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## Social Capital and College Preparatory Frameworks A Qualitative Study

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# Social Capital and College Preparatory Frameworks A Qualitative Study

## **Abstract**

The dissertation study on social capital and college preparatory frameworks examined the positive impact college preparatory frameworks have on providing access to post-secondary educational opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The purpose of the study was to determine whether college preparatory frameworks serve as a catalyst in changing the level of access to post-secondary educational resources for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and whether that post-secondary access leads to a change in social capital. The study explored the relationship between graduation from a school that offers a college preparatory framework, including private schools, and the alteration of social capital of disadvantaged students. The qualitative study was comprised of 30-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with six alumni who attended college preparatory high schools. The findings of the study confirmed that college preparatory frameworks provide the students with the resources they need to access post-secondary opportunities, thus improving their social capital. The study recommends three steps to aid students and parents in the process of improving social capital through education: greater investment in the development of college preparatory frameworks, creation of more institutional supports outside of schools, and additional support within schools to aid in the college application process. The study recommends a comparative study be conducted to analyze the difference in social capital between college preparatory alumni who resided in two-parent households and those who resided in single-parent households. The study also recommends research be conducted on the emotional factors associated with improving social capital.

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A Qualitative Study

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## **Dedication**

When I began the pursuit of this degree, I was told it would be a journey that would change my life. This statement could not have been truer. This dissertation is dedicated to my son, my partner, my mother-in-law, my grandfather, my parents, and my sisters.

Chase, you came right on time. You sat in class with me growing physically as I grew educationally. You give my life a different purpose and I thank you for being my constant reminder that there is no limit to what you can accomplish. Justin, thank you for doing this with me. I thank you for your selflessness and sacrifice in allowing me to be a slave to my educational growth. You exemplify what it means to be a partner and you have never let go of my hand as we walked this journey. To Mom, words cannot express how much your journey inspired me through mine. You were one of my biggest cheerleaders and as you battled with cancer, you never let me forget my task at hand. You are an inspiration and I thank you for teaching me how to live purposefully, prayerfully, and powerfully. Grandpa, you planted the seed of education deep into my soul as a little girl and I hope you are proud of the flower that blossomed from it. Mom and Dad, thank you for your continued support and sacrifices you have given me over the course of my life. I am forever grateful to you. Erica and Amber, thank you for being my source of laughter. Erica, you have given me more support over the last 27 months than words can describe. Thank you for not only being my sister but also my best friend. Amber, I want

you to know this is just another bar that I have set for you to become bigger and better than me. Never stop pushing yourself. I love you.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Morgan B. Freeman is currently an educator in the New York City charter school network. Ms. Freeman attended Syracuse University from 2006 to 2010 and graduated with a B.A. in Political Science and a B.A. in African American studies. She attended Howard University from 2011 to 2013 and graduated with an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. She came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2013 and began her studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Freeman pursued her research in social capital under the direction of Dr. Ellen M. Gambino and Dr. Shelly Jallow and received the Ed.D. in 2015.

## **Abstract**

The dissertation study on social capital and college preparatory frameworks examined the positive impact college preparatory frameworks have on providing access to post-secondary educational opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The purpose of the study was to determine whether college preparatory frameworks serve as a catalyst in changing the level of access to post-secondary educational resources for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and whether that post-secondary access leads to a change in social capital. The study explored the relationship between graduation from a school that offers a college preparatory framework, including private schools, and the alteration of social capital of disadvantaged students. The qualitative study was comprised of 30-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with six alumni who attended college preparatory high schools. The findings of the study confirmed that college preparatory frameworks provide the students with the resources they need to access post-secondary opportunities, thus improving their social capital. The study recommends three steps to aid students and parents in the process of improving social capital through education: greater investment in the development of college preparatory frameworks, creation of more institutional supports outside of schools, and additional support within schools to aid in the college application process. The study recommends a comparative study be conducted to analyze the difference in social capital between college preparatory alumni who resided in two-parent households and those who resided in single-parent households. The study also

recommends research be conducted on the emotional factors associated with improving social capital.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement was a movement for equality in the United States, which was spurred by the unequal treatment of post-slavery African Americans. One of the key pillars of the movement was equal education. The Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896 deemed segregation constitutional until the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1952 overturned it. In 1974, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act was passed, giving all students the right to equal educational opportunities, extending to post-secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 1974).

The passing of the Act set the tone in post-civil rights America that all students, despite race, ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic status, could have the opportunity to change their lives and social capital through educational advancement. As the years progressed and public schools across the United States were integrated, a gap in education began to form. The achievement gap, or achievement debt (Ladson-Billings, personal communication, 2013), gave a name to the disparity in educational achievement of students from different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status, with the largest gap being between low-income African American students and their Caucasian counterparts. The educational gap plaguing low-income students has lasting effects beyond the classroom, with social capital implications. This gap in educational support leads to cycles of socioeconomically disadvantaged populations of people. These

populations have a difficult time improving their socioeconomic status because they do not possess the education to access better opportunities. This lack of access to resources caused by the achievement gap impacts living conditions, job selection, and healthcare, leading to conditions that can trap generations of people.

Educators, along with the federal government, have tried to find ways to close the achievement gap and repay the educational debt imposed on socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. One way was to design frameworks, such as the Common Core State Standards (“The state-led effort to develop the Common Core,” n.d.), policies such as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002), curriculum implementations, and the development of new schools. Educational leaders across the country have responded to the educational debt through the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, by providing all students with equal educational opportunities delivered in the form of standards-based learning, built on a set of foundational skills. School building leaders have also implemented curricula that may have been designed for one set purpose, but have had major results in making students of all ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds competitive students for college and careers. Parents of school-aged children have also taken matters into their own hands by exploring other educational opportunities for their children outside of public education, such as Catholic private schools, which also offer rigorous curricula leading to college preparedness (Higareda, 2010).

This study explored the extent to which a relationship exists between the attainment of a diploma from a school with a college preparatory framework and an increase in access to resources and social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged

students. This chapter provides a foundational understanding of the need for this study. It also describes the theoretical rationale from which this study emerged. Finally, this chapter explains the significance of this study, the historical context, and a list of terms applicable to the study.

### **Problem Statement**

As the economy continues to change and more students fall under the classification of disadvantaged, more research needs to be compiled on the impact of rigorous college preparatory curricula on socioeconomically disadvantaged students and the access that enhanced education provides for post-secondary educational opportunities. The problem this study sought to understand was the educational institutional component of the “cycle of the disadvantaged” (Farmer-Hinton, 2008) by examining a potential relationship between the need for rigorous college preparatory curricula (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) and the lasting effects it can have on socioeconomically disadvantaged students, thus stopping the cycle of the disadvantaged.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

This study evaluated the extent to which a relationship exists between the attainment of a diploma from a school that offers a college preparatory framework and the creation of access to post-secondary educational opportunities, thus leading to an alteration in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The research was examined from a pragmatic lens, which is a philosophy asserting that an ideology or theory is “true” if it works satisfactorily; if it does not perform satisfactorily, then it is not true (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d).

This study focused on the impact of college preparatory frameworks on access to resources and the social capital of participants derived from disadvantaged backgrounds, in reference to post-secondary educational opportunities and long-term success. One's social capital is the collective value of all social networks and the power they possess (Harvard Kennedy School, n.d.). The social networks to which one belongs provide access to resources, which can have lasting impacts on one's socioeconomic status. The pragmatic lens allows the impact of college preparatory frameworks to be isolated with regard to their ability to provide disadvantaged students with access to the social networks they need in order to change their social capital and end generational restrictions on access to resources.

This study's theoretical framework is comprised of two theories. The overarching theories are the emancipation theory (Freire, 1970) and the social capital theory (Lin, 2000). The confluence of these theories provides a foundation to understanding the possible access to resources and change in social capital that college preparatory frameworks provide.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether college preparatory frameworks serve as a catalyst in changing the level of access to post-secondary educational resources for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and whether that post-secondary access leads to a change in social capital. This study explored the relationship between graduation from a school that offers a college preparatory framework, including private schools, and the alteration of social capital of

disadvantaged students. This study will add to the literature on the long-term effects of college preparatory frameworks on socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the reviewed literature, this study focused on the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework (including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) and a change in access to post-secondary education for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

Research Question 2: To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework and an improvement in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

### **Potential Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because there is a lack of research in the area of college preparatory frameworks and the exposure to resources that socioeconomically disadvantaged students receive through their participation in the frameworks. The findings of the study will add to the body of research, which addresses the impact of institutional support on an alteration of social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The study's findings may also provide insight into school districts that have large socioeconomically disadvantaged populations with regard to curriculum selection, school culture, and college preparation resources for students. Furthermore, the findings of the study can show the impact college preparatory frameworks have on access to post-

secondary education and the social capital of graduates, thus ending generational restrictions to the elevation of socioeconomic status and capital.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*First-generation college student* – a student who is the first in his or her family to attend post-secondary education.

*Post-secondary education* – synonymous with colleges and universities.

*Private school* – tuition-based school.

*Social networks* – groups to which people belong that can be based on socioeconomic status, gender, race, and class.

*Social capital* – the collective value of all social networks and the power they possess.

*Socioeconomically disadvantaged students* – students who meet one or both of the criteria that they qualify for free or reduced lunch and/or neither of the student's parents have received a high school diploma (California State Department of Education, 2006).

### **Chapter Summary**

The fight for equal education in the United States is about more than racially and ethnically diverse classrooms. It is about access to equal educational opportunities and the social capital that comes as a result. This study examined the extent to which college preparatory frameworks have the ability to create access to resources and social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Chapter 2 examines literature that focuses on education's capacity to emancipate oppressed people and increase. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study, explaining the research context and participants. Chapter 4 presents the data gathered from the participants and explains the formulation of themes.

Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the found themes and presents recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

This chapter presents a review of the literature that aligns with the dissertation topic. It discusses literature as it pertains to the construction of the study. The chapter also analyzes theories that explain the experiences of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in order to guide the study on the experiences of those students in college preparatory programs.

### **Review of the Literature**

Currently, a substantial number of published studies focus on either post-secondary education access for disadvantaged students or social capital (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Perna, 2006; Ward, 2006); college choice methodology (Bergerson, 2009; Chapman, 1986; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Terepka, 2006); private schools (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Higareda, 2010; Hoffer, 1997; Neal, 1997); and International Baccalaureate Programmes alone (Bunnell, 2008; Culross & Tarver, 2011; Duevel, 1999; Hill, 2006, 2012; “The IB Diploma Programme,” n.d.; Panich, 2001; Smith, 2009; Sperandio, 2010; Wilson & Adelson, 2012). The literature in each of these areas explains the impact they have on access to post-secondary education for general student populations. The purpose of this literature review was to draw a connection between the body of research that can currently be found in the field of education on the relationship among social capital, college preparatory frameworks, and college choice models, as it pertains to socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The field of

education offers a number of theories surrounding the benefits of education and the change in social capital that results from educational opportunities.

**Theories guiding the research.** The study was informed by the emancipation theory (Freire, 1970) and the social capital theory (Lin, 2000). Each of these theories provides a foundation for establishing the need for education as a means of providing students with the opportunity to improve their current socioeconomic status and their ability to become contributing citizens in a 21st century democracy.

