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By

Leonard J. Brown

August 2012

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON  
SCHOOL FACTORS THAT AFFECT RESILIENCE AND COLLEGE  
READINESS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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August 2012

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my mother, Catherine Brown. You always told me to persist, be strong, and that nothing is impossible, some things may just take a little longer! I am eternally grateful for the encouragement, support and love that you have always given me. God Bless You.

## Acknowledgement

It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge my advisor Dr. Patricia Holland and my committee members for not letting me settle for mediocrity and helping me to produce a meaningful body of work. To my friends and family, I say thank you for pushing me and always believing in me. To my two daughters, Leslie and Asia, I thank you both for being understanding of my commitment to my work, and you should know that you both are motivation for everything I do to better myself. Most of all, I want to acknowledge and thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for keeping his guiding hands on my shoulders throughout my life.

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## Abstract

Brown, Leonard J. "African American Males: A Qualitative Case Study on School Factors that Affect Resilience and College Readiness." Unpublished Doctor of Education Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, August, 2012.

The purpose of this study is to identify elements of the school environment that foster resilience and positively influence African American male students' state of college readiness.

A qualitative approach was used to examine the support and resources needed to help educators foster resilience in, and better prepare African American males for college. Specifically employed in this qualitative study were ethnographic interviews to help determine school related factors that might influence the resilience of young African American males. Through a descriptive analysis of the findings, this researcher attempted to describe a framework for building resilience in African American males. Additionally, this researcher examined elements of the data for college readiness indicators outlined in the review of literature.

Through a descriptive analysis of how the experiences of the three resilient young men in the study reflect the concepts and notions from the review of literature, four prevailing themes were identified as influencing academic resilience and college and career readiness in African-American males; the importance of mother-figure influence, the motivation in the desire to dispel negative stereotypes, the value placed on education by influential adults, and the involvement or lack thereof of school counselors and administrators in the college and career preparation process.

Results of this study should prompt educational leaders to re-examine the extent to which they influence academic outcomes for African-American male students.

Educational leaders need to employ programs that: foster the connection between mothers and schools because of the overall influence mothers have on the development of resilience attributes in African-American male students; emphasize the value that education has and how it influences life outcomes; foster cultural awareness and the elimination of negative stereotypes; and get counselors and administrators actively and directly involved in the college and career preparation process.

**KEY WORDS:** Resilience, African-American males, Ecological Systems Theory, protective factors, risk factors, college readiness.



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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

In today's political environment leaders have called for a focus on college preparedness and career readiness, particularly in regard to African American males. Due to the historical academic achievement gap between African American males and their White counterparts, a definite need for this focus is present. Additionally, a critical analysis is essential regarding why some African American males are successful despite their circumstances. The understanding of resilience in these students could very well lead to answers concerning how we can change the conditions in K-12 schools to achieve a higher state of college readiness and career preparedness for African American male students.

High stakes accountability surrounding standardized test results has caused a shift in focus from individual student readiness to more of an assessment of an organization's ability to produce students classified as college-ready, based on student performance on standardized tests. The question can be raised whether African American students have fell further behind in regard to college readiness, due to this shift in focus. This study will provide first-hand insight into what schools can do to influence resilience and the state of college readiness positively for African American male students.

### **Background**

Most research on the socio-emotional development of African American males has focused primarily on externalized disorders, such as delinquency and aggression, and problems related to social and academic maladjustment (Barbarin, 1993). Researchers have generated considerable information about the disproportionately high rates of

behavioral problems from early childhood through adolescence. For example, even though African American youth only accounted for 15% of the adolescent population, they accounted for 50% of arrests for murder, 25% of arrests for crimes against property, and 66% for rapes (Myers, 1989). In his state of Black Americans report, Myers (1989) concluded that the African American youth, particularly those individuals raised in an urban environment, face a negative social and mental outlook that includes poor school performance, school dropout, teen pregnancy, gang involvement, violence, and substance abuse. Researchers have shown that African American students, and particularly African American male students, were susceptible to academic disengagement (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). Implications of poor performance by this particular group could lead to disadvantages in adulthood in the forms of unemployment, crime, and poverty (Kuykendall, 2004). Current data on school suspensions, expulsions, and drop-out rates indicated higher percentages for African American students (Kuykendall, 2004). To highlight this dilemma further, the percentage of African American and Hispanic males in the penal system continues to grow at alarming rates since the 1980s (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001), and the drop-out rate for African American youth has been as high as 50% since the 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

African American students are overrepresented in special education, score lower on standardized tests, and receive lower grades in school (Hilt, 2011). As the only measure of school and student success, high-stakes testing and accountability practices can undermine the entire school environment with a disproportionate negative impact on students of diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). Even affluent schools with abundant resources report achievement scores that

show disparity between the achievement of White students and their African American counterparts (Prince, 2004). Stewart (2006) suggested that the educational setting could control and improve some of the factors contributing to the low performance of African American males. Teacher perceptions, teacher expectations, course offerings, and support systems can directly affect the achievement of African American male students.

An examination of African American males' experience in school and society is a record of persistence and triumph that has been overshadowed by the literature and discourse focusing primarily on the social pathologies of African American young men (Batey, 1999). Although many African American males are achieving at commendable levels and are navigating the academic and social currents of their lives, young African American males, as a group, remain "at-risk" for numerous social, economic and education ills (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Deepening our understanding of how individuals cope with, and respond to their social and cultural environments is an important part of finding ways to assist African American males with living healthy and productive lives (Noguera, 2008). Understanding the resilience demonstrated by some African American youths raised in challenging social environments could provide useful information that can help administrators, teachers and policymakers design effective school environments and intervention models to aid in the development of resilience in African American male students (Winfield, 1994).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify elements of the school environment that foster resilience and positively influence African American male students' state of college readiness. Resilience refers to the process of overcoming the negative effects of

risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences and avoiding negative outcomes associated with risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). In our schools we have assigned such labels as “at-risk” to students because of a sole focus on the negative consequences associated with those risk factors. Garmezy (1991) contended that the study of success is just as important as the study of failure, and focusing solely on problems frequently yields inaccurate and often unnecessary data. Research is needed to identify processes that we can implement in schools to counteract the risk factors many African American males face, and processes that build hope and, consequently, positively influence the academic achievement gap and improve their state of college and career readiness. Through close and in-depth exploration of how resilience has developed and is demonstrated by these young men we can better understand resiliency and can help develop structures and practices in schools to support resiliency in young African American males. Ultimately, such knowledge may lead to answers to the problem of an achievement gap for African American males and other students and improve the state of African American males’ college readiness.

In this study, the characteristics of three resilient African American males will be analyzed. Moreover, the influence of schools on their resilience and state of college readiness will be examined. Consequently, elements grounded in the resilience and ecological systems theories will be uncovered in this study that may affect the resilience of African American males. In fact, a descriptive analysis and examination of the extent to which the experiences of these three young men reflect the notions and concepts from the review of literature on; resilience, elements of Brofenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, and school based factors that influence college readiness, will take place.



Because the focus in this study will be on the intrinsic characteristics of the individual students, the results will provide educators with more clues on how to prepare African American males better to handle both academic and social challenges. Consequently, more strategies may arise that can help close the achievement gap between African American male students and their White counterparts.

### **Description of the Study**

An assumption in this study is that graduation with their cohort implies a certain level of resilience and college and career readiness. Three recently graduated, at-risk, African American males were interviewed. These in-depth interviews helped to examine the school experiences of successful economically disadvantaged African American males. Specifically explored in this study was the influence of school elements on the resilience and state of college readiness of the participants.

This study is rooted in ecological systems theory, which is further characterized by resiliency theory. Resiliency theory focuses on individual strengths rather than deficits, and on the healthy development of the individual in spite of risk factors. The ecological systems model highlights the interaction between individuals and their environment. Both theories constituted the framework for this study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored in this study: (1) What do particular comments suggest about what schools/educators can do to: (a) positively influence the development of, and (b) support resilience (incorporate protective processes) in African American male students; and (2) What do particular comments

suggest about what educators can do to prepare African American male students better for college readiness?

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of literature**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Ecological systems theory emphasizes the need for social interaction and subsequently, focuses on the development of social skills through those interactions (Maring, 2006). Resiliency theory is a derivative of ecological theory in that it focuses on the social development of the individual and adds depth to understanding the individual with regard to how he handles adversities. For example, a student may have never met his father, a circumstance which could cause that student to resent adult males. This situation would be considered a risk factor with regard to the student's resilience and a missing element with regard to the ecological systems theory.

**Ecological systems theory.** Ecological systems theory posits that children develop through interactions with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, coaches, and religious leaders (Maring, 2006). This theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The resiliency theory is grounded in the ecological systems theory. In examining these interactions, researchers have determined that the interactions outlined in ecological systems theory contribute to or define both risk and protective factors in resiliency models. According to the ecological systems model, development is influenced by individual family, community, and societal level systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). Bronfenbrenner, in his theory, defined complex "layers" of environment, each having an effect on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). In 2001, Paquette and Ryan

provided the following outline of Brofenbrenner's structure of environment, which defines the layers in his ecological systems model:

#### Microsystem

The microsystem is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate surroundings. Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. At this level, relationships have impact in two directions; both away from and toward the child. For example, a child's parents may affect his beliefs and behavior, however, the child also affects the behavior and beliefs of the parent. Brofenbrenner called these *bi-directional influences*. The interaction of structures within a layer and interactions of structures between layers is key to this theory. At the microsystem level, bi-directional influences are strongest and have the greatest impact on the child.

#### Mesosystem

The mesosystem is the layer that provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem. For example, the connection between the child's teacher and his parents, or between his church and his neighborhood.

#### Exosystem

The exosystem layer defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The structures in this layer impact the child's development by interacting with some structure in her microsystem. Parent workplace schedules or community-based family resources are examples. The child may not be

directly involved at this level, but he feels the positive or negative force involved with the interaction of his own systems.

#### Macrosystem

The macrosystem may be considered the outermost layer in the child's environment. Though not being a specific framework, this layer is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws. The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers. For example, if it is the belief of the culture that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, affects the structures in which the parents function. The parent's ability or inability to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's microsystem is likewise affected.

#### Chronosystem

The chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environments. Elements within this system can be either external, such as timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the psychological changes that occur with the aging of a child (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

#### Implications in schools.

Because of the amount of time children will spend in schools, the relationship a child develops with the adults in the school environment is critical to his positive development. Adults in the school setting are often times the first adults outside of the home that a child may be developing a relationship with. According to Bronfenbrenner, those relationships help to develop a child both cognitively and emotionally (Paquette &

Ryan, 2001). In 1990, Brofenbrenner highlighted the importance of these bi-directional interactions with the following five propositions that describe how relationships developed at home and at school work together for positive development:

Proposition 1: The child must have on-going, long-term mutual interaction with an adult (or adults) who have a stake in the development of the child. These interactions should be accompanied by a strong tie to the child that ideally is meant to last a life time. It is important for this attachment to be one of unconditional love and support. This person must believe that the child is the “best”, and the child must know that the adult has this belief.

Proposition 2: This strong tie and the pattern of interpersonal interaction it provides will help the child to relate to features of his mesosystem. The skills and confidence encouraged by the initial relationships will increase the child’s ability to explore effectively and grow from outside activities.

Proposition 3: Attachments and interactions with other adults will help the child progress to more complex relationships with his or her primary adults. The child will gain affirmation from a third party relationship, and will bring those new skills to the primary relationship. Also, these secondary adults will give support to the primary adults, and help the child see the importance of the primary role.

Proposition 4: The relationship between the child and his primary adults will progress only with repeated two-way interchanges and mutual compromise.

Children need these interchanges at home and at school or childcare, parents need these interchanges in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

Proposition 5: The relationships between the child and adults in his or her life require also a public attitude of support and affirmation of the importance of these roles. Public policies must enable time and resources for these relationships to be nurtured, and a culture-wide value must be placed on the people doing this work. This includes the work of parents and teachers, but also the efforts of extended family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, pp. 2-3).

These five propositions have direct implications for practice in schools today. Brofenbrenner viewed the instability and unpredictability of modern family life as the most destructive force to a child's development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Often times this destructive force is carried over into the school setting. According to the ecological systems theory, if the relationship in the immediate family breaks down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of the mesosystem; this may lead to children looking for the affirmations that should be present in the child/parent (or child/other adult) relationship in inappropriate places. These deficiencies show themselves, especially in schools as anti-social behavior, lack of self-discipline, and an inability to provide self-direction (Addison, 1992).

A question that may arise from the examination of the ecological systems theory in regard to practices within the school environment; Is it possible for the school to close the gap for the deficiencies that exist due to the systematic breakdown of a child's home environment? Brofenbrenner stated that schools and teachers should work to support the primary relationships and to create an environment that welcomes and nurtures families (Addison, 1992).

Within each of the layers in the ecological systems theory, risk and protective factors are associated with the development of resilience. In this study, the focus is placed on the mitigation of some of the risk factors facing African American male students and the development of those protective factors, within the school environment, that will foster resilience in these students. Therefore, it is important to provide a review of literature on resilience and protective factors.

**Resilience studies.** Masten and Coatsworth, (1988) cited Dr. Norman Garmezy as the pioneer in the study of competence and resilience. Garmezy and his colleagues conducted what was considered groundbreaking research on adaptive and maladaptive research of adults with schizophrenia; they then followed that research with the study of children of parents with schizophrenia to determine their risk for also developing the illness. They established that having a parent with schizophrenia does indeed increase one's risk for the illness, but they also determined that about 90% of their subjects did not develop the illness. Garmezy stated that these children:

Upset our prediction tables and in childhood bear the visible indices that are hallmarks of competence like; good peer relations, academic achievement, and commitment to education and to purposive life goals, early and successful work histories.

If we were to study the forces that move children to survival and to adaptation, the long range benefits to our society might be far more significant than our many efforts to construct models of primary prevention designed to curtail the incidence of vulnerability. (Garmezy, 1971)



As result of this study, Garmezy and several of his colleagues went on to investigate what protected these children, and the field of resilience research was born (Starkes-Ross, 2000). Researchers have determined that for every child who comes from an at-risk background, meaning a background where deficiencies exist within his microsystem, many more children come from the same background who become healthy, competent adults. These children have often been referred to as being resilient, having the ability to bounce back or defy the odds (Starkes-Ross, 2000).

In a major effort to identify possible protective factors, Garmezy and other researchers used a literature survey on studies related to competent African American children living in urban areas who had been exposed to risk factors such as poverty and prejudice. In this effort, the researchers were able to produce a number of correlates that were associated in different studies with these achieving children.

1. Teachers and clinicians rated these children as having social skills.
2. They tended to have a positive sense of self and a sense of power as opposed to powerlessness.
3. Such students had an internal locus of control and a belief that they were capable of exercising a degree of control over their environment.
4. The physical and psychological environment of the home was important. One investigative team documented that these achieving lower-class children had homes that were less cluttered, less crowded, neater, cleaner, and marked by the presence of more books.

5. Parents were more concerned about their child's education; they assisted willingly with homework, and participated willingly with school-related activities.

6. Several researchers suggested that achieving children seemed to have at least one adequate identification figure among the significant adults who touched their lives. In turn these children held a more positive attitude toward adults and authority in general.

These attributes of competent African American children suggested three major factors: (1) dispositional attributes in the child, (2) family cohesion and warmth, and (3) support figures in the environment and in the schools who can serve as identification models for the child. (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983)

Another longitudinal study on resilience involved a group of children born on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai in 1955 and tracked over 30 years by Werner and Smith (Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). These children were designated as high risk based on their having four or more risk factors that were evident in the first two years of their lives. These factors included parental stress, family discord, low parental education, and poverty. About one-third of the group was identified as being resilient because they had adapted well in childhood and adolescence (Starke-Ross, 2000).

The Perry Preschool Project was another influential study on resilience (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1989). This Perry Preschool Project documented the importance of high-quality early childhood programs in the fostering of resilience in the school environment (Starkes-Ross, 2000). This study began in 1962, involving 123 school aged, African- American children from Ypsilanti, Michigan. These children came from

backgrounds that were marked by high rates of poverty, drop outs and/or failures. The experiment was designed to measure whether government subsidized preschool education for 3- and 4-year-old children from families with low socioeconomic status had lasting impact and whether the programs were cost effective. Children meeting the criteria of economic deprivation were selected and then randomly assigned to either a control or experimental group. Children in the experimental groups were provided with preschool education between 1962 and 1965. The project used a curriculum model that emphasized problem-solving, social competence, and parental involvement. Those children in control groups did not attend a preschool program before starting their formal education. Students who participated in the experimental groups were less likely to be retained or placed in special education than were students who participated in the control groups. Those students and their families also had higher expectations for their academic achievement.

The recurrent findings across the longitudinal studies on resilience is that 50% to 70% of the participants manage to develop significant competencies to grow up and lead successful lives as adults with strong abilities to love and work (Starke-Ross, 2000). These children manage to function well and demonstrate remarkable resilience. (Midence, 1994)

**Defining resilience in children.** Despite the common misperception, many African American male students who may be described as at-risk do not fit the stereotype at all (e.g., dropout, teen parent, drug abuser, violent). In fact, many African American males are successful in school, working, attending college, staying out of trouble, establishing realistic goals, and taking the steps necessary to achieve them (Garbarino,

2000). These individuals would be described as exhibiting resilience. They are succeeding in spite of their circumstances. Garmezy (1985) described the resilient child as one who works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well. Werner (1984) summarized multiple studies on resilient children: Clark's (1983) and Garmezy's (1983) studies on minority students who succeeded in schools; Anthony's (1974) study on the traits and factors of surrounding children from dysfunctional families; and Moskivitz's (1983) study on resilient survivors of wars and concentration camps. In his summary, Werner identified four central characteristics that resilient children have in common:

1. Resilient children take a positive rather than a reactive or passive approach to problem solving. They tend take charge of their life situation, in contrast to children who wait for others to do things for them or react negatively to situations they cannot control. This proactive approach to problem solving requires children to be self-reliant and independent while at the same time socially adept enough to get appropriate help from adults and peers.
2. Resilient children are able to construe their experiences in positive and constructive ways even when those experiences are painful or negative.
3. Resilient children are good-natured and easy to deal with. As a result they gain other people's positive attention. These children usually establish a bond with at least one caregiver during infancy and childhood. This caregiver is not always the child's parent. It may be another relative or a neighbor, friend, coach, or teacher.

4. Resilient children develop early in life a sense of “coherence”, defined as a basic belief that life makes sense and one has some control over what happens. This sense of coherence keeps resilient children strong even through the difficult times.

