the scarcity of scholarly literature published regarding African American LGBT population, and specifically the practices that lead to success of the businessmen and entrepreneurs within this population. The secondary research questions were constructed based on information about this population from the review of available literature.

In order to ensure validity and reliability, the researcher had the interview tool undergo a formal content validation. With the assistance of a doctoral level degreed counseling psychologist, an African American gay male physician and entrepreneur (M.D.) and a master's degreed counselor, the researcher had the interview tool assessed. The questions of the interview tool were modified according to the suggestions offered by the content validation panel to guarantee accurate content and interpretation. Once the interview questions are deemed appropriate by the content validation panel for the purpose of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot interview.

Table 2

Content Validation Panel Demographic Information

Content validation panelist (CVP)	Level of education (Degree Attained)	Number of years as an entrepreneur
CVP A	Ph.D. (Doctorate in Philosophy)	3 years, 2 months

(continued)

Content validation panelist (CVP)	Level of education (Degree Attained)	Number of years as an entrepreneur
CVP B	M.D. (Doctorate in Medicine)	6 years, 4 months
CVP C	M.S. (Master's of Science)	8 years, 4 months

Additionally, to enhance the integrity of the study, the researcher conducted a usability study by pre-testing the interview instrument on an African American gay male leader, not participating in the study. This practice interview helped to certify the proposed interview tool as appropriate in its structural, contextual and grammatical design. The individual participated in the interview session for one hour. The researcher used the quality of responses offered from the pilot interview session to identify any necessary improvements within the interview instrument.

Table 3

Pilot Study Participant Demographic Information

AAGME				
Pilot Interviewee	Age	Level of Formal Education	Industry	Years of Enterprise Operation
A	41	Ph.D. (Doctorate in Philosophy)	Corporate Human Resources Management	3 years, 6 months

In an effort to achieve external reliability within the study, the researcher consistently followed the interview protocol during each interview. The interview sessions were audio recorded and an in depth review of the transcripts occurred before the response interpretations were formally documented. This was executed to increase the accuracy of data collection. To further ensure the internal validity of the research study, the researcher coded all responses offered in the interview sessions. All interview sessions were conducted, analyzed and feedback provided for each participant within a three-week timeframe.

The interview questions associated with each sub-research question are as follows:

What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- What is your leadership style?
- What personal characteristics do you feel helped with your success in your career trajectory?

What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- What is your educational history?
- What was your professional history prior to beginning your own enterprise?
- Can you identify any resources/factors that helped enable your success?
- What (if any) professional organizations do you believe augmented your career advancement?
- Do you have a professional mentor(s)?

What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- Do you feel any discomfort in your leadership role?
- What sets you apart from other African American gay males looking to pursue a career in entrepreneurship?

What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- What obstacles have you faced in your career progression in becoming an entrepreneur?

- What, if any, disadvantages do you face in your career as compared to your heterosexual (or non-minority) counterparts?

Once the interview questions are deemed suitable as a result of having been reviewed by the practice interview and content validation process, the researcher will proceed with the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study involved multiple components to ensure accuracy, applicability, reliability and validity of the data gathered. The researcher began qualitative analysis by audio recording the participant responses to the interview questions. Interviews were recorded using a dictation device. Once audio accounts of responses were gathered from the participating subjects, a transcription of each of the participants' recorded interview sessions were then be created and coded.

The researcher began qualitative analysis by manually transcribing participant informational offerings as soon as the interviews were conducted. Transcription happened immediately so that the researcher could gain familiarity with the data offered from each AAGME. Upon a focused review of the transcriptions, the researcher identified significant statements and topics mentioned by the participants. After the transcription of all interviews were complete, the researcher cataloged emerging commonalities and trends yielded from the data. In accordance with Richards & Morse (2013), topic Coding was used to help organize and isolate both shared and unique perspectives unveiled by the study participants. The identified topics, supporting statements and quotes provided by the research participants were grouped into particular themes that were assigned to specific research sub-questions based on content and applicability. The themes for the data analysis were chosen based on broad foci shared among

participants. The themes and their assignments to specific research sub-questions were cross-referenced with the information present in the literature review to assess consistency of the information provided. Once identified and documented the analyzed information was reviewed once more by the content evaluation panel to guarantee accuracy of theme placement, and to confirm the integrity of the transcription and coding process.

During the data collection process, the researcher engaged in personal reflection through journaling and noting his-own values and beliefs on the research (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). As the researcher encountered elements of the study that incited reactions within him, he documented these responses in a calendar of dissertation events. This calendar was kept separate from the main data set of survey and interview results to avoid accidental inclusion of researcher comments or concerns that could negatively alter the researcher's perceptions of the participants. The researcher used this reflexivity log to continue the bracketing process begun described in the preliminary proposal. By adhering to these steps and the analysis procedures described in the preceding paragraph, the study remained in conformance with Creswell's (2013) articulated standards for phenomenological data analysis, which include:

- Understanding the philosophical tenets of phenomenology,
- Articulating the phenomenon in a clear, concise manner,
- Using the procedures of phenomenological data analysis,
- Conveying the essence of the experience, including a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred
- Employing reflexivity throughout the study.

Data Management

The information captured from this study was handled and stored with high security and

reliability. Interviews were recorded using a dictation device for eventual transcription and analysis. Any hard copies of documents and handwritten reports pertaining to this study were secured in a cabinet located in the researcher's office. All electronic work was kept in a password-protected folder housed on the researcher's laptop computer, to which the researcher is the only person with the password. Additionally, all electronic work was kept securely on a backup external hard drive in the researcher's locked file cabinet for the duration of the study and will be destroyed three years upon completion of this research. The reason for such meticulous measures is to keep the captured information true and the results free from any possible contamination.

The researcher transcribed all interviews manually during each interview, followed by manually coding the transcriptions. All interviews were coded using the role of the participant (African American gay male entrepreneur: AAGME) and letter identifiers for each (letters A, B, C...J). The informational keys for the identifiers of the study participants were kept separate from the data in a secured offline locked cabinet. To guarantee anonymity the participants' real identities were not be linked to their interview responses.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the methodology of which the overarching research question was investigated. The research question essential to guide this study was: What are the enabling and inhibiting factors that impact the success and career progression of African American Gay Male Entrepreneurs? To better support the investigative processes of exploring the central research question, the study more specifically posed the following questions:

1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

These research questions and the design of the case study used to gather participant data were developed to complement one another to gain an understanding of the internal and external factors that enable and inhibit the success of AAGME.

This chapter details the methodology used to conduct this research and identifies the participant selection process. Also provided in this section is a detailed account of the process for which data was collected. Additionally, the validity and reliability of the instrumentation employed within the study were described. Also detailed in this chapter was the data analysis process, IRB and Human Subject considerations. The data yielded from this investigation could be utilized to improve the understanding of racial, gender, and sexual orientation equality in the field of business and specifically within the practice of entrepreneurship. The outcomes from this study may have several implications for researchers, business leaders, and aspiring entrepreneurs. The results may provide a blueprint to achieve professional equality, lessen negative stereotypes of African American gay males, and supply an archetype of success within this demographic. Potentially, the data reported could change the landscape of business, make visible the contributions and ambitions of African American gay males; and ultimately shape the professional practices and career trajectories of future African American gay male leaders.

Chapter Four: Research Study Results

The intention of this research study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors that enabled or inhibited the career progression of African American Gay Male Entrepreneurs (AAGME) as they found and operate their-own enterprises. This investigation sought to examine the narratives and stories of this population as they offered an account of those dynamics they perceived as having helped or hindered their career trajectory. The objective of this research was to ascertain variables considered most commonly faced by the participants within the study, and to identify areas for future research. The methodology employed in this study was a qualitative research design. The research study included the gathering of qualitative data via an interview and transcribing the data into a narrative format. The case study format was employed, because it allowed the researcher to gain an intimate familiarity with the lives and cultural nuances of the African American gay male entrepreneurial and professional experience. The one-on-one personal interviews allowed the researcher to ascertain patterns in the lives, actions and experiences of the respondents. This method of self-report resulted in a depth and quality of that may have been absent if data were to have been quantitatively analyzed. Neuman (1997) asserts:

Case studies are valuable because through this method of researcher the investigator is able to immerse themselves in the lived experiences of the participants. A quantitative researcher usually gathers specific information on a great many cases. By contrast, a qualitative researcher may use case study approach. He or she may gather a large amount of information on one or a few cases, go into greater depth, and get more details on the cases being examined. He or she may gather a range of information about a few selected cases. (p. 127)

This chapter analyzes and discusses the findings from the qualitative data collected through interviews. The interview sessions included open-ended questions associated with each sub-research question to gain insights into the overall inquiry guiding this research study (which attempts to identify, the enabling and inhibiting factors of entrepreneurial success for AAGME). Prior to presenting the findings, the research questions and a description of the data-gathering process were reviewed, and a description of the participants provided.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The central research question used to guide this study is as follows:

What are the enabling and inhibiting factors that impact the success and career progression of AAGME?

The study more specifically attempts to answer the following research sub-questions:

1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

Description of the Data Gathering Process

Interview data gathering process. An introductory email invitation was extended by the researcher to AAGME throughout Atlanta, Georgia, inviting them to participate in interviews regarding enabling and inhibiting factors experienced throughout their career trajectory and their

decision to begin their own companies. The researcher spent three weeks conducting interviews. The participant interviews were conducted in person at a location convenient for both the interviewee and the researcher. All interviews were conducted in Atlanta, Georgia. Additionally, the interviews were audio recorded using a recording device application, AudioNote, on the researcher's computer. The researcher took typed notes during the 10 interviews for the research study. After conducting the interviews, the recordings were utilized to create transcripts. The researcher manually cross-referenced his notes with the recordings and typed any missing information from the original notes into a full transcription. The transcription was then analyzed and coded by the researcher for themes, manually.

