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## Why Aren't We Getting the Part?

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# Why Aren't We Getting the Part?

**Abstract**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to compare the soft and social skills attainment of African American college seniors and non-African American college seniors. College graduates in the United States are experiencing the challenge of underemployment (low wages) and unemployment. However, African American college graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed and or underemployed when compared to their White counterparts. The research indicates that hiring managers value soft/social skills above technical skills and the education required for the position. This study reviewed data from a survey administered to college seniors graduating from a college in a large metropolitan area in the northeast United States. The student body at the college was predominately minority and commute to the school from local neighborhoods. The school has both associate and bachelor's degree programs. The study found that the African American seniors identified themselves as having a higher level of soft skills than the non-African American seniors. The findings present an opportunity for institutions of higher education to establish formal soft and social skills training as curriculum.

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Why Aren't We Getting the Part?

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of the requirements for the degree  
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Dr. Sandye Johnson

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## **Dedication**

Dr. Debra Lamb, my Brooklyn Girl Friend and mentor, was instrumental in propelling me on the path of my doctoral journey. I am forever grateful to Debra for the push and her continued support.

To James Strachan and Lillian Hunt-Strachan, my parents, the two words, thank you, seem so small in comparison to the large role you played in my life from birth. You taught me I could do anything and be anything. More than “thank you,” I want to say, “I love you.”

This journey has had its share of highs and lows, triumphs, and, obstacles. God is the reason I made it through. He held my hand, refusing to let go, even when I doubted myself. Although unseen, His presence was felt and powerful. Only for His grace, I am, and I thank Him.

Throughout my studies, I have been surrounded by earth angels—an understanding group of supporters, advisors, Sorors, Girl Friends, and friends—who daily sent me encouraging messages. Although, they are too many to name, I appreciate every one of them. Thank you to my amazing group: Sean Davenport, Melissa Aponte, and Merica Neufville. There is no group better than D4G8! To the two people who held me up when I thought I was sinking, Dr. Maria Delongoria and Dr. Kimberly Louis, thank you. To my Executive Mentor, Dr. Evelyn Castro, thank you for giving of your time and experience to me, without hesitation, for the past 2 years. To My Girl Friends, Dawn Thomas and Joan Johnson, thank you for your words of encouragement and for always

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Jocelynn Rainey is currently the Chief Administrative Officer at The Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation. Ms. Rainey began her journey of higher education in 1985 at Southern Connecticut State University graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology in 1989. She attended Audrey Cohen College, now Metropolitan College, and graduated with a Master of Science degree in Public Administration in 1997. She began her pursuit of a doctoral degree at St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2016 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Rainey pursued her research comparing the soft skills of African American college seniors and non-African American college seniors under the direction of Dr. Sandye Johnson and Dr. Jackilyn Manning Campbell and received the Ed.D. degree in 2018.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to compare the soft and social skills attainment of African American college seniors and non-African American college seniors. College graduates in the United States are experiencing the challenge of underemployment (low wages) and unemployment. However, African American college graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed and or underemployed when compared to their White counterparts. The research indicates that hiring managers value soft/social skills above technical skills and the education required for the position. This study reviewed data from a survey administered to college seniors graduating from a college in a large metropolitan area in the northeast United States. The student body at the college was predominately minority and commute to the school from local neighborhoods. The school has both associate and bachelor's degree programs. The study found that the African American seniors identified themselves as having a higher level of soft skills than the non-African American seniors. The findings present an opportunity for institutions of higher education to establish formal soft and social skills training as curriculum.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The unemployment rate for African American college graduates is worse today than it ever was for White college graduates in the aftermath of the Great Recession (Jones & Schmitt, 2014). Today, 40% of all unemployed persons in the United States are college graduates (Goodman, 2015). White college graduates make up only 4% of the unemployed population, while African American college graduates make up 20% of the unemployed population (Gould & Cooke, 2016). More college African American graduates are either unemployed or in low-wage nonprofessional jobs than their White counterparts. There is a debate as to whether the inequity in hiring is due to racial discrimination or difference in human capital (Gaddis, 2015). Human capital differences, as described by Gaddis, is the standard of education that a person experiences.

Additionally, the wealth gap between White American families and African American families is significant, with the average income of White American families at \$126,064 per year compared to African American families of at \$31,118 per year (Adamson, Brewer, Leondar-Wright, Lui, & Robles, 2016). There is a stunning correlation between wealth attainment and level of employment (Khosrovani & Ward, 2011).

Research supports that initial earnings at the start of a person's career dictates an earning trajectory throughout his or her career. Thus, working in a low-wage job will negatively impact the ability to accumulate wealth (Adamson et al., 2016). Therefore, individuals who start their careers in low-paying jobs are likely to remain behind their

counterparts in earnings and the accumulation of wealth throughout their lifetime (Adamson et al., 2016). Statistics indicate that there is a significantly higher number of African American college graduates who are in low-wage jobs that do not require a college degree, when compared to their White counterparts (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013).

Most hiring managers report that they are seeking more than the basic technical skills required for a job. These managers value soft skills and are interviewing and hiring employees who possess both exceptional soft/social skills and technical skills (Deming, 2017; Rivera, 2012). Employers believe that candidates often have the technical skills required for the work, but they are not confident that the applicants have the soft skills needed to be successful in the job (Deepa & Manisha, 2013; Stewart, Wall, & Marciniak et al., 2015; Tymon, 2013). There is a growing importance put on social and soft skills in the workplace (Deming, 2017). Workers with higher social skills earn more than those without these skills, and workers with higher social skills are more likely to be hired in professional positions (Deming). Hiring decisions are also being made more based on how a candidate fits into the workplace than the candidate's actual technical knowledge (Rivera, 2012).

The issue of job seekers not possessing the soft skills needed to be successful at work has been a longstanding issue. Over 20 years ago, Cotton (1993) found that employers from all business sizes were discovering that prospective hires met the technical and education requirements required for employment, but employers—even then—had serious reservations about the nontechnical skills of the candidates they interviewed. Once the employers identified candidates who met the education and

technical requirements, they were interviewed for good social and soft skills (Cotton, 1993).

It appears that regardless of where African American students attend college, upon graduation, they still have less positive outcomes in the job market than White college graduates (Gaddis, 2015). Employers do value the schools that applicants attend. White applicants attending prestigious, elite universities did far better than all other applicants. However, African American applicants who attend elite universities do not do as well in the job market as White applicants who attend less prestigious universities (Gaddis, 2015). College graduates who attended historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) earned significantly less than all other college graduates (Strayhorn, 2008).

There is significant literature regarding discrimination in hiring, but there is a paucity regarding the level of social skills demonstrated by African American college graduates and how social skills might impact their ability to secure professional jobs. This study compared the level of soft/social skills attained by African American seniors and non-African American seniors prior to graduating from their college or university.

### **Problem Statement**

College graduates in the United States are experiencing the challenge of underemployment (low wages) and unemployment. However, African American college graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed and/or underemployed when compared to their White counterparts. Twenty percent of African American college graduates are in low-wage jobs that do not require a college degree, and 10% are unemployed, while only 4% of White college graduates are in low-wage jobs (Gould & Cooke, 2016). The

literature demonstrates that even if granted an interview, the African American applicants, in most instances, are not the candidates chosen to fill the position (Rivera, 2012).

Hiring managers often seek candidates who have the same interest and hobbies as they have (Rivera, 2012). These interests and hobbies are often the same as privileged White men. African American candidates do not have the same level of exposure to many of these interests, and they do not normally participate in such activities (Rivera, 2012). Many hiring managers seek employees who they can be *friends* with, and hiring managers look for employees who have interpersonal skills that they appreciate (Tymon, 2013). Managers hire people they connect with during the interview process, and the hiring managers believe the interview candidates will be good team members. Managers most often choose to hire the candidates they deem have the soft skills they desire above hard skills (Stewart et al., 2015). However, there is limited research available on how soft skills training may result in positive employment outcomes for African American college graduates.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

The literature suggests that the theory of emotional intelligence (EI) is related to the development of a person's soft skills (Iliescu, Ilie, Ispas, & Ion, 2012). Emotional intelligence theory was first introduced in 1989 by Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer (Ackley, 2016). The concept is not only respected in the scientific community, it is also understood and has been adopted in the business sector. Salovey and Mayer are academicians who first brought emotional intelligence to the forefront, but Daniel Goleman, Harvard psychologist, is often considered the father of emotional intelligence

theory because his research was accepted more widely by the business sector (Ackley, 2016).

Emotional intelligence theory is predicated on the idea that if people are more in tune to others' emotions, they can enjoy more successful workplace outcomes (Ackley, 2016). According to the key emotional intelligence theorists, emotional intelligence is the use of emotions to manage interactions (Ackley). Most researchers believe that these skills can be learned and that individuals who have a high emotional intelligence index can use their skills to manage and influence others' emotions.

Emotional intelligence theory is closely aligned with soft skills attainment. Many businesses rely on emotional intelligence tools to assess job applicants' soft skills (Iliescu et al., 2012). Human resource professionals have found that candidates with a high level of emotional intelligence are more likely to be successful in the workplace (Lievens, Klehe, & Libbrecht, 2011).

Emotional intelligence training can assist African American college graduates in obtaining work by giving them the tools to understand an interviewer's emotional queues, and they can adjust their responses during the hiring process (Elfenbein, Jang, Sharma, & Sanchez-Burks, 2017). Job interviews are a form of negotiation, and emotional intelligence is an asset in negotiations (Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2017). During the interview process, if an applicant can effectively anticipate the response that the hiring manager is seeking, and if he or she is able to perceive the hiring managers emotions, the applicant will experience better outcomes in the labor market (Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2017).

Emotional intelligence theorists have found that emotional intelligence can be taught (Ackley, 2016). The literature demonstrates that assessing for emotional intelligence results in hiring managers who are able to identify candidates with better social and interpersonal skills. Assessing for emotional intelligence results in hiring employees who are good team members who can cultivate more social capital in the workplace (Ackley, 2016). Employers are seeking employees with the ability to fit into their company culture. Employees who can build relationships through interpersonal relationships are quicker to acclimate to a company's culture.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to compare the level of social and soft skills attainment in African American college seniors and non-African American seniors who were preparing for graduation in June 2018. Although racial discrimination has been identified as one factor contributing to underemployment and unemployment of African American college graduates, this study examined the level of social and soft skills attainment needed.