Werner and Smith (1982) identified coherence as the central component of effective coping after their longitudinal study on resilient children.

Benard (1991) described resilient children as socially competent, with life skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and the ability to take initiative. Garmezy and Rutter (1983) stated that resilient children are guided by a more internal locus of control than non-resilient children. Resilient children possess a sense of purpose, foresee a positive future for themselves, have special interests, have goal directedness, and motivation to achieve in school and life (Starkes-Ross, 2000).

**Defining resilience.** Originally, resilience was referred to as a personality trait, whereas, over the past decade or two, resilience has been redefined as a dynamic, modifiable process (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The latter definition provides a basis for this study, as it relates to the development of resilience-based interventions and the ability to study the outcomes of such interventions.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2011) defined resilience as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” As a result of Garmezy’s groundbreaking research, the field of resilience research grew. Several researchers have provided definitions of the term. Starke-Ross (2000) cited the following resilience researchers:

Garmezy (1984) defined resilience in regard to children as manifestations of competence despite exposure to stressful events.

Rutter (1985) defined resiliency as facing stress at a time and in a way that allows self-confidence and social competence to increase through mastery and appropriate responsibility.

Wolins (1993) defined resilience as the capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship, and to repair oneself.

Masten (1984) described resiliency as successful adaptation in an individual despite risk and adversity.

Gordon (1995) described resilience as the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances.

Rirkin and Hoopman (1991) defined resilience as the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to stress that is inherent in today's world. (Benjamin, 2008)

Through a synthesis of the literature, resilience may be defined in terms of attributes that are exhibited by those individuals seen as "resilient". Earvolino-Ramirez (2007) determined what she called "defining attributes" for resilience, by comparing two sets of data: First, an extensive list of protective factors developed by prominent resilience researchers were examined and common features were noted. Second, lists by resilient researchers that described characteristics consistently associated with the concept of resilience were cross-referenced. Rebounding/Reintegration, high expectancy/self-determination, positive relationships/social support, flexibility, sense of

humor, and self-esteem/self-efficacy were all cited as defining attributes for resilience.

She summarized each attribute:

#### Rebounding/Reintegration

The term “rebounding” is found consistently in all aspects of resilience literature and it insinuates a positive direction or response. “Reintegration” describes the process after disruption or adversity in which an individual wants to return to a regular routine.

#### High Expectancy/Self-Determination

High expectancy is a sense of purpose and achievement in life. This sense of purpose may be internal or external. For example, a person may become successful without overtly planning it or someone in their lives may impose high expectations on them with carefully orchestrated goals. Self-determination is a feeling that regardless of what the circumstances or barriers are in life, the individual will overcome barriers and excel.

#### Positive Relationships/Social Support

In studies with children, the presence of at least one healthy attachment to a significant adult is omnipresent when resilience is identified. These relationships provide opportunities for communication and support and are important not only in their existence, but also with the context that the individual perceives them as being of healthy quality.

### Flexibility

The term flexibility captures the essence of adaptability, being able to roll with changes, being cooperative, amiable, and tolerant, and having an easy temperament.

### Sense of Humor

The quality of having a sense of humor about life situations and about one's self is consistent across all resilience studies of all ages. Sense of humor plays an important role in the ability to make light of adversity, to enhance coping mechanisms, and to moderate the intensity of emotional reactions.

### Self-Esteem/Self-Efficacy

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are attributed with many stages, forms, and levels of resilience. They are often credited with the answer to "why some people snap and others snap back." Self-esteem and self-efficacy are present in children and adults both innately and from mastery of previous experiences. (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007, pp. 75-78)

In this study, these defining attributes helped to guide the portion of the interview protocol where this researcher attempted to delineate how elements in the school environment influenced each of these attributes in the participants.

Genetic and environmental elements interact to affect one's proficiency at each stage of development. Those factors or elements that stimulate development are known in the literature as protective factors, whereas those elements that lessen development are called risk factors (Jackson, 1999). Research and literature on these protective and risk factors will be discussed below.



Whereas ecological systems theory provides insight into the effects of individual, family, community, and larger societal level systems on personal development, resiliency focuses on the risk factors at each level that may negatively impact development and also focuses on protective factors that may foster resilience. Models of resiliency focus on the delineation between societal risk and protective factors. Several models are present that will be mentioned in this review, however the focus of this study is on models that mitigate risk factors and promote protective factors.

**Models of resiliency.** Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990) generated a model to explain how resiliency is developed. Their model indicated that risk factors need not always lead to maladjustment; there are several possible outcomes. If sufficient protective forces are present when an individual encounters a risk factor, he/she will be able to maintain a comfort zone. It is only from this comfort zone that one may access protective forces; develop coping strategies; and thus, develop resiliency (Jackson, 1999).

When a lack of protective forces exists and an individual experiences stressors, adversity, or trauma, he/she will experience psychological disruption but will, in time regenerate from the disruption. The type of regeneration the individual makes will be determined by the number and quality of protective forces that are accessible to him/her (Jackson, 1999). According to Richardson et al. (1990), four types of regeneration may occur:

1. Dysfunctional regeneration is characterized by school non-achievement, dropping out of school, drug and school dependence, or attempted suicide.

2. Reintegration with the loss or maladaptation is characterized by a low sense of self-worth and self-efficacy and by lack of coping mechanisms.
3. Reintegration to comfort zone or homeostasis is a zone from which the individual can access protective forces from within and from the environment and develop coping strategies.
4. Reintegration with resiliency is a state where the individual succeeds against the odds.

Further, four models of resiliency have been developed to explain how protective factors operate to alter the probability between risk exposure and negative outcomes. They are the compensatory model, the risk- protective model, the protective-protective model, and the challenge model (Masten et al., 1988; Rutter, 1985; Wolin & Wolin, 1995). These four models offer different explanations for the relationships between risk factors and protective factors. Which model provides applicability depends on the risk and protective factors involved.

#### Compensatory model.

The compensatory model involves a direct effect of a protective factor on an outcome. The compensatory model states that risk factors and protective factors combine additively to predict outcomes. For example, a child exposed to violence is more likely to become aggressive, and a child with high self-esteem is less likely to become aggressive (Hollister-Wagner et al., 2001). Each variable has a direct and independent effect on the outcome (Sugland et al., 1993).

#### Risk-Protective model.

The risk- protective model implies that assets or resources (protective factors) provided to help deal with a risk factor moderate or reduce the effects of a risk on a negative outcome. The risk-protective model, a model based on the interaction between risk and protective factors, proposes that the strength of the relationship between risk and outcome will depend on the presence of protective factors, and that the presence of protective factors weakens the relationship between risk and outcomes. Hollister-Wagner et al. (2001) provided the following example: the risk-protective model predicts the relationship between exposure to violence and the use of aggression is weaker among adolescents with higher self-esteem than it is for those with lower self-esteem.

#### Protective-Protective model.

Another interaction model, the protective-protective model, is similar to the risk-protective model in that it suggests that the presence of protective factors weakens the relationship between risk and outcome. But this model goes further in that it posits that the strength of the relationship between risk and outcome will decrease with each additional protective factor. For example, the protective-protective model suggests that the presence of a close bond with an adult, combined with high self-esteem reduces the association between exposure to violence and the use of aggression more than either protective factor would on its own (Hollister-Wagner et al., 2001).

#### Challenge model.

In the challenge model, exposure to low and high levels of a risk factor are associated with negative outcomes, whereas moderated exposure is viewed as expository and positive in that the individual is exposed to the negative element just enough to know

how to better deal with it. The challenge model proposes that protective factors are stimulated by low levels of risk exposure. In other words, this model supports the notion that when an individual successfully copes with risk, his repertoire of protective factors is stimulated and strengthened, thus preventing expression of the negative outcome despite exposure to risk (Sugland et al., 1993). Rutter (1987) implied that the development of protective factors lies in the successful engagement with risk. Werner (1989) further suggested that above a certain level of risk, the negative outcome normally associated with the risk does occur. The challenge model also predicts that no exposure to risk may lead to higher levels of problem behavior than does a small amount of exposure to risk. This situation occurs because individuals who have not been challenged by lower levels of risk may be more vulnerable to participating in problem behaviors (Hollister-Wagner et al., 2001). This model does not provide a direct relationship between risk and protective factors, it is more curvilinear; a small amount of risk does not result in giving up in school, for example, but if no challenge has been presented to the student, or if exposure to failure increases beyond a point, the likelihood of giving up increases.

Based on the importance of both the individuals' immediate environment and the larger cultural context in defining risk and protective factors, researchers have adopted an ecological/risk and resilience model (Murray et al., 2001). Researchers used this model to organize research on resiliency in African American families. The intent was to clarify links between protective and risk factors at the individual, family, and community levels.

Protective-stabilizing, protective-reactive, and inoculation are three sub-models that were developed to further analyze the effects of time, and degree of exposure to risk

factors. These models provide greater depth and insight into the relationships between risk and protective factors and may provide a basis for future study.

**Risk factors.** Resilience is concerned with individual variations in response to risk or risk factors (Rutter, 1987). Risk factors are stressors that increase the probability of negative outcomes, whereas protective factors are the specific circumstances and behaviors that enable positive outcomes despite stressful conditions (Willert & Stephens, 2001). Ogbu (1992b) brought the topic of resilience and risk factors into an African American perspective as he described the psyche of the *involuntary minority*; from a societal perspective African Americans fit into that category. He brought light to their “way of thinking” in regard to societal frameworks:

Involuntary minorities distrust members of the dominant group and the societal institutions controlled by the latter. In their history, involuntary minorities have experienced many situations that have left them with the feeling that they cannot trust members of the dominant group and their institutions. The schools are usually not trusted to provide minority children with a good education. (pp. 289-291)

This very psyche is considered a risk factor in regard to resilience, because it produces a negative attitude toward schools and school staff members.

Another risk factor that may affect the African American male student psyche is the phenomenon of “selling out”, or “acting White”. In most schools the White or mainstream culture is modeled, therefore, achieving academic success is seen as “acting White” or “selling out” by underachieving African American students (Jackson, 1999).

This phenomenon often contributes to high achieving African American students being rejected by their African American peers.

Teacher perceptions were also cited as a possible risk factor to African American males in the school environment. Teachers have been shown to be highly subjective in their evaluations of African American students as early as entry into Kindergarten (Jackson, 1999). Teachers make subjective judgments about academic ability early in a child's school experience that may shape their entire academic experience. Ability grouping is an example of this phenomenon. Teachers often group students as a means of organizing the classroom, better facilitating effective classroom management, and differentiating instruction. Teachers will also group students based on a response to disciplinary issues. The result of this type of placement often leads to African American male students being placed in low performing groups. Once placed into lower groups, the academic experience for many of these students is diminished.

This phenomenon was confirmed in a study in the 1970's, in which Rist (1970) described a kindergarten classroom where the teacher placed the African American students into ability groups based on skin tone, neatness of appearance, speech habits and their behavior. One group consisted of students with lighter skin tone, neat appearance, and an outgoing temperament, whereas students in the lower groups were those students with darker skin tone, spoke poorly, were not neatly dressed, and rarely spoke directly to the teacher. Rist (1970) tracked those students from kindergarten to the third grade and determined that those students had not broken out of their groups. In fact, what Rist established was that once placed into the lower groups, African American students (especially males) received less instruction time and less feedback from the teacher and

interacted less frequently than students from the higher groups. Again, one purpose of this study is to examine how schools can mitigate such risk factors and encourage the development of resilience in African American males. In the next section protective factors, both internal and external to the school environment, that positively influence the development of resilience will be explored.

**Protective factors.** Research on the concept of resilience provides an alternative explanation to current educational conceptualizations of risk. Winfield (1991) stated that resilience refers to individual variation in a person's responses to risk, stress, and adversity. Some individuals cope successfully, others negatively. The African American male who overcomes his vulnerability (risks) often has done so due to protective mechanisms operating at key points in their lives that help them to be resilient.

Protective factors within the individual or the environment that reduce the negative impact of stressful situations and problems are critical to the resiliency process. Protective factors are referred to as specific attributes that identify not only the internal assets of the individual but also external strengths occurring within systems in which the individual grows and develops (Starke-Ross, 2000). The more protective factors that are present in a child's life, the more likely they are to display resilience. These internal and external assets appear to transcend ethnic, social class, geographical and historical boundaries (Starke-Ross, 2000).

**Assets and resources.** Assets are considered those factors that reside within the individual, such as competence, coping skills, and self-efficacy. Resources are positive factors that help youth overcome risk factors, but are external to the individual, such as, parental support, adult mentoring, or community organizations that promote positive

youth development (Rutter, 1987). Researchers and practitioners working within a resilience framework recognize, despite the risk factors facing young African American males, many are successful and exhibit positive outcomes (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Teachers and adults.

Adults are critical resources for children and youth from urban areas (Garbarino, 2001). Children need to have adults model expected behaviors, both in and outside the home. Adults truly serve as role models, whether they are conscious of this responsibility or not. If a student is brought up in an environment where violence is the norm, it is likely that the student will exhibit his/her own violent tendencies (Garbarino, 2001). In an environment where both parents are present, have attended college, and exhibit at least the desire to learn, it is likely that the child will follow a similar path, or at the least have the support and resources available to do so. In this sense, and within the resiliency framework, adults are not viewed as assets, rather resources, or protective factors.

Major protective processes.

Rutter (1987) had already identified four major protective processes that foster resilience: (a) Reducing negative outcomes by altering the risk or child's exposure to risk, (b) Reducing negative chain reaction following exposure to risk, (c) Establishing and maintaining self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) Opening up opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to determine how schools can positively influence (foster) resilience in African American males, while helping them to reach a state of college and career readiness. An examination in the literature of how different factors of society; personal factors, family factors, peer factors, school and community factors, help



to foster resilience will help to identify elements that may be influenced in the school environment.

Personal factors.

Some individuals have a natural inner force of resistance that empowers them to defeat the negative factors that are present in their lives with little help from others, whether through sheer inner toughness or through the charm of their personalities (Werner & Smith, 1982). Benard (1991) suggested that resilient children possess social competence, thus they are able to attract supportive persons in the environment to lend to protective factors that they need to succeed. Gordon and Song (1994) cited the following attributes that are common to resilient children: self-concept, drive, cognitive style, temperament, motivation identity, knowledge of dominant culture values, health and nutrition, social competence, life-course organization, and autonomy. Adaptive distancing, which refers to the mental distance a child may put between himself and adverse situations, was sighted as another characteristic of resilient children (Chess & Thomas, 1990).

African American male students who face the prejudice and other racial barriers and determine that successful academic achievement is the means by which they can make a better life for themselves and other African Americans manage to fuel their own resilience (Poussaint, 1967). Ogbu (1986, 2008) posited a real need for the African American male student to keep one foot firmly planted in both the dominant culture and the African American culture, in order to facilitate academic success. Resilience can be fostered and has been established to come from four other major sources: the peer group, the family, the community, and the school.

Peer factors.

The Coleman Report (1966), cited peer relationships as the school factor that bore the greatest correlation to academic achievement. The sense of belonging to a social group, particularly in school settings, has been a source of stress and pressure for children and may often lead to students placing more focus on the values of those groups they are trying to be a part of than the values they get from home or the adults in the school environment. Clark, (1991) stated that only the family surpasses the peer group as a support system and a buffer against stress.

The saying, “Beware the company you keep!” embodies the amount of influence peer groups can have on individual achievement. Some peer groups are more supportive of academic achievement whereas other peer groups devalue school success. The choice of peer group is highly predictive of academic self-concept and achievement (Cauce, 1986). Researchers presented a two-dimensional adolescent group model that yielded four types of adolescent groups (Loeb, 1973). In the first dimension, Loeb spoke of continuous groups that lead to membership in future adult groups or institutions versus discontinuous groups that do not extend into adulthood. The second dimension refers to the formality versus the informality of the groups. The following four groups, with an example for each, were provided:

1. Discontinuous/Informal = Counterculture; youth gangs.
2. Discontinuous/Formal = Consumer groups; activists.
3. Continuous/Informal = Friendship groups; musical- taste groups; cliques.
4. Continuous/Formal = 4-H clubs; Boy Scouts; Campfire Girls.

Ogbu (1992b), stated that involuntary minorities, African Americans included, are reluctant to cross the cultural boundaries that so vividly define them. Ogbu (1992b) further posited that African Americans compare their state to the state of Whites in America: In doing so, they see daily evidence that, for them, no payoff exists for academic success. Jenkins (1989) cited the invisibility of successful African American males in the community as a factor that leads young African American males to believe that opportunities for success are non-existent.

In many cases, the school culture is closely mapped to the culture of the majority. For many African American students, excelling in school, studying, doing homework, participating in school activities, or simply establishing academic goals, is seen as “acting White” or “selling out”. This is sometimes looked upon as a betrayal of sorts to some peer groups. Ogbu (1992b) stated that to seek academic achievement is to place oneself in direct opposition to the peer group. In many cases, the cost of alienation by peers is too great, so they settle for failure in order to fit in. Ogbu (1992b) listed nine strategies employed by involuntary minorities who want to experience school success:

1. Emulation of Whites/cultural passing: This strategy involves the duplication of the language, academic attributes, and behavior of White students. This is an academically successful strategy; however it takes an exorbitant toll on the psyche of the student and his relationship with peers in his community.
2. Accommodation without assimilation: The student will drop his minority culture at the schoolhouse door to adopt school rules and norms. He

behaves according to his minority culture when he goes back into the community.

3. Camouflage: The student pretends to be a class clown in order to disguise his academic interests and tendencies. He secretly studies and earns good grades while feigning a lack of interest.
4. Involvement in church activities: The Black church continues to be a protective factor in the lives of Black youths.
5. Attending private schools: This strategy is a means of solving the question of peer disapproval for those Black students whose parents can afford private school for their children; however, it is an option that is unavailable to Black males from low socio-economic families.
6. Mentors: Studies have shown that resilient children usually have at least one caring, responsible adult in their lives to provide encouragement and support.
7. Protection: Some academically proficient students form a mutually satisfying agreement with a “bully type” to exchange help with homework for a safe niche in the peer group which the “bully type” can guarantee.
8. Remedial and intervention programs: Sometimes these programs prove to be a resource for building resilience to students.
9. Encapsulation: Using this strategy, many young African American males insulate themselves from everything except the peer group and its activities. This is a strategy that leads to academic failure (Jackson, 1999).

Jackson, (1999) indicated that students with poor academic achievement are those students most involved in negative peer group activities.

Family factors.

The family environment has to be considered the most influential environment in regard to the development of protective mechanisms. Jackson (1999) stated that the primary protective mechanism comes from the family. Other researchers (e.g., Lee et al., 1991; Shade, 1989) have cited the behaviors of parents and/or guardians as the most important contributing factor to the academic success of African American children.