***Emancipation theory.*** Paulo Freire's (1970) emancipation theory developed from his belief that education was one factor that could influence the ability of members of Brazil's lower class to free themselves from the socioeconomic oppression they faced. Freire conceptualized a plan to teach the poor population to read by using words that pertained to the current social and political environment (Galloway, 2012). The target words used generated meaningful conversations between students and instructors as a means of instilling pride and a sense of hope (Freire, 1970). Freire wanted the poor to understand that oppressive societies will create limitations on what one might accomplish, but challenging those limitations can change one's current situation. The outcome of the literacy instruction showed the poor that they could change their current environment, thus emancipating themselves. Freire reduced the illiteracy rate more than 50% and went on later to document his experience (Freire, 1970). Freire's emancipation theory posits that education is a means of emancipating an oppressed group of people.

Students' attainment of knowledge and skill can be transformative in their immediate environment and future endeavors. When students have the access to more

educational resources, they gain access to higher education opportunities and social networks, thus leading to a change in social capital (Lin, 2000).

*Social capital theory.* Attainment of knowledge is not solely dependent on the desire to emancipate oneself from the current environment, but it is dependent on social capital, social networks, and access to resources. One's social capital determines one's current environment and access to resources. Social capital is the collective value of all social networks and the power they possess (Harvard Kennedy School, n.d.). This definition has been used in a number of different contexts, but for the purposes of this study, it pertains to student access to post-secondary resources. Lin's study on inequality in social capital complements Freire's (1970) ideal that education should be used to emancipate the oppressed from their current environments. According to Lin's work, social capital is conceptualized as access to resources and the access social networks provide (Lin, 2000). Resources can be defined in the educational context as anything from highly qualified teachers to information about colleges and universities. Social networks are defined as groups to which people belong, which can be based on many factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, or class. Membership in these groups dictates the number of resources to which one is exposed, which directly impacts a person's social capital.

Lin's work adds to the body of research by asserting that there is an inequality in social capital due to the social networks in which people are members. This inequality in social capital directly correlates to the availability of resources one's social group may control (Lin, 2000). Lin also asserted that the inequality of social capital is greater when it pertains to children because they depend on the social networks of their parents. Social

capital and access to resources of parents directly affect those of their children. Parental education is a direct predictor of the access their children will have (Ward, 2006). Ward (2006) explained the cycle of social capital and the categorization of disadvantaged by pointing out how disadvantaged parents want to provide their children with access to different social networks, but are mostly limited by their own lack of access. In most cases, this lack of access is due to a lack of educational opportunities and the inability to interact well with non-disadvantaged social groups. The parents' lack of access is passed on to their children, which is then normally passed on to the offspring of their children, which continues the cycle of disadvantaged groups (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). The cycle of disadvantaged groups impacts the total livelihood of persons who reside within this group by impacting their ability to access career opportunities, thus keeping them restricted to a low socioeconomic status.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) took a slightly different approach with his study on social capital. His study shared Lin's ideals of social capital and access, but created a framework based on social capital and institutional support. Stanton-Salazar expanded the role of social networks by referring to them as gateways to improved human development, school achievement, and social mobility. Social capital, similar to the emancipation theory, cannot stand on its own or change by itself. Stanton-Salazar's framework demonstrates that institutions can have a positive or negative effect on social capital. He viewed institutions with the same regard that Lin (2000) viewed resources. In his study, Stanton-Salazar looked at the devastating effects that a gap in institutional support can have on a child who is a member of a disadvantaged social network. The findings of his study showed that it is more difficult for students to improve their social

capital if there is a gap in the institutional support they are receiving. Students will most likely remain in the category of disadvantaged, continuing the cycle of disadvantaged groups (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006), if students are not receiving support within their schools such as from guidance counselors, tutoring, or the rigorous coursework that makes the student a competitive applicant for college admissions. If students remain in the disadvantaged social group, they will most likely remain in that social group for the remainder of their life and will continue the cycle, with their children being born into the same social group.

Pham and Keenan's (2011) study combined the works of Lin (2000), Stanton-Salazar (1997), and Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) in examining the impact of institutional support for first-generation college students. Their study made the connection that first-generation college students are mostly socioeconomically disadvantaged because of their parents' lack of access to post-secondary education. The study focused on the institutional support needed for socioeconomically disadvantaged students to change their social capital. It found that guidance counselors play a large role in accessing resources for the disadvantaged group. Pham and Keenan concluded that first-generation college students need more time with their guidance counselors in an effort to gain enough support, which leads to the correct selection of post-secondary educational opportunities that fit the students' needs.

The works of Lin (2000) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) confirmed Freire's (1970) work on emancipation theory with respect to using education as a change agent in the realm of social capital. Both researchers understood the importance of social capital and how students can be oppressed by their inability to gain access to available resources.

Education can end the cycle of disadvantage by providing students with the resources they are lacking. This may be done by exposing students to rigorous frameworks that will either help them function within the social system that has oppressed them or give them enough resources to circumvent their oppressive social systems (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Researchers Stanton-Salazar (1997) and Farmer-Hinton (2008), among others, have found that institutional support in the form of private schools and college preparatory frameworks, including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, have a significant role in providing disadvantaged students with the access to resources they are lacking in order to aid them in being competitive for post-secondary admission.

**Private schools as an institutional support.** Rigorous curricula can be emancipatory in the way of providing students with the coursework they need to be successful in post-secondary educational institutions (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Tuition-based or private schools, especially Catholic schools, have been found to provide the rigorous coursework which leads to higher academic and social outcomes for at-risk students of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Higareda, 2010).

Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) laid the foundational research on private schools by examining the impact of curriculum and culture on student achievement. They wanted to dispel the ideology that students enrolled in private schools performed better due to the selectivity of admissions at the school. This was dispelled through an empirical analysis of data from the National Center for Educational Statistics' longitudinal study High School and Beyond (cited in Coleman et al., 1982). The findings of the 1980s cohort of comparable students from public, private, and Catholic high schools showed that students who attended private schools (Catholic schools included) achieved higher

scores in reading, vocabulary, and mathematics. In addition to higher achievement scores, the findings of Coleman et al. explained that test scores cannot be the sole measure of the impact of a school. The study also compared the culture of each type of school. The findings posited that private schools have a different culture surrounding discipline and homework, whereas certain behaviors must be tolerated in public schools due to policy restrictions to which private schools are not subject. Additionally, the researchers found the level of rigor went beyond the classroom with respect to homework. Students enrolled in private schools spent on average five hours on homework per night, whereas students in public schools spent on average three hours per night (Coleman et al., 1982).

Hoffer's (1997) and Neal's (1997) studies expanded the findings of Coleman et al. (1982) findings by focusing their attention solely on the performance of Catholic institutions. Catholic schools are in a classification of their own within the scope of private school literature because of the large number of Catholic schools in existence and their classification as religious institutions.

Hoffer's (1997) study built directly on the findings of Coleman et al. (1982) study but introduced another factor: functional community that contributes to the achievement of Catholic school students over public school students. *Functional community* is the term used for the relationships parents of Catholic school scholars form because of the new social group they have joined as a result of the shared experiences of their children attending the same Catholic institution. The functional community also serves as a contributing factor to social capital (Hoffer, 1997). Once students become a part of the Catholic school, their parents then gain access to a new social group (Hoffer, 1997; Lin 2000). The new access gained leads to a change in social capital for the students due to an

exchange of ideas and opportunities in which the parents share. This phenomenon is precisely what Lin (2000), Farmer-Hinton (2008), and Stanton-Salazar (1997) referred to regarding altering social capital through institutional support and access to new social groups.

Neal's (1997) study also focused solely on the effects of Catholic school on student achievement. The study confirmed the findings of Hoffer (1997) and Coleman et al. (1982) by stating that Catholic school students outperformed public school students. Neal (1997) used testing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth which showed that Catholic schools succeeded in areas where public schools were failing. Additionally, the graduation rate for minorities attending Catholic schools were higher than those attending public schools within the same geographic area. Neal found that 91% of Hispanic and African American students graduated from urban Catholic schools, whereas 62% of Hispanic and African American students who attended urban public schools graduated.

Similar to Neal's (1997) study, Higareda (2010) examined the graduation rates and college enrollment of Catholic school students, with a specific focus on low-income ethnic minority students in Los Angeles, California. Higareda took a stance that public schools no longer possessed the capacity to provide low-income students with the coursework they needed to be prepared for college. This lack of preparedness would prevent many of the students from having the necessary coursework to gain acceptance into post-secondary educational institutions. The study focused on 176 low-income students who were enrolled in schools within the Los Angeles archdiocese, the fifth largest in the United States from 2001 through 2005 (Higareda, 2010). The data showed

that of this cohort of students, 99.4% graduated and 93.2% enrolled into post-secondary educational institutions. The findings of each of these studies, which date back to the foundational work of Coleman et al. (1982), demonstrated the impact of private education on students within the United States. These schools, both non-religious and religious, are serving as institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) for socioeconomically disadvantaged and advantaged students alike.

**International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme framework.** The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme framework is seen as an example of the institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) and resources (Lin, 2000) disadvantaged students can receive, which has the potential of providing a long-term change in social capital (Wright, 2014).

In 1968, a group of educators from a variety of educational institutions across the world held a conference in Geneva, Switzerland to find ways to address the educational needs of children of diplomats who were internationally mobile (Hill, 2006). Teachers, along with other international school leaders, developed a comprehensive educational program that was widely recognized across different countries, thus creating the first International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (Hill, 2006).

The concept of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), at its inception and presently, is to provide students with the education and skills they require to be successful in higher education and beyond (“The IB Diploma Programme,” n.d.). The IBDP focuses on students who range in age from 16 to 19 years old, and grooms them to become active citizens in a global world by exposing them to a rigorous college

preparatory curriculum and holding them to the values outlined in the learner profile (“IB Learner Profile,” n.d.).

***International Baccalaureate in schools.*** Schools across the world have selected programs offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) for a number of reasons based on the benefits of the curriculum. Hill (2012) asserted that schools are in favor of curricula that support globalization, which IB was designed to do. Educational institutions around the world also adopt the IB for the program’s ability to transfer across national educational systems (Bunnell, 2008).

Mayer (2010) found the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme can be used as a tool for educational reform in diverse urban high schools. The study consisted of 39 structured interviews with IBO officials and high school staff in addition to 24 days of observations. Mayer’s research concluded that the IBDP was successful as a vehicle of reform in an urban high school with a disadvantaged population because of pre-service training and consulting or coaching. Mayer also found the IBDP was successful because of staff evaluation, staff and program evaluation, facilitative administrative support, and systems interventions. A case study of eight public Texas schools from Rio Grande Valley (northeast and southeast areas) implementing the Middle Years Programme demonstrated that IB improved instructional practice and increased student critical thinking (Stillisano, Waxman, Hostrup, & Rollins, 2011). According to the research, the diverse schools studied found that the benefits of implementing an IBO program in their schools were improved instructional practice and instructional focus on higher-level thinking. Additionally, the study found other benefits of implementing the IB were cultural awareness and student learning.

***IB and post-secondary education.*** The literature showed a positive correlation between IB and higher education (Culross & Tarver, 2011; Duevel, 1999; Panich, 2001; Smith, 2009; Wilson & Adelson, 2012). From 1963 to 1978, the IBO committed to marketing to universities and colleges (Hill, 2006). The organization wanted to make university admission offices aware of the rigor that IBO provided so that students would be given the same consideration for admission as non-IB students (Hill, 2006). As IBO has continued to spread, colleges and universities around the world have begun to recognize the IBDP as a college preparatory program (Culross & Tarver, 2011).

