LET OUR YOUTH SPEAK:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS WITH

MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS

JOHN W. HODGE

Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Dr. Jean Crockett, Co-Chair
Dr. Travis Twiford, Co-Chair
Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn
Dr. Carol Cash
Dr. Neil Stamm

March 31, 2009

Keywords: African-American, Resilience, Risk Factors, Protective Factors

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John W. Hodge

ABSTRACT

Resilience is a phenomenon that refers to the ability to overcome risk factors that increase the likelihood of academic or social failure. Considerable research has been conducted to determine what may enhance or hinder the ability of individuals to overcome adversity. Unfortunately, much of the research has focused primarily on factors that place individuals at greater risk of failure. Today in the United States, a number of students experience academic failure due to multiple risk factors. However, the research is clear that there are individuals referred to as resilient who are able to achieve at high levels in spite of many of the same risk factors. This heuristic phenomenological study provides insight, based on interviews with high risk, African-American, young adults, into those factors that enabled them to exhibit behaviors consistent with resilience in spite of risk factors in the home, school or community. The study helps to illuminate their challenges and the reasons for their success.

For Mama and Richelle

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the fall of 2002, Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary, Superintendent of Public Instruction for

Virginia Schools, requested that the Urban Learning and Leadership Center provide training for

schools listed in Governor Mark Warner's Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS)

initiative. PASS targeted more than 100 academically warned schools based on the results of the

Standards of Learning exams. Thirty-four of the schools were designated as PASS priority

schools based on very low performance and were encouraged to attend training during the

summer of 2003. With the governor's approval, the training was called the Governor's Urban

Learning and Leadership Institute. As Director of the Urban Learning and Leadership Center, I

was an integral part of the planning and delivery of training sessions.

I can vividly remember a comment made by a somewhat disgruntled participant. After

expressing resentment that his school was "labeled" a PASS priority school, the participant

commented; "these children can't be successful because the deck is stacked against them."

Research regarding a phenomenon called resilience suggests that this type of deficit thinking

may be partly responsible for the failure of students (Bernard, 1997). In keeping with the

metaphorical observation presented by the participant, it is not that the deck is stacked against

students; it may be that educators sometimes focus on the wrong cards. Research on resilience

illustrates that children who are born with factors that place them at risk of failure can grow into

productive citizens in spite of those factors (Werner & Smith, 1992). The perceptions of

students regarding their own resilience are the primary focus of this study.

Resilience refers to the ability to "bounce back, recover, or form a successful adaptation

in the face of obstacles and adversity" (Zunz, Turner, & Norman, 1993, p. 170). Wang, Haertel,

and Walberg (1994) helped to place the definition of resilience into an educational context by

defining it as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments

despite environmental adversities [italics added] brought out by early traits, conditions, and

experiences" (p.46). The ability to disassociate from dysfunctional environments, the ability to

exercise control over one's surroundings and feelings of self-worth contribute to a person's

resilience (Bernard, 1997; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Current achievement levels of many minority

students may be indicative of the need for educators to consider factors that might enhance the

likelihood of resilience in students.

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests representative samples of

American students in grades 4, 8 and 12. NAEP tests show a consistent gap in academic

achievement between African-American and Latino students and their Caucasian and Asian

counterparts. These data are longitudinal and include multiple subject areas. Results of the

NAEP expose the fact that in certain subject areas, African-American students are up to four

years behind students who are Caucasian or Asian by twelfth grade (Thernstrom & Thernstrom,

2003). In their data analysis, Thernstrom and Thernstrom concluded that:

> the average black and Hispanic student at the end of high school has academic skills that
>
> are at about the eighth-grade level; in fact, on most of the NAEP tests, the majority of
>
> black students in twelfth grade have scores Below Basic, while those of Hispanics look
>
> only slightly better (p.22)

The following tables display data from the National Center for Education Statistics: The

Nation's Report Card (NCES, 2003). The data presented in Table 1 show comparative reading

scores of African-American and Caucasian twelfth graders. Table 2 shows reading score

Table 1

Comparative NAEP Reading Scores of African American and Caucasian Twelfth Graders

Subject	Year	African-American Score Range Grade 12	Caucasian Score Range Grade 12	Achievement Gap Range
Reading	1992	270-275	295-300	25%-30%
Reading	1998	270-275	295-300	25%-30%
Reading	2000	265-270	290-295	25%-30%
Reading	2003	265-270	290-295	25%-30%

Note. Adapted from National Center for Education Statistics (2003). *The nation's report card.*

Table 2

Comparative NAEP Reading Scores of Hispanic Twelfth Graders and Asian Eighth Graders

Subject	Year	Asian Score Range Grade 8	Hispanic Score Range Grade 12	Achievement Gap Range
Reading	1992	265-270	275-280	5%-10%
Reading	1994	265-270	270-275	5%-10%
Reading	1998	265-270	270-275	5%-10%
Reading	2002	265-270	265-270	0%

Note. Adapted from National Center for Education Statistics (2003). *The nation's report card.*

comparisons from Asian eighth graders and Hispanic twelfth graders. The data show a

consistent gap in reading achievement scores of African-American students and their Caucasian

counterparts from 1992-2003. Perhaps more disturbing are the comparative scores of eighth

grade Asian students and their twelfth grade Hispanic counterparts that show relatively similar

scores between the two age-groups. Further, the achievement gap between African-American

and Caucasian twelfth graders is greater than the gap between Asian eighth grade students and

Hispanic twelfth graders (see Table 1 and Table 2).