### **Research Questions**

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is the difference in the level of social and soft skills attainment between non-African American college seniors and African American college seniors?
2. Is there a gender difference in the level of soft skills attainment between African American male and female college seniors?

## **Potential Significance of the Study**

Research indicates that hiring managers are looking for job candidates who possess exceptional soft/social skills along with technical skills (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Statistics show that African American graduates are twice as likely to be in low-paying jobs when compared to their White counterparts. One factor that has not been researched sufficiently is whether African American college students have developed a high level of soft skills. The literature indicates that although soft skills are primarily obtained at home, they can also be taught (Hirsch, 2017). Employers believe that higher education should add soft and employability skills training to curriculum (Hirsch). This study has the potential to uncover the need for formalized soft/social skills training in higher education to assist in African American college graduates in obtaining post-graduation professional work in their fields of study.

## **Definitions of Terms**

*African American* – a United States American of African descent and especially of Black African descent (Merriam-Webster Online, n.d.).

*Non-African American Students* – learners who do not identify as being African American or of being of Black African descent.

*Social and Soft Skills* – desirable qualities for employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge; they include common sense, interpersonal behavior, politeness, flexibility, good attitude (Thefreedictionary.com, 2017). For this study, emotional intelligence will be used to describe one of the social skills.

*Underemployment* – the condition in which people in a labor force are employed at less than full-time or regular jobs or at jobs inadequate with respect to their training or economic needs (Merriam-Webster Online, n.d.).

### **Chapter Summary**

There is significant literature showing that African American college graduates are underemployed and unemployed at a higher rate than White college graduates. The literature indicates that most hiring managers are hiring for *fit* and not necessarily for technical skills (Deming, 2015; Rivera, 2012). Hiring managers have reported that although most candidates have the technical skills required for the job, lack employability because they do not have the soft skills that are needed to be successful in the workplace (Deepa & Manisha, 2013; Tymon, 2013). College students are realizing too late in their tenure at school that these skills are the key to success in the labor market (Tymon, 2013).

Emotional intelligence theory may explain the disconnect between African American college graduates and hiring managers. Emotional intelligence training may assist college African American graduates in being able to understand hiring managers' desires and interest (Iliescu et al., 2012). Currently, companies report that they value soft skills above technical skills and education. Employers seek candidates who will *fit into* their organizations, be good team players, are likeable, and are relationship builders. When recruiting candidates for positions, most employers now use emotional intelligence evaluations to assess for soft skills.

There is literature that supports that soft skills can be learned, and most businesses believe that colleges are responsible for ensuring that graduates have the soft skills

required for success in the job market (Murti, 2014). Colleges seldom incorporate soft skills into their curriculum even though graduate success in the labor market seems to depend on these skills. Students leave academia believing they have the skills required to get professional work. However, there is a gap between the skills students believe they possess and the skills employers seek (Suvedi, Ghimire, & Millenbah, 2016) .

The remainder of this publication is made up of additional chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature found concerning the under- and unemployment of all recent college graduates, under- and unemployment of African American college graduates, the importance of social skills, emotional intelligence theory, and the wealth gap. Chapter 3 details the methodology used to compare African American seniors to non-African American seniors, and Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 explains the limitations of this study and the implications and recommendations for future studies.

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

African American college graduates experience significantly more underemployment and unemployment than White college graduates (Jones & Schmitt, 2014). Many African American college graduates who are employed are in jobs where a college degree is not a requirement. Another problem correlated with employment is the wealth gap between White American families and African American families. African American families have an average household income \$100,000 less than the average White family (Adamson et al., 2016). This is significant because wealth attainment is connected to income (Adamson et al.). The literature presented here will examine the reasons why college African American graduates are not obtaining professional employment after graduation.

The research indicates that hiring managers value soft/social skills above the technical skills and education required for the position. Hiring managers find that identifying candidates with the technical skills and education required is not difficult. However, finding candidates with exceptional social and soft skills that will work well within their companies is more problematic (Deming, 2017; Rivera, 2012). Employers are assessing candidates for their ability to fit into the employers' culture and who have good interpersonal skills (Deming, 2017). Hiring outcomes are more often based on a candidate's soft skills rather than actual technical knowledge (Rivera, 2012).

The issue of job seekers not possessing the soft skills needed to be successful at work has been a longstanding issue. Over 20 years ago, Cotton (1993) found that

employers from all sized businesses had serious reservations about the nontechnical skills of the candidates interviewed. Employers expect to train new employees in job-specific technical skills. However, once the employers have identified the candidates that met the required education and technical requirements, the candidates are interviewed for good social and soft skills (Cotton, 1993).

There is significant literature regarding discrimination in hiring, but there is not a substantial amount of literature regarding African American college graduates and the impact of subpar soft skills on their ability to secure professional jobs after college graduation (Eriksson & Lagerstrom 2011; Gaddis, 2015). This study explored how formalized soft and social skills programing in higher education may positively impact African American college graduates' ability to obtain professional employment after graduation.

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature explored the research on the under- and unemployment of all college graduates and, specifically, the subgroup of African American college graduates and the impact of social and soft skills on professional job obtainment. The literature review contains five key components. It includes, first, a discussion on the impact of the Great Recession on college graduate job obtainment, the value of a college degree, and whether college graduates have the social skills needed to obtain work in their areas of study. The second component is the under- and unemployment of African American college graduates and the reasons why the unemployment rate and underemployment of these graduates is substantially higher than their White counterparts. The third component speaks of the importance of social and

soft skills to employers when making hiring decisions. The fourth component is emotional intelligence theory to explore how candidates who are more aware of social cues may have more positive outcomes during the hiring process. Lastly, the wealth gap between White and Black families and its impact on several aspects of success are reviewed.

The average White family in the United States has 90% more wealth than the average African American family (Adamson et al., 2016). This is significant because the literature indicates that the most significant career growth occurs during the early years of working. If college graduates begin their work experience underemployed in jobs that do not require a degree, they may remain behind in earning throughout their career, and they may have difficulty obtaining wealth in their lifetime (Adamson et al.). Employers value soft skills more than education and technical skills. Job seekers with good soft skills have better outcomes in the labor market (Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2017). All college graduates suffered significant joblessness following the Great Recession. However, African Americans have experienced much higher rates of under- and unemployment (Abel & Deitz, 2014). Under- and unemployment greatly impacts the ability to obtain wealth, which means that if there is not a remedy to the high rates of unemployment, the wealth gap will continue to expand (Adamson et al., 2016). The literature review specifically focused on African American college graduates.

### **Under- and Unemployment of Recent U.S. College Graduates**

Abel and Deitz (2014) measured the wage difference between individuals with a college degree and those without a college degree by comparing the average wage of those with a college degree against those without a degree. Data were obtained from the

U.S. Census Bureau Average. The variance presented in the research findings have some cautions to consider.

To measure the direct cost of college, Abel and Deitz (2014) reviewed data from the College Board and the U.S. Department of Education. The reports reviewed included data on average tuition paid, not actual tuition cost. With financial aid and other student aid, the true cost of college to students is less than the tuition cost.

Abel and Deitz (2014) also measured the return on investment of a college degree by reviewing the cost compared to the wages earned after college. They assumed the cost was incurred while enrolled in college, and the benefits were measured by wages earned once the students graduated. The findings demonstrated that even with declining wages, the decline for those with a bachelor's degree was significantly less than those with an associate degree or high school diploma.

Abel and Deitz (2014) further evaluated the under- and unemployment rate of college graduates. The findings were that college graduates who entered the labor market under employed or found themselves unemployed were less likely to remain in that condition throughout their career. To examine this, the researchers looked at American college graduates' employment status throughout their career life cycle using data from the U.S. Department of Labor. The findings from the Abel and Deitz study disclosed that even in jobs that do not require a degree, individuals with a college degree tend to fare better than their counterparts, thus indicating that employers will pay higher wages to an employee with a college degree even if it is not a requirement for the position.

Davis, Kimball, and Gould (2015) studied the high unemployment rate of American college graduates. During times of economic downturn, like the Great

Recession, recent college graduates fare far worse in the labor market than other demographics. Although under- and unemployment rates are improving, they are still significantly higher than before the Great Recession. Many college graduates are working in jobs that do not require a college degree primarily because of the weak demand of goods and services, causing less hiring. Additionally, 10.5% of college graduates are neither pursuing further education or working, and this has increased from 8.4% in 2007. Black and Hispanic college graduates are experiencing higher rates of unemployment, and all women have seen substantial declines in wages.

Davis et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study using data from 1969-2015 to evaluate the unemployment rate of American workers under 25 years old. Their research shows that the unemployment rate of young adults is twice as high as the unemployment of older workers. Data from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) were used to determine the highest education earned by age and other demographical data in 2015. The findings show that a college degree is still in the minority. Davis et al. looked at the under- and unemployment rates of high school and college graduates. The findings support that the unemployment rate was exceptionally high and that many college graduates were ending up in lower-level jobs. However, the data also indicates that college graduates' unemployment was still lower than other workers in the same age group.

Due to graduating in a weak economy, the class of 2015 will earn less for the next 10 to 15 years than if they graduated in a stronger economy (Davis et al., 2015). The research also addressed the under- and unemployment of high school graduates, and the researchers presented that, in the current labor market, that high school graduates do far worse than college graduates (Davis et al.).

Vedder, Denhart, and Robe (2013) found that many college-educated workers are in jobs that traditionally do not require a college degree. This was a qualitative study to examine the issue of American college graduates' work status. Reviewing statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the authors demonstrated that 48% of employed college graduates are in jobs that require less than a college degree. Students who graduate from elite institutions fare better in the job market than those who graduate from state institutions. This demonstrates that employers have a strong preference for workers from elite colleges, thus their experience in the labor market is different than those who do not attend elite universities. Although many college graduates do benefit from economic gains due to the attainment of a college degree, a substantial number of college graduates are not acquiring work in professional jobs (Vedder et al., 2013).