Culross and Tarver's (2011) qualitative study focused on the perceptions of IBDP students regarding the short-term and long-term effects of the program. Their interviews demonstrated that students thought they gained an advantage in college admissions and felt better prepared for post-secondary coursework. The study further showed that graduates near the end of their post-secondary career participated in honors coursework, attended research-extensive universities, and earned at least 15 hours of college credit for their IB coursework. Wilson and Adelson (2012) demonstrated that students who enrolled in advance placement (AP) or IB Programmes performed better on the Scholastic Aptitude Test than other students. Their study also concluded that students who participated in IB courses applied to colleges and universities farther away from their homes than AP students. Similarly, Smith's (2009) mixed-method study discovered that students who graduated with IB diplomas felt better prepared for their first year of college studies than AP students. Additionally, in examining the American College Test (ACT) scores of 36 AP students and DP students, the study found that DP students achieved higher means on the test. Panich's (2001) study of a total of 1,861 IB and non-

IB graduates attending Florida State University between 1998 and 2000 also found that IB graduates had consistently higher grade point means than non-IB graduates. The study concluded that graduates of the DP had higher university performance, as noted by their grade point averages.

Research has also shown that students' completion of the IBDP is a predictor of college completion within four to five years. Duevel's (1999) qualitative study observed the relationship between DP graduates and performance in post-secondary education. Duevel surveyed graduates as well as registrars of universities where graduates intended to matriculate and received responses from 92% of the registrars and 37% of the graduates. The study demonstrated that graduates held high graduation rates, were more likely to attend graduate school, and felt their participation in the DP had a role in their career choice. Wright's (2014) qualitative study consisted of the narratives of 23 IB alumni ranging in age from 20 to 63. Focused on the long-term outcomes of people who have completed IB coursework, the study discussed the themes present in the interviews regarding long-term outcomes of their participation in IB programs: international mindedness, critical thinking, and a broad worldview. The main themes were educational engagement, academic rigor and lifelong learning, higher education, vocational choice, and working life. The study also discussed the themes of community service, social engagement, and lifelong friendships.

**College choice.** The literature on college choice spans areas ranging from models that explain student behavior to empirical research delving into the specific factors that contribute to which school students choose to attend (Bergerson, 2009; Chapman, 1986; Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Perna, 2006; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the literature review focused on the various models that were designed to

explain the college choice of high school students. The research on college choice is important to the present study because it examined the patterns students exhibit when considering pursuing post-secondary education.

Chapman (1986) used the existing literature to develop a behavioral model of college choice. His work examined how students approached the college search process and selected the schools they would attend. Chapman based his theory of college selection on five components: pre-search behavior, search behavior, application decision, choice decision, and matriculation decision. During pre-search behavior, students realize they want to obtain higher education. This phase can last over a number of years before students exhibit search behavior. Search behavior is exhibited once students begin to seek higher education possibilities actively. In this phase, students consider the long-term benefits of attending the colleges or universities they are searching. The application decision begins once the students decide to apply to a number of colleges and universities. This stage is important because it is here that students begin to establish their own criteria for selecting schools. The choice decision begins once students receive college acceptance letters. During this stage, students must make the difficult decision about which school to attend in the upcoming school year. The matriculation decision occurs once students make a formal commitment to the schools they plan to attend.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) created a much simpler model, which explained college choice in three parts: predisposition, search, and choice. The research asserted that all students who are interested in going to college will move through all three of the phases. While in the predisposition phase, students are influenced by individual factors such as student characteristics, significant others (loved ones or anyone in the students'

life that has the power to influence their decision-making), and educational activities. The outcome of the predisposition phase is a search for college options and alternatives to college. Hossler and Gallagher argued that this stage can last for a number of years before students move into the search phase. While in the search phase, students are influenced by their own search activities, college values, and the universities' search for students. The outcome of this stage is that students are knowledgeable enough to develop a choice set of schools to which they would like to apply. According to Hossler and Gallagher, the final phase is choice. During this phase, students and the university engage in a courting behavior, which results in the final decision of where students matriculate in the fall.

Perna (2006) used Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) work to develop her own model of college choice that added additional factors which influence students' ability to choose a school to attend. Perna felt it was important to incorporate aspects of human capital and sociological notions of cultural and social capital in her college choice design. Her model is comprised of four layers: habitus; school and community context; higher education context; and social, economic, and policy context. The habitus layer is comprised of students' demographics, gender, social capital, and socioeconomic status. The school and community context focuses on the way social structure and access to resources influence college choice (Perna, 2006). The higher education context focuses on the role colleges and universities play in student college choice. This layer directly expands Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) search phase. The final layer focuses on the social, economic, and policy context of college choice and how it is influenced by social, economic, and policy changes (Perna, 2006). The social, economic, and policy influences directly relate to social capital and access (Lin, 2000). Disadvantaged students most

likely will not have access to the social networks that will provide resources that can aid in the college choice process. Furthermore, economic and policy changes impact students in their access to resources and social capital, thus presenting obstacles for disadvantaged students, especially in the college choice process.

Tierney and Venegas (2009) developed a model similar to Perna's (2006), in which they further discussed the role of educational, familial, and community environments in students' college choice. Their work moved away from the linear model of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Perna (2006), and stated that students equally analyze educational, familial, and community environments as they choose a college. The study found that students equally consider educational, familial, and community environments, in addition to institutional influences, when deciding where to matriculate.

Henrickson's (as cited in Bergerson, 2009) college choice model spoke to the interactions between students and institutions. The model asserts that institutions of higher education have a direct impact on student choice. Researchers Breen and Goldthorpe (as cited in Bergerson, 2009) took a different approach to college choice by stating that students focus on the cost of education, their likelihood of success, and the belief they will achieve their expected outcomes. Students were found to consider the cost of tuition of the university and the likelihood of their success there before deciding whether attending the university was worth the associated cost. If students found a university's cost was too high compared to their expected success, they would not consider that school in their choice process.

***Factors influencing college choice.*** Similarly to the body of work on college choice models and student behaviors, a large number of studies have been conducted on

factors that influence college choice. The literature directly looks at *who* or *what* is most important when students select a college or university to attend. A review of the literature uncovered major themes surrounding the role of guidance counselors, social capital and access, and the influence of the high school curriculum.

Terepka's (2006) work solely focused on the ethical role of the college counselor. He argued that the college counselor, or guidance counselor, is responsible for playing a number of roles in students' college choice process. The counselor is responsible for aiding students in the college application process, maintaining student records, and creating relationships between the higher education institution and the student. Terepka also touched on the amount of access the guidance counselor can provide to each student, thus providing them with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about where to enroll.

Researchers Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) studied the correlation between college counselors and college application rates. Their study focused on tenth grade students and the amount of time they spent interacting with their guidance counselors. They found a positive relationship between the number of guidance counselors and student involvement. Further review of the results showed that schools with more than one guidance counselor had higher student involvement, thus yielding higher college application rates. The research showed the role of the guidance counselor is very influential in students' college choice process.

Another influential factor in college choice is social capital and access. Lillis and Tian (2008) conducted case studies on students who were already enrolled in college and questioned them about the role wealth played in their decision to attend a private college.

The results from the case study showed that the students' social capital and their level of access were major factors in their decision to attend a private institution (Lillis & Tian, 2008). Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) studied the role of college counselors at an all-Black school and their ability to improve student access to college. Their work was founded on the ideal that the oppressed group needed the aid of their guidance counselors to improve their social capital, thus increasing their ability to go to college and improve their socioeconomic status. The study concluded that guidance counselors aided the students in obtaining access to colleges and universities. The guidance counselors exposed the students to institutions of higher education and aided them in the application process (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2008). The assistance of the counselors gave the students the additional help they needed to apply successfully to the colleges and universities of their choosing.

The last section of the reviewed literature focused on high school curricula and their influence on the college choice process. Wilson and Adelson's (2012) study on academically talented secondary students studied the important choice factors that influenced AP students and students enrolled in an IB program. Their findings showed both groups of students used SAT scores as a factor in deciding the schools to which they would apply. Wilson and Adelson also found the curricula students received were not a statistically significant factor in their college choice process. In contrast, Arnold, Lu, and Armstrong (2012) found the opposite result of Wilson and Anderson's study: that high school curricula are highly important in the college choice process. Students are heavily influenced by how they are taught in school and most schools celebrate a culture of higher education. The study also found that students who attended programs with a

culture of higher education, such as a college preparatory program, were more likely to apply to college (Arnold et al., 2012).

In order for students, especially first-generation students, to be able to participate in the college choice process, they must have the access to resources that are informed about post-secondary education (Cunningham, Cooper, & Leegwater, 2012). Students who are caught in the cycle of the disadvantaged normally do not experience the same college choice process as their peers who are not in the disadvantaged cycle. College preparatory frameworks, including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, give students access to the interschool resources they need to gain access to post-secondary education.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 examined the literature that builds a case for analyzing the possible connection between a college preparatory framework and its ability to create access and change social capital for disadvantaged students. The literature showed that Freire identified education as a tool for emancipation that can lead to a desire to change one's social capital. The journey to a change in social capital can start through change agents in the form of educational opportunities, such as college preparatory frameworks, and accelerate through post-secondary educational opportunities. The present study is important to the existing body of literature because it examined the story of students who are still fighting for equal opportunities in.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This study explored the extent to which a relationship exists between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory curriculum and access to post-secondary educational resources, thus leading to a long-term alteration in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The study examined the perceived impact of college preparatory frameworks by answering the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework (including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) and a change in post-secondary education access for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

Research Question 2: To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework and an improvement in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

The goal of critical qualitative research, as defined by Georgiou and Carspecken (2002), is to uncover social, cultural, and psychological assumptions regarding present-day contexts with the goal of empowering individuals and enabling change. It challenges current power distributions and the status quo, as opposed to merely revealing meaning. The study used the scope of critical qualitative research to challenge the issue of educational inequality within the United States that is exacerbated because of inequities in socioeconomic status. This form of research allowed the researcher to give voice to

those whose stories are not often heard: alumni who were deemed disadvantaged, due to generational socioeconomic status, at the time of their enrollment in a high school that offered a college preparatory framework.

The researcher conducted interviews with graduates from college preparatory high schools who matriculated at four-year colleges or universities. The qualitative method of interviews served as a tool to measure the perceived impact of college preparatory frameworks on access to post-secondary educational opportunities, the matriculation process, and alteration of the social capital of high school students. The interviews allowed the alumni of the college preparatory high schools to give personal accounts of their experiences and elaborate on the opportunities that were made available to them, as socioeconomically disadvantaged students, because of their enrollment in a college preparatory school.

The findings answering the research questions provide insight into the world of college preparatory schools and their impact on access to post-secondary education, college matriculation, and increased social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

### **Research Context**

This study focused on the experiences of high school graduates who completed college preparatory coursework in the United States. The focus was specifically on U.S. alumni because the social and economic structures that reside in the United States may not be present in other countries. The researcher gained access to college preparatory school alumni via public postings of the study's description on the professional social network LinkedIn. The researcher posted the study description on her personal LinkedIn

page (Beninger, Fry, Jago, Lepps, Nass, & Silvester, 2014; Wesolowski, 2014). The study description was also posted on the general and alumni page of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. The researcher was granted access by the IB Alumni Coordinator to post the description and survey link directly on the LinkedIn pages. The researcher created the post in a way that others could share the post and link to the qualification survey. The number of college preparatory framework alumni present on the entire LinkedIn network was unknown to the researcher at the time of the study, but the IBDP currently had over 7,000 verified alumni on the professional social network.

From the postings, the researcher used the qualification survey to determine which alumni would qualify for the study based on their graduation from a college preparatory high school and their socioeconomic status at the time of high school enrollment. The final selection of participants was accomplished when the researcher electronically mailed 10 alumni who stated their willingness to participate in the study on the qualification survey. Six of the qualified alumni responded to the correspondence to schedule an interview.