This chapter will review the questions asked of the participants. Each question will be listed and then followed by a description of the participants' comments to that specific item. The responses are represented in categorical groups and quantified when possible. Throughout the analysis, the participants' responses are quoted and in some instances paraphrased to capture the essence of their perspective.

Description of the interview respondents. A personal phone call introducing the research objective was made to 10 AAGME. Following the introductory phone conversation a subsequent email invitation to the study participants was extended. Attached to the email was a copy of the consent form and interview questions. All participants were living in, and operate their own enterprises within the Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area. The researcher obtained the phone numbers of the participants either directly from the researcher's own professional and personal network of AAGME, or from the recommendations of previous study participants. The email addresses of the participants were obtained from the phone conversation with participants. Participants responded to the researcher via email in order to schedule the interviews. All of the

participants who agreed to partake in an interview were offered an interview session within the timeframe of the study. A total of 10 participants were interviewed.

Table 4

Participant Demographic Information

AAGME	Age	Level of formal education	Industry	Years of enterprise operation
A	32	MSM: Master's Degree in Science Management	Financial Services	3 years, 6 months
B	34	MUEP: Master's Degree in Urban and Environmental Planning In Progress: Doctoral Candidate (Graduation December 2016)	Travel & Lesieur	3 years, 2 months
C	47	DDS: Doctorate Degree of Dentistry	Healthcare: (General/Comprehensive Denistry)	4 years, 1 month
D	32	MBA: Master's Degree in Business Administration	Jewelry and Apparel	6 years, 8 months
E	29	1 Year of college	Information Technology	8 years
G	56	MS: Master's Degree in Computer Science	Information Technology	10 years , 3 months
H	48	BA: Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Business Administration	Event Planning and Corporate Entertainment	12 years

(continued)

AAGME	Age	Level of formal education	Industry	Years of enterprise operation
I	45	MA: Master's of Arts Degree in Counseling Psychology	Healthcare: Counseling and mental illness	4 years
J	41	3.5 Years of college	Relestate (Investment and Wealth building)	15 years

Data Summary and Analysis

The data for this research study was collected in a case study format utilizing qualitative research methodology. The data obtained is arranged in a format that discusses various topics, which correspond to the themes uncovered from the literature review found in Chapter Two. The data from the interviews was categorized into the following emerging themes and assigned based on the information in each research sub-question: Leadership Approach; Personal Characteristics; Education; Career Trajectories; Enabling Resources; Mentorship; Self-Efficacy; Decision-making processes; Motivation; Inhibiting Characteristics; Racial Discrimination and Sexual Orientation Discrimination. When analyzing the data; and to adequately capture the responses from the study participants, the information is represented in narrative format.

Responses to the Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study is: What enabling and inhibiting factors impact the success and career progression of AAGME? The study's participant's answers to the research sub-questions and associated interview queries within each research sub-question are provided below.

Research sub-question 1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs? Qualitative interview questions that related to Research Question 1 included:

- What is your leadership style?
- What personal characteristics do you feel helped with your success in your career trajectory?

This section identifies the main themes from participants' responses to open-ended questions pertaining to this research question. The major topics associated with these questions were related to leadership approach and personal characteristics.

Leadership approach. When participants were asked to discuss their leadership approach, all participants responded with having a commitment to employing collaborative leadership and a focus on establishing a culture of trust and authenticity. AAGME-H states, "In my enterprise, I must create an experience, a customer experience that serves to engage both my employees and my clients. As the leader of the organization I must remember I have two sets of customers, those who work for me and those that are serviced by those who work for me. All parties must be satisfied." In addition to the theme of collaborative leadership being a prominent leadership characteristic among the AAGME interviewed; also emergent were the themes of aspirational and servant leadership. "Leading from within the task assignments and leading by example," is how AAGME-B described enacting servant leadership. AAGME-A mentioned, "In business it is important to know how to establish an array of networks and relationships in an array of spaces and make all parties feel comfortable with the product you are producing." AAGME-I stated, "collaboration is essential for transformation to occur. Transformational leadership can not happen without collaboration." "A collaborative, team-based approach is the

most important aspect in building a team,” professed AAGME-G. When speaking about the importance of collaboration, AAGME-F added, “I love to involve my team and coworkers to make them part of the solution. Oftentimes I provide my team the goal and allow their professional qualities to drive the result or outcome.” In describing his leadership style, AAGME-E stated, “I have to be open to new ideas, open to discussion, yet I make the ultimate decision for the organization.” AAGME-C never asks something of his staff that he would not do himself. He says, “it’s so important to lead by example; professionalism and punctuality...open communication; it’s key to success.” AAGME-D and J, both discussed the importance of being a coach to their teams and intentionally engaging them. AAGME-D commented, “I must show them I am invested in them, so they invest in the ideas of the organization. I look for the skills and interests of each employee. I try to build on strengths that are present and get as much out of them as possible for the good of the whole.” AAGME- J added, “I have to remain “big picture” with my team. Money is not the focus, I am not as concerned with the profit margin as I am with the people who generate the profit.”

Personal characteristics. The participants in this study were asked to discuss personal characteristics they felt contributed to their career progression. Of the offerings, several themes emerged regarding the characteristics the AAGME acknowledged as enablers (those characteristics that aided) to the development and success of their careers. Among the characteristics cited; confidence and integrity, humility, and authenticity were most frequently mentioned as having helped the AAGME in gaining valuable industry experience, mentors and making worthy networks to help their businesses flourish.

Confidence and integrity were specified throughout the interviews, often in tandem and typically mentioned as both personal motivating factors and/or distinguishing characteristics. In

helping as an advantage and distinguishing characteristic of success, AAGME-J stated, “Humility, integrity and confidence are most important to my success. I am selling and promoting a lifestyle, when people purchase homes through my brand they are engrained in a very special community-I have to safeguard that, they have to trust me.” He spoke about his intrinsic confidence in being able to create rapport with clients, and the vital importance of engendering trust throughout his clientele and within the community. Because his business involves the management of sensitive financial and personally vulnerable information he is particularly concerned with the perception of organizational integrity. In addition AAGME-F offers that as a compound minority in a largely dominated female profession, it is important to him that his clients and their families respect the organization, and as the lead of the company, regard him as integral and competent in the profession. He says, “I am constantly working to prove that I have the skills needed to advance in health care, manage my company and provide stellar care. My brand is all about honor, truth and helping to uphold a family legacy, thus integrity is key to my success.”

Humility was a strong theme mentioned throughout the study. Many of the participants mentioned interacting in a humble manner with both employee and client populations. Many of them cited gratitude and fairness as pillars of their success. “I try to do the right thing, treat people right and be fair in all my decisions regarding the practice and my staff,” admitted AAGME-C. He describes what humility means to him and its importance by continuing to say, “In order to do my job to the best of my abilities, I need them. And I remember that...that humbles me when I think I’m getting too big.” AAGME-D reports that it is his attitude of inclusion and employing modesty that has helped him to connect with his staff and develop an affirming culture. He states,

I have to look at grievances between staff and/or those of clients through careful lenses. I have to identify the issues, and find out how to correct them. If something goes wrong with an order, I do not threaten my employees and I approach them with humility. I allow them to guide me through their processes.

AAGME-H says, “You need good people in your corner! You need them to tell you when you’re wrong and you need them to tell you when you and/or your ideas are not so great. You can get caught up in the glamor of creating experiences for celebrities and high profile clients, you need to have people in your life who do not respond to all that extra and can keep you humble. You don’t need yes men.” AAGME- H speaks to the reality of getting so engrossed in one’s work that it can take over and can shift one’s perspective from those things that really matter to material and superficialities.

With regard to Authenticity, AAGME-A emphasized the importance to be willing to accept responsibility for decisions made. He remarked, “Authenticity is very important. Be prudent, be fair and know yourself so that you can better know and serve your customers.” As he engages people regarding their financial circumstances he mentioned the importance of being able to find common ground with his clients. He continued to support the notion of authenticity by stating, “You can’t find common ground if you don’t know who you are, anything else is a lie, and I am sure people do not want a liar dealing with their money!” AAGME-I commented on his passion for serving others and helping to “provide voice for those who are voiceless.” He also discussed the importance of advocating for others who belong to vulnerable populations, as they are those who need the most aid to become substantive contributors to society. He shared his “belief in treating everyone the same and showing no favoritism between his client populations.” He states, “The most foundational characteristic of authenticity is fairness and I

make all my decisions based on fairness and integrity.” AAGME-B- admits that part of authenticity is accountability; identifying shortcomings and finding solutions to ensure his success. He stated, “ I have made a lot of mistakes and I have had to honor those mistakes and work with the client to rectify the situation.” “I am who I am, and it is important that I be true to that. I need my clients to feel comfortable with me, value me and respect me; as we typically have access to important information,” stated AAGME-E as he dialogued regarding the importance of dealing with clients in their personal spaces. He discusses the high value he places on selecting team members who are true to themselves and can represent the brand truthfully regardless of gender, orientation, color, race, etc. AAGME- G discussed his ability to better serve clients because of his strong sense of self. He reported, “I look at things carefully and I have to be vulnerable enough to be wrong. If I am wrong, it is all about making sure that in addition to making amends with those who feel wronged, I direct the team in solutions that are beneficial for all.

Research sub-question 2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs? Qualitative interview questions that related to Research Question 2 included:

- What is your educational history?
- Which (if any) professional organizations do you belong and/or do you believe helped to support your career advancement?
- What was your professional history prior to starting your own enterprise?
- Can you identify any specific resources/factors that helped enable your success?
- Do you, or do you not have a mentor?