Vedder et al. (2013) disclosed that the projected number of people enrolling in college exceeds the projected growth of high-skilled jobs. The researchers used empirical evidence to demonstrate that there are more Americans obtaining college degrees while there are fewer professional jobs being created. The job market was not growing in 2013. Vedder et al. looked at working American college graduates and the training required by the jobs they were employed in. The BLS data projected that the underemployment rate would likely continue to grow because of a projection of low job growth. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics surveyed American college graduates who were working and found that 51% of those surveyed were working in jobs that required a bachelor's degree or more education, while over 48% of workers with a bachelor's degrees were employed in jobs that require less than a bachelor's degree. The empirical data show that the number of jobs requiring college degrees are far fewer than the

number of employed American college graduates. The number of American college graduates has drastically increased, while jobs requiring degrees have not experienced the same growth (Vedder et al., 2013).

The Great Recession left a lot of college graduates underemployed or unemployed (Nunley, Pugh, Romero, & Seals, 2017). The unemployment rate of college graduates after the Great Recession was higher than the national average. College graduates experience their most significant career growth during the initial career years. It has been found that college graduates who entered the labor force after the Recession have experienced lower lifetime earnings and career growth. Nunley et al. (2017) conducted a study regarding what the effect was on college graduates entering the job market after the Great Recession.

Nunley et al. (2017) conducted a resume audit. They created fictional resumes and applied to 2,300 jobs on the Internet. They assigned the fictional job seekers to different spans of under- or unemployment. Resumes were sent to job openings in 2013, which indicated that the fictional job seekers received degrees in 2010. The impact of underemployment on job market outcomes for recent college graduates was studied. The fictional applicants were randomly assigned work experience that is considered underemployment, they all had the required education, and some had worked internships in the industry where they were applying for work (jobs that do not require a college degree). The resumes were e-mailed to jobs openings in several large cities in the United States. The findings found there were negative outcomes for applicants who had the required education but no relevant work experience. Graduates who had internships on their resume experienced more call backs than those without relevant internship

experience. Nunley et al. (2017) found that short-term unemployed candidates received callbacks at a higher rate than those who were underemployed at the time of the study.

The literature is limited on empirical data demonstrating support of unemployment for any length of time leading to a significant negative impact on work outcomes. However, underemployment does have a negative effect on job attainment outcomes. It is possible that employers expect recent grads to experience some unemployment (Nunley et al., 2017). Underemployment acts as a negative indicator to employers.

All college graduates are suffering high unemployment rates and many are working in jobs that do not require a college degree (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Davis et al., 2015; Vedder et al., 2015). However, although many college graduates are unemployed or underemployed, the long-term economic benefits of obtaining a 4-year degree outweigh the negative financial outcomes of not obtaining a degree (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Davis et al., 2015). The cost of college tuition has increased remarkably, causing a lower number of people who can attend college, making the pool of job seekers much smaller (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Davis et al., 2015; Vedder et al., 2015). Individuals with a college degree still outearn those without a degree—even when they are unable to obtain professional work when they enter the labor market and are more likely to obtain professional employment during their career (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Davis et al., 2015). However, starting in a low-skilled job has long-term negative economic impacts (Nunley et al., 2017). Underemployment early in one's career results in lower lifetime wage earnings (Nunley et al., 2017). The Great Recession has negatively impacted the job market and job growth, especially for African Americans (Jones & Schmitt, 2014). The

literature indicates that African Americans and Hispanics with college degrees have higher rates of under- and unemployment than their White counterparts.

### **Under- and Unemployment of African American College Graduates**

Black college graduates suffer unemployment at double the rate of White college graduates (Love, 2015). Blacks with college degrees are unemployed at the same rate as Whites with only a high school diploma.

Jones and Schmitt (2014) did a quantitative study using data from the Occupational Information Network. Data were reviewed on all college graduates and data specific to Black college graduates was reviewed separately, and Jones and Schmitt found that although there have been some improvements, Black college graduates are still behind other college graduates in earnings.

African American college graduates are doing far worse than their White counterparts (Jones & Schmitt, 2014). The Great Recession made it difficult for all college graduates to find work in their fields of study, but it has been far more damaging to Black college graduates (Jones & Schmitt). In 2013, 12.4% of all African American college graduates, 22-27 years of age, were unemployed, which is more than double the 5.6% of White college graduates in the same age group. In 2013, over half of all Black college graduates were underemployed. Even with the coveted science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees, Black college graduates are experiencing far greater under and unemployment than their White counterparts and all other American workers. The underemployment rate for all college graduates is at approximately 33%, while the underemployment of Black college graduates is at 40% (Jones & Schmitt,

2014). African American college graduates suffered an advanced rate of under- and unemployment in comparison to their White equivalents.

It has been well established that African American college graduates suffer disproportionately higher percentages of under- and unemployment than White college graduates (Strayhorn, 2008). Black unemployment is two times higher than it is for White Americans and, when employed, African Americans earn less than any other racial group.

Many African Americans graduate from HBCUs. Strayhorn (2008) conducted a longitudinal study following African American college graduates, nationally who graduated from both HBCUs and non-HBCUs. There were 16,316 baccalaureate degree recipients identified for the study. The sample included 67% more women than men, and the average age of the sample at graduation was 26.25 years. The findings held that individuals who graduated from HBCUs earned significantly less than those who graduated from non-HBCUs. There was no significant difference in job satisfaction or socioeconomic status between the HBCU and the non-HBCU graduates. The study also found that graduates from HBCUs attained higher-status occupations more often than those who did not graduate from HBCUs. Strayhorn (2008) also found that those who graduated from HBCUs had higher levels of educational aspirations than those who graduated from other institutions. However, these higher aspirations did not result in better labor market outcomes (Strayhorn, 2008).

Gaddis (2015) conducted a computerized audit study and a field experiment to determine the relationship between colleges attended and races in employment outcomes. Both Black and White job candidates were created using race, gender, school, and social

class resumes. Elite universities and nationally ranked universities that ranked below the elite universities were selected and assigned to fictional resumes. This study evaluated state department data of births during the early 2000s, and Gaddis used that data to create names for the candidates. The names of babies born to parents by ethnicity who were seemingly popular during that period were searched. Job postings in three regions were applied to using two resumes for each job posting. The researcher reviewed the employers' responses to candidates via e-mail and phone to measure responses. The Gaddis (2015) results suggested that both college attended and race have a relationship to employer responses. Gaddis found that credentials from elite universities do result in better work outcomes for all graduates.

African American college graduates with a degree from an elite institution have better work outcomes than those from other less prestigious universities, but African Americans from elite universities do not do as well as White candidates with degrees from elite universities. White candidates with degrees from elite universities are often hired into management-level positions, while African American candidates with the same credentials are hired into less responsible positions. African American college graduates do much worse in the job market than their White counterparts (Gaddis, 2015). African American male college graduates make 75% of the income of White college educated males, and African American college-educated women make 90% of the income of White college-educated women (Gaddis, 2015). There is debate as to whether the inequity in hiring is the result of racial discrimination or a difference in human capital. Differences in human capital may be due to African Americans attending low-performing schools, making them less desirable to employers. It cannot be discerned if the inequality

in hiring and earnings is due to racial discrimination or human capital differences. The Gaddis study showed that both Black and White graduates from elite universities were hired at a higher rate than those who attended other universities.

The Gaddis (2015) study demonstrated that education does not equate to parity in opportunities for African Americans. Even with degrees from elite universities, race still holds African American college graduates back from equitable earnings (Gaddis, 2015). One issue with this study is that there were no insights into why the hiring of someone was ultimately made (Gaddis).

Eriksson and Lagerstrom (2011) conducted a quantitative study using data from an Internet-based resume database in Sweden to study how ethnicity, age, and gender affect responses from employers. All job searchers who logged on in December 2004 were asked to participate in the study. Over 18,000 searchers agreed to participate in the study. The average age of the searchers was 34 years; 53% were women, 18% had foreign names, 27% were employed, 53% were unemployed, and more than half had some college education, and most had work experience (Eriksson & Lagerstrom, 2011).

Twenty-eight percent of the job seekers were contacted by their employers. Eriksson and Lagerstrom (2011) found that job seekers with Nordic names, the old, the working, and men received the most employer responses. These findings are significant because those who receive contacts from employers have a higher probability of getting employed, thus having negative economic outcomes for job seekers who do not have Nordic names, are young, unemployed, or female. The Eriksson and Lagerstrom (2011) findings demonstrate that employers sort applicants by characteristics that they can identify in a curriculum vitae (CV).

Cohen (2014) found the gap between Black and White college graduates obtaining employment has widened since the Great Recession. White college graduates have always enjoyed more success in the job market than their Black counterparts. However, after the Great Recession, Black college graduates are finding it more difficult to obtain employment. Younger workers traditionally fare worse than older workers when seeking employment, regardless of the economic conditions. Cohen's study, conducted in 2013, found that White job seekers with only a high school diploma performed better in the job market than African Americans with a college degree. No matter the level of education, Blacks were found to be 50% more likely to be unemployed. Cohen (2014) stated that 56% of college graduates were in jobs that did not require a college degree.

Although a college degree increases the earning potential for all college graduates, African American college graduates are far behind White college graduates in career and career trajectory (Gaddis, 2015; Jones & Schmitt, 2014). African American college graduates, regardless of the institution they graduate from, suffer higher unemployment rates and underemployment rates than their White counterparts (Cohen, 2014; Gaddis, 2015; Jones & Schmitt, 2014). Although African Americans with degrees from elite university experience better outcomes than those who attend other universities, they are still less likely to be hired into managerial positions than their White counterparts (Gaddis, 2015). African Americans who attend HBCUs have significantly less success than African Americans who attend predominately White universities (Strayhorn, 2008). Although a college degree is still a good investment for African Americans to ensure economic achievement, African American college graduates still

experience higher rates of joblessness and underemployment (Cohen, 2014; Gaddis, 2015; Jones & Schmitt, 2014).