### **Research Participants**

The participants of the study were alumni of high schools that offered college preparatory frameworks. All of the participants qualified for the study by their responses on the qualification survey indicating that they were taught under college preparatory frameworks and were classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged during their high school tenure. The process of research participant acquisition was executed in three stages: access to participants, qualifying participants, final participant participation.

**Stage I: Alumni access.** The first stage of participant acquisition focused on gaining access to alumni of high schools that offered college preparatory frameworks. The researcher used the professional social network LinkedIn to gain access to the high school alumni. LinkedIn was selected because it is a professional social network used by post-secondary education students and professionals. The network is comprised of a number of for-profit and non-profit organizations and schools that subscribe to and have verified pages.

The researcher completed two tasks to gain access to college preparatory high school alumni. The first task was to post the study description (Appendix A) and link to the qualification survey on the researcher's LinkedIn page. The researcher created the post in a way that it could be shared on the pages of other LinkedIn members who were interested in the study. The post was shared among different LinkedIn members once the researcher posted the description.

The second task the researcher performed specifically targeted IBDP alumni. The IBDP and the IB Programme have organizational pages on LinkedIn, in which membership is verified. An organizational page is verified when a site manager for the organization checks the subscription requests of the LinkedIn members who are asking to add the organization to their personal pages. This can be done by requesting vital information from the LinkedIn member, which is then checked in the organization's database by the organization's site administrator. Once the information of the LinkedIn member is verified, the site administrator grants the member access to add the organization to their personal page.

The researcher was granted access to the IBDP and IBO pages by the IB Alumni Coordinator. After the researcher was granted access, the description of the study and link to the qualification survey were posted on the pages.

**Stage II: Qualifying participants.** The second stage of participant acquisition focused on qualifying participants for the study. Interested alumni completed the survey and were qualified based on whether they attended a college preparatory high school, as denoted by the school being private or tuition-based, or if they graduated from the IBDP. In addition to the alumni being qualified based on the type of educational curricula they received, they were qualified on the basis of socioeconomic status at the time of high school enrollment. This was evidenced in the survey by the alumni's free or reduced lunch status (if known) and/or their status as a first-generation college student.

***Qualification survey.*** The researcher created an 11-question survey (Appendix B) that asked interested alumni questions about high school attended, years graduated, free or reduced lunch qualification, first-generation college student status, and optional demographic questions. The survey questions were modeled from the demographic information gathered on the participants of the long-term outcome study (Wright, 2014). A panel of six educational experts validated the survey questions for consistency and clarity. One expert serves as a superintendent of a school district in New York State. One expert on the panel serves as a high school principal of a non-religious private school and one expert, an alumnus of a Catholic high school, serves as an admission officer of a university. Three of the experts serve as educators within private schools and have attended private schools. The personal and professional experiences of the members of the panel provided a level of expertise, which enabled them to ensure the questions, were

clear, and not leading. Once the questions were validated, the survey was created using Qualtrics software. The survey was active for three weeks and 37 people responded. Of the 37 respondents, 10 qualified for the study. The qualification surveys of the participants served as a data collection tool for the study as well. The researcher used the information reported in the surveys to compile profiles for each participant. The profile data is displayed and analyzed in Chapter 4.

**Stage III: Final participant selection.** The third stage of participant acquisition of the study was the final selection process of participants. The researcher used the emails of the 10 qualified alumni, as provided in their surveys, to send an introductory message (Appendix C) and a more detailed description of the study. The email message further asked the alumni if they were still interested in being interviewed for the study, as they initially specified by providing their email at the end of the survey. The researcher awaited the responses of the alumni to the introductory email. Six alumni (three who attended Catholic school, two IBDP alumni who attended public school, and one private school alumni) responded to the introductory email with a willingness to participate in the study by being interviewed by the researcher. The participants were given consent forms (Appendix D) once an interview was scheduled. To protect the privacy of the study participants, all identifying information was changed, as indicated in Chapter 4.

### **Instruments Used in Data Collection**

The qualitative study used in-depth phone interviews to answer the essential research questions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are one effective way of gathering data for critical qualitative research (Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002). The interviews allowed the participants the freedom to disclose information on their

experience as alumni of college preparatory curricula and whether an improvement to their access and social capital occurred. The use of semi-structured in-depth interviews further allowed the participants to fully expand on their attitudes toward the impact of college preparatory curricula and culture on their social capital without being limited to the constraints of survey questions. The responses to the interview questions also provided information on post-secondary experiences, career choices, and additional opportunities the participants experienced. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended so participants had the flexibility to expand on the questions and add details needed in order to provide thoughtful and reflective responses to the questions. The interview questions were modeled on the long-term outcomes study (Wright, 2014), the emancipation and social capital theories, and the literature on private education. The same panel of experts who validated the qualification survey validated the interview questions. The experts assessed the questions to ensure they were not biased, and they provided feedback on the language of the questions to make sure it was easy to understand.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for the study was executed in two phases, both qualitative. In Phase I, the researcher used a voice recorder to audiotape each interview. Once the interviews were complete, a professional transcriber transcribed the voice recordings. The researcher listened to the interviews while reading the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Once the data were assessed for accuracy, the researcher developed apiary codes based on the theories that drove the research.

The development of the a priori codes began with the researcher compiling terms, which were representative of the theories used in the study. The researcher created a list of these terms and read each transcript individually, noting the frequency an example of each term was mentioned by the participants. The frequency of the terms were then analyzed as the researcher reread each transcript for deeper correlations between each participant, thus developing more encompassing codes. After the final codes emerged, the researcher found the similarities across them, which led to the emergence of themes (Appendix E). The themes were analyzed and synthesized to determine the extent of the relationship between the impact of college preparatory frameworks on access to post-secondary educational opportunities and alteration of the participants' social capital.

In Phase II of the data analysis, the researcher imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet all descriptive data from the participants such as gender, race, ethnicity, high school graduating year, high school attended (public or private), International Baccalaureate Diploma alumni status, first-generation college student status (socioeconomic status), and college or university attended. The descriptive data collected from the qualification surveys were compiled to create participant profiles. The researcher analyzed the descriptive data to determine any relationships between the themes present in the interviews and the data collected from the qualification surveys.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology of the research. This study is a theory-informed, critical qualitative study. The researcher engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews with alumni of college preparatory high schools. She analyzed the data from the study in two stages to determine the extent to which a relation exists between

enrollment in a high school that offers a college preparatory framework and access to resources, further leading to an increase in social capital

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

This study on social capital and college preparatory frameworks strove to provide a deeper understanding of the potential relationship between college preparatory frameworks and an increase in access to post-secondary educational opportunities, leading to an increase in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The study posited a positive relationship between graduation from a school that offers a college preparatory framework or International Baccalaureate Programme, and the enhancement of social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

This critical qualitative study was executed through researcher-conducted 30-minute in-depth phone interviews with alumni who were socioeconomically disadvantaged at the time of enrollment in a high school that offered a college preparatory framework. The participants were recruited through a three-step process: gaining access to alumni, qualifying participants, and selecting final participants. The researcher gained access to college preparatory alumni by posting a description of the study and link to the qualification survey on public group pages within the LinkedIn professional social network. From the postings, the researcher used the qualification survey to determine which alumni would qualify for the study based on their graduation from a college preparatory high school and their socioeconomic status at the time of high school enrollment. The final selection of participants was accomplished when the researcher electronically mailed 10 alumni who stated their willingness to participate in

the study on the qualification survey. Six of the qualified alumni responded to the correspondence to schedule an interview.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher used semi-structured in-depth interviews to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework (including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) and a change in access to post-secondary education for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

Research Question 2: To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework and an increase in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The data collected from the participants were analyzed in two phases: Phase I, a synthesis of the descriptive data provided in the qualification survey (Appendix A) as noted in Table 4.1; and Phase II, an analysis and synthesis of participant interviews to determine present themes and patterns. The qualification survey was distributed along with a description of the study on public alumni pages on LinkedIn. The professional social network is comprised of personal pages, group interest pages, organizational pages, and the company pages. The study description and survey link were posted on public pages where college preparatory alumni may be members. The researcher posted the description on the student and recent college grad page, which is a verified group page of the LinkedIn network for anyone enrolled in college or college alumni. The researcher

also posted the study description on the verified International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme pages. The International Baccalaureate Organization has four pages (of which the researcher is a member): IB Americas, International Baccalaureate Alumni, IB Diploma Programme Coordinators, and International Baccalaureate page. Each page caters to a specific sub-population within the IB network. The researcher used these specific pages to target IBDP alumni who would qualify for the study. Additionally, the researcher posted the study description on her personal page, which is public, making it searchable by any organization or person in the LinkedIn network.

The posting of the study description and the completion of the qualification survey led to 38 people, of whom 10 qualified based on their enrollment in a college preparatory high school and their socioeconomic status. Of the 10 college preparatory alumni, six responded to the researcher's electronic correspondence, thus agreeing to be interviewed for the study.

The final participant breakdown of the study consisted of three alumni who attended private Catholic schools, two IBDP alumni who attended public schools, and one non-religious private school alumna. Each of the participants identified as female, with four identifying as Hispanic, non-White, and two identifying as Black or African American. The participants came from different demographic locations across the United States. Two of the participants were in pursuit of their bachelor's degree, one of the participants possessed a master's degree, and three participants were in pursuit of doctoral degrees. Each of the participants identified as first-generation college students, an evidence of their socioeconomic status during high school. All of the participants

attended a college or university, with three having attended a public university and three having attended a private university.

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive information gathered from the qualification surveys of the six participants of the study. The data were used as participant profiles.

Table 4.1

*Participant Profiles*

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Race or Ethnicity	Hispanic, non-White	Hispanic non-White	Black or African American	Black or African American	Hispanic Non- White	Hispanic, non-White
High School Graduation Year	1990	Unknown	2007	2006	1991	2012
High School Attended (Public, Private, or IB)	Private (Catholic)	Private	Public IB	Private (Catholic)	Private (Catholic)	Public IB
First- generation Status (socio- economic status)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
College or University Attended (geographic location)	Public West Coast University	Private East Coast University	Public Southern University	Private East Coast University	Public East Coast University	Private East Coast University

Phase II of the data analysis used the qualitative method of semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants to answer the research questions. Each interview question was derived from the literature on the emancipation theory (Freire, 1970); social capital theory (Lin, 2000; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Perna, 2006; Ward, 2006); college choice methodology (Bergerson, 2009; Chapman, 1986; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Terepka, 2006); and literature on college preparatory curricula in private schools (Coleman et al., 1982; Higareda, 2010; Hoffer, 1997; Neal, 1997), including the IBDP Programme (Bunnell, 2008; Culross & Tarver, 2011; Duevel, 1999; Hill, 2006; Hill, 2012; “The IB Diploma Programme”, n.d.; Panich, 2001; Smith, 2009; Sperandio, 2010; Wilson & Adelson, 2012).

**Research Question 1.** To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework (including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) and a change in post-secondary education access for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

Research Question 1 was constructed with the idea that education can be emancipatory (Freire, 1970) through the attainment of knowledge, which serves as a factor in creating opportunities. Freire did this through increasing the literacy of Brazil’s lower-class citizens, thus giving them the ability to advocate for themselves against an oppressive system. The citizens’ newfound ability to advocate for themselves provided them with access to resources, which improved their quality of life. The first research question used the basis of Freire’s (1970) work by determining whether exposure to college preparatory frameworks, paralleling Freire’s literacy instruction, provided access to post-secondary education for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. As stated in

the literature on social capital, education can put an end to the generational membership of a socioeconomically disadvantaged group (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Ward, 2006). Social capital theory is also seen in Research Question 1 as it pertains to post-secondary educational access.