The educational literature is clear that the use of research supported strategies in schools

where students have access to lower class sizes, competent teachers, and high quality

remediation services are logical solutions to achievement issues (Okpala, Smith, Jones & Ellis,

2000). However, Davis and McCaul (1990) asserted that these measures do not change the fact

that millions of children endure circumstances, beyond the scope of many current educational

interventions, which place them at risk of failure. Various factors in the home, school and

community may either help or hinder academic achievement and social adjustment (Werner &

Smith, 1992). Unfortunately, very little research and understanding from the direct perspective

of students exists regarding these factors. Resilience literature implies that this lack of

understanding and collective focus on primarily the negative factors in the lives of students may

be responsible, in part, for the failure of many children for whom interventions were designed

(Bernard, 1997). Although the gap in Table 2 is closing, it is important to note that the

comparison is between Asian 8th graders and Hispanic twelfth graders.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

This study is designed to discover the perceptions of students regarding those factors that

inhibit or contribute to their resilience. The purpose of this study is to achieve a greater

understanding of the resilience phenomenon directly from the perspective of students, determine implications for educational practice, and report findings in such a way that principals, teachers and paraprofessionals have a clearer understanding of how they may help to foster resilience in students.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The following questions guided the inquiry:

1.   To what or to whom do students attribute their ability to get through challenging circumstances?

2.   How did aspects of life in the home, school, or community help or hinder the students' social and academic success?

3.   What do participants perceive as possible ways of helping others in similar circumstances?

Phenomenology was selected as the qualitative research methodology for this study. Qualitative designs have been used in resilience studies to determine the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity and phenomena that helped or hindered their success (Colaizzi, 1978; Margalit, 2003).

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

Resilience: A dynamic internal conversion process that helps individuals overcome the impact of negative circumstances in the home, school or community (Luthar, Cicchetti, Becker, 2000)

Resiliencies: One of several internal attributes that help individuals to overcome challenging circumstances (Wolin and Wolin, 1993)

Risk factors: Psychological or environmental challenges that heighten the likelihood of

maladaptive behaviors and academic failure (Werner and Smith, 1992)

Protective Factors: A combination of external phenomena that reduce the impact of risk factors

on the life of the student (Werner and Smith, 1992)

Phenomenology: The acquisition of data through interviews focused on the lived experiences of

study participants in which the interviewer is the tool of measurement (Seidman, 1998)

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework for the Inquiry</div>

Theory is the lens through which we view a phenomenon. When one considers the

situational nature of the resilience construct and changes within individuals as they mature,

consideration of Piaget's cognitive theory of development seems logical (Wadsworth, 1979).

"Longitudinal studies that have followed high risk children to maturity find that, at each

developmental stage, there is a shifting balance between the stressful life events that heighten

children's vulnerability and the protective factors that enhance their resilience" (Werner &

Smith, 1992, p. 13). As cognitive ability is developed, so may be the resiliencies within children.

For example, a student may be much more skilled at using humor as a resiliency during

adolescence than during earlier stages of their development. Jean Piaget believed that children's

logical mental structures change with age (Driscoll, 1994). Unlike behavioral theorists,

"Piagetians view the child as a person who is not simply acted upon by the environment, but who

actively approaches his or her surroundings with an inborn capacity and drive" (Alexander,

Roodin, & Gorman, 1980, p. 56).

Studies of resilient children and youth point to protective factors that are essential to

cognitive human development (Masten, 1994; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Cognitive

development refers to the changes that occur in an individual's cognitive structures, abilities and

processes.   "Piaget's theory is familiar to most educators and has had substantial influence on

American curriculum and instruction" (Gall, Borg, Gall, 1996, p.9). The work of Piaget in

cognitive development and psychology may serve as a strong theoretical foundation for the

further study of resilience in students by educators.

Lev Vygotsky's theory on social development and its applicability to the resilience

phenomenon also warrants consideration (Vygotsky, 1978). His approach stresses the need for

researchers to study human development within multiple contexts and environments (Seráfica,

1997). "A constructivist interpretation of resilience reflects a postmodern understanding of the

construct that better accounts for cultural and contextual differences in how resilience is

expressed by individuals, families and communities" (Ungar, 2004, p. 341).

Factors that place students at risk and protective factors that buffer risks exist

simultaneously in multiple environments. These environments include: the home (Walsh, 2002),

the school (Freiberg, 1993), and the community (Frieberg, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Students are exposed to both risk and protective factors. However, this exposure results in

behaviors consistent with resilience in some students and behaviors consistent with non-

resilience in others (Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993). Risk and protective factors, as well

as behaviors consistent with resilience and non-resilience will be discussed in the Review of

Literature.

The theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 takes the viewpoints of Piaget and

Vygotsky into consideration and represents an amalgamation of commentary and research

findings expressed in the resilience literature. The figure is a hypothetical model that depicts the

existence and reciprocal nature of risk factors and protective factors in the home, school and

community. It is, therefore, an ecosystemic model that requires one to reflect on the

"interrelatedness and interdependency" between individuals and social systems within multiple

environments (Queralt, 1996, p. 17). Within each of the three environments, three factors

contribute to the development of resiliency: caring and support, high expectations, and

meaningful participation and involvement (Bernard, 1993). There are also negative risk factors

that hinder resilience in each of the three environments (Werner & Smith, 1992).

The model shows that students can be negatively pressured or positively supported by all

three of these environments simultaneously (Walker, 2001). The school environment, for

example, may include teachers who mentor students to do their very best. This mentorship could

be conceived as a protective factor (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002). However, in that same

school environment, there may be peer groups for whom academic success is not important.

This type of peer group would be considered a risk factor (Jessor, VanDenBoss, Vanderryn,

Costa, & Turbin, 1995).

In the model, multiple stimuli from various environments surround the student

represented by the circle in the center of Figure 1. The external risk and protective factors

combined with the internal resiliencies of the student result in a dynamic internal conversion

process (Rutter, 1999). This process leads to either resilient or non-resilient behaviors (Luthar,

Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). As a result of these behaviors, students follow a trajectory toward

achievement or failure (Garmezy, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992). Resilience research seeks to

identify the complexities of the interactions between internal and external risk and protective

factors in multiple contexts (Margalit, 2003). Issues involving self-efficacy and locus of

control could be a part of this conversion process (Bandura, 1984; Garmezy, 1983; Lefcourt,

1992). However, these areas of inquiry are not the primary focus of this study.

ACHIEVEMENT

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Risk Factors   Protective Factors

Internal Conversion Process

HOME   **SCHOOL**

Resilient Behaviors

Non-Resilient Behaviors

COMMUNITY

FAILURE
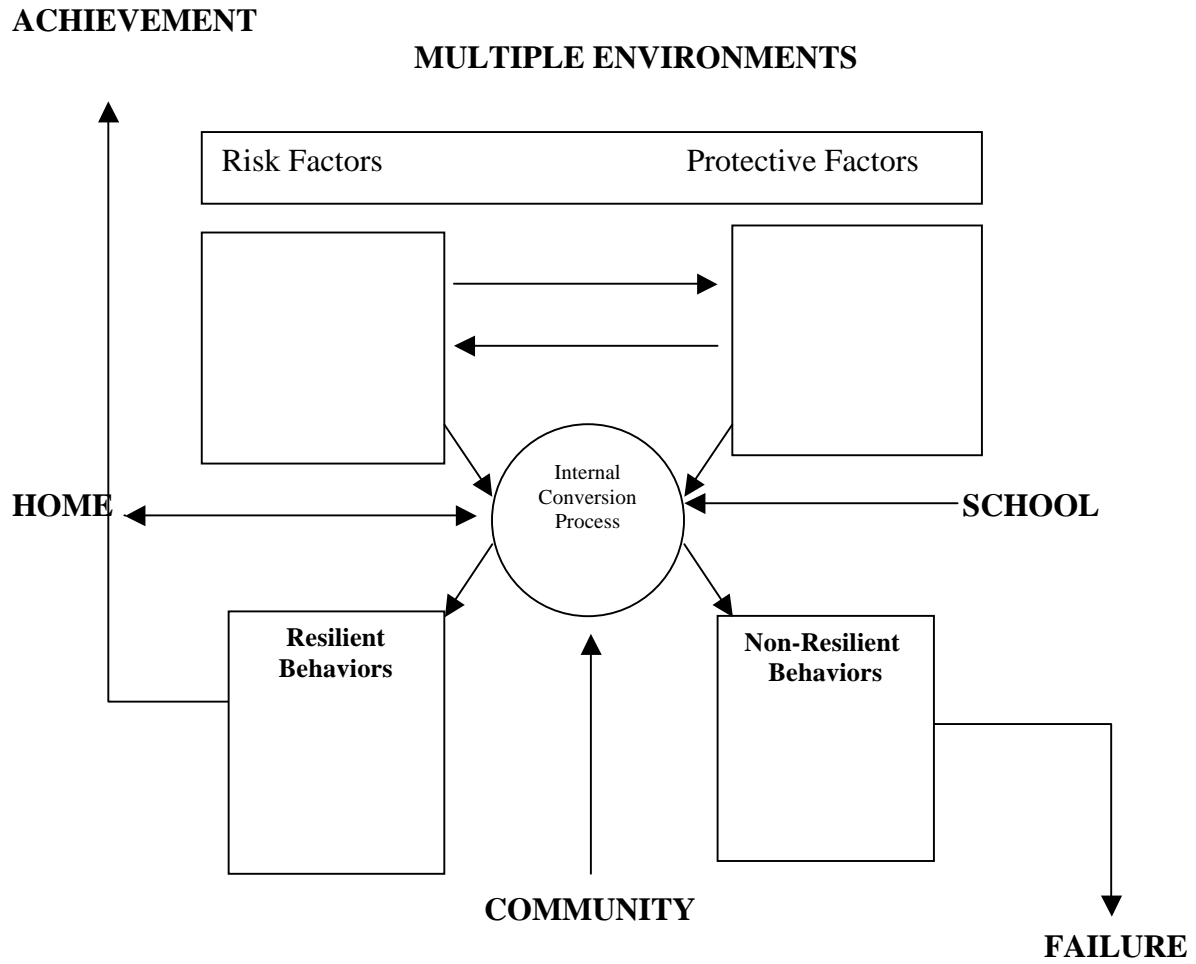
Figure 1. The dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient or non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