African American college graduates fare worse in the job market than White job candidates with only a high school diploma (Cohen, 2014; Love, 2015). Employers often do not respond to candidates with ethnic names on the applicant resumes (Ericksson & Jonas, 2012; Gaddis, 2015). The practice of not responding to applicant resumes, because the names are ethnic, is discriminatory and results in negative employment and economic outcomes for non-White individuals (Ericksson & Jonas, 2012; Gaddis, 2015).

### **Importance of Social Skills and Soft Skills in Hiring**

Heckman & Kautz (2012) found that the importance of good character in work and social life is more important than experience and intelligence quotient (IQ). IQ is not an independent indicator of success. Personality is a more significant indicator of success in work. School grades and standardized achievements tests are not the only indicators of ability to perform in work or in social settings. Personality traits predict and cause positive or negative outcomes in work (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

In the global labor market, companies are focused on recruiting job seekers who not only have the education and technical skills required for the position, but they must also have the soft and social skills that businesses find necessary for their businesses to thrive (Murti, 2014). Companies are complaining that finding candidates with adequate social skills has been difficult. There is a need for job candidates to possess a mix of social and hard skills to be more marketable in this global market.

Murti (2014) found that business schools have not been able to incorporate soft skills into curriculum in an operative way. Soft skills seem to be difficult to teach and are

often believed to be developed early through interpersonal relationships. Today, during the interview process, soft skills are considered equally as important to hiring managers as hard skills. Many companies believe that candidates lack the social skills they need to be effective in the positions they were being considered for. Higher education institutions need to consider industry needs when creating curriculum, focusing on creating candidates that can thrive in today's workplaces. This article highlights the need for higher educational institutions to include formal employability skills curriculum and training and real-work experiences that are focused on closing the skill gap for students and making the students more attractive to firms when they interview (Murti, 2014).

Suvedi et al. (2016) conducted a survey of college seniors attending the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources from 2004-2013 to measure how prepared the students believed they were for the work world. Overall, 2,556 students responded to the survey with the largest response coming from students who were seniors in the academic year 2010-2011, and the least responsive respondents were from academic year 2003-2004. Most respondents were individuals who resided in Michigan where the college is located (Suvedi et al., 2015). The respondents were 87.3% White, and there were more females who responded to the survey (60.6%) than males. Suvedi et al. found that the students felt that their academic training did contribute to career preparedness and they had acquired the soft skills they needed for success in the workplace. Most of the respondents felt that their research contributed greatly to their career preparedness, while they felt their specialization did not seem to contribute as much. The students from rural areas perceived themselves as less prepared than other students. The skills the students

rated lowest were diversity, computer technology, and research skills (Suvedi et al., 2015).

In the Suvedi et al. (2015) study, respondents from different ethnic groups had different perceptions. The White American students rated themselves low regarding experiences interacting with diverse groups. Suvedi et al. stated that it is troubling in the global marketplace because employers are looking for candidates who can work in diverse workplaces. Another significant finding was that international students from rural backgrounds rated themselves low in preparedness. With the competitive labor market, high unemployment, and layoffs, Suvedi et al. posited that it is essential that colleges offer students course work and resources that increase their ability to be successful in the labor market (Suvedi et al., 2016).

In 1993, Cotton found that hiring managers reported that they were dissatisfied with their entry-level candidates' employability skills. Cotton (1993) conducted a qualitative study where she cited work from 63 documents pertaining to employability skills, and she surveyed American employers to determine what were the most desirable skills they looked for in candidates. American employers were surveyed, and they identified technical skills as important, but most of the employers indicated that employability skills/soft skills were most critical. Hiring managers in all sized organizations ranked employability skills as more important than technical skills (Cotton, 1993). This is significant considering that the literature indicates that, today, job seekers still are deficient in soft skills.

Hiring managers expect to teach technical skills and company norms to new employees once on they are on the job. However, Cotton (1993) found that managers

expect employees to possess employability skills at the time of interview. Employers believed that schools are responsible for ensuring employability skills and that new employees need soft skills to navigate the workplace effectively. Cotton found, also that employees are most often terminated for behaviors that are attributed to a lack of soft or social skills. Many educators believe that employability and soft skills cannot be taught but are skills that are obtained incidentally (Cotton, 1993). However, Cotton's research demonstrates that these skills are teachable. Often, when institutions of higher learning attempt to train these skills, they do so in nonwork settings where they can more effectively be taught in work-like settings (Cotton, 1993).

Rivera (2012) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 120 hiring managers of elite firms who hired entry-level employees. Rivera found that recruiting is not just about finding candidates with the technical/hard skills that are required to perform the work. For firms, it is also about the *cultural matching* of the candidate with the employer. Rivera found that finding candidates with similar interests often outweighed hard skills in elite firms. The researcher found that hiring managers often hired the candidates who had interests most like their own; hiring managers gravitated toward hiring candidates who were closely aligned with them culturally. Hiring is the point of economic activity that can be a gateway to some groups while denying other groups access to long-term economic opportunities (Rivera, 2012).

Hiring is based significantly on the interview process, because hiring managers tend to give more weight to the interview than to resumes, skills, or institutions attended (Rivera, 2012). Although, there is research that demonstrates that there are preferences in hiring related to gender and race, there is also research that shows that similarities in

interest, experiences, and style also result in positive hiring outcomes. Firms see cultural fit as an asset to the business, and they believe that hard skills can be learned unlike cultural fit (Rivera, 2012).

In the Rivera (2012) study, the extracurricular activities interviewers were most attracted to the candidates who were most commonly enjoyed by upper-class Whites or those from a higher socioeconomic class. The applicants who the hiring manager believed they had more in common with had better outcomes than those who they did not feel they shared a like interest (Rivera, 2012).

Deming (2017) conducted a longitudinal data study that spanned over a period of 30 years, on young adults, ages 14 to 22, spanning over a period of three decades. The study included premarket skills, education, employment, and wages. Data from the O\*NET survey administered by the U.S. Department of Labor was used to assess requirements and wages for occupations. Deming measured the requirements for social skills in the labor market using O\*Net, looking at required social skills for jobs. He found that, since 1980, there has been growth in careers that require a high degree of social skills. The Deming study highlights the importance of social skills in the job market, but the research was unable to determine the where social skills attained and whether they should be included in academia or policy (Deming, 2017).

Tymon (2013) researched the issue of employability skills from the students' perspective. Most higher-education institutions say they include employability skills in the curriculum. However, employers believe that college graduates lack the social skills required for them to be successful in the workplace. An example of the disconnect between students and employers is that while communication, teamwork, and integrity

were ranked numbers 1, 2, and 3 in desired skills by employers, the same skills were ranked 16, 7, and 9 in skills by candidates (Tymon). The gap between what employers want in employees and the actual skills that are needed is evidence that although students are obtaining the qualifications they need for the work, they continue to lack the soft skills required to be successful in the workplace (Tymon). Tymon found that researchers have investigated the disconnect between academia and industry, but there is little research on the students' views. The student perspective is important because the research indicates that a student's commitment and interest are needed to ensure his or her ultimate success in work (Tymon, 2013).

Tymon's (2013) study was qualitative. Focus groups were used consisting of 400 students from one university majoring in various programs. Tymon asserted that first and second year students need to understand the necessity of employability skills to increase engagement to allow them more time to hone these needed skills.

Stewart et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study to look at why graduates and employers have different perceptions of the graduates' job readiness (Stewart et al., 2015). College students attending a 4-year college were surveyed. The students were asked to rank their social skills. They used a Likert-type scale to measure opinions, and students ranked themselves high in areas that employers found that the graduates lacked (Stewart et al., 2015). Stewart et al. found that the students rated themselves high in soft skills, and the employers fed back that the graduates did not demonstrate the soft skills that the graduates thought they possessed.

Stewart et al. (2015) found that employers value soft skills more than technical skills because soft skills are imperative for success in the workplace. Employers found

that most college graduates do not possess the soft skills they need to succeed in the labor market, and most college graduates believe they are job ready and well prepared to secure work in their fields of study.

Deepa and Maisha (2013) found that corporations who hired employees with superior soft skills gave those companies a competitive edge. The researchers found that employers want employees to have the hard and technical skills required to do the job, but they seek applicants with strong social skills. Recruiters know that with the changing market, hard skills and technical skill requirements will change throughout people's careers, and employees will have to keep learning, thus making soft skills more important at the time of hire (Deepa & Manisha). Recruiters seek employees who can work in a team, communicate well, and fit into the company culture (Deepa & Manisha). Hiring managers found that companies who were hired individuals with adequate soft skills experienced better outcomes in the workplace, and those individuals who did not have the appropriate soft skills suffered negative outcomes in the workplace. They studied employers' desires when hiring and the importance of soft skills verses hard skills when hiring MBAs.

Deepa and Manisha (2013) conducted a quantitative study, surveying 100 employers, from four to five sectors, regarding the importance of soft skills in hiring regarding the importance of soft skills in hiring. Of the respondents, 86% believed that soft skills were crucial to success, while 60% surveyed felt that the candidates who were entering the workplace lacked the soft skills necessary to result in positive work outcomes. Of the 100 respondents, 82% found that there was a disconnect between employers' expectations and the product (students) leaving colleges the colleges and of

the 100 respondents, 50% believed that job applicants could learn soft skills in the workplace, but 80% felt that universities should add soft skills to their curriculums (Deepa & Maninsha, 2013).

Showry and Manasa (2016) studied why IT professionals leave jobs and how the lack of soft skills impact IT professionals' experiences in the workplace that lead them to leaving their jobs. The study indicates that 40% of all employees leave their jobs within the first 6 months of employment. Showry and Manasa also found that hiring managers focus more on technical skills verses soft skills.