Research Question 1 was answered through interview questions 1, 2, 2a, 3, 3a, 3b, 4, and 5. Table 4.2 shows each question and the theory from which it was derived.

Table 4.2

*Interview Questions and Theory Alignment for Research Question 1*

Interview Question	Theory Alignment
1. Please explain your family background.	Social capital theory and long-term outcome study
2. What prompted you or your family to enroll you in the IBDP or college preparatory program?	Emancipation theory and social capital theory
2a. Please explain your journey of acceptance into the IBDP or high school.	Emancipation theory and social capital theory
3. If you can recall, please explain your experience as an IBDP candidate or college preparatory high school student applying for post-secondary education?	College choice and social capital
3a. What colleges and universities did you apply?	College choice
3b. Who or what influenced your decisions to apply?	College choice
4. Do you believe your involvement in the IBDP or enrollment in a college preparatory high school had an influence on your college and university matriculation?	College preparatory curricula and emancipation theory
5. Did you receive financial assistance from the colleges and universities, which you believe were due to your involvement in the IBDP or enrollment in a college preparatory high school?	College choice

Each response was analyzed using codes that were aligned with the theories from which the questions were derived. Three themes of significance emerged in answering Research Question 1: importance of education, support, and college choice influence.

***Theme of significance one: importance of education.*** The theme of educational importance was seen as the participants answered interview questions 1 and 2. The participants went into detail about their parents' limited education, which spoke directly to their lack of social capital, but also about their conscious decisions to ensure that their children had better educational opportunities than they had. The first code, which provided the researcher with an understanding of why education was important to the parents of the participants, was through family composition. This code was broken down into family composition, citizenship, and socioeconomic status. The codes were gathered from the participant responses as to how they chose to answer the initial question. Each of the participants' parents immigrated to the United States, and three of the participants came from single-parent households, which provided an explanation for some factors contributing to the lack of social capital and access to resources they possessed.

Well, my parents are both immigrants from the Dominican Republic. I was actually born there myself and I came here when I was four. Also my family like immigrated like here in the Eighties from the Dominican Republic. I still have family over there. (Participant 2)

I came from a two-parent household. They were married the entire time. My mom is Trinidadian, from Trinidad and Tobago, and my father was from Jamaica. I say "was" because he passed away. I have two older sisters, pretty far apart. My oldest sister is I want to say around thirty-nine and my middle sister is thirty-two and I'm

twenty-six, so we have some distance between us. In terms of just family background and our dynamics, I guess because my family is from the islands, a lot of our extended family are back in the islands, so it's kind of just us in Florida, so very close-knit family in that regard because we only had our—we didn't have much of an extended family. (Participant 3)

When answering interview question 2 and sub-question 2a, the participants explained to the researcher how a lack of resources and social capital led to their parents' desire to give more to their children in the sense of educational opportunities. The need to provide their children with more opportunities in life by giving them an excellent education was seen in the code of pipelines.

Pipelining was seen with all six of the participants, especially those who attended Catholic school. Each participant was enrolled in a middle school, which provided them with a framework that created a direct link to college preparatory frameworks. The IBDP alumni (two participants) were slightly different because they attended public schools for primary education but received advanced coursework.

I also went to private Catholic elementary school and, you know, I don't know what it's like in your area or other people's areas, but you know, you have like the three, you know, private Catholic elementary schools in the area, and then they generally become feeders to, you know, the private Catholic high school in that area. (Participant 1)

The decision of the participants' parents to enroll their children in private school at an early age was evidence of their understanding of the benefits the schools had to offer, even if it was solely centered on religion.

My mom is a practicing Catholic, very religious, very involved in her church, and she felt that at the time I would get a better education than in a public school because religion is part of the curriculum and in Catholic school, there's a lot of disciplinary action for kids, and so she felt that, hey, in public school everyone gets to go and with private school, with Catholic school, it's a privilege to go.

(Participant 5)

Participant 4 spoke of a different aspect of the pipeline regarding an educational legacy. Her parents attended a Catholic school in the Caribbean and they understood the benefits of a religious-based education, thus sending her to a Catholic school in the United States.

We are Catholics and they [parents] both were raised in the Catholic school also and they knew the benefits of being in a Catholic school, being able to—it's usually a smaller class, to be able to focus and they also elaborate more on the actual Catholic religion in their courses and day to day with students, the teachers do. So myself and my siblings were enrolled. It's a Catholic school so I went from Pre-K-one and it was just no-brainer to also let us go on to Catholic high school... It's [high school] already in, attached to the school [elementary school].

(Participant 4)

Participants 3 and 6, both IBDP alumni, did not participate in the IB primary years or middle years program, but they both took high-level coursework prior to being accepted into the DP. Participant 2, the non-religious private school alumna, was in a private elementary school, which ensured she would be placed in a private high school, thus continuing the pipeline of education.

I actually have been in private school since middle school, since the seventh grade, and in my, in my elementary school, I have, I was in the talented and gifted class which is like they set up like the smarter kids or put them in one class, or the people that they would consider to be the smartest kids. (Participant 2)

The parents of the participants understood the importance of education by making sacrifices in order to pay for their children to stay in tuition-based schools.

Now I know both my grandmothers only have like a third grade education and I think just the way that my parents grew up, they really wanted, you know, quote-unquote “better” for their children, you know, wanted to provide them with opportunities and things like that. . . . Education was always very, very, very important to them, so I just remember as far back as forever, you know, even in young grade school, you know, them purchasing different things and making sure we had what we needed, and it was just school was very important for them to provide for us. So they, you know, went without a lot and obviously I see this now as a reflection back on, on them and I’ve had conversations with them about this, you know. But they, they really did for their kids so, you know, if the house needed repair or new paint or new wallpaper, whatever, you know what I mean? Like those type of things, like those types of things would [not] get done so that us kids could actually, you know, afford, you know, they could afford to send us to, you know, private school and, you know, and in their minds, you know, a better education. (Participant 1)

The importance of education was communicated in various ways among the six participants, but the patterns of each of their parents making educational decisions that

put their children in better educational environments showed they understood the level of impact education can have on one's life. The family composition code explained the contributing factors, on the parental end, that can add to the social capital of a family as a whole. The researcher understood later how important family composition was when she compared the transcripts of the participants with two-parent households and those with single-parent households

*Theme of significance two: support.* Support was the second theme of significance, that emerged from the data when answering Research Questions 1 and 2. The theme, however, was more prevalent when the participants discussed their process of gaining access to post-secondary educational opportunities. The theme of support emerged when the participants began to discuss the initial stages of the college application process. The participants, all first-generation college students, stated that their parents were not able to help them with the application process. They also mentioned that they too had limited knowledge of the college search and application process. From this, the codes of access (parental and child) emerged. The lack of exposure to the college application process from the parental and participant level showed the connection between parental access to resources and their child's access to resources. Access to resources was initially governed by the parents' own access to the resources they were exposed to through their social networks. The participants encountered obstacles when applying for post-secondary education with their parents because their parents had limited or no exposure to the process. Very limited support was given to the participants at home, but their parents did provide them with encouragement to apply for post-

secondary education based on their understanding of the importance of education (theme one).

My mom did not know the English language at the time. She herself had just come to this country and so she, you know, everything is in English. She couldn't provide any resources. Also my mom, at the time my mom learning—my mom dropped out of school in seventh grade, so I was going to high school so I was actually going, you know, I was already far ahead of her in education than she had ever gone to. (Participant 5)

Support for the participants came in the form of school personnel (institutional support). Each participant discussed how teachers, guidance counselors, administrative staff, and parents of classmates provided access to resources, which aided the participants in gaining knowledge about their post-secondary education options. Institutional support, a major factor present in the social capital literature, seemed to have propelled them into a pool of resources that would have not be accessible had they not attended the college preparatory high schools.

Now through high school, I would go to summer programs \_\_\_\_\_ so our closest like, you know, college that would have these things was UC Santa Barbara. So I would go to different summer programs out at UC Santa Barbara every summer since my freshman summer. So the year after my freshman summer, sophomore summer, and junior summer. And so I always was, you know, gearing myself towards, you know, going to college and these college preparatory summer programs and this, that, and the other. So I guess that's

probably also where I learned a little bit of, you know, what to do and kind of what to expect and how to apply and all this stuff. (Participant 1)

I had really good counseling and, with like college counsel—my college counselors were really amazing, and I don't think I could have done it without them. (Participant 2)

The new guidance counselor that we had come in during my, my senior year, she was more involved with the students, we did a lot of one on one. (Participant 4)

My guidance counselor was instrumental in kind of sort of talking to me about cost, and going away and the difference between private school and a state school, for example. Since my mom didn't really know a lot of English, even though she knew enough to work, she didn't know enough to fill out a FAFSA. So my guidance counselor actually filled out everything for me. She sat down with me and just between me and her, we did all my college applications, we did the FAFSA for me to go to college. She coordinated college trips for me to visit some of these high school—some of these colleges. So my guidance counselor at the time when I was in high school was really my mentor in getting me to college.

(Participant 5)

The support the participants received became their new social network. The new social networks consisted of individuals who gave them access to the resources they needed to become informed about the post-secondary application process. The parents of the participants were not able to provide them with the post-secondary resources they needed, but were able to place them in environments that provided the access.

*Theme of significance three: college choice influence.* The third theme of significance that emerged from the responses collected from the participants was college choice influence. This theme is tied to the theme of support because the institutional support received led the students through the college choice process. The theme of college choice influence was based on the factors that influenced their decisions to apply to certain colleges and universities. This section of the data yielded factors that did not conform to the models of college choice stated in Chapter 2. The participants all expressed a desire to attend a college or university, which is the first step in many of the college choice literature. The participants did not always appear to follow any particular college choice model with fidelity; most of the participants' college choice application decisions were based on their social network, geographic location, and institutional reputation.

It wasn't like that, you know, it was just kind of like, oh yeah, well, you know, obviously growing in California, you know about all schools, you hear about them at least, you know? So it was just like, okay, you know, what did you hear about or I think these ones are hard and these ones are easy, you know, and this is medium and, so yeah. So that's kind of like the whole process that I went through when I decided to, you know, apply, and that's the step, yeah, this is the process to go to college and how everything happens. (Participant 1)

I knew I wanted to go to college and I wasn't sure if I wanted to be out of state. I guess when it came down to picking them, that was, it was more so their reputation, so if you were to be a Floridian and you went to Florida schools. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 demonstrated the way in which her parents' social network almost altered her college choice process:

I was going to stay in New Jersey because someone at my church explained— one [lady] at my church, you know, approached my mom and said that often students who go out of state for school, you might have a nice, you know, financial aid your freshman year, and then it starts to deplete as you go down the road to finish the rest of your schooling, and my mom didn't want me to become trapped at [school attended], so she said I might as well just stay in [state resided in].

(Participant 4)

Participant 3 discussed an incentive her state had for students who completed the IBDP. The state incentive gave IB alumni a full-ride to any state school:

We had a program in Florida called Bright Futures and it was based solely on your involvement in either IB or AP courses. So it gave me a full—it gave full tuition for having an IB diploma. (Participant 3)

The theme also emerged from the participants' perceptions of why they gained acceptance to the schools to which they applied and the school at which they ultimately matriculated. The most frequent code, which led to this theme, was the coursework to which they were exposed during their high school tenure. The participants felt the colleges and universities saw them as strong candidates because of the reputation of their schools. This was very apparent with Participant 3, who discussed the high-level coursework in her IBDP, but also expanded on the relationship her state had with the schools that offered the IB curricula. "I think it was a [state] thing. It was almost, it was—I remember IB and APB advertised as this was an easier route to get to colleges

within [state]. I definitely had to do more work when I was going out of state,” explained Participant 3. Participant 5 openly talked about her school’s reputation as an internationally known school. She felt that the school’s reputation along with the coursework she took made her candidacy enticing colleges and universities.