This section identifies the main themes from participants' responses to open-ended questions pertaining to this research question. The major topics associated with the questions for sub-question two was related to; education, enabling resources and mentorship.

Education. While formal education is not a specific requirement for entrepreneurship, 100% of the participants interviewed in this study entered and completed some of their undergraduate schooling. Many of the participants completed graduate degrees and formal education beyond the bachelor's degree. "Being credentialed is as important if not more than experience and expertise," stated AAGME- A. The majority of the study respondents mentioned to the importance of holding a degree as they believed it helped to showcase their expertise and establish credibility amongst their client/customer population. AAGME-C stated, "not only did I need my schooling to do what I do, but the added associations, credentials and networks has helped to establish my credibility in a very narrow field." AAGME-I discloses his vulnerability around always wanting to make sure he was competent and seen as able to provide and administer the best care to his patients. He states, "Growing up, I always heard I had to be twice as good as my white counterparts, and then being gay I always made sure I was proactive and over-prepared." AAGME- F shared, "I am a perfectionist and I am a multi-level minority in that I am a male in a female dominated profession, so I needed to make sure I was credentialed and as prepared as possible even though I had years of experience in the field." AAGME-G speaks about how specifically his academic experience has shaped his success as an entrepreneur, he says, "I got to study what I do. When I started there were very few younger black men with computer science degrees so it set me apart from the rest." AAGME- H offered, "my formal educational training helped me become successful in the management aspect of the business. I knew what I was doing in every other part, but my education helped me to pull it all together."

And while most participants noted that formal education has helped buttress and/or augment skill sets and talents, some admit that schooling to prepare for entrepreneurship was not at all a primary focus. “My business was a hobby; consulting for travel and entertainment was something fun for me while in school, and when I found out I could get paid for it; I hustled harder. School is still my primary focus,” revealed AAGME- B. AAGME- D recalls never really intending on starting his own business and that his educational pursuits were to move up the corporate ladder. “I had great government and corporate jobs were employees had to be producers. When I began my own company, this experience coupled with my formal training helped me to quickly assemble a team and begin promoting my business.”

Two of the AAGME attended college but did not graduate with a bachelor’s degree. While they were not awarded a formal education credential they do give credence to the experience and the skills they learned and were exposed too whilst engaged in the academy. “I had a non-traditional educational track prior to beginning my own business. I only attended one year of school, but that year was valuable in helping to prepare me for the task of running my own business,” proclaimed AAGME- E. “I grew up to value education and while I did not complete mine all the way, I did learn how to navigate business and I made some fantastic networks,” stated AAGME- J.

Following the pursuit of formal academic training, several of the participants sought supplemental education in the form of apprenticeships, religious and community networks to help provide skill development and professional training: and many mentioned being mentored in their respective fields as a means in which to enhance their business acumen. Many of the AAGME revealed that time actually working in their respective field has helped to hone their skills. In addition, the participants identified the resources that could help to take them to the

next level of success (than could their education exclusively). Most of them asserted the best asset was learning in the trenches with their employees and leadership teams.

Table 5

Participant Educational Information

AAGME	Level of formal education
A	Master's Degree in Science Management
B	Master's Degree in Urban and Environmental Planning In Progress: Doctoral Candidate (Graduation December 2016)
C	Doctorate Degree of Dentistry
D	Master's Degree in Business Administration
E	1 Year of college
F	Master's Degree in Public Health
G	Master's Degree in Computer Science
H	Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Business Administration
I	Master's of Arts Degree in Counseling Psychology
J	3.5 Years of college

Enabling resources. As participants were asked about professional organizations and enabling resources which augmented their career trajectory, a number of themes emerged, mainly based on the individuals' original career and academic interests. Other themes that

emerged were based on opportunities offered through religious, community, family and field specific institutions of which the participants were affiliated. When mentioning the various types of communities the AAGME intersected, many of the participants disclosed their association to the African American (Pan-Hellenic/ Divine nine) Fraternity and Sorority systems. AAGME-D stated, “ My success has been more associated with my informal networks of peers such as; my religious network, my Morehouse brothers and my frat brothers. These have been the folks to guide and mentor me to success, these people have given me so many resources.” Similarly to this particular response, the theme of religious peers and church network was mentioned throughout the series of interviews. AAGME-J responded, “The church has been my biggest resource; my church community has helped to promote my business and actually helped to supply both a client and employee base. I go to Atlanta’s largest affirming church and it has been incredibly helpful with my business.” Many participants made reference to the LGBT and the larger affirming community of Atlanta as whole, as a network responsible in helping to achieve success in their respective enterprises. AAGME- H offers, “Moving to Atlanta from Virginia has been the best decision I could have ever made. Not only did I take a leap out on faith and let my talents speak for themselves, but also the love and support I have gotten from this space has been unparalleled.”

Most of the respondents did mention industry specific organizations as resources for success however; they seemed to indicate the most valuable resources to their success were those organizations of which they were affiliated with through their personal and social capacity outside of their professional industries. The responses to the questions within this section primarily focused on the ability to self-actualize through pulling resources and experiences together, the importance of networks and how mentorship does affect success. Each participant

also extensively discussed the significance of having an engaged and responsive support system. The participants mentioned either having, or meaningfully creating a strong family network, consisting of support from spouses, children and/or extended family. AAGME D-mentioned the importance of family culture and spousal support by saying, “In this community specifically, it is important not to discount the importance and advantages of marriage. Marriage breeds stability. There are psychological, social and important financial advantages to entrepreneurial candidates being romantically connected.” To emphasize his point, AAGMED continues by saying, “There is security that exists for one partner to have the ability to pursue their craft full-time with the other partner bringing in a steady income into the household.”

Mentorship. All study participants with the exception of one, acknowledged having mentors throughout their career progression, who helped encourage their success. AAGME-I stated, “I have folks I seek advice from, but none of whom I’d consider a mentor.” AAGME-I discusses feeling isolated at times throughout his career progression and reports having faced many professional challenges such as office politics, management obstacles and personnel situations. He adds, “I think I would have been further ahead had I had a specific mentor/mentors I could have regularly relied on.” He mentioned many inhibiting factors that he had to overcome in order to be successful that potentially could have been mitigated with the presence of a mentor.

Of the AAGME who did have mentors, many of the mentors discussed were described as community members, peers who excelled in similar professional industries, family members, former colleagues and supervisors. AAGME-E mentioned that his first mentor was someone very dissimilar to him and his experiences. He describes his first mentor as an older lesbian, Caucasian female. He discusses coming to learn and appreciate her wisdom and recognizing that

she saw potential in him that he did not see in himself. He mentioned when he was thinking of starting his own company, she was encouraging and even financially invested in his efforts. However, as he became successful, he reports they grew apart, separated financially and no longer have a relationship. He stated, “We just disconnected. We were no longer close. But she did help me when I first started my business.”

AAGME-F also mentioned a Caucasian woman practitioner as one of his mentors, he stated, “She was the one who inspired me to strike out on my own. If it were not for her, I would not be successful in this field.” AAGME-D also references a female as being one of his mentors. He stated, “leadership and management was a painful process for me. She always reminded me to remember what’s mission critical and what’s the task at hand.” AAGME-A stated, “My friends have made a big impact in my life.” AAGME-A believes it is important to have many mentors for different situations. In describing his networks and community of influences, he states, “You should surround yourself with people who will propel you forward.”

AAGME-B mentioned the significance of mutual mentorship. He noted, “Just as I learn from my mentors they learn from me and my experiences. Mutual mentorship is a successful strategy that helps build a rich relationship.” He articulated the importance of having several mentors at various stages in an area of focus and bouncing ideas of more than one person. Similarly to the notion of mutual mentorship, AAGME-H mentions a former college instructor of his being a mentor in his effort to self-actualize, and as a result, being tasked with being a mentor to other struggling gay youth. He adds, “I had a mentor, but now I am in a position to be a mentor. Giving back is the most important form of leadership there is.” Most AAGME mentioned the importance of creating those strong bonds between mentee and mentor, as well as their willingness to mentor individuals also.

AAGME-C met his mentor during childhood and they have had a strong relationship since. He reflected, “He took me under his wing, and even helped pay for dental school. He is a wonderful resource and has helped me shape my career.” Like AAGME-C, AAGME-J met his mentor during his childhood years also. AAGME-J’s mentor was the director of one of the youth excellence programs of which he was inducted. His mentor was an older African American female who followed his progression throughout high school and into college. He states, “She was amazing, she went out of her way and took the time from day one to constantly call on me, send me money, books and care-packages. She truly nurtured and mentored me into adulthood. I still employ many of her lessons today.” AAGME-G mentions the bond between he and a former supervisor as the motivation to continue to pursue excellence. He had a supervisor who was very encouraging to him; he reminisced on that experiencing by saying, “He would check-in on me and constantly encouraged me.” He began to trust him and as he progressed in his career and eventually into entrepreneurship, AAGME-G began to seek his former supervisor’s advice on how to navigate the business landscape.

Although most of the participants identified having mentors throughout their career trajectory, all participants discussed that the lack of readily visible AAGME mentors of which to model behaviors and succession paths were in fact an inhibitor. AAGME-C commented, “There were few role models that thought, loved and looked like me. I was fortunate to find one that was at least Black and male.” AAGME-G expressed that even with opportunity present today, it is still hard for young, Black gays in this generation to identify paths to success. Parallel to this notion, AAGME-D articulated his thoughts regarding role modeling by saying, “We are an underground force, and unless you have the networks to get plugged in, you will remain clueless and floundering.”