Overview of Methodology

The fact that resilience is a theoretical construct involving many variables makes its measurement somewhat problematic (Palmer, 1997). The myriad of factors that might place students at risk coupled with the factors that might buffer those risks may limit quantitative measures of this phenomenon due to collinearity. Resilience is not like height or weight, which are generally easy to measure. Like intelligence, the measure of resilience and the degree to which it impacts the lives of children may be relative to a variety of variables. Very few research studies of resilience have been designed specifically to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students regarding factors that helped or hindered their successful development into adulthood. For this reason, a qualitative phenomenological design structured to investigate the lives of six young adults was selected as the most appropriate methodology.

Case studies allow researchers to bring phenomena to life for readers (Gall, et al., 1996). Phenomenological research is ideal for gathering data beyond quantitative statistics on human behavior and perceptions from the point of view of individuals who have had a specific experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Wolin and Wolin, "behavioral scientists, with tests that too often miss the subtleties of our innermost thoughts and feelings, have tended to limit their inquiries to our surface behavior and our biology" (1993, p.10). Vaillant (1993) noted that:

> social scientists tend to study what they can measure rather than what really interests
> them. In this way they sometimes resemble the proverbial drunk who searched for his car
> keys, not where he lost them, but under the street lamp where the light was better. (p.
> 118)

Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to achieve a greater understanding of a phenomenon in its context by either immersion into an environment for observation or by delving deeply into the experiences of others through interviews (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). Although the phenomenology allows the participants to tell their own story, the depth and clarity of that story is dependant upon the skill of the interviewer and the design of the process (Seidman, 1998). Qualitative research designs like any other methods have limitations. However, a phenomenology using intensive, semi-structured interviews is very useful in capturing implicit and explicit details that might be missed by other research designs.

<p style="text-align:center">Limitations and Delimitations</p>

Qualitative research methods by their very nature are not intended to provide generalizable data. Instead, the burden is on the researcher to provide rich, detailed descriptions so that readers might be able to transfer relevant information to their own settings and circumstances. In this inquiry, findings were based primarily on the recollections and articulations of the participants. Specific incidents were not verified by analysis of public records or interviewing others, but rich details were provided to address the research questions.

Every study has delimitations that result from the decisions made in designing the research study. In this inquiry, all participants were African American young adults between the ages of 18-years and 22-years of age who achieved success despite the presence of specific risk factors. Their lived experiences took place in a southeastern region of the United States at the turn of the 21st century.

Catalysts of the Inquiry

I have had the privilege of working with and training thousands of educators and students across the country. When I speak to students, I am often asked why I entered the field of education. When speaking to educators, I am often asked why I remain in the field. This research project has required that I reflect on my answers to both questions. The reasons why I entered and remain in the field of education are due, in large part, to two people: my friend Chuck and a student who literally changed my life a few years ago.

Although there is a 15 year difference between the times I first met these two individuals, both have inspired me to learn more about the human ability to bounce back from challenging circumstances and to thrive in the face of adversity. The research is clear that this capacity is common in most people and the literature refers to this phenomenon as resilience ((Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Resilience theory involves the belief that the presence of protective factors in a person's life allows them to overcome adversities (Krovetz, 1999).

Charles "Chuck" Berry is one of the most brilliant, dynamic, and courageous people I have ever met. I clearly remember the day I met Chuck on the campus of my undergraduate alma mater. I was a sophomore student and Chuck was a transfer student. While driving in my car, I was listening to our campus radio station. I had never paid much attention to the station until this day, but I was captivated by the radio personality who would later become one of my best friends.

Chuck's radio show was one of the most popular in the city. Our campus radio station competed successfully with the local professional stations. Chuck's radio program was called, The Spin Cycle. Everyone loved it. The music was powerful and uplifting. On the day we met, Chuck announced that the radio station was looking for volunteers to participate in a fund-raiser.

He stated further that those interested should come to the station immediately. I was among the first on campus to show up at the station. When I walked into the entrance, I expected to meet a tall, athletic person. On the radio, Chuck often talked about playing basketball. What I saw changed my life forever.

I walked into the station and told the student-receptionist that I wanted to volunteer. She told me that I needed to talk to Chuck. I noticed a wheelchair in the reception area, but I never imagined that it belonged to the person with the most popular radio program on campus. I heard a strange clicking noise followed by a dull thump on the floor. The noise and thump repeated several times until Chuck arrived in the reception area. The clicking noise I heard was the sound of his crutches. The thump that followed was the sound of Chuck's one prosthetic leg. When he entered the room, I stood and hoped that my facial expression had not revealed my shock. Chuck walked over to where I was standing, extended his hand and immediately cracked a joke. He told me that breathing was permissible in the station. His level of comfort with my shock made me feel at ease. After this first encounter, I continued to visit the station often. This was over 17 years ago and we continue to be the best of friends.