Employers found that most candidates possessed the hard skills and academic qualifications that are required for the work, but they lacked the soft skills required to be successful (Cotton, 1993; Deming, 2017; Murti, 2014; Rivera, 2012; Tymon, 2013). Employers are having difficulty finding candidates with strong employability but with soft skills that they believe will make them successful in their work (Cotton, 1993; Deming, 2017; Murti, 2014; Rivera, 2012; Tymon, 2013). Technical skills and educational requirements are identified before the interview when reviewing resumes. During the interview process, hiring managers are assessing mostly for soft skills (Cotton, 1993; Rivera, 2013). There is a need for higher education to include formal soft skill/employability training in curriculum to ensure graduates employability (Cotton, 1993; Deming, 2017; Suvedi et al., 2016; Tymon, 2013). While employers find that college graduates are lacking the soft skills required for success in this global marketplace, college students and recent graduates believe that they are career ready when they leave school (Stewart et al., 2016; Suvedi et al., 2016). There is a disconnect

between what employers' experiences and what the college students believe their soft skills are (Tymon, 2013; Showry & Manasa, 2016; Stewart et al., 2016).

### **Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory**

EI theory is closely related to soft skills attainment. Many businesses are relying on EI theory during their selection process when recruiting candidates to assess for fit and soft skills. EI is a good predictor of probable performance at work (Iliescu et al., 2012). Iliescu et al. conducted a study to understand applicants' reactions to EI testing during selection. The study sample consisted of 178 Romanian graduate students ranging in age from 21-40 years old. The participants completed the test and a questionnaire investigating face validity of the EI test.

The purpose of the study was to examine applicants' reactions to the test, and it was one of the first attempts at investigating applicant reactions to EI, as a selection tool (Iliescu et al., 2012). Some of the tasks the students were asked to complete seemed more closely aligned with what they believed EI to be; the faces task was the most easily accepted of all of the tasks to be the most associated with EI and the perception of the emotions of others. However, other tasks to measure ability, or even EI were considered not fair assessments in the selection process.

The face validity task encompassed exercises where the participant was asked to come to a decision regarding common, everyday situations, as opposed to the more hypothetical situations (Iliescu et al., 2012). This information is relevant when comparing the different subtests of the EI test against another test.

Lazovic (2012) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 10 top managers to see what role EI plays in productivity and in the leadership of organizations. The interviews

were semi-structured to allow for open responses. Lazovic found that leaders with higher EI develop positive cultures and build trust, which results in higher returns for the organization. Companies with leaders who have a higher level of EI build teams with better EI, and they are better able to obtain employee commitment (Lazovic, 2012).

Employers have been using EI to evaluate job candidates for fit and soft skills since 2011 (Lievens, Klehe, & Libbrecht, 2011). Lievens et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study using self-reported EI assessments of job applicants and incumbent workers. The samples consisted of 109 job applicants who applied to a large company. Of the total applications 52% were men, aged 18-60 years, and 46% of the men had higher education degrees. The incumbent sample was 239 participants, aged 22-63-years old, and 41% had a higher education degree. The study was approved by the HR department and the applicants were told that the assessment would be used to determine hiring decision. After they completed the assessment, the applicants were briefed and informed that the assessment would not be used for a hiring decision. The incumbents were assured that the assessment would only be used for research purposes.

The findings from the Lievens et al. (2011) study were that applicants reported an EI that was higher than the incumbents. These differences could not be explained by differences in age or gender. The study demonstrated that employers who want to rely on EI testing should do so with some caution and that applicant norms should be used when conducting such assessments in the hiring process.

Elfenbein et al. (2017) found that the ability to tune into and out of nonverbal or emotional cues can help people respond appropriately to others. Understanding others' emotions can help job seekers understand the cues of hiring managers, and that may help

to guide them to the correct answers. The researchers conducted a quantitative study, surveying 412 undergraduate and graduate students. There was an auditory and a visual test with both positive and negative validated words spoken in negative and positive vocal tones. The participants made judgements using instructions based on tuning into (TINC) or tuning out (TONIC) of nonverbal cues. The tuning in and out of nonverbal cues had similar trends that were correlated with each other, although imperfect, they indicated that EI allows people to respond to nonverbal cues appropriately (Elfenbein et al., 2017).

Farh, Seo, and Tesluk (2012) conducted a study to understand the correlation between EI and job performance. There were 346 full-time professionals and early-career managers participating. The study found that the high EI levels resulted in high performance and positively impacted teamwork.

Businesses have been looking to EI assessments as tools to determine employee success and fit in organizations (Farh et al., 2012). Companies are increasingly using EI to make hiring decisions. Employees who have high EI are better able to interpret others' emotional cues, thus giving them the advantage of undercurrent information that could allow them better decision making and better relationships with colleagues (Farh et al., 2012; Lazovic, 2012). These attributes can also result in good teamwork and social opportunities (Lazovic, 2012).

Employers and human resource (HR) practitioners evaluate applicants' ability to be successful in the workplace using EI theory and evaluations (Ackley, 2016; Iliescu et al., 2012; Lievens et al., 2011). EI is closely related to the soft skills employers seek in new hires (Farh et al., 2012; Lievens et al., 2011). Employees with high EI have positive

job performance outcomes and teamwork skills (Farh et al., 2012). The literature demonstrates that assessing for EI may result in more successful hiring outcomes by prospective employers identifying candidates with the soft and interpersonal skills required for the workplace. Employees who are intuitive to others' emotions are effectively better teammates, and they cultivate more social capital at work (Elfenbein et al., 2017).

The concept of EI was founded 25 years ago. When EI was first introduced, some scholars considered it a fad (Ackley, 2016). However, EI has become a theory that is respected in both science and corporate America (Ackley, 2016). In 1990, Peter Salovey and John Mayer, both research psychologists and academics, wrote early papers on EI (Ackley, 2016). However, Daniel Goleman, also an academic researcher, is considered the father of emotional intelligence theory. Daniel Goleman's work became highly recognized by corporate America (Ackley, 2016).

### **Wealth Gap**

Shapiro et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study that followed 1,700 families from 1984 through 2009. Following families for 25 years allowed the researchers to identify factors that impact wealth accumulation. Shapiro et al. found that during the 25-year period, homeownership accounted for 27% of the wealth gap, which is the largest percentage of wealth gap between Black and White families. The second largest wealth gap is income, which created a 20% gap. Highly educated families experienced more wealth. However, college degrees resulted in more wealth for White families than Black families, accounting for a 5% gap. Inheritance accounted for 5% of the wage gap and how much wealth the family had when the study began accounted for 3% of the wage

gap. The Shapiro (2013) findings indicate that homeownership, stable, consistent employment with growth opportunities, education, and opportunities for inheritance are all factors that can help close the wealth gap.

Wealth is calculated by considering property owned, savings, and the influence of money that families can leave to the next generation (Adamson et al., 2016). Wealth is usually accumulated over several generations. Most wealth in America is inherited. However, for some who did not inherit direct wealth, they may have inherited family legacy and connections that lead to their ability to secure wealth by generating work through family networks (Adamson et al., 2016).

Every year Gallup conducts a *minority rights in relations* poll. In 2004, that poll found that 77% White and 68% Hispanic Americans believed that African Americans have the same opportunity as White Americans to get any job that they are qualified for, while only 41% of African American respondents agreed (Adamson et al., 2016). This demonstrates the perceptions of non-African Americans versus African Americans regarding African American outcomes in the labor market. Most non-African Americans believe that African Americans have the same opportunities as others. However, African Americans' experiences are far different.

African Americans experience lower income levels than White Americans. In 2004, the average White family's income between the ages of 30-39 was more than double that of a Black family in the same age group (Khosrovani & Ward, 2011). To understand the wage gap between White and Black Americans, Khosrovani and Ward studied African Americans' experiences in the workplace. They conducted a qualitative and quantitative study in Houston, TX of African Americans' perceptions of

opportunities in the work place. The convenience sample comprised 187 African Americans who were employed in Houston at various companies. Of the candidates canvased, 30 members of the sample agreed to be interviewed. The researchers used a convenience sample because companies would not cooperate. The sample consisted of 62% women; 38% male of which 61% had full-time jobs, and 39% had part-time jobs. The sample participants worked in several different industries in Houston, and the participants completed a survey, and all 30 members agreed to interview participated in a 30-minute structured interview.

Khosrovani and Ward (2011) found that most of the respondents felt they were being compensated fairly for their work. However, 65% had never experienced advancement in their companies while others had. Of those surveyed, 67% percent of were unhappy with the training and mentoring opportunities at their jobs, and 73% felt that to receive training and advancement, employees needed to have social capital and mentoring, which those surveyed did not believe they would have access to. The limitations to this survey were that the researchers were unable to use a random sample because of the companies' reluctance to participate. Without a random sample, it is difficult to extend a study to the larger population; however, this study does contribute to the literature regarding African Americans' experience in work settings.

African American families have far less wealth than White American families (Adamson et al., 2016; Khosrovani & Ward, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2013). The wealth gap correlates with under- and unemployment because where people start in their employment, and opportunities for advancement indicate the networks they would have access to and the wealth of their families for generations (Adamson et al., 2016;

Khosrovani & Ward, 2011). Families with stable employment, which includes opportunities for advancement, are better able to accumulate wealth (Shapiro et al., 2013). Education also equates to the accumulation of wealth but African Americans do not experience the same positive outcomes as White families (Shapiro et al., 2013). White people have more opportunity than African Americans because of established networks and generational wealth (Adamson et al., 2016). African American workers have less opportunities for advancement and fewer mentorship relationships on the job than White workers, thus making it difficult to increase their wages (Khosrovani & Ward, 2011).

### **Summary**

Following the Great Recession, college graduates of all racial groups suffered and continued to suffer significant unemployment rates. However, African American college students are experiencing double the unemployment rate of White college graduates. The literature presented evidence that Black college graduates are more likely to be underemployed when compared to White college graduates. Underemployment of college graduates is defined as employment that requires less than a college degree. Being under employed has dire consequences on African Americans' ability to accumulate wealth. One of the most significant contributors to African American families having significantly less wealth than White families is that African Americans make pointedly less income than White Americans, and their outcomes with a college degree are far behind White Americans. The wealth gap may be decreased if the unemployment and underemployment rate of African American college graduates is decreased or more in line with White college graduates.