Research sub-question 3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs? Qualitative interview questions that related to Research Question 3 included:

- Do you feel any discomfort in your leadership role?
- What sets you apart from other African American gay males looking to pursue a career in entrepreneurship?

This section identifies the main themes from participants' responses to open-ended questions pertaining to this research question. The major topics associated with the questions for research sub-question three were related to; motivation and decision-making processes.

Motivation. The ability to express control and autonomy over one's life experiences and career path, were themes identified throughout the interviews. The capacity to identify a "bigger picture" for one's life and establish a vision for their future was also a significant topic gleaned from the participant responses. AAGME-B reported that his motivation for entrepreneurship arose from the victimization he endured while working for the government. When describing misappropriated opportunities, falling victim to ageism, racism and various forms of discrimination; he articulated his professional experience as an "oppressive environment." He offered, "You have to have a vision of where you want to be at the end, and working for someone else dreading to come in was not where I wanted to be." AAGME-F described himself as a "perfectionist with a high standard of excellence." He mentioned that because he was particular to detail he was able to make substantial profits for his employers; and this inspired him to consider the idea of being able to do the same for himself. He attested, "I knew if I was able to make outstanding profits for the various companies I worked for, I could tweak my business and do the same for myself." Many AAGME shared that they were good at their jobs

and as they grew professionally and advanced in their skill sets, they began to notice opportunities to create their own enterprises. AAGME-D stated, “I pay attention to detail which made me successful in previous positions and when my eye for detail began to yield large profits in the form of my hobby, I realized I could be successful on my own accord.” AAGME-H reflected, “I notice that with my corporate clients I saw what they needed, I could predict needs and I realized I could branch off and do it for myself. I realized I thrive off change and that pushes me to be better.”

Additionally, the concepts of confidence and resilience were ideas that surfaced in the responses for section 3 in the interview tool. AAGME-I stated that he sometimes felt self-doubt and the need to always prove himself as he progressed throughout his career. He confessed, “I had to learn how to get out of my-own way. I had to stop internalizing negative messages from my friends and family and trust myself.” AAGME-A shared the importance of resilience and the confidence he had in venturing out on his own, when he stated, “I was not afraid to strike out on my own, I was just careful. I had started businesses and failed, so I knew how to do it, I just needed to ensure my success.” Many participants mentioned that they, at some point in their career, felt doubt and the need to prove themselves to others; and in many ways, prove to themselves their ability and worth as a professional and businessperson. It was reported by some participants, they felt their success was a result of overcompensating for being both African American and gay. AAGME-C mentioned, “We often have to fight society’s reaction to us because we are both black and gay. I did this by overcompensating in the classroom.” AAGME-G stated, “I am a dark complexioned, gay man. I always felt I needed to do more and be more, and that’s what keeps pushing me to be successful.” AAGME-E expressed, “I didn’t finish college, so I worked myself to death, my work ethic is how I typically overcompensate.”

In discussing his success, AAGME-J offered, “ Sometimes this job is high risk, but I pride myself on being able to create a good rapport one-on-one with my clients. It is important that I transcend both race and orientation.”

Decision-making. Throughout the interviews, many participants spoke about the process and importance of implementing short-term and long-term goals with their staff in an effort to professionally develop their employee base and to ensure sustainability for the company as a whole. The participants often mentioned acknowledging short-term benefits of hard decisions, but articulated the priority as always being focused on the long-term wins. In his interview, AAGME-D discussed his confidence in making hard decisions, because he uses the mission of his company as his guiding principles. He commented, “It’s a lot easier to make a hard-decision when you know it’s in the best interest of the company.” AAGME-B emphasized the importance of continually moving forward despite challenging situations or setbacks. He advocated, “In this role, being able to make a decision, be ok with that decision and move on is very important.” AAGME-H says that he is confident in making the hard choices, and while the final call is his, that he encourages his team to “call me out” when he’s going in the wrong direction. Similarly AAGME-E discussed the importance of self-actualization as a source for effective decisions; he adds, “Don’t be afraid to know your limits, your strengths and to ask for help when you need it.” Monteiro and Fuqua (1994) describe the process of self-actualization as the importance of understanding the intersection of race, sexuality and socio-economic status and its influences on identity formation. Understanding these constructs and how they interplay helps in having a healthy concept of self. They assert, “development of a meaningful understanding of one’s race, culture, and sexuality are all critical aspects in the developing self concept for LGBT persons”

(p. 34). This suggests there is a correlation between how LGBT persons understand themselves, their ability to actualize full agency and the positive decisions they make.

Another AAGME mentioned that not being able to make a decision could actually be an inhibitor to success. AAGME-C commented, “You must appear to be decisive for the team, the inability to make a decision is something that tends to hold people back.” AAGME-J shared, “your way might not always be the right way, but can not let people write your story.”

As the decision-making theme emerged, AAGME-I shared, “Sometimes, decision making has to do more with the with urgency of the problem rather than its genre and a decision must be rendered quickly.” AAGME-A complemented this notion by stating, “Sometimes you need to make a decision to complete a project, you might not have all the information, but a decision must be made.” AAGME-F spoke on making decisions that affect his staff by saying, “The final decision may not be the one they favored, but I want them to feel that they have been heard.” AAGME-G emphasized making decisions that make him happy as a leader as to how he makes the decisions for his organization. He mentions that he has always been “adventurous” in business. He claimed, “I know my business very well” and “I work hard at it.” In fact, he actually pursued further education by completing a master’s of computer science in order to enhance his credibility as an entrepreneur in the field.

Research sub-question 4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs? Qualitative interview questions that related to Research Question 4 included:

- What obstacles have you faced in your career progression in becoming an entrepreneur?

- What, if any, disadvantages do you face in your career as compared to your hetero-sexual (or non-minority) counterparts?

This section identifies the main themes from participants' responses to open-ended questions pertaining to this research question. The major topics associated with the questions for research sub-question four were related to: racial discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination and inhibiting characteristics.

Racial discrimination. Each participant shared both personal and professional experiences where they endured victimization as a result of their race. AAGME-B shared a story about his experiences in the workplace. He recounts his dismay of being passed-over for promotions and opportunities because his former supervisor hired and supported other workplace friends and/or people with whom he could more closely identify with racially. "You'll always have your haters," shared AAGME-B, "he professionally insulated himself with friends he hired...the old white men I trained. He was professionally threatened by my accomplishments and education level." AAGME-A stated, "My early career I faced ageism and racism, people didn't think I could do the job." AAGME-I commented, "As Black men always have to be on our A-game. We are black first and then gay." Referencing a former supervisor, AAGME-D recalled, "he was threatened by me this much was obvious; I was big, Black and smart. He sabotaged me every chance possible." AAGME-C shared that one of his pre-medical advisors did not believe he should be in medicine. AAGME-C commented, "he would make racial comments and was not supportive of my goals even when I proved I could do it."

AAGME-F suggested that barriers were also based on societal perceptions of young Black males. He stated, "White women are dominant in my field. I have to be better than they think I should be." AAGME-E shared the importance of trust for his line of work. He

commented by saying, “I can’t force myself on people, we live in the south and sometimes they have prejudices and may not want a young black male in their home.” When talking about his experiences in the workforce, AAGME-I mentioned, “I am a minority in many instances, and faces in my field don’t look like mine. I have to be twice as good to get mediocre contracts than my white male counterparts.” AAGME-G shared experiences with co-workers and supervisors before beginning his own entrepreneurial endeavors. He mentions being the only African American male in the computer software company and discusses the inequities he faced by saying, “they set me up to fail, I would be assigned tasks and not get the proper resources or be assigned to a group and receive poor communication. Eventually this is what caused me to start out on my own.” AAGME-H also mentioned that he was unfairly treated at the company for which he used to work. He talked about being assigned smaller and low profile projects and not being provided the opportunity to showcase his talents. In speaking about how race could affect the marketing and growth of his business AAGME-J professed, “Certain people have their preferences and I might not fall within those preferences because of who I am. I can’t let that stop me.”

Sexual orientation discrimination. Each AAGME conceded to the fact that they were part of a marginalized population with respect to their profession. AAGME-C talked about being singled out as a gay male in dental school and throughout his profession. He stated, “In my early career I had to be mindful of my surroundings and how I interacted with patients. Starting my own business has given me an outlet to be who I am holistically.” AAGME-J commented about the importance of one’s brand and how an overtly homosexual message could deter clients. He says, “Bigotry is a large factor in business. We typically do business with people we trust and if people can’t trust how I love, then they probably will not do business with

me.” AAGME-A continued the conversation on bigotry as he discussed the role of media and popular perceptions of the Black gay population. He commented, “We continually have to fight the stereotypes of being both black and gay. The media and society at large depict us as diseased, dishonest and disloyal, and when people mirror that it detracts from who we really are.” Having experienced and extensively studied how bigotry and provincial thinking harm others, AAGME-B offered, “homophobia is learned. It is a social construct and it is a form of abuse. This form of oppression can be all consuming if you are reliant on mainstream society for your definition of success.”