In her research on resilience in African American male students, Jackson (1999) examined elements of the Coleman Report (1966) and cited the level of educational attainment of the parents or guardians as a correlate to the academic achievement of young African American males. In 1995, researchers synthesized data collected from; the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, the National Assessment of Educational Progress of 1990 (reading and math data), and the 1990 Scholastic Aptitude Test. The results of this synthesis illustrated that 56% of the students with at least one parent with a college degree scored in the top achievement quartile. Of the students that had parents with little or no formal education, 52% scored in the bottom achievement quartile (Starkes-Ross, 2000).

James Coleman used the term *social capital* to highlight the potential assistance relationships between people. Coleman emphasized the *social capital* inherent in parent-relationships when he suggested that the level of parental education attainment is based on the time and energy parents invest in helping their children with their studies, not the level of education they attained for themselves (Coleman, 1991).

Lee et al. (1991) stated that family composition was not a correlate to the academic achievement of African American students; however, Starkes-Ross (2000) listed family size as well as: the availability of caregivers within the household; amount of attention given to a child; a manageable maternal workload; structures and rules established during childhood; family cohesion, an informal and multi-generational network of kin and friends during adolescence; and few chronic or stressful life events experienced during childhood, as factors in the home/family environment that influence the development of resilience. The review of the literature suggests that the key element of family influence on the development of resilience is the academic expectations that parents have for their children (Peng et al., 1992). Further, this researcher would suggest that the alignment of their parental activities (e.g., involvement in school related activities, homework help and support, academic encouragement) to those levels of expectation can be even more of a factor on the development of resilience in young African American males.

#### Community factors.

A review of the literature implies that three distinguishing features exist in communities that foster resilience (Benard, 1991; Parham & Parham, 1989; Jackson, 1999):

1. Provide a provision of various resources to community residents.

Examples would include; neighborhood clinics and other health programs, job training forums, recreational programs, and child-care facilities.

2. Clear communication of expectations for moral, non-violent behaviors. At the root of this element is the recognition of religion and faith as

protective factors (Masten et al., 1990). They identified both the abstract values and teachings and the association with members of the religious community as a means of raising expectations and standards of behavior for children at risk (Jackson, 1999).

3. Encouragement of the inclusion of community youth in community affairs.

Floyd (1996) implied that fostering resilience in children requires family environments that are caring and structured, hold high expectations for children's behavior, and encourage their participation in the life of the family. The interdependence of schools and the communities ensures a lasting connection between them. Therefore, for schools to influence the development of resilience in African American males, the relationship between personal, family, and community factors and those factors affecting resilience in the school environment must be considered.

#### School factors.

The focus on the study of resilience has shifted over the years. Originally resilience was viewed as a personality trait, whereas over the last two decades resilience has been redefined as a dynamic, modifiable process (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007). In this study, resilience based interventions and their effectiveness were examined from the perspective of three African American males who recently graduated from a public high school in Texas. A comparative analysis of the factors mentioned in the literature and those extrapolated through the interview of the study participants should provide plausible insight into how schools can positively influence the resilience of African American male students. The literature implies interventions that address teacher-

student relations, teacher pedagogy, student self-concept, student self-efficacy, and high student expectations are effective in the development of resilience.

According to researchers, process variables connected with schooling rather than family background explained important differences in achievement between high and low achieving African American male students (Lee et al., 1991). Wang and Gordon (1994) asserted that schools that foster resilience have been determined to emphasize academic learning and opportunity for all students, active student and parent involvement, and sensitivity to student diversity.

Henderson and Milstein (1996) suggested six consistent themes that have emerged from the literature that show how schools, as well as families and communities can provide both the environmental protective factors and the conditions that foster the individual protective factors (Jackson, 1999). The following six step strategy was given:

1. Increase bonding- This involves strengthening connections between the individual and any pro-social person or activity. This strategy is based on the evidence that children with strong positive bonds are far less involved in risk behaviors than those without these bonds. Some examples of this strategy include: making family involvement a priority, giving parents meaningful roles within the school, and setting up parent resource centers.
2. Set clear and consistent boundaries- Be consistent in implementing school policies that clarify behavior expectations. These boundaries should be clearly written, clearly communicated, and coupled with appropriate consequences-consistently enforced.



3. Teach life skills- This strategy includes teaching cooperation, conflict resolution, resistance, and assertive skills, communication skills, problem solving, decision-making, and healthy stress management skills.  
  
Cooperative learning would be a viable technique for this strategy because it requires cooperation, communication, and interpersonal skills.
4. Provide caring and support- This is the most crucial of all elements that promote resiliency. Education reformers are beginning to recognize the importance of this strategy. Some examples of behaviors that express caring and support are: noticing all students, knowing students' names, reaching those students that rarely participate, and investigating and intervening when students are dealing with difficult circumstances.
5. Set and communicate high expectations- It is important to establish both high and realistic expectations in order to provide effective motivators. Classrooms that embody high expectations are characterized by: higher-order, meaningful, and participatory curricula; flexible, heterogeneous grouping (with no labels or tracking); evaluation systems that reflect multiple intelligence and learning styles, and a variety of participatory activities, including community service opportunities.
6. Provide opportunities for meaningful participation- This strategy involves giving students a lot of responsibility for what goes on in school by providing opportunities for them to solve problems, make decisions, plan, set goals, and help others. The critical foundation for this step is for

educators to view students as resources, rather than passive objects or problems.

According to researchers, when combined, these six resiliency strategies have resulted in increased positive self-concepts, attachment to school, and beliefs in rules, as well as higher standardized test scores, and significant decreases in delinquency, drug use, and suspensions (Hawkins et al, 1992). As this portion of the review of literature focuses on resilience and how schools can help to foster it, the remainder of the literature review will focus on the issue of college and career readiness for African American males. Consequently, the first phase of the review will help to provide insight into building resilience in these young men, whereas the remainder of the review focuses on how schools prepare these resilient young men for college or careers. In this study, the degree of relationship between school practices related to building resilience and those practices related to helping African American males achieve a state of college readiness will be examined.

### **College Readiness**

Readiness is defined as a developmental stage at which a child has the capacity to receive instruction at a given level of difficulty or to engage in a particular activity (Dictionary.com, 2010). The implications of this definition are that readiness should be viewed as a social, psychological and perhaps even physical stage in the human development process. The fact that college readiness is defined by a set of academic requirements in some states, such as Texas (TEA, 2009), is evidence of either the dismissal of the relevance of social factors in defining college readiness, or an opportunity to expand their understanding of college readiness. In regard to college

readiness, Conley (2008) defined college readiness as the degree to which previous educational and personal experiences have equipped students for the expectations and demands they will encounter in college. Conley provided a more detailed definition as it relates to the matriculation of students through college: the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program (Conley, 2008). Conley (2008) made a point to define success as the completion of entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to consider taking the next course in the sequence or subject area.

Other researchers (e.g., Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010) have suggested that college readiness be defined as college preparedness; calling into consideration requisite skills for college success, such as creativity, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. An examination of these perspectives on college readiness calls to point the need for a more comprehensive definition of college readiness. Thus, because addressing the issues concerning African American students' state of readiness is a priority, current existing factors affecting the college readiness of African American students such as: the academic achievement gap, college readiness initiatives and programs, and the gap in African American representation in such programs, were examined.

**Academic achievement gap.** The gap in academic achievement has shifted steadily from being an indicator of educational inequality to being a direct cause of socioeconomic inequality (Harris & Harrington, 2006). This shift has become a point of concern on a national scale. President Obama recently called for the re-examination of

the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate and its effect on the state of college and career readiness of students. The implication that the achievement gap can be closely coupled with socioeconomic status was disturbing, yet is supported by the dynamics of the basic systems theory, where students are a part of the equity output added into society. Characteristics of the achievement gap have changed in conjunction with changes in national policy. In the 1980s the push was for increased standards and stricter graduation requirements (Harris & Harrington, 2006). This push resulted in exposure to greater resources and academic content, and consequently, a closing of the gap in achievement (Harris & Harrington, 2006). Harris and Harrington (2006) noted that the rise in accountability standards in the late 1990s coincided with an increase in the achievement gap between White and minority students.

A common element between the standards movement in the 1980s and the accountability movement of the late 1990s is the increase in availability of resources and increased exposure to more academic content. However, the gap between African American students prepared for college and White students prepared for college has grown wider since the inception of the accountability movement. One perspective on the achievement gap phenomenon is that it is a function of socioeconomic status; this perspective is an interesting parallel with the state of college readiness for minority students. Researchers have reported that students in urban area schools that serve both; disproportionately high population of African American students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are less likely to have access to the human and material resources that are critical for college preparation (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Nationally students from middle and upper-income families are five times more likely to

earn a 2- or 4-year degree than are students from low-income families. Only 11% of the low-income students who were eighth graders in 2001 are projected to earn a college degree by 2014 (Hoffman, Santo, & Vargas, 2008). Socioeconomic implications were alarming with regard to high school completion rates and college preparedness.

Researchers stated only 65% of low-income students complete high school, compared with 91% of middle and upper-income students; furthermore, only 22% of low-income students graduate from high school academically prepared for college, compared with 54% of middle and upper income students; and ultimately, only 42% of low-income students who graduate from high school prepared for college actually go on to earn a degree, compared to 73% of similarly prepared middle and upper-income high school graduates (Hoffman et al., 2006).

**Standards and assessment alignment.** Other academics have attributed the gap in achievement and thus, college readiness, to the changes in academic standards and the assessment practices linked to the accountability movement. Researchers have suggested that more stringent accountability increases the average level of achievement (Harris & Herrington, 2006). However, evidence exists that increased standards in high school do not guarantee alignment to standards for success in entry-level college courses. Many states are using state assessments as a requirement for graduation although the content and criterion validity of these assessments in relation to college readiness is not well documented (Brown & Conley, 2007). Leading researchers in the field of education have suggested that basic alignment problems exist in Mathematics and English (Brown & Conley, 2007). These alignment issues further contribute to the basic factors in the

academic achievement gap and consequently, the college readiness gap between African Americans and Whites.

**Instructional practices.** Because more stringent accountability means increased academic standards, minority students, particularly African American students, still end up having a needs-deficit with regard to college preparation. These deficits may be occurring due to practices in the classroom. African American students often experience oppressive practices both inside and outside of schools that may affect their ability to pursue high-level courses (i.e., Advanced Placement programming) and their postsecondary aspirations. Some examples of these oppressive practices include retention, standardized testing, tracking, and discipline policies (Lambie, Leva, & Ohrt, 2009). Lambie et al. (2009) further stated that African American students were disproportionately represented in exceptional education programs and were more likely than their White peers to be labeled as learning disabled or slow learners.

The interpretation of data related to mathematics achievement levels suggest that many minority students, particularly African American students, are not experiencing instructional practices consistent with recommendations suggested by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM); in contrast more White students are experiencing NCTM standards-based instruction (Berry & Bol, 2005). These instructional practices are evidence of a fundamental difference in teachers' expectations for minority student groups. Researchers have suggested that teachers' expectations, perceptions, and behaviors sustain and even expand the Black-White achievement gap, and the effects accumulate from kindergarten through high school (Berry & Bol, 2005). The societal implications of the achievement gap suggest the need for an urgent response

by state boards of education to establish programming that addresses the needs of the African American student population in regard to college readiness.

**College readiness initiatives.** The successful transition of students from high school to college is a function of their readiness (Conley, 2008). A substantial number of states are now aligning high school graduation standards with standards required to advance directly into non-remedial, college-level work. Several states are instituting core curriculum that ensures that the pathway to high school graduation involves the successful completion of a college preparatory sequence (Hoffman, Santos, & Vargas, 2009).

Though certain states have based their standards of college and career readiness on the results of standardized tests (i.e., ACT, SAT, TAKS in Texas), the realization that these standards do not account for the current state in the achievement and college readiness gaps between minority and White students has prompted the adoption of several early college exposure strategies, with the aim of exposing underrepresented students to various pathways to college. An examination of the results of this programming suggests that providing college-level work in high school is one way to better prepare a wide range of students for college success, including students who do not see themselves as college material (Hoffman et al., 2009).

**Advanced Placement (AP).** Because of the societal implications that the achievement gap brings about, education policymakers are interested in recruiting more low-income and minority students into college. For example, Texas has a goal of attracting 500,000 additional minority students into Texas public higher education institutions by 2015 (Dougherty, Mellor, & Jian, 2005). Further concerns are centered

around the need for African American students to complete college and make more of a contribution to the labor market. One approach to increasing the level of college readiness for all minority students has been to increase their participation in AP courses and exams. Participation in AP programs awards students college credit and familiarity with some college-level course content. Students who take and pass the AP exams have demonstrated the ability to do college-level work prior to leaving high school (Dougherty et al., 2005). Though researchers have suggested that participation in AP classes and successful completion of AP exams may imply higher likelihoods of college enrollment and completion (Hoffman et al., 2009), the lack of representation of African Americans in these programs is a valid concern. DeCuir-Gunby and Taliaferro (2008) documented that African American enrollment in AP courses was smaller than that of White students. In another study, Davis, Hilton, Moore, and Palmer (2010) stated that only 25% of African American high school graduates were enrolled in the college preparatory track at their high schools.

One noted factor affecting African American representation in AP programs is the selection process. The disparity between enrollment often exists because African American students are less likely than their White counterparts to be nominated by White teachers (DeCuir-Gunby & Taliaferro, 2008). Additionally, other factors such as lack of parental involvement, and fear of alienation by peers contributed to the lack of representation in AP courses (DeCuir-Gunby & Taliaferro, 2008). Some states, such as Texas, have implemented other programming initiatives as a means of affording all students the opportunity for exposure to college-level course work while simultaneously completing state requirements for high school graduation.



**Accelerated learning options.** Accelerated learning options, also known as credit-based transition programs, include two basic designs: early college and dual enrollment. Some early college programs are designed to enable students to earn up to two years of college credit or an associate degree, along with a high school diploma (Hoffman et al., 2009). Dual enrollment programs are similar in design in that students earn college credits while completing requirements for high school graduation. However, dual credit enrollment follows an open enrollment policy. Some states have established guidelines for admission to dual enrollment programs, based on projected goals. For example, in Florida, students who were projected to take a general education path were required to have a 3.0 grade point average (GPA), whereas students projected to pursue a career certificate were only required to have a 2.0 GPA (Hoffman et al., 2009). The innovations in accelerated learning options have created opportunities for African American students to gain valuable exposure to college-level course work.

**What can we do.** As discussed, the lack of enrollment in AP courses and successful completion of AP exams is an issue that must be addressed. The more exposure African American students have to AP courses the greater their chance of completing college (Dougherty et al., 2005). However, African American students' lack of parental involvement, fear of alienation by peers, and being void of a sense of belonging are all factors that have affected the overall enrollment of African American students in AP Programs (Lambie et al., 2009). Other researchers have suggested that the development process for college readiness should begin in middle school (Wimberely & Noeth, 2005). The Association of Classroom Teachers offered additional policy recommendations that could help facilitate effective early educational and postsecondary

planning: (a) Schools should explain to students and their parents the effects of taking a challenging curriculum on their future educational and career options; (b) Schools should use multiple sources of information, including standardized assessments, to help inform students and their parents of the students' progress toward college readiness; and (c) Schools should work with families to calculate college costs and develop a plan to meet those costs. Ultimately, schools and students alike need to understand the comprehensive definition of college readiness or preparedness. If schools and students take the expanded approach to college preparation they can do more to develop the full-range of capabilities and skills needed to succeed in college (Conley, 2007).

**What schools can do.** Conley (2007) identified four core elements schools need to focus on to change the trend of students graduating from high school not prepared for college: (a) express the importance of creating a culture focused on the intellectual development of all its students; (b) schools must specify what the core knowledge and skills are, and that the standards related to those skills be clearly stated; (c) ensure that necessary student supports are in place; and (d) schools must provide necessary support to classroom teachers. Other researchers have suggested that schools take a more strategic approach for increasing college readiness, particularly in urban high schools that serve a higher percentage of African American students. Coca, Nagaoka, and Roderick (2009) cited four strategies for high schools to implement in an effort to increase college readiness: (a) Develop valid indicators of college readiness and build accountability; this strategy requires developing a data system and valid indicators that make college readiness a component of their accountability; (b) Help educators meet the instructional challenge; increasing college readiness is fundamentally an instructional challenge that

will require developing classroom environments that deeply engage students in acquiring the skills and knowledge they will need to gain access to and succeed in college; (c) Bridge the information and social capital gap; this strategy entails providing the resources and supports necessary to help low-income and minority students effectively manage the college application and financial aid processes; and (d) Use of incentives and strong reinforcement signals for students; this strategy is based on the premise that parents and students are both more likely to respond strongly to college preparatory programs if they receive a clear signal about expectations and if performance is connected to real payoffs, particularly college attainment. Researchers have suggested that programs and policies that use multiple strategies for increasing college readiness, particularly if they are a part of an integrated (comprehensive) strategy around college access, are strongest (Coca et al., 2009).

The Texas Advanced Placement Incentive Program is an example of such a program that has yielded positive outcomes in regard to college readiness. In a study of the effectiveness of this program, researchers noted substantial increases in the number of students scoring high on the ACT (higher than 24) and the SAT (higher than 1,100) at campuses where the Advanced Placement Incentive Program had been implemented (Coca et al., 2009). It appears to this author that a comprehensive approach to college readiness is necessary; an approach that emphasizes increased access to more rigorous academic programs and is supported by district and campus personnel alike. Another program that schools could incorporate as part of a comprehensive model for building expectations of high academic achievement and college readiness is the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). The PIQE is a curriculum based, parent education

program that offers incentives to parents for participation, researchers have shown that PIQE can have a positive effect on linking the bond between adults in the home and in the school environment and on the academic achievement of students whose parents participated in the program (Vidano & Sahafi, 2004 ).

**What students can do.** Not all students are presented the same set of social circumstances, as indicated in the societal gaps related to socioeconomic status. African American students typically are forced to manage factors that their White counterparts may not have to manage. However, African American students still have the same responsibility in preparing themselves for college. African American students need to urge their parents to be involved in their college and career planning processes. Researchers have noted that parental involvement plays a significant role in the academic achievement of students (Decuir-Gunby & Taliaferro, 2007). The support, involvement, and expectations, especially those of mothers, have been widely shown to affect students' expectations and outcomes, including grades and attendance, as well as the likelihood that African American students will continue on to college (Amor, Carlton, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2008).