Currently, companies report that they value soft skills above technical skills and education. Employers seek candidates that will fit into their organization, be good team players, are likeable, and are relationship builders. Many employers now use EI evaluations to assess for soft skills. There is literature that supports that soft skills can be learned, and most businesses believe that the colleges are responsible for ensuring that graduates have the soft skills necessary for graduates to be successful in the marketplace. Colleges seldom incorporate soft skills into their curriculum—even though graduate success in the labor market seems to depend on these skills. Students leave academia believing they have the skills required to get professional work. However, there is a gap between the skills students believe they possess and the skills employers seek. Hiring managers review resumes for technical and educational requirements and think they can teach company-required technical skills.

Often during the interview process, employers are assessing for the soft skills they desire. Hiring managers desire to hire employees who are like the hiring manager, enjoy similar interests, and have hobbies lead to the hiring managers inadvertently hiring White elite candidates who are exposed to experiences, and who have had the experiences that are like the hiring manager.

There is a plethora of research on the impact of racism and discrimination on hiring process. Unfortunately, there is only a limited amount of research on social and employability skills and the impact on hiring. The present research study was conducted with African American college students to determine their attainment level of soft skills.

The following Chapter 3 details the methodology used in this study. It discusses the process used to compare the soft/social skills of African American college seniors and non-African American college graduates.

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

### **Introduction**

College graduates in the United States are experiencing the challenge of underemployment (low wages) and unemployment. However, African American college graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed and/or underemployed when compared to their White counterparts. Twenty percent of African American college graduates are in low-wage jobs that do not require a college degree, and 10% are unemployed, while only 4% for White college graduates are unemployed (Gould & Cooke, 2016). The literature demonstrates that even if granted an interview, the African American applicants, in most instances, are not the candidates chosen to fill the job positions. Managers more often value soft skills over hard skills when hiring (Stewart et al., 2015). However, there is limited research available on how soft skills training may result in positive employment outcomes for African American college graduates.

This study compared the level of social and soft skills development in African American and non-African American college seniors preparing for graduation in June 2018. Although racial discrimination has been identified as one factor contributing to underemployment and unemployment of African American students, this study compared the level of social and soft skills attainment of two groups of college seniors.

This study utilized a quantitative, nonexperimental, causal-comparative research design. A nonexperimental approach was chosen because the data were to be nonrandom and did not contain a control group or multiple measures. This approach was chosen

because mean differences between gender groups in the dependent variables could be examined by using a causal-comparative research design (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). Further evidence of the appropriateness of a causal-comparative design is shown by a lack of control over the independent variables by the researcher (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004). The participants recruited into the study were not randomized into gender groups. The gender of the participants was set prior to the study recruitment.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were investigated:

1. What is the difference in level of social and soft skills attainment between non-African American college seniors and African American college seniors?
2. Is there a difference in the level of soft skills attainment between African American male and female college seniors?

### **Research Context**

The study was conducted at a 4-year college, located in an urban setting, in the northeastern region of the United States, which offered both associate and baccalaureate degrees. According to the latest available reporting for the 2015-2016 school year, the total student enrollment was 6,425 students as of fall 2015 and the majority of the student body was female (72% ) with an average age for all students of 27 years (*Mdn* = 23 years).

Two-thirds of the students attended full time. Approximately 60% of all of the students received financial aid in the 2015-2016 academic year, with 46% of all aid provided by federally funded programs. The majority of the students were classified as

African American ethnicity. Out of the total enrollment of 5,690 students, 84% were classified as African American.

At the time of this study, there were 181 faculty members at the college. Of the 181 faculty members, 90 were tenured, 41 were on a tenure track, and 113 had doctoral degrees. Of the 181 faculty members, 96 identified as male, and 85 identified as female. Additionally, of the 181 faculty members, 117 identified as Black, six identified as White, 18 identified as Asian, five identified as nonresident alien, no one identified as Hispanic, and 35 faculty members identified as other.

### **Research Participants**

There were 131 students identified as graduating in June 2018, who responded to the survey. However, once the data was cleansed, those surveys with outliers and missing data were identified and not included in study. The remaining surveys that met the criteria of completing the entire survey included 75 seniors who self-identified as African American and 25 who identified as White, and they all qualified for the study. Of those that identified as African American, 58 self-identified as female, and 17 identified as male.

This study incorporated a convenience sampling procedure by targeting graduating students from one undergraduate institution, because it is not always possible to collect equal sample sizes, and a large sample size is beneficial because it more closely approximates the population (Field, 2013).

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

The Review of Personal Effectiveness with Locus of Control Questionnaire (ROPELOC; Richards, Ellis, & Neill, 2002) was an adapted version of the Life

Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ; Neill, 2000), which was utilized to assess the level of soft skills attainment. The ROPELOC survey was used according to the condition of use (Appendix A).

The ROPELOC instrument, a self-rated inventory, measures life effectiveness of an individual by measuring 14 psychological and behavioral domains (Appendix B). The 14 scales include: personal abilities and beliefs (self-confidence, self-efficacy, stress management open thinking); social abilities (social effectiveness, cooperative teamwork, leadership ability); organizational skills (time management, quality seeking, coping with change); one energy scale called active involvement; and a measure of overall effectiveness in all aspects of life. The two Locus of Control scales measure an individual's tendency to take responsibility for his or her actions and successes (internal locus of control) and one's degree of belief that external controls determine one's actions.

The 14 scales of the ROPELOC consist of three items each. Each of the 45 items are rated on a scale of 1 = *False, Not like me* to 8 = *True, Like me*. The items for each of the 14 subscales were averaged and the range of possible scores for each of the 14 subscales was 1 to 8, with higher scores indicative of greater association of an individual with the subscale measured.

Although a total of the 14 scales are measured by the ROPELOC instrumentation, only the five competency scales of (a) self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT) were included in the analyses of this study. Only the five competency scales most closely aligned with the assessment of the soft skills attainment that was used for this study. Multiple research outcomes imply that self-reporting, alone, is sufficient, and therefore,

conducting the ROPELOC as a self-assessment was sufficient for this study (Carmeli & Josman, 2006; Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, & Sheng, 2011; Killian, 2012). Test-retest reliability was not assessed for the ROPELOC.

### **Procedures for Data Analysis**

IBM SPSS Statistics (version 24.0) was used for all descriptive and inferential analyses. A 95% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ) was set for all inferential tests. Data analysis was used to answer the following research questions pertaining to this research study:

**Research question 1.** What is the difference in level of social and soft skills attainment between non-African American college seniors and African American college seniors?

A series of five one sample  $t$ -tests, one test for each of the five ROPELOC variable constructs, were used to test the research question. The one sample  $t$ -test provides the means to inferentially test Research Question 1 because it compares the means of the scores for the collected sample of African American college seniors on the five ROPELOC variable constructs to the average scale scores of the ROPELOC for non-African American students.

Before testing, data were screened for missing values and univariate outliers. Missing data were evaluated via frequency counts and screened for univariate outliers by transforming raw scores to  $z$ -scores and comparing  $z$ -scores to a critical value of  $\pm 3.29$ ,  $p < .001$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).  $Z$ -scores that exceed this critical value are more than three standard deviations away from the mean and thus represent possible outliers.

Basic parametric assumptions were tested to determine data quality and distributional appropriateness. That is, for the five constructs for each group, assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance, were tested. Linearity and homogeneity of variance were evaluated using residual scatterplots. To further test if the distributions were normally distributed, the skew and kurtosis coefficients were divided by the skew/kurtosis standard errors, resulting in  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients. This technique was recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Specifically,  $z$ -skew/  $z$ -kurtosis coefficients exceeding the critical range between  $-3.29$  and  $+3.29$  ( $p < .001$ ) can indicate non-normality. Once the assumptions were tested, one-sample  $t$ -test was conducted to assess effect size.

**Research question 2.** Is there a difference in the level of soft skills attainment between African American male and female college seniors? A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test Research Question 2. This test was appropriate given that each of the five ROPELOC variable constructs were specified as dependent variables in the study. The test was used to assess the difference in resiliency as defined by: (a) self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT), between the genders of the African American senior college students.

A MANOVA test provides the means to inferentially test the five composite ROPELOC mean scores by gender. Descriptive statistics were displayed for each one of the specified constructs for the non-African American college students.

Before testing, data were screened for missing values and univariate outliers. Missing data were evaluated via frequency counts and then subsequently screened for

univariate outliers by transforming raw scores to z-scores and comparing z-scores to a critical value of  $\pm 3.29$ ,  $p < .001$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Basic parametric assumptions were examined to determine data quality and distributional appropriateness. For the five latent constructs for each group, assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance were tested. Linearity and homogeneity of variance were evaluated using residual scatterplots. Skew and kurtosis coefficients were divided by the skew/kurtosis standard errors, resulting in z-skew/z-kurtosis coefficients to determine distribution symmetry. This technique was recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Specifically, z-skew/ z-kurtosis coefficients exceeding the critical range between  $-3.29$  and  $+3.29$  ( $p < .001$ ) may indicate non-normality. Box's M test was also used to test the null question that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups. Once assumptions were tested, a MANOVA test was conducted to assess the significance and effect size.

### **Summary of Methodology**

College students graduating in June 2018 were identified and e-mail addresses were obtained for each student. The participating college students came from one participating institution located in the northeast region of the United States. Each student received a survey created using Qualtrics via e-mail, which described the study and explained that the survey was confidential (Appendix C). Each student was required to electronically consent to participating in the study. The e-mail also included a hyperlink to a survey to assess the students' self-perceptions of their social skills attainment. The ROPELOC consisted of 50 multiple choice questions that would take no longer than 20

minutes to complete. It was indicated that all questions on the survey must be completed in order to be included in study. Additionally, questions regarding demographic information of class, gender and race were asked before the ROPELOC survey questions displayed.

The survey was electronically sent to 500 students, and 131 students responded. After data cleansing, 75 potential participants that identified as African American and 25 that identified as White met the participant criteria for the study. Of the 75 who identified as African American, 58 were female, and 17 were male.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to compare the level of social and soft skills development in African American and non-African American college seniors preparing for graduation in June 2018. The research design was appropriately chosen to contribute to the existing research findings and literature that pertains to emotional intelligence factors among African American college students.