AAGME-D proposed, “There is a dearth of talent of which is ready to marry.” He spoke to the importance of stability and perception. He mentioned that there is great stability for the entrepreneur in creating a supportive family unit. Also, he discussed the importance of both self and social perceptions. He offered even those people who may not be readily accepting of homosexuality, typically can relate to the notion of family. He adds, “Because we are gay there is a large perception we are totally indulgent and don’t want the “picket fence” dream also. But it is the stability of that dream that would take us to the next level.” AAGME-G shared a story of a corporate client mentioning “the gays are everywhere.” The client continued to make derogatory comments about homosexuals for the duration of the project. Upon its completion, AAGME-G purposely scheduled an exit meeting with the client where he disclosed his sexuality to prove the client wrong for his point-of-view. AAGME- H shared the importance of not succumbing to the fad of being gay. He commented, “Being gay is cool right now, its cultural tourism; everyone wants the “coolness” of gay, but none of the trials that come with it.” He continues by saying, “You have to stay mindful that not everybody will like you, nor do you need to like everyone else, you have to stay focused on your business.” AAGME-I stated, “A

couple of times I could not work with certain people because they were not interested in working with a gay black man. I had to find new clients and new partners. It was painful.” AAGME-F reflected on losing a contract early in his business because of his sexuality. He acknowledged, “I’ve since started wearing a band on my ring finger. My clients assume I married and therefore we avoid in depth conversations and they paint their own picture.” AAGME-E spoke about “code switching” (the ability act differently with different groups of people). He pointed out that he has to constantly be on guard, he commented, “I am a feminine man, so it is important to quiet that down and be aware when I am with others or in their homes; not only for the comfort of the client, but for my safety as well.”

Inhibiting characteristics. The participants all spoke on behalf of their roles as entrepreneurs as being tough, yet rewarding; and also sometimes having to make risky decisions to move forward the needle of success. During the interviews, the AAGME also talked about their personal and professional insecurities and feelings of discomfort that can occur from responsibilities such as financial oversight, administrative responsibilities, and maintaining the vision of an institution. Additionally, many of the respondents felt particularly passionate regarding the social stigmas and public perceptions surrounding African American gay males. AAGME-J maintained, “The social climate we live in can really have a bad affect on success. Encountering and then believing naysayers can really have a negative affect on how you do business.” AAGME-H offers, “Negative stereotypes can be infectious. When we internalize all the bad society is spouting about us, we become our worst enemy.” AAGME-G simply added, “We are a subset of an invisible population. There is very little to tell us we matter, therefore we believe we don’t.” AAGME-C stated, “Professionally successful black gay males weren’t (and still are not) the norm, nor are they readily visible so I felt tremendous pressure to be successful.”

The lack of readily available gay, Black mentors and/or publicized pipelines to success emerged as the largest inhibitor to success for the AAGME. The participants mention that leadership was much different than merely performing in the industry and/or working for someone else. They discussed having to hone and develop personnel management skills and continue to believe in their vision despite insecurities and challenges. AAGME-F commented, “In the beginning, my insecurities and assumed perceptions of others sometimes led me to feel unqualified to lead. I did not have a gay, black man who I could identify with, so my mentor became an older Caucasian lady who helped me navigate through the profession.” Role models and mentorship were identified as vital to not only the self-efficacy of the emergent entrepreneur, but also to factors of motivation and sustained success. AAGME-B stated, “When you consider skill set and talent, we can do it. In fact we have been innovating and doing “it” for centuries. It is racism, homophobia and limited access and exposure that cause a chasm of success.” AAGME-I acceded to the notion of mentorship, “Mentorship would have made my road easier. I didn’t always know what I was doing and it really could have helped.”

An additional theme that surface as a result of the research was financial responsibility and stability. Some participants shared how important money management is as one progresses throughout the entrepreneurial process. AAGME-A stated, “Financial habits are a learned skill often passed down from family interactions. That type of exposure is not usually a pillar or value of most young, black gay males’ childhood experience.” AAGME-E acknowledged, “I needed money, I didn’t know proper money management and therefore at the beginning, my then mentor was very helpful.” In further discussing factors that challenge success, AAGME-D mentioned, “The personal economic situation of an entrepreneurial candidate is so important, and

unfortunately there are not a lot of models or occurrences of successful couples, healthy family relationships, or readily accessible networks for AAGME to shape their trajectories.”

Each participant shared feedback as to their experiences in beginning their own company and the factors that have helped to keep their organization viable. The commonality amongst participants seems to be the themes of finding/building community and creating a succession or pipeline plan that can bring in more people to buttress success. The research shows that education, professional associations, and relationships that provided opportunities for professional exposure and growth are helpful in augmenting success; however, it is the close social and communal ties of AAGME that serve as the network which enables continued success for this population. All of the entrepreneurs mentioned the positive implications of having a mentor(s) guide them in professional development (even if they themselves, did not identify as having a specific mentor). Furthermore, many of the respondents emphasized the significance of their-own mentorship and outreach efforts as a means to help fill the pipeline of African American gay male entrepreneurship. AAGME-H recognized, “We who have made it have a duty to mentor.” And, in his final thoughts during his interview, AAGME- J affirmed, “I try to be a role model of hope. I understand my success has been the exception and not necessarily the rule.”

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four provides a description and examination of how the research data were offered. The data garnered from the interview were coded and organized into themes based on commonalities in respondent responses. Ten different topics were used to present the data: Leadership Approach; Personal Characteristics; Education; Enabling Resources; Mentorship;

Motivation; Decision- making processes; Racial Discrimination, Sexual Orientation
Discrimination and Inhibiting Characteristics.

Chapter Five provides a summary, discussion, conclusion, implications about the findings analyzed in Chapter Four and suggestions for future research. The recommendations for future research are based on the data analysis from this chapter and the literary as well as scholarly gaps of information discovered from the review of available literature.

Chapter Five: Research Study Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to conduct research that identifies and describes the factors that enable and inhibit the success of AAGME. This research examined how AAGME in Atlanta, Georgia have progressed throughout their careers, to begin their own enterprises. Considering the personal and professional settings, and potential challenges this demographic must learn to navigate to reach success, this study serves as an exploration of those enabling factors that have assisted in realizing success—despite having to overcome those identified inhibiting factors discussed by the respondents. A secondary aim of this study is to also engage in discourse regarding the possible positive influences that AAGME can and do have within the world of business, and on contemporary society as a whole.

This chapter provides a summary of the data gathered and the processes utilized in the research study to better understand the narratives of this particular population of African American gay males. Additionally, the researcher will provide conclusions and implications drawn from the collected data. The final section in this chapter will include recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

The central research question for this particular study was; *What are the enabling and inhibiting factors that impact the success and career progression of AAGME?* Additionally, there were four overarching research inquiries that aided in guiding this study; they are as follows:

1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

Before engaging in the research on the topic in question, a literature review was conducted focusing on entrepreneurship, the professional contributions of African American LGBT persons and the mainstream perception of African American gay males in society. The review of literature revealed there to be a vast amount of scholarly accounts regarding business and entrepreneurship, but very little research on the professional contributions of African American LGBT persons. No scholarly information could be uncovered regarding the nature, motivations and influencing factors that lead African American gay males into business and into beginning their own organizations. Thus, an in-depth review of the literature with a directed focus on African American gay male leaders in business and entrepreneurship did not produce substantial yields. However, there was an adequate amount of literature on topics surrounding the central research idea of which to build a framework for this study. Literature regarding the perceptions of African American LGBT persons, the intersection of race and gender and the importance of considering leadership characteristics expressed by gay leaders in business, helped to shape the aforementioned questions and the present study.

Reference to the Literature

As the investigation of available literature developed, the topics of concentration that became relevant to the present study were: History of Entrepreneurship, The Characteristics and Motivations of Entrepreneurship, The Importance of the Images of African American Gay Males, and the Significance of Atlanta as the study's setting. Additionally, through the literature available on the topic it became vital to examine the subject matter from a socio-cultural perspective. Therefore, the literature review also discussed important features related to the enabling and inhibiting factors of success such as: Intersectionality and Entrepreneurship, Ethical Considerations, the concepts of Personal Power and Transformational Leadership, the Importance of Holistic Identity Expression, and the importance of Mentorship. These were all critical components in aiding in the exploration of, and these components provided a general framework for which to research the leadership qualities of AAGME.

There are many enlightening narratives that contribute to creating a rich socio-cultural discourse regarding the success of a particular "vulnerable" population. In the conducted interviews, significant emphasis was placed on the respondents' pre-entrepreneurial experiences to help better understand motivating factors toward entrepreneurship. Following Harper's (2012), anti-deficit model of investigation, the questions asked did not necessarily focus on lack or professional deficiencies, rather a concentration on how success was reached. Questions in the interview tool were designed to capture information uncovering support system contributions, interventions that enhanced opportunities for success, and mechanisms for thriving in professional environments that could potentially be considered racist and culturally unresponsive.

There are many important perspectives and cultural assessments offered from the analysis of intersectionality. And, because of the significance of considering the implications of one (or a group of persons) who navigate(s) life with the merging of uniquely marginalized experiences, the researcher may explore future connections with authors of some of the topics mentioned above. As an example, Kimberle Crenshaw has authored many articles regarding the importance of recognizing the various spheres of diversity, and how these categories can and do exchange with one another to create certain realities that affect decision making-processes; thus affect ultimate “life outcomes” for particular peoples. Additionally, Keith Boykin (2005) has released publications relating to understanding the perception that exists concerning the identity and actions of African American gay males. He discusses the crucial importance of “destigmatizing” homosexuality and creating comprehension around the differences between identity and behavior. Lastly, he offers to audiences the importance of capitalizing on the intellectual and social capital of African American gay males to create a community of trust and tolerance that moves the topics related to this population from negative and taboo, to matter-of-fact and commonplace.

When initiating this study, the researcher’s intent was to further the conversation beyond promiscuity and pathologies as it relates to African American gay males. Of interest, was discovering if there was a clear pattern of enablers and inhibitors that affected the success of African American gay male businessmen. One of the many benefits of this study is that it directly provides a context and a voice to an under-explored demographic. Understanding the motivations and leadership capabilities of African American gay male entrepreneurs helps to better understand a multifaceted group of businesspeople who substantially contribute to the global marketplace.