Based on the literature reviewed, the paradigm of college readiness may need to undergo a shift to one of college preparedness, where the focus is not just on the core academic set of skills involved in transitioning from high school to college, but includes focus on social and psychological elements of readiness. Furthermore, examination of the lack of African American representation in early college programs needs to take place.

A gap in college readiness, as it pertains to African American students and their White counterparts, exists. This gap is the result of many factors, internal and external. Clearly, a comprehensive definition of college readiness that synthesizes both social and academic factors will help provide high school students and staff with a clearer picture of what skills and, perhaps, traits are necessary to be college ready. The hope is that educators will plan based on a more comprehensive definition of college readiness. Other issues that are variables in college readiness, such as the academic achievement gap that currently exists, are being addressed through aggressive initiatives such as dual enrollment and early college programs. However, the under-representation of African American students in these programs presents yet another challenge to education policy makers.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

In this study, a qualitative approach was used to examine support and resources needed to help educators foster resilience in, and better prepare African American males for college. Specifically employed in this qualitative study were ethnographic interviews to help determine what school related factors might influence the resilience of young African American males. Through an examination of the findings, this researcher attempted to describe a framework for building resilience in African American males. This researcher relied on concepts of resilience and college readiness described in the review of literature for the analysis of interview data. The flexible nature of a qualitative research design allowed the researcher to consider how school-based practices may contribute to the resilience and state of college readiness of this population of students.

#### **Research Design**

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), a qualitative study design can provide a more comprehensive understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. Creswell (1998) added that qualitative research can give voice to a population that is often overshadowed by prevailing stereotypes, like those stereotypes circulated about African American males academic abilities or lack thereof. Creswell (1998) further stated that a qualitative study can add to existing research, fill in gaps, provide opportunity for original ideas, and evaluate an issue of great concern within an underrepresented population. This type of study can offer greater insight about characteristics and environments that support resilience and/or the fostering of resilience in African American male students.

Berg (2001) emphasized that qualitative methodology facilitates the exploration of meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things' (p. 3). The qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine and expound on an atypical source of knowledge found in life experiences. For this study, this researcher was interested in the meanings, concepts, and categories which emerged from the interview data with academically successful African American males regarding their academic experience. Further, this researcher's aim was to examine how the experiences of the three participants reflects and deviates from four key theoretical notions discussed in the review of literature: Brofenbrenner's five ecological systems theory based propositions, six attributes of resilience as stated by Earvolino-Ramirez, protective factors in the school environment, and elements in the school environment that influenced their state of college readiness.

### **Sample/Participants**

Participants in this study were three specifically selected, economically disadvantaged African American male former students who graduated from a high school in a large (greater than 50,000 students) school district north of Houston, Texas during the 2010-2011 school year. Incorporated in this study were qualitative interviews with these former students from one high school in the above-described district.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the three African American male former students who had been academically successful in school. Success for the purpose of this study were based on three criteria: (a) successful matriculation through each school grade level in high school; (b) no history of serious or consistent misbehavior or discipline issues (c) are college-bound/college-ready. Participants all attended a rural

high school which had a total population of 3,200 students: 12% African American, 46.2% economically disadvantaged, and 41.5% identified as at-risk.

Christensen and Johnson (2008, p. 239) described purposive sampling as a process in which the researcher specifies characteristics of the population of interest and locates individuals with those characteristics. Creswell (1998) identified criterion sampling as a strategy used in purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling assures that the participants meet or satisfy a requirement of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants for this study were selected based on the following criteria: (1) Academic success in high school, (2) Were economically disadvantaged while attending high school (3) resided in a single-parent home during high school, and (4) College-bound. For the purpose of this study, economically disadvantaged means they qualified for free or reduced lunch and academic success means the successful matriculation from grades nine through 12. The researcher solicited participants primarily through recommendations from colleagues. Next, background information was solicited on each individual, through conversations with each participant's counselor and the participant. The final step in the selection process consisted of the researcher approaching each student, after graduation, about participating in the study. Through this process, this researcher was able to obtain verbal commitments from five resilient African American males. Of the five verbal commitments, only three African American males met all three criteria for success, as described above. A detailed description of each participant is provided in Chapter IV.

### **Researcher Background**

To lend validation to this research project, in this section, I will provide the reader with some basic background knowledge about me as the researcher. I was raised in a



household with four siblings; an older brother, two older sisters, and a younger sister.

We grew up in the New York City area until my parents divorced when I was at a very young age. Subsequent to my parents' divorce, we left my father in New York and moved to a small town in the southwest corner of Michigan. Needless to say, the move was a culture shock to all of us, because we had gone from a very culturally diverse setting to one that was culturally sterile; a majority White community. I can recall my mother, who battled with being an alcoholic, single, unemployed mother with five children, often venting about the racist and stereotyping practices that were prevalent in the school environment. As a result of her disdain over the lack of social justice, my mother was very tough and inflexible when it came to academics.

I remember one particular incident that has stuck with me throughout my life. My brother, the oldest of the children, applied for a high school program that introduced the basics of flying airplanes, and basic aerodynamics because he viewed the program as a great step toward achieving his dream of becoming a military pilot. When my brother, an honor roll student, was denied and told that he could not be a part of the program because the counselor did not think being a pilot was a realistic goal for him, my mother became very upset and decided to call us all into the living room and enlighten us on how the "world" would perceive us all because of the color of our skin. She expressed, through passionate rage, how we all had to work 10 times as hard and do better than our White counterparts in school just to have a chance at opportunities in life. At that time I was fairly young and had not recognized the engrained racism, so I didn't understand why my mother was so upset. At that point, I knew we were expected to excel, and that she was not going to settle for anything less. My mother went on that night to emphasize that

excuses and placing blame on the “system” would not be acceptable. She always told us to “rise above” what people think, and work to show the world how we can do anything we set our minds to. One of my mother’s favorite sayings is, “Nothing is impossible; some things just may take a little longer!” This was my lesson in persistence.

I did not know it at the time, but my mother was fostering resilience in all of us. As I grew older and progressed through school, I met teachers, and coaches along the way that re-enforced the tenets my mother had engrained in us. The fact that some of those teachers and coaches were White helped me to understand that not all White people are racist or oppressive. By the time I reached high school, I was pretty well equipped with the tools of resilience to deal with most situations. However, the reality is, today there are many African American male students who do not have the type of support that I received. In fact, many of them get to high school and struggle academically and socially. This research project will provide the researcher the opportunity to examine what will help the current generation of African American males foster resilience and be successful academically and socially.

### **Procedures**

This researcher conducted an initial guided interview with each of the three participants in the study based on the interview protocol in Appendix D. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed to explore further or to provide clarity to preliminary categories or patterns in the interview data. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis, at a mutually agreed upon location. Participants in the study were expected to commit up to 3 hours of their time to conduct the interviews. Any follow up interviews for the purpose of providing clarity to the initial interview were conducted,

either via telephone interview or face-to-face, depending on the availability of the participant(s). The interview protocol used in this study helped this researcher to examine the experiences of resilient, college-ready African American males to see how their experiences reflected or deviated from the key theoretical notions discussed in the review of literature. Interviews were informed by the following notions: (a) Brofenbrenner's five propositions related to his ecological systems theory; (b) the six attributes of resilience, as summarized by Earvolino-Ramirez (2007); (c) the protective factors in the school environment, as described by Henderson and Milstein (1996); and (d) elements in the school environment affecting the state of college readiness.

Interview questions also addressed socioeconomic factors that were experienced by the participants that may affect their resilience. Particularly questions that may provide some indicators for: the amount of parental support and encouragement, parental education history and ethos regarding education, peer influence, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and family values. Further, the interview protocol for this study was designed to examine the experiences of three resilient African American males as they related to: the attributes of resiliency identified in the literature review, the influence of school variables (e.g., teachers, peers, administrators, and counselors) on the resilience and state of college readiness of the participants, and several elements of the ecological systems theory. The interview protocol was mixed with regard to approach, meaning it was neither strictly structured nor completely open. Interview questions were designed to gather useful information through an anecdotal approach. For example, I defined the situation, introduced the topic of conversation, and through further questions guided the course of the interview to encourage participants to describe their own experiences.

Interview transcripts were provided to each participant for review, confirmation, and possible follow-up elaboration and explanation.

### **Data Collection**

Descriptive notes on each potential participant were made prior to the selection process. Those notes contained basic background information and anecdotal information obtained through conversations with teachers, counselors, and administrators. Archival data, such as school records, were obtained from each participant to supplement and verify information collected during interviews. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device and/or audiotape and will be fully transcribed. Besides basic background information, the interview guide contained questions grouped according to categories established in the review of literature. The grouping of questions in the interview guide set the stage for an analysis of what the literature stated as prominent factors for school-based fostering of resilience and college readiness in African American males and the actual experiences of the participants. These groups were: (a) Brofenbrenner's five propositions related to his ecological systems theory; (b) the six attributes of resilience, as summarized by Earvolino-Ramirez (2007); (c) the protective factors in the school environment, as described by Henderson and Milstein (1996); and (d) elements in the school environment affecting the state of college readiness.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study this researcher employed a descriptive analysis using the interpretive data obtained in the interview protocol. Procedures for data analysis incorporated two main phases: open coding and axial coding (Creswell, 2009).

The first stage of data analysis was open coding, which begins after some initial data has been collected, involves examining the data and naming, and categorizing discrete elements in the data. In other words, it involves labeling important words and phrases in the transcribed data (Christensen & Johnson, 2008, p. 413). Open coding was followed by axial coding, which is the stage where the researcher develops the concepts into categories and organizes the categories. The researcher then looks to see what themes are prevalent in the data and tries to establish relationships among the categories in the data and the concepts and notions outlined in the review of literature (Christensen & Johnson, 2008, p. 414).

The methodology for this study also reflects Siedman's (2006) process for analyzing qualitative interview data. He suggested that the researcher organize excerpts from the interview transcripts into categories, then search for connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that have been identified as themes. In fact, Siedman describes this process as fundamental to any qualitative study. The initial phase of the analysis, has been developed through the review of literature and the following categories have been identified for comparative analysis with the experiences of the participants: (a) Brofenbrenner's five propositions related to his ecological systems theory; (b) the six attributes of resilience, as summarized by Earvolino-Ramirez (2007); (c) the protective factors in the school environment, as described by Henderson and Milstein (1996); and (d) elements in the school environment affecting the state of college readiness, as outlined by Conley (2007). These categories were used to shape the guided interview protocol and help to set the stage for a descriptive analysis of how the experiences of the

participants reflect and deviate from the aforementioned theoretical notions. Analyzed data are presented in the next chapter in the form of narrative descriptions.

### **Ethical and Special Considerations**

All participants in the study were provided with the nature and context of the study, and any associated risks related to participating in the study. All participants in the study were voluntary participants. Each participant in the study was also provided with a consent form that included an overview of the study. Necessary permissions were also obtained throughout the study (i.e., the clearance to video or audio tape interviews) via the IRB approval process. Each participant was provided a copy of his interview transcription to ensure accuracy and validity.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Delimitation to the study is the availability and access the researcher has to the study sample. One limitation to the study was the student selection criteria. Based on the selection criterion, the sample was confined to students who currently exhibited resilience. Another limitation was the potential reluctance of participants to discuss their personal experiences and values openly. One obvious limitation was the small size of the sample. Data collected may not be indicative of the experiences that all teachers and resilient African American male students have had. Though an aim in this study was to use the grounded theory approach to data analysis, the data may not identify a core concept, therefore the study may be limited in approach to the normative process for analyzing qualitative data as described by Siedman (2006). Finally, because all the students attended the same high school and were raised in the same area, the study may only be relevant to that high school. These concerns are standard limitations in a

qualitative study, however these limitations will be counterbalanced by the rich information obtained throughout the interview process.

### **Significance of the Study**

In this study, the experiences of resilient African American males were analyzed. Moreover, how variables in the school environment influence their resilience and their state of college readiness were examined. Consequently, the study will provide detail about the perceptions of the participating African American males on their experiences that can inform an understanding of their resilience and college readiness, and perhaps, provide a pedagogical framework which schools can work from to foster resilience and a state of college readiness in this population. Because this study will focus a great deal on the experiences of the individual students, the results may provide educators with more clues on how to better prepare African-American males to handle both academic and social challenges. Consequently, more strategies may become apparent that could help close the achievement gap between African American male students and their White counterparts.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify elements of the school environment that foster resilience and positively influence African American male students' state of college readiness, through the examination of the experiences of three resilient African American male students. This researcher conducted six interviews over a 2-month period to collect the description of their experiences throughout their high school years. Emphasis of the interviews was on the participants' experiences and how they relate to: Brofenbrenner's five ecological systems theory based propositions, six attributes of resilience as stated by Earvolino-Ramirez, protective factors in the school environment, and elements in the school environment that influenced their state of college readiness.

Each interview lasted about 1-3 hours in duration. All interviews were audio recorded. Thereafter, this researcher transcribed the interviews. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the anonymity of each participant. Any additional information that could compromise the privacy of the participants was also removed or changed.

This researcher then analyzed the transcripts and reflective notes for thematic content. The analysis was a continual process which occurred throughout the interviews and after. In order to shed more light and/or add more depth, this researcher developed and asked new questions as new information emerged. This researcher then listed the categories and the concepts that emerged from the data and examined their alignment with the four categories/theoretical tenets outlined in the review of literature.



This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) Participant profiles, which includes their educational and demographic background and some of the accomplishments and adversities they highlighted as part of their experiences; and (2) Responses and alignment. Participant responses are examined and compared for alignment to the four theoretical tenets outlined above. Transcribed texts of the participant's narratives were used to provide a context for the researcher's interpreted meanings. A detailed discussion on the findings will take place in Chapter V, including any prevailing themes common to all three participants.

### **Participant Profiles**

Malcolm.

Malcolm, a 19 year old recent graduate who earned his diploma on the state of Texas recommended plan, is currently pursuing a degree in Kinesiology at a small university in the southwest. Malcolm is however, currently considering pursuing a career as a firefighter as he has been accepted to attend the local firefighters' academy. Malcolm is a first-generation college goer. His mother graduated high school and attended beauty school afterward. He grew up in a predominantly African American neighborhood within a predominantly White community with a history of racial discord.

Malcolm's parents divorced when he was 7 years old, leaving only his mother to raise he and his three younger sisters. Malcolm has only seen his father once since then at a family members' funeral. His mother worked primarily as a beautician, but worked other temporary jobs at times to help take care of her kids.

Malcolm admits to being an underachiever up until his freshman year of high school. He said what changed his attitude and approach to school was an incident that took place at home:

“One day during the summer before my 10th grade year, our lights got turned off. I’d never seen my mother want to give up, but that day she had had enough. Seeing my mother crying and upset made me sick to my stomach, literally. The next day I got on my bike and rode around until I found someone that would give me a job. I started sacking groceries the next day and I swore to my mother that I would make sure the light bill was always paid.”

Malcolm has worked at the same grocery store ever since. Although he participated in athletics in his elementary and middle school years, Malcolm elected to only participate in band in high school and to bypass opportunities to participate in athletics in order to be able to work.

Martin.

Martin is a 19-year-old African American male high school graduate. Martin is currently attending a prestigious private college in the Midwest. Martin is the older of two siblings raised in a single mother household. Martin and his family moved to the local area when he was 10.

Martin describes his upbringing as sheltered. He says his mother kept really close tabs on he and his brother even though she worked a lot. Martin’s mother had attended college and earned an associate’s degree. She has worked in a doctor’s office since moving to Texas.

Martin and his younger brother were latch-key kids growing up and were expected to follow their mother's strict guidelines in that regard: get home and lock the doors and there is to be no company over when mom is not home, find something to eat until mom gets there, and make sure all homework gets done before thinking of turning on the television. Martin stated that his mother made it clear he was the man of the house and he was going to be held responsible for whatever took place when she wasn't home.

Martin was active in high school, he served as an officer in more than one club or organization, and at age 16 began working part-time at a pizzeria, where he remained employed until departing for college. In 2010, Martin was awarded the Gates Millennium Scholarship and chose to pursue a degree in biochemical engineering.

Barrack.

Barrack is a 19-year-old African American high school graduate, currently pursuing a degree in criminal justice at a small university in the southwest United States. Barrack was born and spent the first 13 years of his life in a large urban city on the east coast. He has a sister who is 7 years older whom moved to live with their maternal grandmother when she was 12 because she had begun to get into trouble. He was sent to live with his maternal grandmother after his mother was killed in a violent crime. Barrack's father has been incarcerated for drugs and conspiracy to commit murder since Barrack was nine years old.

Both Barrack's parents were college graduates; however, they chose illegal drug trafficking for their occupations. Barrack described his childhood as one filled with good memories and being surrounded by a lot of nice material things, including foreign luxury

cars, big houses, and taking family vacations often. He further suggested that he enjoyed being the only child for a while, because he got lots of attention from both his parents. Things changed, as he describes, “for the worst”, when his father was incarcerated. He said, against his wishes, his mother carried on the family business for about four more years until she was found murdered in her car one Sunday afternoon. Barrack identified the death of his mother as a key point in his life. Adapting to his new culture, trusting others, and making new friends were challenges for Barrack after moving to Texas.

Barrack described his grandmother as loving, supportive, and “old school” strict. Upon his arrival to Texas one of the first things his grandmother did was sign him up for football. Barrack lettered in both football and baseball while in high school. He attributes his success in large part to his participation in athletics; “Athletics helped me make social connections and kept me grounded and focused in school.”

Barrack characterized his high school experience as “good.” He stated his biggest challenges were adjusting within the culture of the school, and building relationships with peers. Of the three participants, Barrack is the only one with a physical abnormality and some experience in the special education program.

### **Categories, Concepts, and Themes**

In this section this researcher will share the interpretation of the data obtained in the participant interviews and examine the alignment of the data with the four theoretical tenets mentioned in the review of literature. Any recurring themes common to the participants will be highlighted as well. This researcher used the interview protocol to capture any alignment of the participant responses to the thematic concepts under review; Brofenbrenner’s five ecological systems theory based propositions, six attributes of

resilience as stated by Earvolino-Ramirez, protective factors in the school environment, and elements in the school environment that influenced their state of college readiness.

**Brofenbrenner's propositions.** Because of the amount of time children will spend in schools, the relationship a child develops with the adults in the school environment is critical to his positive development. Adults in the school setting are often times the first adults outside of the home that a child may be developing a relationship with. According to Brofenbrenner, those relationships help to develop a child both cognitively and emotionally (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). In 1990, Brofenbrenner highlighted the importance of these bi-directional interactions with the following five propositions that describe how relationships developed at home and at school work together for positive development.