I could not imagine what caused Chuck's disability. At first glance, Chuck appeared to be a double-amputee or victim of a violent act. There was no sign of a leg on the left side of his body. I saw no evidence of a femur or thigh-bone. Chuck's left pant leg of his shorts was neatly tucked behind his belt. His right leg had a prosthetic lower-leg and foot, which were attached to the lower portion of his knee by a device that appeared to be a knee-pad of some kind. The prosthesis protruded downward from his shorts. His entire tibia or lower-leg was missing. Chuck was very creative in the way he maneuvered from his crutches to his wheelchair. He carried his crutches with him everywhere to allow him access to areas out of the reach of the

wheelchair. The radio station was a perfect example of such an area. The wheelchair was too bulky for the small broadcasting booths. Chuck overcame this potential handicap by transferring from his wheelchair to crutches when working at the station. This was a skill he had learned earlier in life.

Chuck grew up in New Jersey and lived a life free of a disability until the age of 14. As an adolescent, Chuck and his brothers would frequently jump onto cargo trains as they moved throughout the city from place to place. The trains were a popular mode of transportation for many children in Chuck's neighborhood.   Although there were signs that clearly indicated the illegality and danger of this activity, Chuck used the trains as transportation from the age of 10 until the day of his tragic accident.

On the morning of the accident, Chuck and his brothers awoke with the intent to go into town to purchase a Father's Day gift. Chuck's father always made time for his sons despite his extremely busy schedule. His children appreciated his dedication and wanted to make Father's Day a very special day. Chuck and his brothers went to the train tracks as they had done many times before. Chuck's older brother, Jeff, was the first to hop onto the train. He turned and assisted his younger brother Kevin who then attempted to help Chuck get aboard the train. As he attempted to join his brothers, Chuck slipped below the train and his legs were immediately severed by its moving wheels. Chuck's brothers believed he would die at the scene due to the incredible amount of blood he lost. Emergency technicians arrived immediately and rushed Chuck to the hospital for surgery. The result of the surgery left Chuck with a partial right leg ending just beyond the knee and no left leg. The left leg was severed only inches from his pelvic region.

After hearing his story, I felt that life had been unfair to Chuck. However, I learned very early in our friendship that it was almost impossible to be unhappy in his presence. He has always possessed the ability to offer a positive perspective to any situation. Chuck has shared with those closest to him that he has sometimes felt thankful for his accident. The accident, the rehabilitation process and the many challenges he has faced have given him tremendous self-confidence and love for life. But, according to Chuck, he is most thankful to his many teachers who instilled in him the ability to overcome life's obstacles. My experience with Chuck inspired me to enter the field of education, but what keeps me in the field is a little boy who is now in high school.

The school in which I worked from 1999 to 2004 was designed to target students with specified social risk factors and equip them with the academic and social skills needed for success in society. In order to be admitted to our school, a student had to be entering third grade and qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Students from foster homes or single-parent homes were given preference over students from two-parent households. Each day students entered our doors, they are welcomed with a firm handshake and a smile from a caring adult. Many students brought with them tremendous support needs.

Whether it is substance abuse in the home, imprisoned parents, or neglect, many of our students came from difficult circumstances. Fridays were particularly challenging days for us, especially with our younger students who feared the unknown perils many weekends brought into their lives. Our staff came to work mentally prepared every Monday to help students cope with their experiences.

I thought I had heard it all until the morning Robert came to school looking a bit more overwhelmed than usual. When asked what was bothering him, Robert replied that his

mother would not wake up over the weekend. Literally moments later, the school received a

phone call from a neighbor indicating that Robert's mother had been found dead in her bedroom

and that Robert could not be found. The neighbor was relieved to find out Robert had come to

school. We later discovered that Robert, an 8 year old, found his mother unconscious on Friday

night and spent the entire weekend periodically attempting to wake her. Robert fed himself daily

and completed all of his homework. He did not realize his mother had passed away.

On Monday morning, Robert woke up, tried to wake his mother, told her to take a bath,

dressed himself and came to school. It is difficult for me to think about this story without

shedding tears of sorrow and joy. I feel sorrow that Robert lost his mother, but I am joyful that

he passed his Virginia Standards of Learning tests that year and was promoted to the fourth

grade. All too often, circumstances outside the school create challenges in the classroom. But in

Robert's case, he was able to achieve in spite of tragedy.

<center>Significance of the Study</center>

The lessons learned from Chuck and Robert guide and inspire my efforts as an

educational leader to find out more about what or to whom specific individuals attribute their

ability to overcome obstacles. The literature is clear that students can achieve if given social and

academic support structures (Mehan, Villanueava, Hubbard, Lintz, Okamoto, 1996). Support

structures are referred to in the resilience literature as protective factors (Bernard, 1991).

Protective factors coupled with high expectations may be the key to helping students at risk of

school failure achieve at high levels despite the presence of multiple risks (Bernard, 1993).

Research in resilience may offer educators alternative lenses through which to view the potential

success of students (Bernard, 1991).