Research Design and Methodology

This research study was completed using a qualitative case study format. This study involved interviewing ten AAGME. The study was completed by having each entrepreneur engage in a recorded interview in person at a mutually agreed upon location in Atlanta, Georgia. The aim of the questions posed to the respondents endeavored to solicit the entrepreneurs' own perspectives and opinions about the research topic addressing, *the enabling and inhibiting factors that impact the success and career progression of AAGME*. The personal interview format was selected as the data collection method in order to encourage authentic and robust responses from the entrepreneurs.

Upon collecting the narratives from the population of entrepreneurs, a systematic content analysis of the data was completed. The data were analyzed, grouped and coded according to themes. The resulting data were related to many of the major concepts in the literature review.

Data Source

The population used for this study was composed of African American, gay male entrepreneurs, all residing and working in Atlanta, Georgia. The businessmen within the study worked across five different industries, with the largest percentage of the respondents working within the health services profession. All participants have owned and operated their enterprises for 3 years or more.

Table 6

Participant Information by Industry

Interview participant	Industry
AAGME- B AAGME- H (20% of participant population)	Entertainment, Leisure and Travel

(continued)

Interview participant	Industry
AAGME-A AAGME-J (20% of participant population)	Financial Services, wealth planning and real-estate
AAGME-C AAGME-F AAGME-I (30% of participant population)	Healthcare
AAGME- E AAGME-G (20% of participant population)	Information technology
AAGME-D (10% of participant population)	Jewelry and apparel

Assumptions and Resolutions

At the beginning of the study the researcher established four assumptions. These assumptions were listed in Chapter One. This section addresses each assumption as it relates to the data obtained from the research study. The original assumption is represented in italic font and the resolution formulated upon the data analysis follows.

- *Because race and sexuality are dominate factors regarding the behaviors of the participants, there will be similarity in the participants' comments.*

The findings in this study validated the assumption that race and sexuality dominated some of the factors affecting many of the professional behaviors and motivations of the participants. All participants made mention to the constructs of race and sexuality as being factors relating to unfavorable experiences in their conventional employment positions prior to starting their entrepreneurial pursuits. AAGME-C stated, “I got stuck, I was the only Black boy on staff, and I was gay. I had more education and a better track record of productivity than everyone who got promoted over me. They were all older white men. I hit a glass ceiling.”

- *A combination of race and sexuality will dominate the factors affecting the entrepreneurial success of the participants in this study.*

The AAGME in this study all ascribed to the same gender; and therefore race and sexuality are the mitigating constructs. Each participant noted that mentorship and role models are incredibly important to success, and that finding AAGME in their fields for which to solicit advice and guidance is an enabler to success. Many AAGME in this study mentioned their inability to find mentorship in their field. AAGME A offered, “I looked around at my friend base, my media outlets, and asked around in our community...no one was doing or providing the service I wanted too. I was a pioneer.”

- *The questions asked during the interview sessions solicited the most important factors influencing the participants’ success as an entrepreneur.*

The interview questions used were deemed accurate as they were rooted in content derived from the literature review. Additionally, the interview tool was analyzed and reviewed by a content evaluation panel and pilot participant. Opinions and suggestions about the questions for the interview tool were considered and implemented. Due to the knowledge base

regarding assessments and interviews, and expertise of the content evaluation panel and the pilot participant the most important factors were ultimately solicited as a result of the interview tool.

- *The AAGME interviewed will respond truthfully to the interview questions asked.*

Prior to the interview, the importance of confidentiality and informed consent was discussed with each potential participant. Also, during each of the interview sessions the AAGME participants were assured of the confidential nature of the study. There is no clear reason to believe participant responses were untruthful.

The factors discussed by the African American gay male entrepreneurs in this study are specific to male leaders who hold roles in business as the preeminent authority figure of their enterprises. Because of their unique circumstance of belonging to multiple minority categories, leadership approaches and personal behaviors may vary to fit a particular environment(s). Due to the intersection of race, and one's sexual orientation, many factors identified with the AAGME participants may be experienced by other leaders occupying one or similar minority categories in other industries.

Restatement of Findings

In addressing the original research question, what are the enabling and inhibiting factors impacting the success and career progression of African American gay male entrepreneurs, several results emerged. The topics discovered from the study are as follows: Leadership Approach; Personal Characteristics; Education; Enabling Resources; Mentorship; Motivation; Decision- Making Processes; Racial Discrimination, Sexual Orientation Discrimination and Inhibiting Characteristics.

Leadership approach. In order to evaluate the leadership approaches of the AAGME study participants, the researcher employed qualitative research methods by asking AAGME to freely describe their leadership style. Overall the participants most commonly stated having a

collaborative leadership approach. Senge (2006), offers when building effective collaboration is the aim, developing a shared conceptual "systems sense" amongst stakeholders is essential. All parties involved must understand what elements of the enterprise are operationally sound and those that need to be altered or improved. Effective and successful collaborative change and innovation are products of the leader taking the time to gather input from all stakeholders so that true, inclusive systemic thinking can give rise to innovation that will yield sustainability and future vitality. In an effort to motivate and transform teams, a leader must create stakeholders and cultivate a followship. Many of the AAGME also directly associated their approach as aspirational (coaching, developing and encouraging employees to reach their potential) and detail oriented. AAGME- C offered, "It is important to lead by example, you should periodically ask the question, would you follow you?" Also, the leaders consistently mentioned a commitment to the notion of creating a shared vision for their staff and employees.

Personal characteristics. A variety of positive characteristics and traits emerged from the interviews. The most commonly identified themes by the participants were confidence and integrity, humility, and authenticity. The four common themes were communicated through stories of triumph and often overcoming challenges. Many of the participants emphasized confidence and integrity as compliments of each other. AAGME-A asserted, "When I make a bold move I do so with intent and with the well-being of my employees and clients." AAGME-J claimed, "I put people first: I make sure to respond to their needs. That's integrity and when I do that profit follows." Concerning maintaining credibility, five participants mentioned the importance of integrity. AAGME-F stated, "I make decisions that are fair. That's how you gain employee trust." Also, a common theme was humility. This theme was especially present during discussions of their leadership style and enabling factors. It was a repeated theme when

discussing building one's leadership team and creating an organizational culture that values open communication. AAGME-D acknowledged, "Sometimes I lead from behind. Its important to show my team I trust them, more importantly, I get more mileage from my team by sharing center-stage."

Lastly authenticity was identified throughout the interviews as being a personal characteristic having significant value. Authenticity is also a very prominent theme throughout the literature that was reviewed, its consistent presence in the interviews further endorse it as being a vital enabler to success. Expressing accountability, being emotionally secure and having the ability to be flexible were all attributed to valuing and acting in an authentic manner. AAGME-A sums it up best when he stated, "When you know who you are you know where you are going, more importantly you know who you can take with you and those you need to leave on the curb."

Education. Most participants in this study pursued non-traditional pathways to starting their own companies and had originally intended to work for others. Several participants of the study admitted not planning to become entrepreneurs initially. And, although all participants had attended some college, not every participant held degrees in a formal discipline. The level of education held by participants in this study was varied. While many stated during their interviews they felt their academic pursuits bolster skillsets such as personnel management and financial planning; formal education is not necessarily an essential factor to achieving entrepreneurial success. The AAGME interviewed, all noted that their formal education, professional exposure and developmental opportunities have had a great influence on external parties and potential clients as to their credibility and perceived abilities as it relates to their businesses. However, they also assert the advancement of their enterprises and the learning to

navigate complex situations has directly come from their experiences in the field, and not from the classroom, seminars or presentations.

Enabling resources. When asked to describe resources that enable their success, all of the AAGME described the importance of creating, or being part of a special network of people. The study participants casually mentioned professional affiliations, cited their schooling as helpful, and some even mentioned leadership development opportunities that aided their in success. However, the predominant response from the respondents was the ability to create or find a support system. AAGME-F admitted, “You just need a good group of people to vent to and help you strategize.” Many of the AAGME emphasized the importance of being a visible part of the LGBTQ community, giving back and inspiring others to achieve success. AAGME-J shared, “Being visible within the community creates a series of opportunities to connect with all types of people. I take advantage of every opportunity to connect with others, and to connect others to others.” Similarly, AAGME-D’s involvement with his fraternity facilitated an opportunity for him to connect with PR and marketing experts that he now utilizes when promoting events for his company. Furthermore, the common theme articulated was that the support system should not just be industry specific, but include family and friends as well.

Mentorship. AAGME-B describes the benefits of having mentoring throughout a professional’s career as “a vital piece to the puzzle of success.” AAGME-I acknowledged, “You need to see what it is you want to become.” Interestingly enough, of all the professionals interviewed AAGME-I admitted to not having a mentor. Of the AAGME participants, all but one referenced having at least one mentor throughout his career trajectory. The participants’ recognized former supervisors, colleagues/peers, friends and family when dialoguing about their mentors. All participants that noted having mentors expressed the substantial contributions and

learning they garnered from their mentors. AAGME-C mentioned his childhood dentist as one of his mentors stating, “He’s been there since the start, and he still mentors me. Were it not for him, I would not be here.” AAGME-D asserts, “Mentorship helps tremendously, people gain new skills, it promotes professional retention, and a good coach or mentor can help create long-term career satisfaction.”

Additionally, when discussing mentorship, all respondents expressed disappointment at the lack of role models and representations of successful Black gay professionals. It was determined that a lack of mentorship and visible models of achievement has been the largest inhibitors to their career success. AAGME-H commented, “There are few role models and that’s why I jump in and help where I can.” He expressed that the AAGME leaders who are visible in the community need to pave the way for the next generations of entrepreneurial hopefuls, and Black gay youth in general.