The assessment tools used to gather data pertaining to EI was the ROPELOC survey instrument, administered through Qualtrics. In addition, the demographic variables of gender and race were collected from each participant. The survey instrument was described in this chapter, and details providing information regarding the validity and reliability of the instrument were also provided. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The purpose of this study was to compare the level of social and soft skill development in African American college seniors and non-African American college seniors preparing for graduation in June 2018. Although racial discrimination has been identified as one factor contributing to underemployment and unemployment of African American students, this study will examine the level of social and soft skill attainment as an additional factor.

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, causal-comparative research design. A non-experimental approach was chosen since the data was not randomized and did not contain a control group or multiple measures. This approach was chosen because mean differences between gender groups in the dependent variables can be examined by using a causal-comparative research design (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). Further evidence of the appropriateness of a causal-comparative design is shown by a lack of control over the independent variables by the researcher (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). In essence, participants recruited into the study were not randomized into gender groups; that is, participant's gender was biologically set prior to study recruitment.

This study incorporated a convenience sampling procedure by targeting graduating students from one undergraduate, coeducational, nonresidential institution of higher learning located in an urban setting. The students targeted were set to graduate in June 2018 either with a 2- or 4-year degree. The graduating class of 2018 included

approximately 500 students from a wide variety of academic disciplines. One hundred and thirty-one ( $N = 131$ ) participants completed the survey. This represents an approximately 26% response rate. Of the 131 who responded, 75 students met the inclusion criteria of being African American and a graduating senior. Table 4.1 displays the final breakdown of the participants obtained from the survey by gender.

Table 4.1

*Descriptive Statistics for African American College Seniors by Gender Groups*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	17	100
Female	58	100

### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 posited: There is no difference in level of social and soft skills attainment between non-African American college students and African American college students. A series of five, one sample  $t$ -tests, one test for each of the five ROPELOC variable constructs used as dependent variables of the study, were used to answer Research Question 1. The one sample  $t$ -test provides the means to inferentially test Research Question 1 as it compared the means of scores for the collected sample of African American students on the five ROPELOC variable constructs to the average scale scores of the ROPELOC for non-African American students. Descriptive statistics were displayed for each one of the specified constructs for non-African American college students. Table 4.2 and Table 4. 3 show non-African American students' descriptive statistics by specified construct sourced from the ROPELOC survey and African

American senior students' descriptive statistics by specified construct sourced from the ROPELOC survey.

Table 4.2

*Non-African American Students' Descriptive Statistics by Specified Construct Sourced from the ROPELOC Survey*

Construct	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
SF_Total	2.000	8.000	5.720	1.960	-0.536	-0.893
CT_Total	2.330	8.330	5.693	1.745	-0.328	-0.919
SE_Total	2.000	8.000	5.907	1.899	-0.544	-0.850
CH_Total	1.330	8.000	5.667	1.946	-0.438	-0.825
OT_Total	1.330	8.000	5.853	1.965	-0.870	-0.180

Note. Valid N (listwise),  $N = 25$  Standard Error Skew = .464, Standard Error Kurtosis = .902

Table 4.3

*African American Senior Students' Descriptive Statistics by Specified Construct Sourced from the ROPELOC Survey*

Construct	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
SF_Total	1.000	8.000	6.512	1.528	-1.342	2.017
CT_Total	1.000	8.330	6.667	1.702	-1.288	1.292
SE_Total	1.000	8.000	6.444	1.632	-1.306	1.427
CH_Total	1.000	8.000	6.422	1.552	-1.242	1.841
OT_Total	2.330	8.000	7.080	1.200	-1.872	3.455

Note. Valid N (listwise) = 75, Standard Error Skew = .277, Standard Error Kurtosis = .548

Before the research questions were evaluated, data were screened for missing values and univariate outliers. Missing data were evaluated using frequency counts, and no cases were found to have missing values. The data were screened for univariate outliers by transforming raw scores to  $z$ -scores and comparing  $z$ -scores to a critical value of  $\pm 3.29$ ,  $p < .001$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).  $Z$ -scores that exceeded this critical value were more than three standard deviations away from the mean and thus represented possible outliers. The distributions were evaluated and no cases with univariate outliers were found. Thus, the data were collected from a sample of 75 African American senior students ( $N = 75$ ) and 25 non-African American students.

**Test of normality.** Before the question was analyzed, basic parametric assumptions were evaluated. That is, for the five constructs for each group, assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance were tested. Linearity and homogeneity of variance were evaluated using residual scatterplots. To further test if the distributions were normally dispersed the skew and kurtosis coefficients were divided by the skew/kurtosis standard errors, resulting in  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients. This technique was recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Specifically,  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients exceeding the critical range between  $-3.29$  and  $+3.29$  ( $p < .001$ ) may indicate non-normality. Based on the evaluation of the residual scatterplots and  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients, parametric assumptions were not assumed to have been met. However, the general linear model was reasonably robust against these types of violations, but it should be considered a limitation of the study.

**Research question 1 results.** Using SPSS 24.0, Research Question 1 was evaluated using a one-sample  $t$ -test to assess the difference in resiliency as defined by: (a)

self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT) between non-African American students and African American senior college students. Results indicated that a significant effect was observed; that is, there was a significant difference in (a) self-efficacy (SF),  $t = 4.486, p < 0.001$ ; (b) cooperative teamwork (CT),  $t = 4.968, p < 0.001$ ; (c) social effectiveness (SE),  $t = 2.835, p < 0.01$ , (d) coping with change (CH),  $t = 4.197, p < 0.001$ , and (e) open thinking (OT),  $t = 8.874, p < 0.001$  between non-African American students and African American senior college students,  $F(3,64) = .453, p = 0.716$ . Table 4.4 shows inferential Statistics from One-Sample t-Test by Life Effectiveness Construct.

Table 4.4

*Inferential Statistics from One-Sample t-Test by Life Effectiveness Construct*

Construct	<i>t</i>	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
SF_Total	4.486	74	< 0.001	0.79152	0.4399	1.1431
CT_Total	4.968	74	< 0.001	0.97658	0.5849	1.3683
SE_Total	2.835	74	0.006	0.5344	0.1588	0.91
CH_Total	4.197	74	< 0.001	0.75222	0.3951	1.1094
OT_Total	8.874	74	< 0.001	1.23	0.9538	1.5062

*Note.* Test value = SF = 5.72 , CT = 5.69, SE = 5.91, CH = 5.67, and OT = 5.85,  $N = 75$

## Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the level of soft skill attainment between male and female African American college seniors? A MANOVA was used where each of the five

ROPELOC variable constructs were specified as dependent variables of the study. The MANOVA test provides the means to inferentially test the five composite ROPELOC mean scores by gender. Descriptive statistics were displayed for each one of the specified constructs for non-African American college students.

**Test of normality.** Before Research Question 2 was analyzed, basic parametric assumptions were evaluated. For the five constructs for each group, assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance were tested. Linearity and homogeneity of variance were evaluated using residual scatterplots. To further test if the distributions were normally dispersed, the skew and kurtosis coefficients were divided by the skew/kurtosis standard errors, resulting in  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients. This technique was recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Specifically,  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients exceeding the critical range between  $-3.29$  and  $+3.29$  ( $p < .001$ ) may indicate non-normality. Based on the evaluation of the residual scatterplots, Box's M test, and  $z$ -skew/ $z$ -kurtosis coefficients, parametric assumptions were not fully assumed to have been met. Box's M tests the null question that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups. Findings revealed that the assumption was met. However, the normality assumption was not met as observed by the residuals and  $z$ -tests. However, the general linear model was reasonably robust against these types of violations, but it should be considered a limitation of the study. Table 4.5 shows the descriptive statistics for each of the five ROPELOC constructs by gender.

Table 4.5

*Descriptive Statistics for Each of the Five ROPELOC Constructs by Gender*

Gender	Construct	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skew	Kurtosis
Male								
	SF_Total	17	4.67	8.000	6.8842	1.17892	-0.625	-1.181
	CT_Total	17	4.33	8.330	7.1569	1.34432	-1.135	0.106
	SE_Total	17	3.33	8.000	6.4706	1.56817	-0.906	-0.095
	CH_Total	17	3.67	8.000	6.8824	1.31731	-1.307	1.202
	OT_Total	17	4.00	8.000	7.2941	1.00611	-2.392	7.058
Female								
	SF_Total	58	1.00	8.000	6.4023	1.60865	-1.344	1.837
	CT_Total	58	1.00	8.330	6.5229	1.77832	-1.245	1.098
	SE_Total	58	1.00	8.000	6.4367	1.66402	-1.418	1.827
	CH_Total	58	1.00	8.000	6.2874	1.59977	-1.213	1.850
	OT_Total	58	2.33	8.000	7.0172	1.25256	-1.780	3.062

**Research question 2 results.** Using SPSS 24.0, Question 2 was evaluated using a MANOVA Test to assess the difference in resiliency as defined by: (a) self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT) between genders of African American senior college students.

Results indicated a non-significant effect was observed; that is, there was no difference in the multivariate composite of the five ROPELOC (a) self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT): Wilks Lambda (5,69) = .917,  $F = 1.246$ ,  $p = .298$ , between male and female African American senior college students,

Table 4.6

*Inferential Statistics Sourced from the MANOVA Test*

Effect	Value	F	Question df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Wilks' Lambda	0.917	1.246b	5.00	69.00	0.298	0.083	0.416

  

Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
SF_Total	3.053	1	3.053	1.313	0.256	0.018	0.204
CT_Total	5.284	1	5.284	1.844	0.179	0.025	0.268
SE_Total	0.015	1	0.015	0.006	0.941	0.000	0.051
CH_Total	4.654	1	4.654	1.957	0.166	0.026	0.282
OT_Total	1.008	1	1.008	0.697	0.407	0.009	0.131

*Note.* IV = Gender,  $N = 75$

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to compare the level of social and soft skills development in African American college seniors and non-African American college seniors preparing for graduation in 2018. Social and soft skills development data was obtained from non-random, primary data sampling. The data were obtained from individuals who completed the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (ROPELOC). The two questions developed to be answered were:

1. What is the difference in the level of social and soft skills attainment between non-African American college seniors and African American college seniors?
2. What is the difference in the level of soft skills attainment between African American male and female African American college seniors?