In light of available achievement data, the ongoing search for new and better ways in which to educate children and a willingness to change is what Goodlad (1997) might consider a *moral imperative* [italics added] for the educational leader. Fullan (1993) adds clarity to this moral imperative with a basic message: "each and every educator must strive to be an effective change agent" (p.13). According to Goodlad, "education is a handy virtue to promulgate when the obligation to become educated falls on another, as is the case when we set educational goals for the young and ignore what all of us must do to ensure their attainment" (p. 177). The investigation of new areas of educational practice that might improve pedagogy and, thus, raise the academic achievement of children at risk of failure is the moral responsibility of today's educational leader. Resilience is such an area (Bernard, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Although there has been a substantial body of research in the area of resilience and its role in rehabilitation, information on the topic and its potential applicability to education has not reached many mainstream classroom teachers or building leaders, many of whom continue to allow circumstances to justify academic failure. This area of inquiry suggests that educators must begin to look at students in terms of their assets and high academic potential, rather than their risk factors (Bernard, 1993). To do otherwise may mean that far too many students will experience unnecessary failure in our schools (Boyd, 1991).

Perhaps the translated words of Dante Alighieri aptly describe the plight of children destined to attend schools where the focus on their resilience is nonexistent and where risk factors are used to justify failure; *abandon all hope, ye who enter here* (as cited in Fergusson, 1953).

Organization of the Research Document

Chapter 1 has been an executive summary of the proposed area of inquiry. This chapter was designed to serve as an introduction to the resilience phenomenon and justify further study. Chapter two, the literature review, explores commentary and empirical research in this area of inquiry. Chapter three provides a discussion of phenomenological research and its applicability to this study. This chapter also provides the rationale for the selected methodology, details of the study sample and a plan for data collection and management. Chapter four presents findings based on the lived experiences of the participants in the study and recommendations, from the perspective of the participants, on how adults can help children in similar circumstances. Finally, chapter five provides relevant themes, a discussion of findings and implications for educational leadership.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom

lies in their simplification. (Fabing & Marr, 1937)

In Chapter two, the recent history of educational reform in America following *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 is briefly discussed. Secondly, there is a brief discussion of increased accountability for student achievement, current levels of achievement, and family income for diverse populations of students in the United States according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In addition, a conceptual framework developed by leading researchers in the field and a theoretical model representing the function of resiliencies are presented. Next, a discussion of semantics in resilience literature is shared followed by a brief discussion of related topics including self-efficacy and locus of control. Finally, research findings regarding resilience in the home, school and community are analyzed.

Relevant literature searches of psychological, educational, and sociological abstracts were conducted both manually and via a variety of research databases. Databases included: Questia, E-library, ProQuest, PsycInfo and Education Full-Text. These searches uncovered a wealth of information. However, due to the breadth of research on resilience and the scope of the present study, the literature review focused mainly on aspects that may be within the educator's sphere of influence. Criteria for the review of literature limited inclusion of studies primarily to those that: (a) discussed resilience in minority or low socio-economic populations, or (b) discussed resilience within the context of the home, school or community.

Educational Reform and Student Achievement

A *Nation at Risk* (1983), a report presented by the National Commission on Excellence in

Education to the United States public, indicated that American students ranked comparatively

low to students from other industrialized countries in several academic areas. Further, it

addressed the disproportionate academic failure of poor and minority students. The report

created a sense of urgency in the U.S. by stating that if an unfriendly foreign power had

attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that existed at that time,

the American public might have considered it an act of war (Gross & Gross, 1985). Since the

establishment of the Title I Compensatory Education Program of 1965, there has been a

continuous effort in the United States to reduce achievement gaps between high-poverty students

and their more privileged peers (McDill & Natriello, 1998).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law on January 8, 2001. The Act

is a reform of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This legislation made

sweeping changes to the role of the federal government in educating children and is specifically

designed to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more

affluent and less challenged peers. The law requires states to implement statewide accountability

systems covering all public school students. Assessment results must be categorized and

disaggregated according to low socio-economic status, disabilities, race, and limited English

proficiency. The legislation refers to these reporting categories as subgroups.

The study of differences in academic achievement between diverse populations has a long

history (Hedges & Nowell, 1999). However, the level of accountability now facing public

education may be unparalleled. Throughout the United States prior to NCLB, efforts made by

public schools to close the achievement gap between ethnic and racial minority students and

Caucasian students were largely unsuccessful and differences persisted at all academic levels (Schwartz, 2001). In addition, educational opportunities and instructional strategies provided in the general educational setting for special education students did not produce desired outcomes (Zigmond, et al., 1995).

The public reporting of comparative achievement scores is new in many locations and has already had an influence on public perceptions of education. Ohio, for example, released its student performance data by race and ethnicity for the first time in 2002 (Gehring, 2002). The data showed that only 11% of African Americans passed all five tests on the state proficiency exam, compared with 43% of Caucasian students (Gehring, 2002). This represented an achievement gap of 32% and the supposition of gross inequities in public schools.

Many educators point to disproportionate support structures and a lack of basic resources as possible reasons for such large gaps in achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hanushek, 1996). However, other sources indicate that these factors may be only part of the cause. Mathematics, for example, has been an area in which significant reform efforts have been directed. Mathematics has received more funding in school reform efforts than any other subject (Lewis, 2002). Still, according to Lewis, disaggregated results of 8th grade mathematics scores from 1990 until 2002 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that no state reduced the achievement gap between Caucasian and African-American students or between students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch and those who were not.