#### Proposition one

The child must have on-going, long-term mutual interaction with an adult (or adults) who have a stake in the development of the child. These interactions should be accompanied by a strong tie to the child that ideally is meant to last a life time. It is important for this attachment to be one of unconditional love and support. This person must believe that the child is the “best”, and the child must know that the adult has this belief.

#### Participant responses

All three participants reported a meaningful link to at least one adult in their home who may have influenced their overall growth and development. In all three, the mother

figure in their lives was identified. One participant included his relationship with his father, who is currently incarcerated, is significant in that it influenced the way he analyzed his own actions, whereas another included his younger brother as influential in the same way.

**Martin.**

Martin mentioned his mother as the most-influential adult in his life. He also mentioned his younger brother, though not an adult, as a special person in his life.

“I consider my mother a special person in my life because she's always provided me guidance and stayed on me, she was pretty strict about most everything, but this kept me focused. She provided me with guidance and helped me stay focused on my goals. I consider my brother a special person because I always wanted to be a good example for him.”

**Malcolm.**

Malcolm cited his mother and oldest sister as having the most influence on him as a person. Malcolm stated that his mom would advocate for him on school matters when necessary, but it was his oldest sister that he saw as the person that taught him how to advocate for himself. Malcolm mentioned that though he is older, his sister was sort of a second mother figure to him. Malcolm characterized those relationships as supportive and encouraging.

“My mother and my sister were encouraging and supportive; my sister always talked to me about the mistakes she made and tried to guide me in a positive direction. I think my mother encouraged us to help build our self-esteem. My mother's encouragement and support was of a motherly nature, she stayed on us

pretty hard to make sure that we knew she had our back, in turn we also knew that if we didn't do what we're supposed to do she would come down on us pretty hard. I would say my mother supported me by being hard on me in other words she was a strict disciplinarian.”

**Barrack.**

Barrack mentioned that the significant adults in his life were his dad, grandmother, and older sister. Barrack stated that even though his dad has been incarcerated for over half his life, he still had a significant influence on his own development of resilience, because he states that his dad always talked to him, even from jail, about being a strong man and making good decisions in life.

After the death of his mother, Barrack was sent to live with his grandmother and older sister. Barrack credits his grandmother with having raised him and he characterized her influence as well as the influence of his father as follows:

“My grandmother brought me up to know what life is really about. Even though my dad is incarcerated, he has always taken the time to talk to me about his life experiences and give me guidance on how to deal with different situations in life. My oldest sister, grandmother and dad all emphasized the importance of me not repeating my father’s mistakes, so we talked a lot about things like that. These talks always made me feel like I needed to do better than my parents did, and make better choices.”

**Proposition two.**

This strong tie and the pattern of interpersonal interaction it provides will help the child to relate to features of his mesosystem. The skills and confidence encouraged by

the initial relationships will increase the child's ability to effectively explore and grow from outside activities.

**Participant responses.** Each participant acknowledged that the relationships with the special people in their lives, particularly the mother-figures, were paramount in affecting the way they dealt with different situations in their day to day environments. In regard to school related matters, each participant noted the influence of the relationships with their mother figures as key to their ability to cope within the school environment. All three mother-figures in the study were characterized as having high expectations for behavior as well as effort. In the case of each participant, those expectations were carried over into the school environment. Each participant adapted those values and used them as a guide for interactions with others in the school environment. To examine this phenomenon, this researcher asked each participant to describe how their relationships with the significant adults in their lives influenced their abilities to; cope with adverse situations, socialize with their peers and adults in school, and succeed academically.

Martin.

In regard to dealing with adverse situations Martin stated,

“I often look at those people as role models or examples, so I would say I looked at those people and remember that if they were able to overcome and accomplish goals in their lives, I can do the same thing regardless of the situations that may arise.”

As it relates to the influence that this special relationship had on his ability to socialize with his peers and adults in the school, Martin stated,



“They taught me to deal with people and approach them in a professional manner, and to treat people the way I want to be treated. Those relationships taught me about mutual respect, how to earn it, and how to keep it.”

In regard to academic success, Martin cites his relationship with his mother as being a major influence on him:

“My mother was very strict and had high standards and expectations for me growing up. This was the major influence on my attitude about academics, and I always wanted to keep her happy.”

Malcolm.

As it relates to dealing with adverse situations, Malcolm stated that just knowing that his mother wanted him to do well motivated him. He mentioned that he and his mother did not spend a lot of time talking through situations, but she always made him know that she wanted him to face his problems head-on. Malcolm stated that in regard to building relationships with others, his relationship with his mother taught him to always treat others with respect, especially adults. Malcolm further states, “Being taught this value, has helped me in building relationships with my peers in the school environment as well as my co-workers, outside of the school environment.” In regard to the influence this relationship had on him academically, Malcolm stated, “My mother always emphasized the importance of education and the need to focus in school in order to create opportunities for myself later in life.”

Barrack.

Barrack described the influence that his relationships with both his grandmother and father had on him. In regard to how he deals with adverse situations Barrack stated, “My relationship with my grandmother taught me that there will always be things that happen in life. Both she and my father instilled in me the fact that things will always happen in life and that I just had to be prepared to face things head on, and they let me know that it was never okay to let things in life defeat me.” In regard to how those relationships influenced how he socializes with peers and other adults Barrack stated, “I would always hear people say nice, positive things about my grandma so it made me feel good and want to always represent her in a positive way. When I was small my mother and my father taught me to respect adults and carry myself with dignity, in spite of my physical abnormality.” As it relates to academic success, Barrack said, “I felt it was important to do well not just for me, but for the overall good of my family. They taught me that education is the key to success in life, therefore I knew if I wanted to do well in life I needed to do well in school.”

**Proposition three.** Attachments and interactions with other adults, outside the home environment, will help the child progress to more complex relationships with his or her primary adults. The child will gain affirmation from a third party relationship, and will bring those new skills to the primary relationship. Also, these secondary adults will give support to the primary adults, and help the child see the importance of the primary role.

**Participant responses.** In regard to Brofenbrenner’s third proposition, respondents were relatively consistent in their responses. Each participant made mention of at least one adult from outside their home environment that may have influenced the

fostering of resilience in them. What stood out to this researcher is the fact that only Malcolm and Martin cited an adult individual in the school environment as influential. Though this researcher pressed Barrack to really think about his school experience, Barrack stated that he couldn't think of any relationships with an adult outside his home that he deemed as influential to his personal growth and resilience. Bronfenbrenner's proposition implies that any relationship outside the home should positively influence the relationship with the primary adult in a child's life. Martin was the only participant who mentioned an influential link between an adult in the school environment and the primary adult in his home environment. He said, it often felt as though his mother and health occupations teacher were collaborating because of the similar tone in some of the life lessons they both tried to teach him; when in fact, his mother only met his teacher one time, at his graduation. To examine this proposition and its alignment with the experiences of the three participants, this researcher asked the participants to tell about a significant relationship they had with an adult outside of their home, and why they felt that relationship had a positive influence on them. This researcher, in an effort to get them to expand on how the adults in their lives influenced them, further asked each participant to describe any relationships they had that they felt yielded encouragement and support.

Martin.

Martin cited his relationship with his health occupations teacher as the most influential relationship with an adult outside of his home environment. Martin stated that she was the person that encouraged him to get into the Academy for Health Sciences,

take AP (Advanced Placement), and pre-AP courses his freshman year, to face tough challenges head-on, and to carry himself in a professional manner at all times. The fact that she took a personal interest in his success helped him to stay focused. “My biggest influence was my health occupations teacher, she was actually a dentist, but she took lots of interest in me and tried to keep me focused on making good grades and staying out of trouble.” When asked to describe any relationships that yielded support and encouragement, Martin mentioned the relationships he had with his mother, younger brother, and health occupations teacher. “My mother and my little brother have been my strongest supporters. Even though my mom was hard on me, she always encouraged me to believe that there is nothing impossible, some things just require you to work harder than others. My little brother encouraged me, because I always knew he was watching what I was doing, and it was important to me to be a good role model for him. I would have conversations with him about how hard things seemed sometimes, and he would often say things to encourage, challenge or motivate me because I knew he was paying attention to how I handled things.

My health occupations teacher, would always stay on me about presenting myself in a positive way, from the way I dressed to how I conducted myself in the presence of others. She would praise me when I did things the “right” way, and get onto me when I didn’t.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm mentioned two individuals who he saw as influential adults; the deacon at his church and his high school band teacher. Malcolm mentioned that he appreciated

the fact that both were men he could go to and talk about manly matters with. In regard to the deacon at his church, Malcolm stated that he viewed him as a father figure whom always had time and an open ear for him; “The deacon at my church was special to me because he always listened to what I had to say.” His high school band teacher was viewed more as a big brother figure. Malcolm described him as a motivator, he said that his band teacher would always brag about how skilled he was when they were in a group setting, however, he said the tone would change when they were alone to one of constructive criticism. Malcolm said he realized that his band teacher was trying to keep him humble so that he would continue to work hard. Malcolm’s band teacher made him feel like his successes were important. “My high school band director was also a significant relationship that I had, I think it was because he was young and a recent graduate from college and could relate to kids our age. He served as a good role model.”

Barrack.

Barrack was not able to think of a significant relationship he had with an adult outside his home. When the researcher asked him if he felt his father was an “outside” influence, he adamantly said “no”. Barrack has always felt that his father was with him because of the close bond they developed prior to his father being incarcerated. Barrack in fact, identified only his grandmother, older sister, and father as being influential in the development. Barrack stated, “I can't think of anyone outside of my home that I would say I had a significant relationship with.”

**Proposition four.** The relationship between the child and his primary adults will progress only with repeated two-way interchanges and mutual compromise.

Children need these interchanges at home and at school or childcare, parents need these interchanges in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

**Participant response.** In regard to proposition four, each of the three participants viewed the two-way exchanges they had with a key adult in their lives as influential. However, not all of the participants identified the primary adult in their life as the person they shared those exchanges with. Only one participant identified a school staff member as being someone they had influential two-way exchanges with. To examine the alignment of Bronfenbrenner's fourth proposal with the actual experience of the participants this researcher asked each participant if their parents talked to them about important things in life, and if so, were they given the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings during those exchanges.

Martin.

Martin was the only participant whom mentioned having influential two-way exchanges with an adult in his school. Martin's mother was very strict and rigid in regard to what she wanted and expected from Martin. He said that they didn't really have two-way conversations about life matters, he said that usually his mother guided and dictated how the dialogue was going to go. Martin said that he realizes now that his mother was hard and direct with him because she felt like she needed to be because there was no father figure in his life. He also stated that he noticed how his mother used a much more pleasant tone when she would talk to his younger brother, even when she was upset with him. Again, Martin says in hindsight, he realizes that his mother really counted on him to

do well, and do the right things in order to be successful, and to be a positive role model for his younger brother.

Martin did cite his occupational health teacher as the adult he had influential two-way exchanges with regarding life matters and planning his future. While Martin saw his mother as caring and strict, he acknowledged that the exchanges he shared with his teacher were more influential in regard to him setting goals and planning his future. “My mom was adamant about our focusing on education, but we didn’t have many two way conversations about it, it was more like a demand and expectation on my mother’s part. I did however, have those types of conversations about life and the importance of doing well in school to pave the way for a better life with my occupational health teacher.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm responded in a humorous manner to this prompt. He recalled that his mother never allowed for much interruption when she was trying to say what she had to. Malcolm said that his mother “didn’t play”! She would talk to him and his sisters about doing the right thing and being responsible for their actions, however, Malcolm recalls that they were more like “sermons” than two-way conversations. Malcolm summed up his response to this question by saying, “No. The only time my mom and I talked about life was when she was fussing at me. I was never given the opportunity to express my thoughts in those exchanges.”

Barrack.

This researcher found Barrack's response to this question to be insightful. Barrack stated, "Yes, I was given the opportunity to speak during those exchanges, but I was also taught the importance of listening. My grandmother said listening was often more important than talking, because that's how you learn things you don't know about in life." Barrack went on to mention that two-way exchanges were the foundation to the relationship he has with his incarcerated father. Barrack characterized those exchanges with his grandmother as "wisdom hour". He said he dubbed those times when she would summon him to sit down and talk, as "wisdom hour" because he felt like his grandmother was trying to share her lessons in life about how to be a good person and lead a spiritual life. He characterized his exchanges with his father as being rooted in the "school of hard knocks". He said he saw those exchanges being more focused on how to deal with people in all sorts of situations, including life threatening situations. Barrack viewed the exchanges with his father as lessons in how to survive in a "street" sense. While his grandmother's exchanges were teaching him about surviving in "the White man's world"; how to get along in order to survive.

**Proposition five.** The relationships between the child and adults in his or her life require also a public attitude of support and affirmation of the importance of these roles. Public policies must enable time and resources for these relationships to be nurtured, and a culture-wide value must be placed on the people doing this work. This includes the work of parents and teachers, but also the efforts of extended family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, pp. 2-3).

**Participant responses.** The researcher saw little to no alignment with Bronfenbrenner's fifth proposal and the actual experiences of the participants. None of the



participants felt like they were supported by the community as a whole. However, one participant did make a connection between a negative event that could be linked to “community support”, that he says changed his attitude about life and changed his work ethic. To examine the alignment of this proposal the researcher asked each participant to describe how elements in society; people, mother’s job, neighbors may have supported him and or his family while in high school. As I stated only one participant, Malcolm, had a response. He described a situation in which the electricity service to their home was “cut off” one day during the summer. He recalled that his mother had no one to turn to for help and she was very upset and emotional about the situation: “One day during the summer before my 10th grade year, our lights got turned off. I’d never seen my mother want to give up, but that day she had had enough. Seeing my mother crying and upset made me sick to my stomach, literally. The next day I got on my bike and rode around until I found someone that would give me a job. I started sacking groceries the next day and I swore to my mother that I would make sure the light bill was always paid.” Malcolm has worked ever since that day. He says that situation not only influenced the way he viewed his own living situation, but it changed his attitude about school and having a strong work-ethic, positively.

**Attributes of resilience.** Through a synthesis of the literature, resilience may be defined in terms of attributes that are exhibited by those individuals seen as “resilient”. Earvolino-Ramirez (2007) determined what she called “defining attributes” for resilience, by comparing two sets of data: First, an extensive list of protective factors developed by prominent resilience researchers were examined and common features were noted. Second, lists by resilient researchers that described characteristics consistently associated

with the concept of resilience were cross-referenced. Rebounding/Reintegration, high expectancy/self-determination, positive relationships/social support, flexibility, sense of humor, and self-esteem/self-efficacy were all cited as defining attributes for resilience.

**Rebounding/Reintegration.** The term “rebounding” is present consistently in all aspects of resilience literature and it insinuates a positive direction or response.

“Reintegration” describes the process after disruption or adversity in which an individual wants to return to a regular routine.

**Participant responses.** The interpretive data related to this resilience attribute indicates that each participant exhibited the ability to rebound/re-integrate after a crisis situation in their lives.

Barrack.

Barrack felt like he had to rebound/re-integrate daily between the ages of five and 13 because of other students bullying him about his physical abnormality. When Barrack was five years old he was infected with a virus that was nearly fatal, as a result several surgeries were performed and the outcome was that Barrack ended up with one leg being significantly shorter than the other; affecting the way he walked. He said, “Before I came into my own I would come home angry and/or crying and all upset.” He said that went on for years, and he noted that it was usually other African American students that made the most fun of him. When Barrack was thirteen his father told him if he was tired of being teased he was going to have to stand up to his bullies. Barrack took his father’s advice and fought and beat up his bully. After his fight with the bully, Barrack said people started treating him like he was “normal”. He further reflected that, once he got

through that phase in his life, it took “a lot” to bother me to the point where I would get angry. Barrack stated that he has made many decisions that he has had to rebound from, however, he feels like he can bounce back from any situation, because of his experience with being bullied and his strong belief in self.

Malcolm.

Malcolm referred to the incident with his families lights being turned off as a time in which he had to rebound.

“I feel like the time our lights got cut-off, I had to be strong for my family. I had never seen my mom look so defeated, and that ate me up inside so I knew I had to do something to help her. I feel like me going out and being able to come home and tell her, that I had gotten a job, and that she would not have to ever worry about our lights being cut off again, not only helped me rebound from a bad situation, but I had also helped my mother rebound.” The researcher asked Malcolm had they ever lost electricity again, he replied, “never!”

Martin.

Martin felt like the situations he had to bounce back from were usually related to him feeling like he had not performed as well as he felt he should; at those times he would get “down” on himself. Martin’s best response to those situations was for him to go back and re-do things until he felt he had mastered them. Martin told of an instance in which he scored an 87 on a pre-calculus test: Though he had the second highest score in his class, he felt like he had failed by not making at least a 90. He said, “I knew my

mother would ask what happened, and I felt like I should have done better, so I begged the teacher to allow me to make test corrections. Even after doing the corrections, I went home and went online to do more practice problems over the ones I missed on the test.” Martin went on to say that making low grades was akin to a thug losing a fight, it embarrassed him.

**High expectancy.** High expectancy is a sense of purpose and achievement in life. This sense of purpose may be internal or external. For example, a person may become successful without overtly planning it or someone in their lives may impose high expectations on them with carefully orchestrated goals. Self-determination is a feeling that regardless of what the circumstances or barriers are in life, the individual will overcome barriers and excel.

**Participant responses.** This researcher examined the level of high expectancy and self-determination that each participant exhibited during high school by asking them to describe how they see themselves in regard to having high expectations/self-determination for themselves. Participants were also asked to describe how they view themselves in regard to this phenomenon.

All three participants expressed that they either imposed high expectations upon themselves and/or there was a significant adult in their lives that had high expectations for them. Each of the three participants felt like school personnel had low expectations for them when they entered high school; mainly because they all felt that African American students were viewed as underachievers and discipline problems. All three participants exhibited high expectancy and self-determination on some level. The interpretive data revealed that all three participants shared the desire to dispel the

negative stereotype associated with being an African American on their campus. Each also had a supportive relationship that contributed to the development of their self-determination.

Martin.

Martin cited his mother and occupational health teacher as having high expectations for him academically. Martin acknowledged the influence that both his mother and teacher had as positively affecting the development of his self-determination:

“Well, as I mentioned, my mother was very strict and had high standards and expectations for me growing up. This was the major influence on my attitude about academics, so I always wanted to keep her happy.”

When asked how his relationships with significant adults has influenced to you to succeed academically, Martin mentioned that his mother and was the central influence on his development of self-determination. He further implied that his teacher’s high expectations reinforced the message he was receiving from his mother at home:

“Honestly it wasn’t until I met my occupational health teacher that I began to appreciate how hard my mother was on us about working hard in school, because she would reinforce a lot of the things my mother said.”