Using SPSS 24.0, Research Question 1 was evaluated using a one-sample  $t$ -test to assess the level life effectiveness of college seniors where life effectiveness was defined

as: (a) self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT). The results indicate that a significant effect was observed.

Research Question 2 was evaluated using a MANOVA test to assess the difference in life effectiveness between genders of African American senior college students. The results indicate a non-significant effect was observed; that is, there was no difference in the multivariate composite of the five ROPELOC (a) self-efficacy (SF), (b) cooperative teamwork (CT), (c) social effectiveness (SE), (d) coping with change (CH), and (e) open thinking (OT): Wilks Lambda (5,69) = .917,  $F = 1.246$ ,  $p = .298$ , between male and female African American senior college students.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, completes the dissertation presenting the limitations and implications of the study. The researcher's recommendations will also be included in this chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Since the Great Recession of 2008, college graduates across the United States have experienced high levels of underemployment and unemployment. However, African American college graduates are experiencing double the underemployment and unemployment of their White counterparts. Twenty percent of African American college graduates are in low-wage jobs that do not require a degree, because of difficulty securing jobs in their professions of study. Ten percent of African American college graduates are unemployed, while White college graduates experience only 4% unemployment (Gould & Cook, 2016).

The wealth gap in the United States is momentous between African American families and White families. White families have four times the wealth over African American families (Adamson et al., 2016). There is a correlation between the attainment of wealth and level of employment (Khosrvani & Ward, 2011). Working in a low-wage job negatively impacts the ability to attain wealth.

Although there is research that identifies discrimination as a significant barrier to the hiring of African American candidates, this research is focused on the impact of social skills on labor market outcomes for African American college graduates. During interviews for employment, most hiring managers assess candidates for social and/or soft skills, the assessment of work-related technical skills and education requirements is

primarily done during the resume review before the employer meets candidates (Rivera, 2012). White candidates are experiencing better outcomes at the point of interview.

This research examined what African American college seniors, graduating in June 2018, believed their social/soft skills attainment to be. This was assessed using the ROPELOC. The ROPELOC is a self-rated survey. The study examined the two following questions:

1. What is the difference in level of social and soft skills attainment between non-African American college seniors and African American college seniors?
2. Is there a difference between the level of soft skills attainment between male and female college seniors?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the African American participants in this study believed themselves to have high levels of social and soft skills. The research found that the students who identified themselves as African American believed that they had higher levels of social and soft skills than those seniors that identified as other races. The research also found no significance in the difference in social and soft skills attainment between the male African American seniors and the female African American seniors.

### **Implications of Findings**

It was stunning that this study found that African American seniors who participated in this study believed that they had attained high levels of social and soft skills. The study also found that there was no significant difference between how African American male seniors viewed their social and soft skills attainment compared to African American female seniors. Although, this study found the graduates believed themselves

to have high levels of social and soft skills, the study did not evaluate what the labor market outcomes might be for these seniors when they are interviewed. The study also did not examine what interview hiring managers might believe of these participants' social and soft skills if they were to be interviewed.

The research indicates that hiring managers hire for organizational fit, and they are assessing more for social and soft skills at the moment of interview than for education requirements or technical skills (Cotton, 1993; Deming, 2017; Murti, 2014; Rivera, 2012; Tymon, 2013). The research also indicates that hiring managers believe that college graduates lack the social and soft skills required to be successful in the labor market. Hiring managers also believe that institutions of higher education can do more to prepare students by offering training on social and soft skills (Tymon, 2013; Suvedi et al., 2016).

The results of this study indicate that approaching the problem of African American college graduates' poor outcomes in the labor market by conducting a self-assessment survey is not beneficial to solving the problem. However, it is helpful to better understand how students perceive their social and soft skills. The data indicate that students may not participate in elective social and soft skills training because they believe they possess these skills. The research also confirms this researcher's certainty that social and soft skills training should be mandatory curriculum in higher education course work, because students may not participate in these programs if they are not mandated. This is supported by research that indicates that social and soft skills can be taught (Deepa & Manisha, 2013).

## **Limitations**

This researcher conducted a quantitative, nonexperimental study. This design was used because the data was not random. The study was conducted at 4-year college in the northeastern region of the United States. Given that the study was conducted at one college, the findings are difficult to generalize to all African American college seniors.

Another limitation to the study is that of 131 participants who responded to the survey, only 75 identified as African American and were qualified for study and 25 identified as not African American. This number is a small sampling of the population targeted. A larger sample size may have resulted in a better representation of the population being surveyed.

## **Recommendations**

Many African American college graduates do not experience good outcomes in the labor market. African American college graduates suffer more underemployment and unemployment than their White counterparts (Love, 2015). These poor outcomes may result in college African American graduate's inability to acquire wealth in their lifetimes. The inability to acquire wealth impacts the United States wealth gap, where African American families have significantly less wealth than White families (Shapiro et al., 2013). Addressing the problem of African American college graduates not obtaining viable employment could ultimately lessen the wealth gap. This can be accomplished by informing higher institutions of education of the importance of social and soft skills training in academia.

This researcher believes that future studies should include a mixed-method approach that evaluates hiring managers' assessments of the social and soft skills of

African American college graduates they interview. This could be done by interviewing graduates regarding outcomes in the labor market. This would better measure if students have the social and soft skills employers seek and if the skills they possess result in good outcomes in the labor market.

Further research may also include a quantitative study that evaluates hiring managers' assessments of the social and soft skills of African American college graduates who they interview. This approach would give insight into what soft skills the employers identify as the job candidates' deficiencies.

## **Conclusion**

African American college graduates experience double the underemployment and unemployment of White college graduates in America (Jones & Schmitt, 2014). To ensure equity in the United States for African American people, it is important that college graduates can attain positive outcomes in the labor market when they leave college. There is a substantial wealth gap between African Americans and White Americans. This gap in wealth is partially due to overall poor employment results for African American people. Ensuring this segment of the population is successful in the job market may help to reduce the gap. The research demonstrates that poor labor market outcomes result in the inability to attain wealth (Khosrovani & Ward, 2011).

Employers value social and soft skills in the workplace and seek employees who have such skills. Hiring managers review resumes for technical skills and education requirements, and they assess for social and soft skills that fit their organization during the interview process (Cotton, 1993; Deming, 2017; Tymon, 2013). Employers also believe that institutions of higher education fail to train students on social and soft skills

and that this training should be added to curriculum (Suvedi et al., 2016). Institutions of higher education can add required social and soft skills training to curriculum that is informed by industry professionals who can outline what skills they search for. This partnering could ultimately result in better outcomes for African American college graduates when they enter the labor market.

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## Appendix A

### LEQ/Conditions of Use

#### < LEQ

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outcomes. Before being sent, supplied data sets should be stripped of personally and organisationally identifying information. No identifying information would ever be reported about your dataset(s) without permission. Acknowledgement of your contribution would be included in a general manner in any publications or distributions of the database. Access to the database is currently available by emailing a request to [James Neill](#), however the intention is to put the data on the open web.

4. Translation: Distributed instrumentation and documents may be translated without permission. Translated versions are to be considered new versions unless there is a validation process (including back-translation) conducted in conjunction with the material's author(s).
5. Notification: Whilst not a condition of use, it is strongly recommend that potential users email either the [LEQ discussion group](#) or [James Neill](#) with a description of the intended use(s) and any specific questions.

## Appendix B

### ROPELOC Instrument

STATEMENT	FALSE not like me	TRUE like me
01. When I have spare time I always use it to paint.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
02. I like cooperating in a team.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
03. No matter what the situation is I can handle it	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
04. I can be a good leader.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
05. My own efforts and actions are what will determine my future.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
06. I prefer to be actively involved in things.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
07. I am open to different thinking if there is a better idea.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
08. In everything I do I try my best to get the details right.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
09. Luck, other people and events control most of my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
10. I am confident that I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
11. I am effective in social situations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
12. I am calm in stressful situations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
13. My overall effectiveness in life is very high.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
14. I plan and use my time efficiently.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
15. I cope well with changing situations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
16. I cooperate well when working in a team.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
17. I prefer things that taste sweet instead of	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
18. No matter what happens I can handle it.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
19. I am capable of being a good leader.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
20. I like being active and energetic.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
21. What I do and how I do it will determine my successes in life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
22. I am open to new thoughts and ideas.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
23. I try to get the best possible results when I do things.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
24. When I apply myself to something I am confident I will succeed.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
25. My future is mostly in the hands of other people.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
26. I am competent and effective in social situations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
27. I can stay calm and overcome anxiety in almost all situations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
28. I am efficient and do not waste time.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
29. Overall, in all things in life, I am effective.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
30. When things around me change I cope well.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
31. I am good at cooperating with team members.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
32. I can handle things no matter what happens.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
33. I solve all mathematics problems easily.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
34. I am seen as a capable leader.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
35. I like to get into things and make action.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
36. I can adapt my thinking and ideas.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
37. If I succeed in life it will be because of my efforts.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
38. I try to get the very best results in everything I do.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

39. I am confident in my ability to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
40. I communicate effectively in social situations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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41. My life is mostly controlled by external things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
42. I am calm when things go wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
43. I am efficient in the way I use my time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
44. I cope well when things change.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
45. Overall, in my life I am a very effective person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

## Appendix C

### Sample Survey Introduction Letter

Dear prospective participant

My name is Jocelynne Rainey. I am a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College's Wilson School of Education. My dissertation research focuses on the impact of soft/social skills on professional work attainment for African American college graduates. I would like your participation in an anonymous questionnaire to assess social skills. The survey will allow you to self-assess your social skills. This research may inform academia on the importance of formal soft skills training in higher education. I would like your participation in a survey (find link attached). The survey should take XXXX minutes to complete. If you agree to participate you must complete entire survey by XXXXXX

**(SURVEY LINK)**

Information will be aggregated and summarized for reporting. All e-mail addresses and individual contact information will be anonymous. There will be no identifying information used in study.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or to receive results at the conclusion of the study.

Sincerely;

Jocelynne Rainey

Candidate, Doctor of Education in Executive Leadership

St. John Fisher College

JR02815@sjfc.edu