"Equity is one of the foundational values of public education and one of the hardest to achieve" (Hill, Pierce & Guthrie, 1997, p. 168). While there is no singular approach that leads to improved achievement for all groups, data seem to indicate that we cannot close the gap through additional funding alone. School funding and its relationship to student achievement have been

vigorously debated for over 25 years. However, student achievement seems unrelated to merely the amount of money available for resources in schools (Hanushek, 1996).

In the United States, most of the children who are unsuccessful in school are minority children from poor families, many of whom have limited proficiency in English (McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998). Approximately one-third of students in the United States are considered educationally disadvantaged or at risk of school failure (Pallas, Natriello & McDill, 1989). The majority of these students live in urban communities with the worst social and economic conditions (Cuban, 1989; Hodgkinson, 1991; Peng, Wang & Walberg, 1992). Impoverished students attending inner-city schools are most at risk of failure (Boyd, 1991).

In addition to race and the condition of the communities in which students live, family income is a consistent predictor of academic success (Edelman, 1987). The collective home incomes and family compositions within neighborhoods are indicative of the resources available to children, and higher poverty often translates into less capital for children and their development (Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1999).

The resilience literature is clear that poverty in the home may place students at risk of academic failure and may therefore be a risk factor (Werner & Smith, 1992) The data in Table 3 presents the percentages of American families living below the poverty level according to race-ethnicity (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The data in Table 4 presents NAEP Reading scores for 12th grade Caucasian, Asian, Hispanic and African-American students respectively (National Center for Education Statistics). These data may indicate that achievement is generally higher for students whose families live above the poverty level. For example, the 1998 NAEP reading scores for 12th grade African-American and Hispanic students are lower

Table 3

Percentage of U.S. Families Living in Poverty by Race/Ethnicity

Year	Caucasian	Asian	Hispanic	African-American
2001	8.1%	8.1%	20.2%	21.4%
1998	8.9%	11.4%	24.3%	24.7%
1995	9.6%	13.0%	29.2%	28.5%

Note. Data compiled from the National Center for Education Statistics (2003).

Table 4

NAEP Reading Scale Scores by Race/Ethnicity

Year	Caucasian	Asian	Hispanic	African-American
2002	292	286	273	267
1998	297	287	275	269
1994	293	278	270	265

Note. Date compiled from the National Center for Education Statistics (2003).

than Caucasian and Asian students. However, the percentage of African-American and Hispanic

families living in poverty is higher than that of Caucasian and Asian populations.

Fullan (1993) reminds the educational leader that paradigms, programs and educational

reform efforts of the past 30 years have resulted in the academic failure of many students. These

failures, along with increased accountability at the federal, state and local levels, require ongoing

assessment and change in schools. The study of resilience and its applicability to educational

reform and student achievement represents a change in the way many view the academic

potential of students (Bernard, 1991). Principle-centered leaders "realize that behavior and

potential are two different things" (Covey, 1992, p. 35). "We must, therefore, seek to believe in

the unseen potential. This creates a climate for growth and opportunity" (p. 35). Resilience

literature may serve as a roadmap for understanding the unseen potential of students who

traditionally fail in our schools.

<div align="center">An Understanding of Resilience</div>

Resilience research emerged primarily from the study of risk in psychiatry and

developmental psychology (Walker, 2001). One of the main foci of more recent research in

resilience is to target educational practices which recognize and enhance internal characteristics

in students that foster success (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1994). The focus on primarily the

factors that foster success represents a paradigm shift in the study of resilience (Bernard, 1997;

Leffert. et al., 1998).

Risk and Resilience in the Social Sciences

Developmental psychopathology, psychology, sociology and anthropology are areas in

which the study of resilience has been widely conducted (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Unfortunately,

much of the prior research has caused the collective viewpoints of practitioners in these fields to

be "shaped by the pervasive bias toward problems and maladjustment" (p.12). The orientation

and bias toward risk factors "tends to dominate theory, research and practice and has been

traditionally used to plan, organize and implement prevention policies, programs, and practices"

(Leffert et al., 1998).

Bernard (1991) asserted that this bias is a problem-focused approach that has had a long

history in the social and behavioral sciences. The result is that many children in schools have

been permanently labeled as at-risk. Students with learning disabilities are particularly

susceptible to the negative impact of educators who focus more on students' limitations than

their high potential (Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991). This may be particularly damaging to

African-American students who are generally overrepresented in special education classes

(Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002).

The term "at risk" became a part of our educational vocabulary in the United States in the

early 1980s (Margonis, 1992). This diagnostic label originated in the field of medicine and was

reconceptualized by the educational community in terms of the academic achievement of

students (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985). A definition found in resilience research states that

students who are at risk include those who, *on the basis of several risk factors* [italics added], are

unlikely to graduate from high school (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989).

Although the identification of risk factors is a logical step in efforts to improve the lives

of students, it is essential that practitioners use this information to develop specific action steps

designed to negate the impact of multiple risk factors (Bernard, 1991; Gibbs & Bennett, 1990;

Wolin & Wolin, 1993). The process of translating negative risk factors into positive action steps

was presented by Gibbs and Bennett (1990). Positive actions steps are context specific and may

represent internal phenomena summoned by the individual when facing risk factors or external

phenomena that assist the individual to overcome risk factors.