Motivation. For the AAGME in this study, advancing into a professional position where they are the senior-most authority person was not necessarily their aspirations. They all made mention that despite naysayers and personal doubt, at some point in their career; they were encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship by a colleague/peer/mentor who recognized their potential. While others may have noticed personal and/or professional qualities that promoted entrepreneurship, all participants mentioned pursuing entrepreneurship for a sense of control, to leave a legacy and/or to make a difference within their community. AAGME-C stated, “ I wanted to leave something behind I could be proud of and call my own.” AAGME-F said, “I finally decided I had the skill set and the connections to do for myself what I had been doing so well for others.”

Additionally, a large motivation for entrepreneurship arose from the desire for the AAGME to separate themselves from oppressive work environments. AAGME-B disclosed, “I got physically ill going into that place. I will never work for another person again.” AAGME- E offers, “I just didn’t fit into the role of corporate employee.” AAGME-H commented, “This way I can be all of me all of the time. I can choose how and when and with whom I work, its not done for me.”

And while none of the respondents initially aspired to become entrepreneurs until they were encouraged or coerced, all of the participants’ have some previous work experience and formal education completed prior to holding their role as company founders. Only two participants did not complete their undergraduate degrees, the remaining eight have at least a bachelor’s degree. This may imply that there is no distinct pathway to becoming an entrepreneur. Furthermore, pursuing professional and academic experience in the field of interest could be useful tools for individuals with aspirations of leadership roles or becoming an entrepreneur.

Decision-making processes. The AAGME of this research identified collaboration and inclusivity as their leadership approach and the strategies employed to make decisions. Additionally, in this dissertation, issues related to confidence and integrity moved to the forefront. The participants made note about gaining and re-gaining confidence as it relates to defining, communicating and implementing their vision. As the entrepreneurs became more experienced in their roles they mentioned making tough decisions comes easier to them. Because they rely on the strengths of their leadership teams and use the company’s mission as the guiding principle, its easier to make efficient and effective decisions.

Also a prominent theme regarding factors that lead to the decision making process was autonomy and personal time. The participants' remarked on the substantial amount of time their roles consumed outside of traditional career choices (an eight-hour work-day). The comments about time suggest the participants value their personal time and connection with their networks. Addressing specific family matters of the participants were not discussed at length; nonetheless all of the participants did mention the importance of finding time to spend with their connections and relationships outside of their workplace. AAGME-C said, "I can massage the hours of availability for myself and the practice based on the needs at the time." The remarks on the time commitments by the participants' implies that aspiring entrepreneurs may consider that spending long hours starting a company will have consequences concerning the amount and quality of their time spent with family, friends, and outside connections. Aspiring entrepreneurial leaders should consider assessing their values with regard to "family-life" as this may be a factor in the decisions they make for their organizations.

Racial discrimination. Among the participants, several commented specifically on matters relating to having been a victim of race discrimination in their previous professional experiences. The participants all shared instances of encountering reactions of skepticism and doubt from supervisors or authority figures when excelling at projects. AAGME-B shared, "He looked at me puzzled. He was shocked because I wasn't supposed to succeed. He had been setting me up to fail." The participants mentioned having experienced discomfort within their roles when managing, and interacting with older White people (males specifically).

Branching out on their own and having the ability to create their team has helped to circumvent some of the racial prejudices experienced directly. Aspiring leaders in business and entrepreneurship may consider pursuing workforce training programs, internships, or

foundational employment in a space that celebrates diversity and clearly articulates its commitment to inclusion and engagement.

Sexual orientation discrimination. In describing obstacles and disadvantages experienced, the participants shared many stories related to sexual orientation discrimination throughout their career progression. Of the stories shared, several themes regarding gender and sexual orientation oppression emerged which related to the literature review. A majority of the participants mentioned the theme of overcompensation. Many shared their success is a result of overcompensating because they were gay and felt the need to prove themselves. As societal norms dictate what behaviors are suitable expressions of masculinity; it is often witnessed that men who interact within this construct differently than the prescribed social notions are punished (Sallee & Harris, 2011). Additionally, men representing marginalized masculinities (e.g., gay men, men of color) might have their status as men (or their male-ness) challenged by their peers; thus causing them to find other means for which to compensate, compete and be deemed viable contributors to a particular community (Connell, 2005).

Also, commonly expressed by the participants was the damaging results that cognitive and identity dissonance can produce. All respondents noted having experienced an instance related to facing the oppressive sexual orientation stereotypes; and negative societal, media and familial expectations of what it means to be male, African American and gay. Many shared stories of having to serve as “the exception” to what being a Black, gay male is, and/or pave the way for future young, African American same-gender loving individuals.

Inhibiting characteristics. Overall, a majority of participants’ commented that finding access to resources and professional exposure opportunities were the most significant challenges to success. Also, cited most emphatically was the lack of professional modeling and mentorship

that exists representing the African American, gay male experience. Most often, participants spoke on behalf of the challenges of trying to navigate the business landscape and the disadvantages of beginning a company without an archetype of success or readily available models of which to reference. A few respondents made comparisons of their career progression to those of their male non-minority and non-gay counterparts. AAGME-A said, “I had to learn and build this on my own. I didn’t inherit my business or have the professional exposure opportunities some of my white peers have had.”

Many participants shared stories of declining career opportunities based on having to work with specific colleagues and supervisors. Eventually, many made mention that it was their discriminatory experiences regarding race and sexual orientation at their workplaces that led them to embrace entrepreneurship. Though these negative experiences lead the study participants to seek independent capitalistic ventures, many said they use the memories of the past experiences as a source of motivation to remain successful. And although addressing these inhibitors to success can be frustrating, demanding and stressful; each participant acknowledged having a tremendous support system to help withstand the hardships. AAGME-J offers “My support-system has made it so my challenges don’t become debilitating. I rely on them to pull me up and out of it.”

In addition to the themes noticeably present within the data, resourcefulness seemed to be a characteristic of all participants. Whether the AAGME capitalized on opportunities for professional growth or identified ways to navigate through difficult situations, the concept of resourcefulness presented itself indirectly throughout each interview. Success in business and entrepreneurship may be correlated with race, gender and sexuality; however, these dynamics may also serve as strengths that appeal to a target population and offer a unique and diverse

perspective. Moreover, techniques utilized by successful leaders to inspire staff and employees to follow them and create investment into a shared vision may be different. And, because of the changing culture of the business world and its consumers, as well as the socio-cultural progressions of modern society; achieving economic sustainability for an organization demands a collaborative, innovative and inclusive leadership approach. Therefore entrepreneurs and business leaders in the contemporary marketplace need to appeal to an assortment of needs, perspectives and populations.

Research Study Conclusions

African American gay men often operate through, what scholars Mitchell & Means (2014) have coined as the quadruple consciousness. African American gay men frequently have to move through and consider the realities of what it means to be a) White and heterosexual b) White and non-heterosexual, c) Black and heterosexual, and d) Black and non-heterosexual. Gay/Same-gender-loving/Queer African American men commonly experience marginalization because of their race, sexual orientation, and isolation and exclusion following interaction within the intersection of these two significant identities (Mitchell & Means, 2014).

This condition was echoed through stories offered from the participant interviews. The narratives of the respondents expressed the preoccupation with perception and the intentional nature of contact they employed with certain groups not necessarily ascribing to their same demographic. As a result of having to maneuver through such a complex experience, AAGME in this dissertation make mention to the importance of being professionally and mentally flexible as well as employing emotional intelligence throughout their business dealings.

Though the industries of the participants vary, all the men in the study indicate they have achieved success by embodying a collaborative and inclusive leadership style. Additionally, a

common theme amongst participants has been maneuvering through new situations with confidence and strong decision-making abilities. Often, these men have begun their own enterprises much to the chagrin of friends and family members. They have had to find security and validation internally. AAGME-C made mention that he must, “trust his instincts” and AAGME- I said, he “had worked incredibly hard to prove himself.” The AAGME in this study attribute humility, authenticity, ambition and internal motivation as factors that have enabled their success.

Although members of the LGBT and African American communities have made significant in-roads in the field of entrepreneurship, the results still show that there is a dearth of awareness and investigation into the contributions stemming from the intellectual and professional offerings of AAGME. AAGME have encountered unique barriers throughout their careers, which has shaped their professional outlooks and motivations toward conventional employment. The findings of the literature review and the data analysis reveal that mentorship was deemed as an important enabler to success for all participants involved. Many of the men in this study mentioned having several mentors, some of which were not business practitioners, but helped provide expertise in financial matters, strategic planning, professional development and addressing logistic and staffing needs. The participants overwhelmingly noted they faced unique challenges as compared to their non-gay and non-minority counterparts, and that the lack of visible successful, professional role models is in fact, one of the most debilitating barriers to success.

Implications for the Future: Recommendations to Organizations with African American Gay Male Leaders and, to African American Gay Male Entrepreneurs

In an effort to increase the presence of African American gay male leaders in the business

field, institutions should engage in a commitment to addressing the inhibiting factors affecting this population, as well as ensuring efforts to become aware of the enabling factors of success.

As mentioned in the literature review, fostering the success of African American gay male leaders can be endorsed by implementing some of the following strategies:

- Developing mentor programs that specifically target young African American gay males interested in business and/or entrepreneurship.
- Supporting career development initiatives aimed at providing professional growth and exposure opportunities for this population.
- Providing emotional support for young African American gay scholars interested in business, as they often encounter an intersection of race, religious and gender discrimination.
- Promoting an organizational culture of authenticity and honesty (Snyder, 2006).