Malcolm

Malcolm appeared to exhibit the least amount of self-confidence of the three participants. In his response to inquiry regarding self-expectation/self-determination,

Malcolm's demeanor was void of confidence. He talked about relying on knowing that his family "had his back", as being essential to his level of confidence.

Malcolm's mother had what he characterized as "normal" expectations. She expected him to focus in the classroom, and be respectful and graduate on time. Malcolm admitted that he could have set higher standards for himself, but did not possess the motivation to push himself beyond what needed to be done to graduate on time. In hindsight, Malcolm feels like he could have created more options for himself had he taken harder classes. He mentioned he did not view any school personnel as directly influential on his development of self-expectancy and self-determination. However, Malcolm did state he worked hard enough to not be viewed as a stereotypical African American student.

Barrack.

Barrack's interpretive data indicated a high level of self-determination. His determination to do better than both his parents is central to Barrack's development of self-determination. He mentioned that his father always talked to him about being a leader as opposed to being a follower, and the difference between the two. After the death of his mother and subsequent relocation to Texas, Barrack's primary influences were his grandmother and incarcerated father. Barrack, felt like both, especially his father, instilled in him that he had to "save" the family by representing them in a positive light. Hence, Barrack placed high standards on himself:

"In regard to self- expectations I set my own standards high because I believe if I work hard enough I can make any dream of mine come true. In regard to self-

determination no one can make up my mind for me, space I decided a long time ago that I would be a leader before I became a follower.”

**Positive relationships/social support.** In studies with children, the presence of at least one healthy attachment to a significant adult is omnipresent when resilience is identified. These relationships provide opportunities for communication and support and are important not only in their existence, but also with the context that the individual perceives them as being of healthy quality.

**Participant responses.** Each of the participants in the study acknowledged the presence and/or attachment to at least one significant adult. Two of the three participants identified a relationship with an adult in the school environment as supportive. One participant described his relationship with his summer camp coach as supportive and having a positive effect on his overall esteem. To examine this attribute; each participant was asked to describe any relationships they had that yielded encouragement and support. A cross-sectional analysis of responses to related questions was also conducted.

Martin.

Martin described his relationship with his health occupations teacher as being supportive and encouraging:

“My health occupations teacher, would always stay on me about presenting myself in a positive way, from the way I dressed to how I conducted myself in the presence of others. She would praise me when I did things the “right” way, and get onto me when I didn’t.”

She encouraged him to carry himself with pride and professionalism. However, Martin cited his mother and little brother as being the two most supportive and encouraging relationships:

“My mother and my little brother have been my strongest supporters. Even though my mom was hard on me, she always encouraged me to believe that there is nothing impossible, some things just require you to work harder than others. My little brother encouraged me, because I always knew he was watching what I was doing, and it was important to me to be a good role model for him. I would have conversations with him about how hard things seemed sometimes, and he would often say things to encourage, challenge or motivate me because I knew he was paying attention to how I handled things.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm mentioned his support being rooted in his relationships with his oldest sister and mother:

“My mother and my sister; my sister always talked about the mistakes she made and tried to guide me in a positive direction. I think my mother encouraged us to help build our self-esteem. My mother's encouragement and support was of a motherly nature, she stayed on us pretty hard to make sure that we knew she had our back, in turn we knew that if we didn't do what we were supposed to do she would come down on us pretty hard. I would say my mother supported me by being hard on me, in other words she was a strict disciplinarian.”



In the school environment, Malcolm acknowledged his relationship with his band teacher as supportive and encouraging:

“He would try to establish a bond with me by just holding everyday conversations about life and my future. He often motivated me with his words of encouragement especially about my ability when it came to playing my instrument. He made me feel as though he genuinely cared about my interest in life and the things that affected me on a day-to-day basis.”

Barrack.

Barrack’s father has always been his main support and source of encouragement, in spite of being incarcerated. Barrack views his father as a model of strength. The encouragement from his father and his internal push to honor his father’s message to “do better” than he did in life, has been central to Barrack’s development of resilience. Barrack also mentioned relationships with his grandmother and summer camp coaches as yielding encouragement and support:

“Once I moved to Texas my grandmother had me in sports camps each summer; attending those camps in the coaches at those camps help me to build my confidence in a lot of ways: space I learned how to swim they encourage me to participate and never let my handicap keep me from being a part of something.

**Flexibility.** The term flexibility captures the essence of adaptability, being able to roll with changes, being cooperative, amiable, and tolerant, and having an easy temperament.

**Participant responses.** Each of the three participants displayed the resilience attribute of flexibility. For the purpose of this study, flexibility and adaptability were used synonymously. None of the three participants ever had a fight or physical altercation while in high school, although, all three could recall at least one instance where they were able to remain calm in a potentially volatile situation. Each of the participants had to adapt and be flexible because of changes in their home environment.

Martin.

Martin and his family relocated six times in the four years he was in high school. Martin's mother could not afford to purchase a home, so she was forced to lease. To Martin, it seemed as though every time the lease expired the rent would increase; when it got too high, they would relocate to another rental. When asked how all the relocating affected his academics, he replied that it did not affect it at all, because neither he or his mother would allow all the moving around to be an excuse for not staying focused in school.

Malcolm.

Malcolm experienced residential instability similar to Martin. Malcolm and his family relocated three different times in his senior year alone. Malcolm's mother emphasized to he and his siblings that they were not to worry about "grown folks business"; they were to only worry about doing well in school and staying out of trouble.

Barrack.

Barrack moved to Texas as a pre-teen special education student with a physical abnormality (the researcher was reminded by Barrack that his condition was not a disability, just an abnormality). Barrack mentioned that his grandmother not getting him involved in sports camps, it may have taken him a long time to make his first friend in Texas. Barrack was re-examined and tested out of special education during his freshman year of high school. This new placement was challenging for Barrack initially, mainly due to his lack of study skills. He said, prior to moving out of special education, he was always confident that he could do well. He said, that he remembered his counselor telling him how much harder being out of special education was going to be. Barrack took this as a challenge; he went to all his teachers to find out their tutoring schedules and attended tutoring three times a week for the remainder of his high school career. He said, attending tutoring helped him gain the confidence he needed to be successful in general education classes. When asked why he continued to go to tutoring once he gained his confidence, he said he learned more by going to tutoring, and that helped him feel as though he was not only on level with his peers, but ahead of them in some of his classes. Barrack, as well as Malcolm and Martin, was able to adapt in a culture where African-American males were expected to fail.

**Sense of humor.** The quality of having a sense of humor about life situations and about one's self is consistent across all resilience studies of all ages. Sense of humor plays an important role in the ability to make light of adversity, to enhance coping mechanisms, and to moderate the intensity of emotional reactions.

**Participant responses.** All three participants characterized themselves as having a sense of humor. However, only Martin and Barrack were able to describe a time in the

school environment where having a sense of humor may have helped them cope in a difficult situation. Malcolm acknowledged that he has always known how to make people laugh, but is not the joking type.

Martin.

Martin described his sense of humor as being “very good!” He went on to further characterize his sense of humor:

“The few close friends I have would say that I’m a person that is laid back, and doesn’t have get to upset about much of anything. In fact, most would say that I try to find humor in tough situations, in order to better deal with them.”

When asked to describe a instance in his school environment where his sense of humor may have helped him cope in a difficult situation he recalled an instance, in which a peer made a racial slur toward him during one of his classes, Martin remembered being offended and angered by the comment, but because he was in the school environment, he chose not to respond in anger but to embarrass his classmate instead. He said he asked the student to define the slur and then spell it, and when the student couldn’t, he and his classmates laughed about it. He said, “The embarrassment I brought on him in front of his so-called friends was better than any punch I could have thrown.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm was not able to describe a situation where his sense of humor helped him manage a difficult situation in the school environment. Malcolm presents himself as very hard, and tough, so he always carried himself with a more serious tone. He did not

want people to see his humorous side, because he felt it would have shown some weakness. Malcolm characterized his sense of humor by saying. “I don't think anyone would consider me a joker, but most people would say I know how to make people laugh.”

Barrack.

Barrack says he had to re-learn how to enjoy life because of the hardships he has gone through in his life. He remembered being very happy when all of his family was together, prior to his father being incarcerated and later, the death of his mother. His peers would make fun of him, until he fought and beat one of them up. Consequently, Barrack began to carry himself as a “thug”, as he described it; “ I figured, since they respected me for being hard, that was the best way for me to carry myself so that they would leave me alone about my leg.” Barrack says his father told him that carrying himself that way would only invite trouble, so he had to find be who he really was inside. Barrack said, “I had to learn how to not be so angry and look at the lighter side of situations.” He mentioned that he learned how to balance his moods:

“I would just say my sense of humor is okay. I know how to have fun and kick it when it's time for that, but I also know how to be serious when I need to.”

**Self esteem/self efficacy.** Self-esteem and self-efficacy are attributed with many stages, forms, and levels of resilience. They are often credited with the answer to “why some people snap and others snap back.” Self-esteem and self-efficacy are present in children and adults both innately and from mastery of previous experiences (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007, pp. 75-78).

**Participant responses.** One of the prevailing themes that will be discussed further in Chapter V is the desire by each participant to be instrumental in dispelling the negative stereotype that was attached to being an African-American student. Their desire to be productive in the face of this negative stereotype demonstrated the level of self-efficacy each participant had during their high school experience, and further illustrates their individual resilience. This researcher examined the presence of this attribute by asking each participant to; define resilience, state whether they viewed themselves as being resilient, and to describe how they viewed themselves in regard to self-expectations and self-determination.

Martin.

Martin defined resilience as the drive to succeed in spite of your circumstances. When asked if he views himself as resilient, Martin replied,

“Yes, because I had to deal with a lot of things some of my peers were never faced with, like having only one parent around, and not having a lot of money in our house. I remember a couple of times our lights were cut off, and my mom taking us to the library until it closed so that we wouldn’t have any excuse for not doing our homework. Also, having to work to help out, a lot of my peers never had to deal with any of that type of stuff, yet I outperformed a lot of them when it came to academics.”

Martin professed to being self-driven. He attributed a lot of his intrinsic motivation to having to meet the expectations of his mother:

“I’m pretty hard on myself, and I think it comes from my mother’s influence. She was very hard to please, so I think that carried over to how I view myself; I am somewhat of a perfectionist and its mainly because of my mother’s influence on us. I am a very self-determined individual, and again I think a lot of that is carry over from my mother’s expectations.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm defined resilience as the ability to bounce back from any circumstance or situation. Malcolm defined resilience further as the ability to remain strong and never give up regardless of what is going on. However, in defining resilience, Malcolm also mentioned the need to know that the significant people in his life would be there and not allow him to give up. For this researcher, this remark implied that Malcolm’s need to be supported by the significant people in his life indicated that Malcolm’s level of self-esteem and self-efficacy may not have been as high as the other participants’. In fact, when Malcolm was asked if he viewed himself as resilient he replied:

“Yes I do, mainly because I don't believe in giving up. I know that if I work hard I can get through most things on my own, and sometimes knowing my family is supporting me helps me feel more resilient.”

Malcolm’s need for support by others was further highlighted in his response when asked to describe how he viewed himself in regard to self-expectation and self-determination:

“I see myself as pretty self-determined, though at times I need to know that my family is backing me, particularly my mother. I say particularly my mother because she

has always supported me and encouraged me, and getting encouragement from her has always motivated me and built up my self-esteem.”

Barrack.

Barrack defined resilience as being able to overcome any situation to the best of one’s ability. When asked how he viewed himself in regard to resilience Barrack replied,

“Yes, I definitely see myself as resilient because I’ve been faced with a lot of adversity in my life. In addition to having to deal with my dad being incarcerated and the death of my mother; when I was five I had a viral infection that started eating at one of my legs, so I had an operation that now affects the way I walk.

Growing up kids would tease, but I learned quickly to not let them define me-I believe dealing with my physical situation made me a lot stronger as a person. I feel like if I can overcome this I can overcome anything.” Barrack credited the influence of his father and grandmother as being impactful on his self-esteem and self-efficacy. For Barrack, this attribute was fostered and developed through his trials with his physical abnormality. However, Barrack’s determination and belief in himself was very evident in his demeanor and the confidence in which he carried himself. Further, when asked to describe how he viewed himself in regard to self-expectations and self-determination, Barrack responded:

“In regard to self- expectations, I set my own standards high because I believe if I work hard enough I can make any dream of mine come true. In regard to self-determination, no one can make up my mind for me: I decided a long time ago that I would be a leader before I became a follower.”



**Protective factors in the school environment.** Henderson and Milstein (1996) suggested six consistent themes that have emerged from the literature that show how schools, as well as families and communities can provide both the environmental protective factors and the conditions that foster the individual protective factors (Jackson, 1999). For the purpose of this study, Henderson and Milstein's theme were examined as they relate to the school environment only.

**Increase bonding.** This process involves strengthening connections between the individual and any pro-social person or activity. This strategy is based on the evidence that children with strong positive bonds are far less involved in risk behaviors than those without these bonds. Some examples of this strategy include making family involvement a priority, giving parents meaningful roles within the school, and setting up parent resource centers.

**Participant responses.** All three participants acknowledged that a staff member in their high school had worked to establish a bond with them. One of the three participants mentioned that no such bond was established with him until his senior year of high school, but he was able to establish a bond on some level with his teachers, his administrator and his counselor. To examine the alignment of participant experiences with the actualization of this school based protective factor the researcher asked each participant if they felt that any staff member in their school had tried to establish a bond with them; if so, how did they go about establishing that bond, and if not, why.

Martin.

Martin credited his health occupations teacher with helping him see the big picture; she helped him to focus on his future and what he needed to do to best prepare himself. By engaging in meaningful conversations about his future and what he needed to do to set himself up for the best career options, and by showing that she had a personal interest in him, Martin's health occupations teacher was able to establish an impactful bond that yielded motivation and guidance for him. Martin summed up his response by saying:

“My health occupations teacher established a good bond with me. She always made it a point to stay on me about everything. She was big on letting me know that she cared about me as a person just by engaging in everyday conversations about life and making sure I'd stay focused on my school work. She also made it important to expose us to different things culturally and academically, so we would attend occupational workshops and museums and things like that.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm recalled that his band teacher established a lasting bond. In fact, Malcolm further stated that the bond he established with his band teacher has grown into a genuine friendship. The fact that he was young, a recent college graduate, African-American, and male attracted Malcolm to him. When asked how the bond was established, Malcolm admitted to seeking his teacher out for guidance, stating that he just appeared to be someone he could connect with. “There were not many African-American staff members on campus, he just seemed real cool and easy-going, that made it easy for me to talk to him.” Malcolm summed up his response by stating,

“The only person that comes to mind is the band teacher I had. He would try to establish a bond with me by just holding everyday conversations about life and my future. He often motivated me with his words of encouragement especially about my ability when it came to playing my instrument. He made me feel as though he genuinely cared about my interest in life and the things that affected me on a day-to-day basis.”

Barrack.

Barrack mentioned that it was not until his senior year that a bond of any significance to him had been established with a staff member in the school environment. According to Barrack, it seemed as though no attempt was made on the part of staff to bond with him until his senior year. He recalled that on the first day of his senior year, his counselor called him in to talk about his future plans with him. When Barrack asked her why she waited until his last year in school to ask him about his future plans, she replied that he was not on her radar until then. Barrack recalled feeling angry about her response; feeling like he had missed out on being “guided” like his peers had been.

Barrack would go on to say that after that day he began to feel supported by everyone, including his teachers and administrator. Barrack would sum up his response by saying,

“Yes I believe my AP my senior year definitely bonded with me and most of my teachers and coaches. They would check on me and my progress and they made me feel that they cared about my future.”

**Set clear and consistent boundaries.** Be consistent in implementing school policies that clarify behavior expectations. These boundaries should be clearly written, clearly communicated, and coupled with appropriate consequences-consistently enforced.

**Participant responses.** The participants in this study all acknowledged that boundaries and expectations for behavior had been established in the school environment. However, their response to having those boundaries varied. One participant mentioned that the boundaries set by the school for behavior were not impactful on him personally, because his guidelines for behavior in any setting had been well established in his home environment. One participant mentioned that though the boundaries and expectations for behavior were set and clearly communicated, inequity was present in how consequences were issued to the different races of students. None of the three participants indicated that having those boundaries set in the school environment was impactful on the development of their academic resilience. In fact, each alluded to the fact that their expectations for behavior were established in the home environment and they were universal expectations; meaning those expectations were to be met regardless of the setting. This researcher asked each participant whether the adults at their school had established clear and consistent boundaries for behavior, and if so, how did having those boundaries affect their behavior and how they felt about school.

Martin.

Martin acknowledged that the school did a good job of establishing expectations for behavior, but he did mention that it seemed as though the African-American and Hispanic students received harsher consequences than did his white peers. In regard to

any influence these boundaries may have had on Martin's development of resilience, he stated that his guidelines for behavior were well established at home:

"Everybody knew the rules. My boundaries for behavior were set at home though. I knew my mother wasn't going to accept me acting out in school, and I feared her wrath far more than I feared what my AP could do. I was taught that there is a consequence for every action or decision you make, so that's what pretty much guided my behavior."

Malcolm.

Malcolm acknowledged that clear and consistent boundaries for behavior had been set in the school environment, but he noted that not all the teachers were consistent with the different ethnic groups, in regard to consequences. Malcolm summarized his response:

"Yes the teachers at our school did a pretty good job of establishing boundaries for behavior. I always felt that there were too many rules in schools and that not all teachers were consistent with different groups of students, meaning I felt that some of teachers treated the White kids differently than they treated the Hispanic and black kids. For example, I can remember a time in my math class, my teacher was an older White man: We always felt like he didn't care for the Black kids because if we asked questions it just felt like he responded differently than when he responded to the White kids, there was a consistent difference in his tone of voice; when he responded to White kids he just seemed to be more pleasant than when he responded to Black kids or Hispanic kids."

Barrack.

Barrack acknowledged that clear and consistent boundaries for behavior were established in the school environment. However, he cited the influence he got from his grandmother and the importance of having good character as being more influential on his personal development than any boundaries set by the adults in the school setting.

Barrack summarized his response by stating:

“The boundaries for behavior were pretty clear at our school. However I was raised to know that behavior is about character-I felt that if I was misbehaving I'd miss something important in class, so I always tried to follow the rules. I also remembered the boundaries for behavior that my grandmother established; if we acted up in school she was going to punish us when we got home, because she always said to remember that we represent her when we are outside of the home, and misbehaving was not going to be acceptable.”