I think the other thing that it did was my high school was very internationally known and very nationally known. . . . So at the time, my high school was an all-girls’ high school and there was a category A, which was college prep, and there was a category B, which was I guess regular high school for a high school diploma, and so I actually went from B to A at the end of my freshman year, which put me on track for all Regents courses and AP courses in my junior and senior year. (Participant 5)

I think the Diploma International Baccalaureate Program is like really great because, like I said, it allows you to be compared to people like across the nation and across the globe, which is like really awesome. So I think that on some level, universities see that you’ve pushed yourself and really challenged yourself beyond just the regulars and honors courses. It’s something much more, like to say you’ve done the IB program or even just taken a bunch of AP classes shows that you’ve really I think tried to take yourself to the next level. (Participant 6)

I think if there’s one thing that I learned from being in a private high school is how to like think critically and, you know, close reading and write really well because they really like focused on that. . . . I got a chance to take a class at NYU and things like that that are available to students that go to like private high—public high schools. (Participant 2)

The second code that was prevalent among the participants was the financial aspect of the post-secondary education selection. All of the participants spoke about the importance of financial aid and which schools were going to cause the least financial burden to their families. Participant 1 provided an extensive explanation of why she chose to attend a state school and the guilt she felt because her parents were still expected to contribute to her tuition cost and often went without their necessities so she could stay in school. Participant 6 recalled the financial aid packages she received from the schools to which she applied. She specifically spoke about receiving an acceptance letter from an Ivy League institution, which she wanted to attend, and she appealed their offer because they did not give her enough financial aid based on her socioeconomic status. Her appeal was granted and her tuition cost of the Ivy League institution became equal to that of the aid packages she received from the state institutions to which she applied.

When I got my acceptance letter from [school attending] or when I read it online, I was, I had (pause) no actual intention of going to [school attending] because I didn't, I like not in a million years thought I would get in. And so when I got in, I was just like it was amazing but I also just like immediately thought that I couldn't go because I saw the financial aid package and I was like I cannot afford this. But anyways, I ultimately decided to go to [school attending] because I appealed my financial aid and then I was—and so they approved my appeal and re-evaluated my, like the cost of attendance for me, and so it actually came out to the same price as [college name]. So that's how I ended up here. (Participant 6)

When I first applied to [university attended], I had a full ride through the SFP [letters changed to protect the participant] program and I know that they, that program is very heavily used in the New York, for New York City students I believe, but I didn't think it was going to be that much for the [state] students, but I see, it seemed like they tend to try to look at students with private education, it seemed like that to me because I was in it, my roommate was in it, my other roommate was in the program, and we all went to private high schools.

(Participant 4)

I do get a lot of money from [college attending]. . . . So when I applied to [college attending] I applied blind. I don't think that it's blind anymore, but, so a lot of my friends who are also first generation and like from low-income backgrounds also had the same financial aid package that I do. (Participant 2) [Note: Blind acceptance occurs when a college or university accepts a student without having all of the student's financial information, which would determine if the student would be able to afford the school.]

From the analysis of the codes presented in this theme, one can understand that all students did not follow traditional college choice models. As expressed by the participants, various factors impacted where they applied to college. From this theme, it was hard to state which factor was more prevalent among the participants than others, which is why they were all mentioned. Regarding the factor of acceptance, the participants all attributed it to an aspect of the high school, specifically their coursework. The coursework is a major component of college preparatory frameworks, so there was a correlation with the literature. Lastly, the most influential factor determining where the

participants ultimately matriculated was cost. The participants were most concerned about the cost of their education, which is a direct link to the socioeconomic status of their families. Often the cost can be a deterrent for low-income students when considering furthering their education, but the participants were not deterred by that and matriculated at the school that was most affordable.

**Research Question 2.** To what extent is there a relationship between graduation from a high school that offers a college preparatory framework, and an improvement in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?

Research Question 2 was formulated from the idea that institutions have the ability to be a factor to change one's short-term and long-term social capital (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Lin, 2000; Perna, 2006; Ward, 2006). Within these institutions, students receive support from personnel, are exposed to opportunities that broaden the scope of their world, and are in an environment that provides them access to a new social network. The high schools that the participants attended were examples of the institutions discussed in the social capital literature. Within the walls of these institutions, the participants were exposed to rigorous coursework (Coleman et al., 1982; Higareda, 2010; Hoffer, 1997; Neal, 1997) that is categorized as college preparatory.

Research Question 2 was answered through interview questions 6, 7, 8, 8a, 9, 10, and 11. As previously done for Research Question 1, Table 4.3 shows each interview question and the theories from which it was derived.

Table 4.3

*Interview Questions and Theory Alignment for Research Question 2*

Interview Question	Theory Alignment
6. Do you feel your IB or college preparatory diploma gained you access to educational and social opportunities to which non-college preparatory students would have had access?	Social capital theory and emancipation theory
7. What college or university did you attend?	College choice
8. What did you do after graduation from your college/university? (If still in school what are your future plans)	Long-term outcome study and social capital theory
8a. Can you please describe those opportunities/experiences? (If not answered)	Long-term outcome study and social capital theory
9. Do you believe any aspect of your college preparatory high school/IBDP had an impact on your career choice?	Social capital
10. Did the foundational teachings of your college preparatory high school/IBDP have an impact on your outlook of the world? If, so please elaborate	Long-term outcome study
11. How do you think your life would have changed if you did not attend the college preparatory high school or participate in the Diploma Programme?	College preparatory curricula, emancipation theory, long-term outcome study, and social capital theory

Each response was analyzed using codes that were aligned with the associated theories. In answering Research Question 2, one theme of significance emerged: college preparatory culture.

***College preparatory culture.*** The theme of significance for Research Question 2 is college preparatory culture. The theme emerged from the participants as they reflected on the relationship between their college preparatory experience and their alteration in

social capital. The culture of college preparatory high schools and curricula was seen as the catalyst, giving socioeconomically disadvantaged students the resources they needed to break the cycle of generational economic restraints. The formulation of this theme emerged from the participants' reflections on the impact their high school enrollment had on the improvement of their social capital. The change in social capital for many of the participants began prior to post-secondary matriculation. The change began to occur through their exposure to new social networks that were built within the high schools.

The first code developed from the participant responses was social networks. Each of the participants gained access to a new social network by going to school every day and interfacing with classmates and school personnel. Relationships were built with individuals with more social capital regarding socioeconomic status and education, which helped the participants transition into new social networks. The cultivation of these relationships caused the participants to gain exposure to opportunities to which they may not have had exposure if they did not attend college preparatory high schools.

I definitely would not have taken a feminism class, which was particularly life-changing for me, and it was really, helped shape who I became as a person. That's actually the most important thing. I don't know what I'm talking about. That feminism course really was critical to where I am now, and it came at a very critical point in my life. And so just the fact that I wouldn't have had that, I think I don't know like where I would have been right now. (Participant 2)

I think it goes hand in hand, that it's not only that I have that education but I also have that as my religion background and I stuck to it. But I'm pretty sure if I went to a public school, I would not be where I am today. (Participant 4)

There was never any doubt that I kind of—that there had to be something bigger. It couldn't just be, "Hey, I go to work every day." It has to be, "You have to change something. You have to make the world a better place." And that was one of the philosophies of my high school. It was, "Hey, you leave the world better than how you came into it." And that still rings true to me today. . . . So for me, I feel like my school instilled in me this kind of "Hey, aim high. Aim high. Always aim high and always raise the bar of what you thought." It wasn't just, "Hey, you're going to college because your parents didn't go to college or you're going to finish high school because your mom didn't finish high school." It was like, "So what profession are you going to be? Are you going to be a lawyer, are you going to be a doctor, are you going to be an engineer? Like what—are you going to be a principal? What are you going to be? But you're going to be something." (Participant 5)

The second code present under this theme was the continuation of education. The parents of the participants instilled the importance of education into them, and the participants continued to honor that by continuing their education past their bachelor's degrees. The desire to continue education demonstrated the participants' understanding of the need for education and the way it can continue to serve as a catalyst for socioeconomic growth.

They don't put IB schools in, for lack of a better way to put this although I'm vulgar at this moment, like in \_\_\_ schools, they didn't do it. So at least not in [state resided in]. I don't know how it was anywhere else, but you know, that program was in a better school. I think they would always brag about the fact that

they were number thirty-two in the nation as a high school. And you know, I think having the access to, you know, those resources that I would not have been in a school that was in a poor area or with less money thrown at it, you know, that started a trajectory that ended me up in the doctorate program. (Participant 3)

I always knew I wanted to go to graduate school. That wasn't even a question. It was between law school and education. And so at the time, I ended up doing education because it was free and so I ended up doing my master's a year after I graduated from my undergrad. (Participant 5)

The third code contributing to the theme of college preparatory culture was an expanded worldview and career selection. A component of the culture of college preparatory schools is a culture of global-mindedness. The culture of global-mindedness allowed the participants see themselves as contributors to the world in which they live. This was a major aspect of the alteration in social capital for the participants because their understanding of the power they possessed as citizens in the world changed. The participants were empowered through the service projects to which they were exposed. The school-funded projects required the students to interface with individuals who had less access to resources and social capital than themselves. Through these opportunities to help others, they realized their ability to serve as a resource for other disadvantaged groups, thus inspiring them to continue to improve their environments. The participants expanded their view of the world and began to develop an understanding of the new access they already possessed and their ability to expand that access as they moved into higher levels of education.

This year I had like a kind of like a life-changing opportunity, I guess, because my whole life, I've always wanted to be a lawyer. Because just like every little kid, the only professions that you think of are like doctor, lawyer, things like that, so I always wanted to be a lawyer, but I was also always interested in the law and immigration law in particular because I come from a family of immigrants. But this year, one of my, one of my supervisors, I like am an intern at \_\_\_\_\_ of Social Justice and Equity Office at [school attending], and my supervisor told me to apply to Mellon, the fellowship program, and I got in, which kind of like, and that kind of like is setting the path for what I want to do after I graduate. So but it's not, it wasn't really where I wanted to go to, but speaking of like social capital, like that's just an amazing opportunity, so I had to, you know, take a shot and I got the fellowship, so I guess I'm a Mellon Fellow now. (Participant 2)

Being a global learner, I mean I volunteer with Partners in Health and so they advocate for global, they advocate for the awareness of global health disparities and also eliminating these health disparities, and that's even something that I'm trying to do now in my own community. I'm calling Rhode Island my community now, even if I'm from Miami. Where I'm trying to eliminate health disparities and like this like inaccessibility to health services in an essentially impoverished community and like a community that lacks resources. And I've definitely learned a lot and just about like how global communities work, how global health disparities function, and how these are systemic issues. (Participant 6)

Certainly coming from the religious, you know, background and having been at Catholic school, I mean, you know, life is a little bit more about just you. So I

think that that definitely had an impact on how I, you know, kind of conduct my life. And interestingly enough, so my research is on volunteering . . . I do think that my high school did have an impact on how I view the world, my place in it, the impact that I can have. You know, that may not have come from, you know, just, you know, a public high school unless I had a strong religious aspect of my life outside of high school. I'm not sure that would have come just from having attended, you know, a non-religious high school. Even had it been private, I'm not sure I would have had those same messages, so yeah. (Participant 1)

For me specifically, you know, doing the missionary work and being that I wasn't, you know, yes, I was poor and I didn't have a lot and my mom worked three jobs to put me through this Catholic school. There were people who had less than I did and that was always something that was ingrained in my high school, that this is, you know, the high school and my mom were instruments of saying this kind of \_\_\_\_ and this kind of education is a privilege. And so you know, it opened the door for me to realize that there was more than W. H. [city of origin], even though I was, you know, a small, you know, a Latina first generation, you know, poverty level kid, at high school I knew that there was a bigger world than just my neighborhood. So my high school exposed me to all of New York, not just New York City but upstate New York, by doing trips upstate New York, Long Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania. It exposed me to going down South for missionary work such as Louisiana, South Carolina which I would have never visited those places if I hadn't gone to the high school probably and done those kinds of missionary work. And it opened me up to global issues. (Participant 5)

**Outliers.** The data collected from the participants presented findings that were predominantly consistent across all six participants. However, the outliers that presented themselves provided an understanding of the process the participants endured as their social capital changed. The outliers present in the data fell in the category of family composition. Three of the participants lived in a two-parent household. They seemed to have a different level of access to resources than the other participants. Participant 1 was able to attend extracurricular enrichment programs. Access to these programs could be tied to the access of two parents instead of one. Participant 3 did not speak of the parental lack of access in the same manner as did the other participants when discussing post-secondary applications. The lack of discussion of parental access can be seen as a factor that did not impact Participant 3 in the way it impacted the other participants. Participant 4 also came from a two-parent household, but had a sibling who served as resource of information. These outliers could serve as points for future study when looking at the importance of family composition and social capital.