In addition to the aforementioned suggestions, African American gay male leaders within enterprises may benefit from a professional environment committed to achieving race and gender neutrality. Additionally, this is a notion that should be a consideration of AAGME as they begin their businesses and organizations. Providing a mandatory on-boarding orientation and a series of training workshops for newly hired employees and leaders may help the organization and its administration address professional content areas with which the members of the organization may be unfamiliar. Topics of training may include:

- Effective Communication Strategies
- Authentic and Collaborative Leadership Training
- Ethical Financial Management
- Collaborative and Win-Win Negotiation Strategies

- Strategic decision-making
- Maintaining work/life balance

Cultural intelligence and professionalism trainings to senior leaders (and even administered broadly to the employee base), is a way to address some of the gender, race and sexuality stereotyping and discrimination that can occur within the profession. These types of trainings lead to the formation of an enterprise culture that celebrates diversity. Universal acceptance and the promotion of understanding individuals' specific needs for success; can in turn may lead to an increased number of African American gay males who would choose to advance in business and/or begin their-own companies.

All of the men who participated in this study sited having frustration with, or falling victim to discriminatory practices within their organizations of employment or being unsatisfied within their career experience prior to beginning their own company. These commonalities may imply that the primary motivator for entrepreneurship is establishing a locus of control for one's career trajectory and ultimately, one's quality of life. Developing a pipeline to mentor and encourage African American gay males who demonstrate potential to become entrepreneurs may increase the presence of these men in leadership positions, as well as safeguard members of an intersectional population from experiencing professional and personal cruelties and injustices.

Northouse (2013) describes leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Different leadership techniques work for different people and populations. Therefore, an implication gathered from the findings suggests that aspiring entrepreneurs (especially African American gay males) assume similar leadership approaches as identified by the successful men in this study, so they too can maximize their potential and become successful in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current manuscript discusses the enabling and inhibiting factors affecting African American gay male leaders in entrepreneurial roles. Further research may investigate the responses of gay male entrepreneurs belonging to other racial groups in business and entrepreneurship and compare findings in order to determine exact racial differences (if any do in fact exist).

This research included an underlying assumption that sexuality would be a dominant factor in effecting the success of AAGME. It is therefore recommended that the study be expanded to address all African American male entrepreneurs to determine the exact level of influence sexuality may have on entrepreneurial success.

The position of leading a business is both vast, yet also distinct in responsibilities. Further research may be pursued to investigate the enabling and inhibiting factors of African American Lesbian women separately from African American gay males in order to better understand the factors that may be applicable to entrepreneurial success as it pertains to gender roles in addition to sexuality.

This research investigated the personal characteristics, which enabled the success of AAGME. Future research may examine the characteristics of heterosexual minority women as entrepreneurs in order to compare the characteristics of entrepreneurial success between minority groups.

Additionally, the study references the fact that there are few scholarly accounts exploring the professional contributions of African American gay males. And while AAGME are vastly underrepresented in the realm of business and entrepreneurship; further research could expand this discourse and address other professional fields in which African American gay males have

offered contributions (e.g., higher education, finance, medicine, etc. excluding the studies relating to sexual practices and mental disorders).

As many AAGME experience initial rejection and discouragement from family and friends to beginning their own enterprises; one last recommendation for future research would be to measure how the work/life balance and personal relationships of the AAGME are impacted after becoming successful in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

Final Summary

Until very recently the LGBT community has been neglected in scholarly discussions of excelling in the areas of business and professionalism. However through perseverance and intentional advocacy, African Americans and queer populations have achieved rights, which empower their progression in education and business arenas, thus furthering their communities' economic stability. As African American gay males have become gradually represented in professional spheres, they too have successfully navigated to increase the presence of other African American gay males in education and business.

Work can be done to help enable these particular men to pursue leadership positions in the field of business. This dissertation provided insight on the enabling and inhibiting factors experienced by AAGME businessmen in Atlanta, Georgia. The small sample represented in this research is but a fraction of a larger under-researched population. This work is written with the intent of providing a voice to an otherwise stigmatized community, with the hopes of expanding the conversation of their assumed experiences by providing access to their personal narratives and endeavors to have a positive effect on the perception of African American gay male leaders in business.

As the cultures of business and entrepreneurship continue to evolve; and consumer populations are demanding goods and services unique to, and representative of their needs— African American gay male professionals have a special opportunity to utilize their experiences and multifaceted characteristics in influencing the next generation of business people and economic leaders. As African American gay men become more visible in business fields, their representation in leadership and entrepreneurial roles may also begin to increase.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**AFRICAN AMERICANGAY MALE ENTREPRENEURS: A STUDY OF ENABLING AND INHIBITING FACTORS IMPACTING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Floyd Hardin under the direction of Dr. Jack McManus at Pepperdine University, because you are a self-identified African American gay male entrepreneur. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, your understanding of the purpose and procedures of the research study will be discussed and confirmed with the principle investigator. You will also be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the factors that, enable and inhibit the entrepreneurial career development of African American Gay Males in Atlanta, Georgia. African American gay male leaders bring a unique perspective to their career progression as a compound minority in the field of business. There is little research that exists regarding the barriers that negatively affect or aids that positively enhance the trajectory of African American gay male professionals. Additionally, there is no research that currently exists with regard to investigating the enabling and inhibiting factors of African American gay males who have become successful entrepreneurs. This study will attempt to fill this informational void.

STUDY PROCEDURES

After acknowledgement and confirmation of understanding the informed consent document, should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to...

- a. Complete a short, five-question demographic survey to capture preliminary participant information.
- b. Complete an open-ended interview that will be administered in an in-person and confidential format at a convenient meeting time and agreed upon location.
- c. Participation in the study will take approximately one hour in total to complete

- d. The gathered narrative will be checked with you to ensure accuracy of gathered and interpreted information.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include:

The potential risks in this study are minimal, but include imposition on the participants' time (approximately 60 minutes), potential fatigue and/or boredom experienced from participation, and potential embarrassment should any possible breach of confidentiality occur during the process of the research study. As sensitive information regarding sexuality, sexual orientation, gender and personal experience is to be shared during the course of the interviews, interview sessions will be conducted in a space deemed comfortable to the participant.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include:

The benefit of this study is an opportunity to provide new research in an unexplored area and to advance the occurrence of potential African American gay male businessmen and entrepreneurs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a password-protected computer in the principal investigators place of residence. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years. The data collected will be transcribed, coded and de-identified. The researcher will check with each participant to ensure accuracy of gathered information throughout the interview and transcription process.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items of which you feel comfortable.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact (**Dr. Jack McManus**) if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045.

I have read this document and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form and I am willing to participate in the study in question.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- How would you define your leadership style?
- What personal choices and motivating factors do you feel helped with your success in business/as an entrepreneur?

What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- What is your educational history?
- Which (if any) professional organizations do you belong and/or do you believe helped to support your career advancement?
- What was your professional history prior to starting your own enterprise?
- Can you identify any specific resources/factors that helped enable your success?
- Do you, or do you not have a mentor?

What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- Do you feel any, or have you experienced any insecurity with your role as an entrepreneur/business leader?
- What distinguishes you from other AAGME?

What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

- What obstacles have you faced in your career progression?
- What, if any, disadvantages have you/do you face in your career as compared to your non-African American, heterosexual male counterparts?

APPENDIX C

Email Invitation to Participants

Dear Mr. _____ (email by name/title),

I am writing to invite you to participate in the research study for my dissertation at Pepperdine University. The focus of my research is to identify and describe the enabling and inhibiting factors impacting the success and career progression of AAGME. There is an interview that will be a part of this study, which will address the following sub-questions:

1. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
2. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) enable African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
3. What internal factors (personal choices and motivations) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?
4. What external factors (socio-cultural and environmental) inhibit African American gay males to become successful entrepreneurs?

I will be available via email or phone to further explain the study and its intent and/or to answer any questions you may have. **Additionally, an informed consent form will be provided to confirm your knowledge of the details pertaining to the study. The actual interview questions are available for review and will be provided prior to the interview.** Following your agreement to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a short five-question demographic survey to capture preliminary participant information. The actual interview session will last approximately one-hour; and be an in person conversation at a specified time, date and location of your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Floyd H. Hardin, III

APPENDIX D

Participant Demographic Survey

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
Male Female
3. To what type of industry does your organization belong?
4. How many years has your organization been operational?
5. What is your education level (highest degree received an/or indicate any leadership training, certifications, etc.)?

APPENDIX E

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 18, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Floyd Hardin

Protocol #: 16-01-190

Project Title: AFRICAN AMERICAN GAY MALE ENTREPRENEURS: A STUDY OF ENABLING AND INHIBITING FACTORS IMPACTING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Floyd Hardin:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Brett Leach, Regulatory Affairs Specialist

APPENDIX F

IRB Training Completion Documentation

**COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT***

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Floyd Hardin III
- **Email:** @pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** Education

- **Curriculum Group:** GSEP Education Division
- **Course Learner Group:** GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 18334149
- **Completion Date:** 01/23/2016
- **Expiration Date:** 01/21/2021
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 91

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	01/20/11	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	01/21/16	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	01/23/16	4/5 (80%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	01/23/16	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	01/23/16	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	01/23/16	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	01/23/16	3/5 (60%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI ProgramEmail: citisupport@miami.edu

Phone: 305-243-7970

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

Collaborative Institutional
Training Initiative
at the University of Miami

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT REPORT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Floyd Hardin III
- **Email:** @pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** Education

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- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 18334149
- **Report Date:** 01/23/2016
- **Current Score**:** 91

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	01/21/16	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	01/23/16	4/5 (80%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	01/20/11	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	01/23/16	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	01/23/16	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	01/23/16	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	01/23/16	3/5 (60%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program

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