**Teach life skills.** This strategy includes teaching cooperation, conflict resolution, resistance, and assertive skills, communication skills, problem solving, decision-making, and healthy stress management skills. Cooperative learning would be a viable technique for this strategy because it requires cooperation, communication, and interpersonal skills.

**Participant responses.** Each of the three participants was able to recall some experience in their high school career when they felt like they were being taught a critical life skill. To explore the alignment of the participants' experiences with the actual implementation of this critical strategy for fostering resilience, this researcher asked each participant if they felt like their teachers, counselors, or administrators had in any way

helped them prepare for life, and if so, what critical skills did they help foster. Each participant was able to identify one individual in the school environment whom had an impact in regard to fostering critical life skills.

Martin.

Martin stated that his counselor was not very involved with him at all. The only person Martin saw as impactful in regard to fostering life skills was his health occupations teacher. In his response, Martin highlighted how she was influential:

“My counselor wasn’t very involved at all. In fact, I very rarely saw my counselor. Most things regarding preparation for life and college came from my health occupations teacher. She helped us make decisions about college and how to prepare for life. The main critical skill she taught me was how to be a professional and how to approach everything from preparation to how to communicate in a professional manner. She would take us on field trips to hospitals and other professional environments, and she always demanded that we represent her and the program professionally.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm credited his Spanish teacher with helping him to develop a strong work ethic. In his response, Malcolm also mentioned that she helped him develop his ability to stay focused and prepare:

“...Not all of them. But I did have a female Spanish teacher that helped me by working with me on improving my ability to focus. She was strict and mean but we all knew she cared about us. The critical skill she helped me develop was the

ability to focus and how to prepare. She used to always say, " if you don't work in life, you don't get paid!" I always remember that. So I guess I can say she held me develop a work ethic.”

Barrack.

Barrack did acknowledge that his counselors, administrators, and teachers had taught him some critical skills that would serve him in life. In fact he stated that those people collectively helped him to build a foundation and provided him tools to be academically successful. Barrack would however, acknowledge that he would be ultimately responsible for how he used the tools that he was provided. He also stated that school staff members helped him to learn the importance of integrity. Barrack summed up his response by saying:

“Yes, because I felt like every day you should learn something. I feel like my teachers and counselors helped to build my foundation and to give me the academic tools that I needed to be successful, but I also realize that regardless of what they do or what they did not do, I had to take responsibility for preparing myself for life and actually using the tools that they provided me with. The skill I think that my teachers, counselors, and administrators taught me was about integrity and what that meant to me in my life. Integrity is doing things the right way when no one is looking and my teachers and counselors did talk about how important having integrity was in life, but my grandmother and dad always reinforced that with me. My grandmother used to always say: It’s what you do in the dark that makes you the man you are.”



**Provide caring and support.** This factor is the most crucial of all elements that promote resiliency. Education reformers are beginning to recognize the importance of this strategy. Some examples of behaviors that express caring and support are: noticing all students, knowing students' names, reaching those students that rarely participate, and investigating and intervening when students are dealing with difficult circumstances.

**Participant responses.** All three participants felt like they were supported and cared for by at least one member of the school staff. This would make sense, because each participant felt like they made a connection or established a bond with at least one individual in the school setting. To highlight the efficacy of this strategy, this researcher asked each participant if they felt supported or encouraged by the adults in their school, and if so, could they describe the things that staff members did to make them feel supported. Each participant response is summed up below.

Martin.

“Yes, by the teachers in the health occupations academy. They exposed us to real life situations and real professional settings, so we were able to make connections between what we were learning in the classroom and what is expected in the real world.”

Malcolm.

“I felt like my band teacher always supported me and I guess my Spanish teacher because they would always come to my games or to my band performances. They also have an open door policy so I can go talk to them whenever I needed.”

Barrack.

“Yes. They made me feel supported by always having encouraging words and letting me know they saw me as a good person. The more positives I heard from others about myself the more confidence I gained.”

**Set and communicate high expectations.** It is important to establish both high and realistic expectations in order to provide effective motivators. Classrooms that embody high expectations are characterized by: higher-order, meaningful, and participatory curricula; flexible, heterogeneous grouping (with no labels or tracking); evaluation systems that reflect multiple intelligence and learning styles, and a variety of participatory activities, including community service opportunities.

**Participant responses.** As stated earlier, each of the three participants felt like the expectations for African-American males were low at their high school. Each indicated that they felt responsible for dispelling the negative stereotype attached with being African-American, when they entered their high school. Each participant consequently acknowledged that they felt a higher level of expectation had been set for their White and Asian peers. One of the prevailing themes that will be discussed in chapter five arose from the examination of this strategy; the fact that all three participants felt like they had to prove they were good students to escape being caste into a negative stereotype associated with their race. To examine the effectiveness of this strategy on each of the participants, this researcher asked them if they felt like their teachers expected them to do well in school, and what made them feel they did or did not.

Martin.

“Yes, because as academy students, we were always pushed to do better and compete academically. I don’t think all teachers were this way because I had friends whose teachers never called home and never pushed them to do better. I would have teachers checking my and making changes to my classes to ensure I was being challenged.”

Malcolm.

“I think that most of my teachers didn't expect me to do well until I showed them that I was capable of doing well. I say that because my first year in high school my teachers didn't really pay much attention to me unless I was doing something negative, but I felt like after my first semester in high school my teachers expectations changed because I made really good grades, first report card. It was pretty obvious that teachers treated kids that did better in class better.”

Barrack.

“Not at first, I had to show them that I was not lazy and low class through my work ethic. Once they saw that I worked hard, they began to encourage and push me, but at the beginning of high school I felt like they didn't expect me to do well until I showed them that I could.”

**Provide opportunities for meaningful participation.** This strategy involves giving students a lot of responsibility for what goes on in school by providing opportunities for them to solve problems, make decisions, plan, set goals, and help others.

The critical foundation for this step is for educators to view students as resources, rather than passive objects or problems.

**Participant responses.** All three participants mentioned having the opportunity to participate in what they considered to be meaningful, school based activities. Two of the three participants participated in athletics while one participated in UIL scholastic competitions. This researcher asked each participant if they felt they were given opportunities to participate in meaningful activities at school, and if so, how did participating impact their attitude toward school. Each participant made some acknowledgement of how being able to participate in meaningful activities had a positive effect on their overall attitude toward school.

Martin.

Martin recalled a situation where his being able to participate in a UIL math competition boosted his confidence. In his response to the question Martin stated:

“I was. My ninth grade year, I wasn’t selected to participate in the district math competition, and I wanted to know why, because I felt that I was smarter than most of the people on the team. I was granted a tryout and ended up making the team. Not only did I make the team, they ended up voting me as the captain, and we went on to win the district competition that year, for the first time in like ten years. That experience not only boosted my confidence, but I believe it made my teachers look at me differently. It was from that point that all my teachers seemed to push me more academically.

Malcolm.

Malcolm cited his participation in band and baseball as being influential on his attitude toward school and academics. Malcolm stated that having something positive to look forward to and having to meet the academic standards for participation were both reasons participating in extra-curricular activities helped to keep him focused:

“I did have the opportunity to participate in band and baseball while I was in high school. I would say participating in those activities gave me something positive to look forward to. The other thing is, you had to have good grades to participate so my wanting to continue to participate motivated me to keep my grades up.”

Barrack.

Barrack participated in baseball and football all four years of his high school career, in spite of his physical abnormality. However, Barrack cited the opportunity he was given to speak at an African-American student summit as being very influential on his attitude toward school, because, he stated, it afforded him the opportunity to positively impact his peers. Barrack mentioned this experience in his response:

“Yes, I participated in football and baseball all four years of high school because of my physical disability I was a manager for football but I participated and played outfield and some infield for the baseball team. Something I will always remember is the time I got to attend a summit for African-American males during my junior year: at the summit I got a chance to speak on changing our attitudes toward school and trying to represent ourselves as African-American males in a better light. I came away from that experience feeling like I had helped

a lot of my peers through sharing my experiences and struggles related to my physical abnormality.”

### **College Readiness**

Conley (2008) defined college readiness as the degree to which previous educational and personal experiences have equipped students for the expectations and demands they will encounter in college. Conley (2007) identified four core elements schools need to focus on to change the trend of students graduating from high school not prepared for college: (a) express the importance of creating a culture focused on the intellectual development of all its students; (b) schools must specify what the core knowledge and skills are, and that the standards related to those skills be clearly stated; (c) ensure that necessary student supports are in place; and (d) schools must provide necessary support to classroom teachers. This researcher has taken these four core elements and broken them into concepts that will allow for the examination of the participants’ experience as they relate to college readiness: School personnel influence, school programming, and conversations about college and career readiness at home.

**School personnel influence.** The Association of Classroom Teachers offered additional policy recommendations that could help facilitate effective early educational and postsecondary planning: (a) Schools should explain to students and their parents the effects of taking a challenging curriculum on their future educational and career options; (b) Schools should use multiple sources of information, including standardized assessments, to help inform students and their parents of the students’ progress toward college readiness; and (c) Schools should work with families to calculate college costs and develop a plan to meet those costs.

**Counselor influence.** In regard to the amount of influence the guidance counselor may have had on each participant's state of college readiness, their responses varied. To explore this topic, this researcher asked each participant to tell if and how their counselors may have helped prepare them for college. Participants were also asked to tell how their counselor could have better contributed to their preparation for college.

Martin.

Martin stated that his counselor was not involved at all with his preparation for college. He stated that his Health Occupations teacher did it all:

“My health occupations teacher did it all. She walked us through the application process, how to apply for scholarships, she even took me to visit a couple of schools in the local area. My counselor and AP weren't involved.”

Martin felt like the counselors and administrators could have accomplished more by talking to him about college and how to prepare for college. He mentioned that a lot of his friends who were not students in the academy at his school would come to him for information about college, because the non-academy students did not seem to be privy to the same information.

Malcolm.

Malcolm stated that the only people that would talk to him about college were his band and Spanish teachers, the only two minority staff members he made contact with regularly. Malcolm stated that he felt like his counselor definitely could have done more to help prepare him for college. Malcolm highlighted his sentiments in his response:

“No one at the school really pulled me aside to talk to me about college except my band teacher in my Spanish teacher. Now that I think about it, they were the only two minority teachers that I had. Conversations I had with my band teacher about his college experience motivated me to want to go because it seemed like she enjoyed it. The conversations I had with my Spanish teacher were more about how going to college would open doors for me that may not ever be opened if I didn't go to college.”

Malcolm further stated that he felt the counselors had a practice of selecting the kids they wanted to talk to about attending college instead of talking to all students about it.

“I don't feel like my counselors did a very good job at all. I feel like they could have provided me more guidance and started talking to me about college in the ninth grade. It seemed like they picked the kids to talk to about college and instead of just talking to everybody about it. “

Barrack.

Barrack stated that his counselor did provide him with guidance and help him prepare to go to college. Barrack stated that his counselor did provide him with the information he needed to apply and get into college. When asked how his counselor could have done more to contribute to his preparation for college Barrack was unable to cite any lapses regarding him personally, however he did note that some of his peers that seemed to need the most guidance did not get it. Additionally, he felt as though, because of his physical abnormality more focus was placed on his needs:



“Besides dealing with the stereotypes at the beginning of my high school career I felt like those people did their jobs and gave me the tools I needed to go out into the world and be successful. The only thing I would say I saw as a negative was it seemed like those kids that were less motivated on their own in other words the kids that may not have had guidance at home didn't get the help that they may have needed because they may have struggled with this plan or other things in school. I also think because I was in special ed that they focus more on me and my needs.”

**Teacher influence.** Each participant was able to cite a teacher that was influential in providing guidance and tools for preparing to attend college. To examine the amount of teacher influence that took place among the participants, this researcher asked each to tell if and how their teachers helped prepare them for college. Participants were also asked to tell how their teachers could have better contributed to their state of college readiness.

Martin.

Martin stated that his Health Occupations teacher was the only school based staff member that had any influence on his state of college readiness. He mentioned that his counselor and assistant principal were not involved. In response to how his teachers could have better contributed to his state of college readiness, Martin responded, “I was in the academy, which was a college prep program, so my experience may not have been typical, but even with that, teachers treated students differently. My Health Occupations teacher, went out of her way, it seemed, to ensure that I had everything I needed to be

ready for college. There were times when I know other students, White students, were being given information on certain programs, scholarships or schools that I would not have received had it not been for her.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm acknowledged the influence of both his band teacher and Spanish teacher on his state of college readiness. In his response he noted that both teachers took time to talk to him about their own college experiences and what he needed to do to prepare himself to be successful at the college level. In regard to how teachers could have better contributed to his state of college readiness, Malcolm responded,

“My teachers helped me for the most part. I think most of them did what they were supposed to do in providing me with what I needed to know to do well enough to get into college. I would have liked it if more of my teachers took the time that my band teacher and Spanish teachers took with me, on a personal level, but I would say most of my teachers did their jobs in educating me.”

Barrack.

Barrack shared a similar sentiment in his response. He felt like most of his teachers did what they were supposed to do on a daily basis, which is provide him with the tools he needed to be successful, in life, not just college. He mentioned that he felt like the staff worked together to help him attain a state of college readiness. In particular, Barrack mentioned that his English teacher worked with him to improve his writing skills:

“My English teacher worked with me on my writing skills because he felt that to be successful in college I needed to improve that skill; this opened my eyes to an area I needed to improve in to be able to reach my goal of successfully completing college.”

**Administrator influence.** Only one of the three participants felt like their administrator contributed to their state of college readiness. In fact, the other two participants mentioned that their administrator either could have accomplished more in the way of having conversations about college, or their administrator did not talk to them at all about preparing for and attending college. Participants responded to the researcher asking them to tell if and how their administrator may have helped them prepare for college and how they may have better contributed to their state of college readiness.

Martin.

Martin was one of the two participants that felt like his administrator could have done more to help him prepare for college:

“I felt like the counselors and administrators could have done more to get involved in talking to me about college and how to prepare for college.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm mentioned that his administrator was not involved at all in regard to his preparation for college:

“My administrators didn't talk to me about college at all. It would've been nice for them to show more of an interest in my future.”

Barrack.

Barrack was the only participant that noted his administrator (assistant principal) being actively involved in helping to prepare him for college. Barrack mentioned that one-on-one conversations with his administrator motivated him to make sure he was staying on track and taking the proper steps to get into college.

“My AP motivated me by telling me things that were real about college based on his own experiences, and he was able to related his experiences to my own life experiences, and that helped me believe in myself: He would always say, if he could do it, I could do it better. He also told me that college was an important stepping stone in my life and he provided me examples as to why.”

**School programming.** Because more stringent accountability means increased academic standards, minority students, particularly African American students, still end up having a needs-deficit with regard to college preparation. African American students often experience oppressive practices both inside and outside of schools that may affect their ability to pursue high-level courses (i.e., Advanced Placement programming) and their postsecondary aspirations. Some examples of these oppressive practices include: retention, standardized testing, tracking, and discipline policies (Lambie et al., 2009). Lambie et al. (2009) further stated that African American students were disproportionately represented in exceptional education programs and were more likely than their White peers to be labeled as learning disabled or slow learners. The interpretation of data related to mathematics achievement levels suggest that many minority students, particularly African American students, are not experiencing

instructional practices consistent with recommendations suggested by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics; in contrast more White students are experiencing NCTM standards-based instruction (Berry & Bol, 2005). An examination of the results of participation in advanced programming initiatives suggests that providing college-level work in high school is one way to better prepare a wide range of students for college success, including students who do not see themselves as college material (Hoffman et al., 2009)..

Martin.

Of the three participants, Martin was the only one who took AP courses and pre-AP courses. When asked to discuss why he took AP and pre-AP courses Martin responded:

“I took all pre-AP and AP courses because it was a requirement for me to be a part of the health sciences academy. Plus, those were the harder classes, and I was competitive, so I wanted to take the harder classes.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm did not participate in any advanced level courses throughout high school. When asked to discuss if he had taken advanced courses and his decision for taking or not taking those courses, Malcolm responded:

“No. I don't think the confidence was there from anyone, including my mom and myself. I think my mom was worried that I wouldn't be able to keep up. And actually, my counselor or administrators never talked to me about taking AP pre-AP classes.”

Barrack.

Barrack did not participate in any advanced placement courses either. In fact, Barrack was identified as a special education student until the first semester of his ninth grade year. In his freshman year he tested out of special education; this meant he lost any extra help he had in the classroom environment. When Barrack was asked if he had taken any advanced courses, Barrack responded:

“No I didn't take any pre- AP courses. I was in special ed courses for part of my 9th grade year, however I was still able to graduate on the state recommended plan.”

**Conversations about college and career readiness at home.** African-American students need to urge their parents to be involved in their college and career planning processes. Researchers have noted that parental involvement plays a significant role in the academic achievement of students (Decuir-Gunby & Taliaferro, 2007). The support, involvement, and expectations, especially from mothers, have been widely shown to affect students' expectations and outcomes, including grades and attendance, as well as the likelihood that African American students will continue on to college (Amor, Carlton, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2008).

To explore the relevance of this topic and examine its alignment with the actual experience of the participants, this researcher asked each participant if they had conversations with their parents about attending college. Each participant was also asked to describe how they felt their parents may have helped them to prepare for college, and how important their attending college would be to their parents.

Martin.

Martin acknowledged that he and his mother did have conversations about him attending college, and that his attending college was an expectation that she had for him. He pointed out that she helped prepare him for college by being hard on him and holding him to high academic expectations. Martin responded to the first prompt by saying:

“Yes my mom did talk to me about attending college, but not a lot, because I think it was more of an expectation. I know it was important for her that I go because she trained me to be prepared for it, she’d always present college as a necessary tool to obtaining success in life.”

When asked to explain how his mother may have helped him prepare to attend college, Martin’s response was,

“She helped prepare me by being hard on me when it came to academics. She also taught me that there is no viable excuse for failure, other than the desire to fail.”

Malcolm.

Malcolm acknowledged that he and his mother would talk about him attending college “sometimes”. He felt like his mother and older sister both helped prepare him for college by staying on him about keeping his grades up and staying focused in school. When asked if he and his mother talked about college and how important his attending college was to her, Malcolm responded:

“Sometimes my mother and I would talk about me going to college. She would mostly talk to me about the things I need to do to be ready to go to college, like keeping my grades up, staying focused, and getting key information like financial aid information. It was important to my mom that I attend college because she felt that education was important, and the more education I had the better chance I would have at achieving success in life.”

Barrack.