An additional outlier that emerged from the data was the emotional well-being of the participants as they went through the process of improving their social capital. The process of changing social capital is filled with obstacles, as seen by the participants' responses when discussing applying for post-secondary education. Many of the participants spoke about a feeling of having to accomplish this on their own. Participant 1 discussed her feelings of guilt over being the first person in her family to attend college and the burden that would leave for her family. Participant 2 discussed the obstacle of not having a parent's full support for going to a college that was far from home. These experiences emerged from the interviews as feelings that were not discussed in the

literature. The social and emotional well-being of the participants was not addressed and deserves to be looked at in further studies.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the research questions that guided this critical qualitative phenomenological study. It also presented the data gathered by the researcher in conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with six college preparatory alumni who were socioeconomically disadvantaged while in high school. From the gathered data, four themes emerged: importance of education, support, college choice influence, and college preparatory culture. These themes helped explain the journey each participant took as their social capital was altered by being a high school student participating in a college preparatory framework.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This study examined the extent to which a relationship may exist between college preparatory frameworks and access to post-secondary educational opportunities leading to an improvement in social capital. The data collected from the six participants showed that a relationship did exist between college preparatory frameworks and an improvement in social capital. This chapter discusses the data presented in Chapter 4 and the implications of the findings. Further, it discusses limitations of the study and presents recommendations for future research.

### **Implications of Findings**

This phenomenological study on socioeconomically disadvantaged students in college preparatory frameworks and the enhancement of social capital used semi-structured in-depth interviews to examine the relationship between college preparatory frameworks and post-secondary education access creation, thus leading to social capital alteration.

**Implications of Research Question 1.** Research Question 1 focused on the relationship between enrollment at a high school that offered a college preparatory framework and a change in access to post-secondary educational opportunities. The research question was built on the idea that education can be an emancipator for an oppressed group. Interview questions 1 through 5 used this foundational theory along

with social capital theory, college choice models, and literature on college preparatory models including private schools and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme to examine the extent to which a relationship existed, as perceived by the study participants.

The examination of the relationship between a high school offering a college preparatory framework and a change in post-secondary educational access yielded implications for the area of theory. The theory implications of the study were revealed by the responses to questions 1 through 5. These answers demonstrated the interconnectedness of the emancipation theory, social capital theory, and college choice models. From the participant responses, one can regard the emancipation theory as the initial motivator in changing social capital. This can be seen as transformational. Education is a tool that possesses the strength to break the cycles of poverty beginning with the parents, continuing through educational institutions, and concluding with the child. The parents of all of the participants wanted more for their children than they had. This was done with the understanding that education was going to be the structure that allowed the children to have access to more opportunities than their parents did.

Thus, the child's enrollment in educational settings exposed them to a quality of education that encompassed academic rigor and culture. The schools the participants attended gave them a level of access to resources their parents could not give them. In the high schools the students attended, the participants gained access to new social networks, which was a way in which the school aided the improvement of the participants' social capital. The participants expounded on the relationships they built with school personnel

and the life-altering impact these relationships had on their post-secondary educational access.

As the participants concluded their high school careers, they decided to continue to demonstrate their understanding of the importance of education instilled by their parents. This was done by making the decision to attend an institution of higher education, relying on their new social networks to guide them through the process. The participants recalled the specific teachers and guidance counselors who functioned as resources of the information they needed to navigate the college and university application process.

The participants also recalled a different form of institutional support, extracurricular programs. Many of these programs had partnerships with the schools the participants attended, with the goal of bringing additional resources to students who needed them the most. These programs came in the form of academic enrichment and college entrance exam preparation. Academic enrichment programs were designed to provide the participants with additional coursework, which would make the participants more appealing in the eyes of higher education recruiters. The exam preparation programs, similar to the enrichment programs, provided the students with additional tools that enabled them to perform better on standardized assessments such as the ACT and SAT. For most of the participants, the cultivation of these relationships served as an example of the power of institutional support for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, especially those who became first-generation college students.

The educational institution's aspect of helping the participants' improvement of social capital concluded with college choice selection. The participants explained their progression through the levels of college choice in two ways: self-creation of college choice models and factors that influenced their college choice. Four of the participants explained that they chose which colleges to apply to, based on what they heard about the schools from others in their social networks. This advice came from classmates, family friends, and school personnel. The other two participants received advice on schools based on their perceived chances of acceptance. The second factor, which contributed to the participants' college choice, was cost. Each of the participants discussed how important tuition costs were in their decision to matriculate at the school they ultimately decided to attend. All of the participants wanted to alleviate the burden of paying for college from their parents, which further explained their choice and matriculation decisions.

**Implications of Research Question 2.** Research Question 2 focused on examining the relationship between graduation from a college preparatory high school and alteration in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. This question's main focus was to determine whether the college preparatory high school was the catalyst in setting the participants on the journey to enhanced social capital. The question was answered through reflective questions 6 through 11. Each of these questions asked the participants to think about the impact their high school had on their college matriculation, educational and social opportunities, and career choice. The final question

asked the participants to reflect fully on their high school experience and how their social capital changed since their graduation.

The second research question used the findings of the study to determine whether other college preparatory frameworks, mentioned in the study, had similar outcomes for their alumni. The aspects of emancipation and social capital theories along with college choice models were intertwined in the participants' responses.

Prior to answering the final interview question, the participants drew connections between their high school experience and the life-altering experiences they have been granted. All of the participants talked about continuing their education beyond their bachelor's degrees. This was evidence of their parents' understanding, along with their own understanding, of the importance of education and the impact it can have on one's life. The participants also communicated how the culture of their high schools led them to a deeper understanding of their role in the world. This is a major factor when observing social capital because it shows that although the participants had to face many obstacles as their social capital improved, they were now in a position to help someone just like them, thus making the process easier for others than it was for them. The final analysis of the participants' responses to interview questions 6 through 11 showed that the culture of the college preparatory framework—encompassing school personnel, extracurricular activities, and rigorous coursework, along with the desire to have “something more”—led to an improvement in social capital for the six participants.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study reside in the area of participant collection. This study was originally designed to focus on the extent to which a relationship existed between the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and post-secondary education access for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, thus leading to a change in social capital. The researcher chose this college preparatory framework because of the 7,000 alumni base active on the professional social network LinkedIn. The researcher initially posted the study description on the IB LinkedIn pages (described in Chapters 3 and 4) where qualified alumni would be notified of the study. The researcher hoped that a large number of alumni would also fit the socioeconomic requirement by either qualifying for free or reduced lunch or being a first-generation college student.

After three weeks of the study description being active on the LinkedIn pages of the IB, only five alumni responded who fit the qualifications of the study. Of the five who qualified and stated their willingness to participate, only one person responded to the introductory email to schedule an interview call.

The researcher then expanded the qualification criteria to include alumni from private schools. Private schools, as stated by the literature in Chapter 2, are known for their rigorous coursework, which places those schools in the college preparatory category as well. The researcher created a revised study description and received an additional 34 responses, which led to a total of 10 qualified alumni and ending with six participants. Although the six participants provided rich data, the study could have yielded stronger results if more participants had been involved in the study. The study might have also produced stronger results if all of the participants came from one type of college

preparatory high school. This would have allowed for a more concentrated focus on the relationship between the specific type of college preparatory framework and access to post-secondary education, leading to an alteration in social capital.

Another limitation of the study is the different life stages of the participants. Each participant was at a different stage in her life. These different stages could have caused a difference in the perceived impact of the college preparatory framework on the participants' social capital. The perceived improvement of one's social capital when pursuing a bachelor's degree may differ from that of someone who is pursuing a doctoral degree.

A final limitation of the study is the sole gender of the participants. If the participants were of different genders, a different perspective of the relationship between college preparatory frameworks and their impact on social capital may have been present.

### **Recommendations**

The data gathered by the participants of the study showed a strong relationship between college preparatory frameworks and access to post-secondary education, leading to an improvement in social capital. Based on the data collected from the participants, four themes emerged: importance of education, support, college choice influence, and college preparatory culture. Two outliers also emerged: family composition and social-emotional well-being. The journeys traveled by each participant gave additional information which led to four recommendations that would be helpful in providing access to post-secondary education to socioeconomically disadvantaged students, in order to break the generational cycle of the disadvantaged.

**Recommendation based on the importance of education.** When understanding the factors that impact the social capital of disadvantaged students, one must understand the role education plays in their ability to access resources. In addition to an educational debt existing in America, there is also an equity debt, which is very prevalent in low-income communities. Areas where low-income people reside tend to have a lack of resources to support those who live there. Often, this is shown in schools that are unable to support the needs of the children they serve, thus preventing generations from breaking the barriers of low socioeconomic status. Each of the participants spoke of her parents' ability to provide them with an education that gave them the resources they needed to ultimately matriculate at institutions of higher education and change their social capital, but at a sacrifice to their parents'.

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students and parents need long-term access to resources as they strive to change their social capital through education. The first recommendation derived from the data collected from the participants is for future study on parental social capital and the access to resources it may provide for their children. A study of this nature can help identify the needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged parents, thus generating solutions, which curb the needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged children. As seen by the responses of the participants, their social capital was limited by their parents' until they reached their institutions which provided them with different social networks. The findings of a study on parental social capital could further explain the motivation and experiences of the parents as to make sacrifices to provide their children with educational opportunities to improve their social capital.

The second recommendation under this theme is the creation of more institutional supports outside of the school, which provide parents with the resources they need to aid their children in their educational journey from elementary school through college. This recommendation ties directly to the obstacles the participants faced when applying for post-secondary education. Due to their parents' lack of access and exposure to post-secondary education, the participants could not rely on their parents for assistance when it came to the college application process. The participants were solely forced to rely on institutional support. The formulation of institutional supports outside of school, geared to parents, could contribute to an increase in social capital for parents. This would occur through experiences, access to resources, and development of new social networks. Furthermore, with the increase in parental social capital, the social capital of their children are increased as well, thus making strides to ending generational cycles of being disadvantaged.