Barrack acknowledged that both his grandmother and father, whom is incarcerated, had conversations with him about attending college. He stated that both contributed to his state of college readiness by teaching him life lessons:

“They tried to prepare me for college and life by teaching me life lessons, in particular my grandmother would tell me that life is life and we make life hard when we make bad decisions, and that I should apply that to all things in life including college.”

When asked if he and his parents had conversations about attending college and was his attending college important to them, Barrack responded:

“Yes, both my father and my grandmother saw that I really wanted to go to college so they pushed me to do what I needed to prepare mentally. My attending college was important to them because it was important to me, plus they always talked about the importance of education as a tool to reaching my dream. The other thing was both my parents went to and finished college so I want to make my parents proud and reach even higher than they did.”



**Summary**

In this chapter a summary of the data obtained through the interview protocol was provided. In the next chapter, this researcher will provide an outline of the prevailing themes that emerged as commonalities amongst the participants as they relate to key factors in the school based fostering of resilience in this selected group of African-American males students. Any viable conclusions that contribute to the school based fostering of the resilience will be discussed, as will any implications for further study on this or related topics.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

#### **Introduction**

This research provides an exploration of resilience attributes among three African-American males who have recently graduated from high school. Utilizing a guided interview protocol, data were collected from the participants' narratives. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the strengths, protective processes, adaptive responses, and other attributes of resilience that enabled them to succeed academically in spite of adversity within their environments at home, school, or society. Interpretation of this data set the stage for a descriptive analysis and examination of the extent to which the experiences of these three young men reflect the notions and concepts from the review of literature on; resilience, elements of Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and school based factors that influence college readiness. The interpretive data that chronicled the experiences of the participants were presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter this researcher will highlight the prevailing themes that emerged from the interview data and provide implications for school based practices that may positively influence the development of resilience and state of college readiness in African-American males.

As implied in the review of literature, most research regarding African-American males has been from a deficit perspective. In terms of academics, researchers who conducted studies regarding African-American males have focused on low enrollment, attrition, and underperformance. As a result, minimal emphasis has been placed on the school based and non-academic factors that contribute to academic achievement. In

resilience terms, what protective factors exist in the school environment that will help mitigate those risk factors that may exist? Further, few researchers have examined the actual experiences of those African American males who attained academic success and reached a state of college readiness despite difficult circumstances.

This researcher examined the experiences of the three resilient African-American males for alignment with the notions and themes outlined in the review of literature. The themes and notions used to build the interview protocol and set the stage for a descriptive analysis included: Brofenbrenner's five ecological systems theory based propositions, six attributes of resilience as stated by Earvolino-Ramirez, protective factors in the school environment, and elements in the school environment that influenced their state of college readiness.

After each interview was transcribed the interpretive data were aligned by theoretical notion and compared across the participant pool. In terms of the theoretical notions described above and outlined in Chapter 2, each participant's experience could be linked on some level. However, more telling in regard to what schools can do to influence the development of resilience and state of college readiness positively were the following prevailing themes: Motherly influence, the desire to dispel negative stereotypes, the emphasis placed on the value of education, and the lack of involvement by administrators and counselors. An overview of each theme and its implications for school based practices will follow.

### **Prevailing Themes**

**Family Influence** A prevailing theme that was brought to light by the examination of the participant interview data is the overwhelming influence that each

participant's mother or mother-figure had on the three young men's overall attitude about the importance of academic success. Though not all three participants shared strong emotional relationships with their mother, all three participants referred to the influence of family members, particularly mother or mother figures as the single most influential person with regard to the fostering and development of resilience attributes.

**Implications for schools.** Schools have to find a way to get families, especially mothers into the school. One of the implications of this study is that mothers are highly influential with regard to fostering resilience attributes in young African-American male students. Schools have got to draw on the strength of that mother-son influence and establish school based events; such as parent academies, academic nights, and community outreach programs that will foster the relationship between school personnel and mothers. All three participants in this study highlighted the influence of their mother-figure as a motivating factor in regard to academic achievement. If schools can find a way to establish a united front with families of these young men, and exemplify a common message of support and high academic expectations, they could positively affect the nurturing of resilience in African-American males, and thus have a positive effect on academic outcomes and their overall state of college and career readiness. Epstein (1992), suggested that school administrators must take a leadership role in facilitating parent involvement in education. Epstein further outlined six major types of parental involvement that facilitators should focus on when developing a comprehensive program for effective parental involvement, these include: basic obligations of families; basic obligations for schools; involvement at the school; involvement in home learning; involvement in decision making; governance, and advocacy; and community

collaboration, (1992). One such avenue that researchers have shown to be effective in strengthening the bond between adults in the home and those in the school environment is parent academies. Curriculum based, parent education programs that offer incentives to parents for participation, such as the Parent Institute for Quality Education, have shown to have a positive effect on linking the bond between adults in the home and in the school environment and on the academic achievement of students whose parents participated in the program(Vidano & Sahafi, 2004 ). Another avenue for schools to take is to foster the motherly influence from within (Amor, Carlton, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2008). Staff member awareness trainings that emphasize building relationships, fostering a college going focus, and providing academic and social support to African-American male students could be effective in creating similar influences in the school environment to those influences provided through the mother figures in the home environment.

**Dispelling negative stereotype.** Each participant in the study cited a sense of duty to dispel the negative stereotype that each said was associated with being an African-American student at their school as a protective factor. Though negative stereotyping of any sort is viewed as a negative in society, the resilient African-American males in this study used that negative stereotyping as motivation to work harder in school. Having the desire to dispel such stereotypes is an indicator of the level of social awareness each of these individuals exhibited during their high school years. Again, the level of social awareness each exhibited was closely linked to their home influence, not that of the schools. All three participants felt as though the negative stereotyping was embedded into the school culture and exhibited by all groups in the school environment; peers, teachers, counselors and administrators.

**Implications for schools.** Schools need to be aware of this phenomenon, and seek ways to completely eliminate it from the school environment, because it affects the overall attitude African-American male students have toward school. Participants in this study were all considered to be resilient young men, who therefore, possess the ability to find motivation in negative situations. However, those students who are not as resilient may begin to foster a negative attitude about themselves, schools, the overall learning environment, and the people in it. It is important that the school environment be a place where the playing field is level for African-American male students, or at the least, this population of students is made to feel that they are on a level playing field with their peers. The participants in this study all made mention of friends who felt disenfranchised in the school environment because of their race, and thus developed negative attitudes toward school and academics overall (Ogbu, 1992b).

Negative stereotyping could be a tough element in the school environment to address because evidence of this phenomenon is not often obvious. In fact, like racism, negative stereotyping is an internal sentiment that may or may not manifest itself in the school environment regularly. The first things schools can do is make negative stereotyping something that gets discussed as something that takes place in society at large. That acknowledgement should then make it possible to examine whether and to what extent the school negatively stereotypes, this would also make it possible for educators and African-American students to consciously work against such stereotyping. An effective approach for schools is to build an environment that focuses on and emphasizes cultural proficiency. For staff members, professional development trainings that focus on social awareness and embrace the reality of cultural differences may

affectively influence the elimination of negative stereotyping. For students, presentations by staff members and community speakers that focus on those same things may also have a positive effect.

**Value of Education.** A premium was placed on education in the home environments of all three participants in the study. Each participant viewed education as a necessary component to obtaining success in life. The influential adults in each participants' life were able to instill in them the value of education as a means to achieving more than they have, and living a life without the stresses of financial worry and strain. However, as one of the participants cited, too many of his African-American male friends do not have the benefit of parents who emphasize the importance of education because the parents may not have been successful in schools themselves.

**Implications for schools.** Schools need to be aware that a premium is not placed on education in every household. Many African-American male students do not have influential adults in their homes who emphasize the value of education. This occurrence again makes the case for how influential programs that get parents involved in the school environment can be. Schools need to fill in the gaps where parents fail to make students realize that education is truly a part of their life-line. According to the data obtained in this study, schools can positively affect this phenomenon by ensuring that key staff members are having meaningful conversations regarding the value of education and the effects not being successful in schools can have on the overall success and state of college and career readiness of African-American males (Conley, 2007 ).

School leaders can communicate the value of education by creating an atmosphere that exposes students and parents to and informs them of college and career

options (Conley, 2007). College and career assessment programs exist in schools today that, if used effectively and on a continual basis, could have a positive effect on emphasizing the value of education. An example of such a program would be BRIDGES Choices Planner; this program actually assesses the career goals of students while they are in 8th grade, and creates a 4-year high school plan that aligns the students' course selection with their college and career goals (Conley, 2008). The key, however, is that this program has to be monitored and updated annually, and a counseling component should be present where one-on-one conversations and mentoring sessions take place to emphasize the plan on a personal level. This component was lacking with each of the three participants in the study. In essence, the BRIDGES program helps schools to meet the state of Texas mandate that each student have a 4-year plan for high school that emphasizes college and career readiness, however, the management of these plans by key staff members, particularly counselors and administrators, needs to be an area of focus for improvement.

**Lack of involvement by administrators and counselors.** All three resilient African-American male students in this study noted that the administrators and counselors at their school made little effort to get involved with or establish any sort of personal relationship with them. In the case of these resilient young men, the lack of involvement of these key school personnel was cited as a risk factor and influential on their motivation to perform well academically. The fact that none of them saw their counselors or administrators as influential in that regard is disturbing.

**Implications for schools.** Counselors and administrators need to re-examine their purpose in the school environment. Based on the data obtained in this study,



African-American male students look to counselors and administrators for career and life guidance. They look to this group for information on how to prepare best for their future. They recognize teachers as those school personnel responsible for providing the tools they need to be successful, and counselors and administrators as the personnel responsible for giving guidance on how to best use those tools. Counselors and administrators need to start working on getting African-American male students focused on college and career readiness early and often in their high school careers (Brofenbrenner, 1996; Conley, 2007).

School leaders can make the management of student career and college plans a mandatory component for both counselors and administrators. Again, the BRIDGES program provides a model of continuous monitoring, updating and mentoring; therefore it would be the perfect platform for these key people to stay engaged effectively with African-American male students (Brofenbrenner, 1996; Conley, 2007). School leaders could create and provide professional development sessions which outline a routine of monitoring, updating and mentoring and are all linked to the BRIDGES program assessments for each student. These sessions would not only force administrators and counselors to be more actively engaged with African-American male students, but would also serve to keep a constant emphasis on the value of education and focus on college and career readiness.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Future research needs to explore how schools can best implement awareness programs and trainings that will effectively focus on meeting the needs of these African-American male students. Researchers should examine questions regarding the types of

parenting programs that would effectively connect schools to mothers; the kinds of training that should be provided to staff members to help them heighten their cultural awareness in regard to African-American males; how do we re-define the roles of administrators and counselors to ensure they are encouraging and supporting African-American males to reach a state of college and career readiness; and finally, how can we emphasize the value of education to this population of students in a meaningful way that sparks motivation toward academic success.

### **Conclusion**

Results of this study should prompt educational leaders to re-examine the extent to which they influence academic outcomes for African-American male students.

Educational leaders need to employ programs that: foster the connection between mothers and schools because of the overall influence mothers have on the development of resilience attributes in African-American male students; emphasize the value that education has and how it influences life outcomes; foster cultural awareness and the elimination of negative stereotypes; and get counselors and administrators actively and directly involved in the college and career preparation process.

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**Appendix A**  
**Informed Consent Form**



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**PROJECT TITLE:** African American Males: A Qualitative Case Study on School Factors That Affect Resilience and College Readiness

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Leonard J. Brown from the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Houston. This research project is part of the fulfillment of a Doctoral Degree in the form of a doctoral thesis. This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Pat Holland.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will examine the characteristics of three resilient African American males, and outline the influence of schools on their resilience and state of college readiness. Consequently, the study will uncover elements grounded in the resilience and ecological systems theories that may affect the resilience of African American males. Because this study will focus a great deal on the intrinsic characteristics of the individual students, the results will provide educators with more clues on how to better prepare African American males to handle both academic and social challenges. Consequently, more strategies may arise that can help close the achievement gap between African American male students and their White counterparts. The duration of this study will be approximately four months.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of 3 subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

- Participants in the study will be asked to respond to interview questions.
- **Participants will be asked to provide the primary researcher with a copy of his high school transcript. This information will be obtained in order to confirm that the participant meets the academic criterion for participation in this study. Once this document is reviewed, it will be returned to the participant.**
- Participants should plan on 1-3 interview sessions.
- No other requirements will be asked of the participants.
- Total time commitment will be from 1-3 hours.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number/letter by the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

### RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks involved.

### BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand how schools can help African American Male students foster resilience and improve their state of college readiness.

### ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

### PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

### AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio/video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio/video tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

I agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.

I agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

I do not agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

I do not agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.

## SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to \_\_\_\_\_ my \_\_\_\_\_ satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Leonard J. Brown at 281-814-8408. I may also contact Dr. Pat Holland, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-2927].
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator Dr. Pat Holland. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Study Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**

**Human Subjects Approval**

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON  
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

March 27, 2012

Leonard Brown  
c/o Dr. Patricia E. Holland  
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Leonard Brown,

The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "African American Males: A Qualitative Case Study on School Factors That Affect Resilience and College Readiness" on February 3, 2012, according to institutional guidelines.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your proposal protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately respond to those contingencies made by the Committee, and your project has been approved. However reapplication will be required:

1. Annually
2. Prior to any change in the approved protocol
3. Upon development of the unexpected problems or unusual complications

Thus, if you will be still collecting data under this project on **February 1, 2013**, you must reapply to this Committee for approval before this date if you wish to prevent an interruption of your data collection procedures.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,



for

Dr. Scott B. Stevenson, Chair  
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: (1) All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document. If you are using a consent document that requires subject signatures, remember that signed copies must be retained for a minimum of 3 years, or 5 years for externally supported projects. Signed consents from student projects will be retained by the faculty sponsor. Faculty is responsible for retaining signed consents for their own projects; however, if the faculty leaves the university, access must be possible for UH in the event of an agency audit. (2) Research investigators will promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects and others.

Protocol Number: 12452-01

Full Review \_\_\_\_\_

Expedited Review   X  

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577  
COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

**Appendix C**

**Validation Auditor's Report**

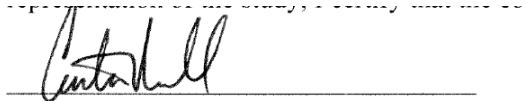
**June 2012**

The role of the auditors consisted of the following. First, the auditors examined the transcribed data from the interview protocol to check for accuracy. Secondly, the auditors examined the researcher's notes against the interview questions and transcribed response data to the interview protocol to ensure validity.

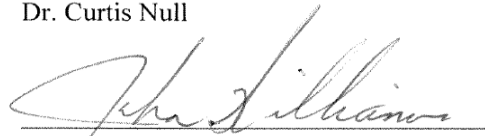
The auditors reviewed credibility of the study through evidence of debriefing notes and triangulation of the transcribed data, the audio recordings of the participant interviews, and the researcher's field notes. The auditing process consisted of two phases in order to establish trustworthiness. The first focus was on assessing confirmability. Secondly, the auditor focused on dependability.

A feedback session was held at the completion of the audit.

After checking the records for accuracy and focusing on the fairness of the representation of the study, I certify that the conclusions of the study are justified.



Dr. Curtis Null



Dr. John Williams



**Appendix D**  
**Interview Protocol**

<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Bronfenbrenner's Propositions</b>	<b>Resilience Attributes</b>	<b>Protective Factors in the school environment</b>	<b>College Readiness</b>
Who have been the special people in your life?	<b>x</b>			
Why do you consider those people special?	<b>x</b>			
Can you tell me about a significant relationship you have/had with an adult outside of your home?	<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>	
Did your parent(s) advocate for you in school related matters? How?	<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>	
Did you and your parent(s) talk about "important" things in life? Were you given the opportunity to express your thoughts during those exchanges?	<b>x</b>			
Describe how your relationship(s) with significant adults in your life has influenced your ability to:	<b>x</b>			
a. Persist during adverse situations?	<b>x</b>			
b. Socialize with other adults and peers?	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	
c. Succeed academically?	<b>x</b>			<b>x</b>
How do you define resilience?		<b>x</b>		
Do you see yourself as resilient? Why?		<b>x</b>		
Describe how you view yourself in regard to self-expectations? Self-determination?		<b>x</b>		
Describe any relationships you had that yielded encouragement and support? Who were these people, and how did they show support?	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	
How would you describe or classify your sense of humor?		<b>x</b>		
Describe what it was like being an African American male at your high school?		<b>x</b>		
How do you see yourself? What kind of man do you want to be? Do you think you will be able to achieve your goals? Why?		<b>x</b>		
What did you think about your classes? Teachers? Administrators? Peers?			<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Did your friends or peers make fun of you for doing well in school? How did you respond?		<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Did you ever think about not finishing high school? Why? What made you stick it out?		<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	
Do you feel that any adults in your school (teachers, counselors, or administrators) tried to establish a bond with you? If so, how did they go about establishing that bond? If not, why do you think that is?	<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>	
Did the adults in your school establish boundaries for behavior? How did they do that? How did having these boundaries affect you and how you felt about school?			<b>x</b>	
Do you feel that your teachers and counselors helped prepare you for life? How? What critical skills did they help you foster?			<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>

Did you feel supported/encouraged by the adults at your school? Can you describe things they did to make you feel supported/encouraged?		x	x	
Did you feel that your teachers expected you to do well in school? What made you feel they did? What made you feel they did not?			x	
Do you feel you were given opportunities to participate in meaningful activities at school? Describe such an activity and tell how that experience impacted your attitude about school?			x	
Did your parents talk to you about attending college? How important would you say your attending college was/is to your parent(s)?	x			x
How would you say your parents helped you to be prepared to attend college?	x			x
Were your parent(s) active at your school? Did they advocate for you? Did they teach you or talk to you about being a self-advocate?		x		x
What were your college and career goals when you entered high school?				x
How did your parent(s) influence those goals?				x
<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Bronfenbrenner's Propositions</b>	<b>Resilience Attributes</b>	<b>Protective Factors in the school environment</b>	<b>College Readiness</b>
Did you and your parent(s) discuss those goals?				x
How would you describe your relationship with your counselor? teachers? administrators?	x			x
Describe any influence each may have had on your high school experience? Your decision to attend college?				x
Please tell me if and how each of these groups of adults may have helped prepare you for college: Counselors, teachers, administrators?	x		x	x
Based on your experiences to date, how do you feel each could have better contributed to your preparation for college?				x
Did you take Pre-AP and AP courses throughout high school? Why did you take those courses? Why didn't you take those courses? Who was the biggest influence in you taking those courses?				x