The third recommendation under this theme is for the creation of more college preparatory frameworks that can be accessible to socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The creation of these frameworks would hold the potential to provide students with the coursework and culture needed to gain exposure to post-secondary education and ultimately matriculation. This recommendation was formulated based on the experiences of the participants within public and private college preparatory frameworks and the impact that exposure had on their social capital. The participants all attributed their success to the experiences they had while partaking in the college preparatory frameworks. Since the college preparatory frameworks had a positive impact on their

social capital, more frameworks should be created to provide similar experiences to a wider-range of socioeconomically disadvantaged students that cannot afford to attend tuition-based schools.

**Recommendation based on support and college choice influence.** The participants of the study received highly effective support from the personnel in their high schools. All of the participants recalled how these individuals compensated for the lack of knowledge their parents were able to provide when applying for post-secondary education and the key role they played in the understanding of their own capabilities. This level of support resounded with the participants as they discussed who influenced their decision to apply to the colleges and universities they applied to. Conversely, the participants also explained the decrease in support from college or university personnel they received once they began their bachelor's degrees. The lack of support added to the difficulties some of the participants faced as first-generation college students. The researcher recommends that further study be conducted on the types of support institutions of higher education provide for first-generation college students to ease their transitions from high school and to ensure long-term success. This study could help members within the higher education field provide tailored supports, similar to those the participants received within their high schools, for first-generation/ socioeconomically disadvantaged students residing on their campuses.

**Recommendations for future study based on outliers.** This study confirmed that the culture of college preparatory frameworks has a large impact on the social capital of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. It found that coursework combined with

opportunities provided through these frameworks aided the participants in college matriculation and career selection. From the responses provided by the participants, two outliers emerged that can serve as a basis for further study: family composition and social-emotional support. As mentioned in Chapter 4, family composition can potentially be a factor of social capital. Half of the participants came from two-parent households and half came from single-parent households. A comparative study could be conducted to analyze the difference in social capital between college preparatory alumni who resided in two-parent households and those who resided in single-parent households.

The second recommendation for future research is based on the outlier of the participants' social-emotional well-being. The participants spoke about the different emotions they felt, as they became the first in their families to break socioeconomic barriers. The participants talked about not feeling confident in their decisions to apply for post-secondary education. They also expressed feelings of loneliness in their pursuit to obtain post-secondary education. Furthermore, they discussed their feelings around being told they were not good enough for certain opportunities by those who they believed had their best interest in mind. These social-emotional factors need to be handled with concern, especially for students who may be minorities in their private college preparatory schools. Further research can be conducted on the emotional factors associated with improving social capital. The findings of this study could aid college preparatory schools to institute support services for their students who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged families so that all of their emotional, social, and academic needs are met.

## **Researcher Reflections**

The inspiration for the study came from the researcher's reflections on the impact of her high school experience on her life. The researcher came from a middle-class family and attended a public magnet high school, which aided in the matriculation at her dream university. While conducting the study, the researcher was deeply moved as the participants talked about how their high school experiences changed their lives.

The researcher was highly impacted by the responses of Participant 1, who expressed her feelings of being average while attending a Catholic high school. This resonated with the researcher because she too shared that drive to be the best academically. The researcher was deeply touched and appreciated the level of honesty and candor the participants shared with her. All of the participants allowed themselves to delve deeply into their emotions about their past as they answered the questions.

## **Conclusion**

In 1974, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act was passed (U.S. Department of Education, 1974) and set the tone in post-Civil Rights America that all students, regardless of race, ethnic background, gender, or socioeconomic status, could have the opportunity to change their lives and social capital through educational advancement. As the years progressed and public schools across the United States were integrated, a gap in education began to form. The achievement gap, or achievement debt (Ladson-Billings, personal communication, 2013), gave a name to the disparity in educational achievement of students from different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status, with the largest

gap being between low-income African American students and their Caucasian counterparts.

As the economy continues to change and more students fall under the classification of disadvantaged, more research needs to be compiled on the impact of rigorous college preparatory frameworks and the access they provide to post-secondary educational opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The problem the study examined was the educational institutional component of the “cycle of the disadvantaged” (Farmer-Hinton, 2008) by exploring the relationship between the need for a rigorous college preparatory framework (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) and the lasting effects it can have on socioeconomically disadvantaged students, thus stopping the cycle of the disadvantaged. The study evaluated the extent to which a relationship existed between the attainment of a diploma from a school that offered a college preparatory framework and the creation of access to post-secondary educational opportunities, thus leading to an alteration in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The study focused on the impact of college preparatory frameworks on access to resources for participants who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The literature review discussed the emancipation theory, social capital theory, literature on college choice models, and college preparatory frameworks as seen in private schools.

The study used the scope of critical qualitative research to challenge the issue of educational inequality in the United States that is exacerbated by a difference in socioeconomic status. This form of research allowed the stories of college preparatory

alumni who were deemed disadvantaged because of generational socioeconomic status to be heard. The study consisted of interviews with graduates from high schools they identified as college preparatory schools based on the curricula they offer and who then matriculated at four-year colleges or universities.

The qualitative method of interviewing served as the tool to depict the perceived impact of college preparatory frameworks on access to post-secondary educational opportunities, the matriculation process, and the enhancement of social capital. The interviews allowed the alumni of the college preparatory high schools to give personal accounts of their experiences and elaborate on the opportunities that were made available to them as socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

From the gathered data, four themes emerged: educational importance, support, college choice influence, and college preparatory culture. These themes helped explain the journey each participant took as her social capital was altered by being a high school student participating in a college preparatory framework. From these themes, recommendations were developed as a means to help other socioeconomically disadvantaged students: larger number of funds allocated to college preparatory frameworks, creation of more institutional supports outside of schools, and socio-emotional support within schools. The findings of the study also yielded two recommendations for further study in the areas of family composition and social capital, and the emotional impacts of improving social capital. The findings can serve as an initial step toward understanding the experiences of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in college preparatory high schools.

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## **Appendix A**

### LinkedIn Study Description

#### College Preparatory Programs and Social Capital

Hello All,

I am currently working on my dissertation research, which focuses on the influence of college preparatory programs, specifically the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, and the creation of access to post-secondary education and alteration in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

If any of you are or know of private school (including catholic school) or IB alumni who were first generation college students, and may be interested in sharing their journey with me, please click on the survey link below:

[https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_6VvxUfWemq1YQcJ](https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6VvxUfWemq1YQcJ)

## Appendix B

### Qualification Survey

1. What IB World School or College Preparatory High School did you attend?
2. From what years?
  - i. Participant enters the years
3. Did you receive/qualify for free or reduced school lunch?
  - ii. Yes
  - iii. No
4. If you graduated from the IB World School, what type of diploma did you receive?
  - iv. General Diploma
  - v. International Baccalaureate Diploma
  - vi. Other
    1. Please explain
5. Did you attend a college or university?
6. Which school?
  - vii. Participant enters the response
7. When pursuing your post-secondary education degree, were you a first generation college student?
  - viii. Yes
  - ix. No

Questions 8 and 9 are optional for this survey and will not impact the selection criteria for the study.

8. Of which gender do you identify?
  - x. Female
  - xi. Male
  - xii. Not disclosed
9. Please identify your race or ethnicity.
  - xiii. White
  - xiv. Black or African American
  - xv. American Indian and Alaskan Native
  - xvi. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  - xvii. Hispanic
  - xviii. Other
10. For the purposes of the setting of the interview, please provide the city and state that you reside.
  - xix. Participant enters information

11. If you would like to be contacted for this study please provide your name and best mode of contact:

## Appendix C

### Introductory Email

Dear Private School or International Baccalaureate Alumni,

Thank you for taking the time to complete the qualification survey for a study on social capital and college preparatory models. My name is Morgan B. Freeman and I am a doctoral candidate in St. John Fisher College's Executive Leadership Program in the Ralph C. Wilson's School of Education.

My doctoral research is focused on determining if college preparatory models have an influence on the lives of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, in regards to creating long term social capital.

In light of your experience as an alumni of a private school and being a first-generation college student, I am seeking your participation in this study. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent document. Your involvement in the study will entail a one-on-one interview that will take an estimated time of one hour to complete. The interview is comprised of eleven questions about your experience in a private high school, college, and beyond. Your one-on-one interview will take place at a time and location (either over the phone or in person) of your choosing.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. I am the only person who will collect and maintain all information about the research participants. Participation is voluntary; you can choose to end your participation at any time. This study had been approved by St. John Fisher College's IRB.

**If you would still like to partake in the study, please respond to this email so an interview time can be established.**

Thank you for your time, attention, and for your interest in partaking in this valuable research. I look forward to working with you.

Warm regards,  
Morgan B. Freeman  
Doctoral Candidate  
Cohort 5  
Ed.D Program in Executive Leadership

Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education  
St John Fisher College  
Rochester, New York

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form

#### St. John Fisher College INFORMED ONSENT FORM

**Title of study:** Social Capital and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

**Name of researcher:** Morgan Brittany Freeman

**Faculty Supervisor:** Ellen Gambino, Ed.D.

**Phone for further information:** [REDACTED]

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of the proposed study is to determine if college preparatory curricula serves as a catalyst in changing the level of access to post-secondary educational resources, leading to a change in social capital for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

**Place of study:** Various locations dependent on the participant

**Length of participation:** One hour

**Risks and benefits:** The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below: There are minimal risks associated with participating in the study related to emotional responses while participating in one-on-one interviews. The main benefit of the study is a creation of information, which can help school leaders, understand the specific outcomes of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme for students who are considered to be socioeconomically disadvantaged. With this information, school leaders can provide additional resources to socioeconomically disadvantaged students, thus aiding them in accessing post-secondary educational opportunities.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:** All identifying information will be removed from the research, keeping the participants anonymous.

**Your rights:** As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

---

Print name (Participant)

Signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Investigator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, or if you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the researcher, Morgan B. Freeman [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for further assistance.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun [REDACTED]. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

## Appendix E

### Code Frequency Chart

Code	Participant					
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
<b>Importance of Education</b>						
Family Composition						
Parental citizenship		X	X	X	X	X
Single parent household		X			X	X
Dual parent household	X		X	X		
Socioeconomic status	X	X			X	X
Pipelines						
Middle school	X	X	X	X	X	X
Advanced coursework		X	X			X
Private school benefits	X	X		X	X	
Parental sacrifice	X	X		X	X	
Educational legacy				X		
<b>Support</b>						
Parental-Child Access						
Limited access	X	X			X	X
Parental support (limited)		X			X	
Parental support (vast)	X		X	X		X
Participant knowledge (limited)		X			X	X
Participant knowledge (vast)	X		X	X		
Institutional Support						
Application process	X	X			X	
School personnel	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>College Choice Influence</b>						
Institutional Support						
Social network	X	X		X	X	X
Geographical location (college)	X		X	X	X	

High school coursework/reputation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Private school benefits	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Finances</b>						
Scholarships (because of high school reputation)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scholarships (from external agencies)				X		
Application fee	X		X			
<b>College Preparatory Culture</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
<b>Social networks</b>						
Extracurricular activities		X			X	
Institutional culture	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Continuation of education</b>						
Bachelor's degree	X	X	X	X	X	X
Graduate degree	X		X	X	X	
Expanded World View	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Career selection</b>						
Early determination	X	X	X	X	X	X
Service oriented career	X		X	X	X	
<b>Emotional Wellbeing</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Need to be better	X				X	
Resilience	X		X	X	X	X
Self actualization	X	X	X	X	X	X
Navigating on their own	X	X	X		X	X