The internal phenomena that help students overcome risks and challenges have been

described as resiliencies (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). These resiliencies refer to one of several

characteristics that enable the individual to overcome adversity. Resiliencies and other

phenomena that negate the effects of risk factors are also called protective factors (Garmezy,

1983). The function of protective factors in the resilience literature is discussed later in this

review.

<p align="center">Conceptual Frameworks for Understanding Resilience</p>

Wolin and Wolin (1993) provided a conceptual framework for the internal resilience

attributes of human beings. A mandala is used to depict the seven resiliencies. Within the

mandala, seven resiliencies form a *"protective ring"* [italics added] around the inner circled

labeled self (p.21). This model depicts how resiliencies act as protective factors. According to

Wolin and Wolin, the resiliencies are fluid characteristics and become more or less prevalent in

different situations. Additionally, resiliencies may change with time.

Developed from the Wolin and Wolin (1993) mandala, Figure 3 attempts to capture: (a)

the school environment, (b) the risk factors that directly surround the student, (c) the social

challenges of the child as a result of the risk factors, (d) the potential impact of resiliencies that,

when supported by school interventions, might help to reshape the imperfections of the student

in spite of risk factors.   In this model, the school is represented by the box. The interventions of

the school are represented by the arrows coming from each corner of the box. The risk factors

are represented by the shaded area inside the box. The misshaped figure represents the student.

The arrows pointing outward from the student in the center represent the resiliencies that, when

supported by proper interventions, act to reshape the student in spite of risks. Although the

model represents the school environment, the function of the resiliencies remains present, to

varying degrees, within all social environments including the home, school and community

(Wolin & Wolin, 1993).
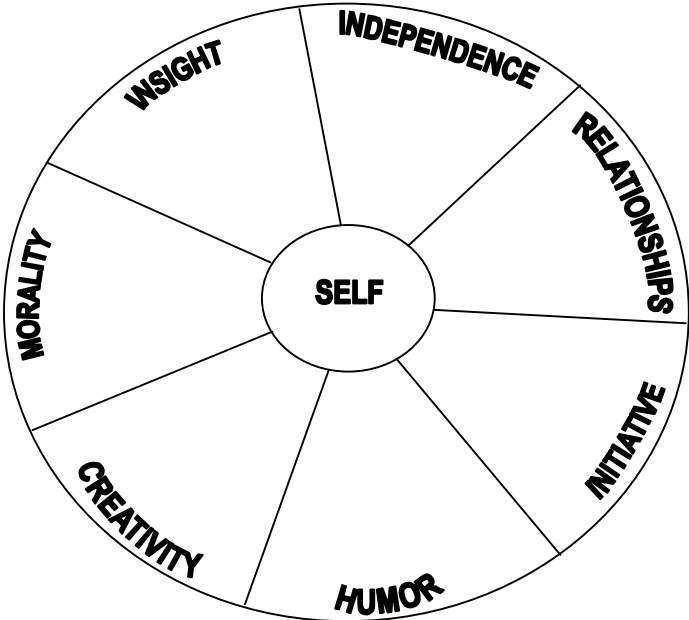
Figure 2. The resiliency Mandela shows how resiliencies surround and protect the individual.
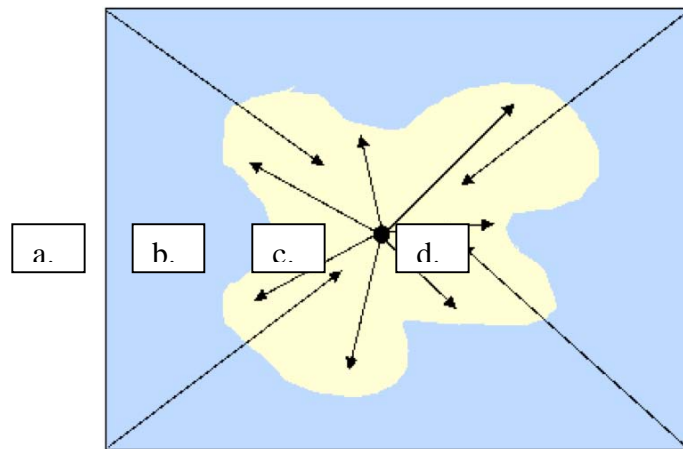
Figure 3. Resiliencies help to positively shape the individual despite the opposing force of risk factors.

The Semantics of Resilience

"Researchers have largely avoided the thorny issue of definitional ambiguity in the resilience construct" (Ungar, 2004, p. 347). Collective agreement among research theorists on definitions in resilience literature has been a primary challenge (Richman & Bowen, 1997). Issues regarding the number and types of the internal attributes that act as resiliencies have been liberally described.

Consider the definitions presented in Table 5 and Table 6. The definitions are not presented verbatim in every case. Instead, they present the essence of the definitions presented by the authors. Careful analysis of the definitions of resilience attributes articulated by Bernard (1991) and Wolin & Wolin (1993) reveals that the terms are somewhat synonymous.   Take, for example, the definition of the term social-competence articulated by Bernard (1991), which refers to the ability to elicit positive responses from others and establish positive relationships. This definition appears very close in meaning to the terms: relationships and insight articulated by Wolin and Wolin (1993). The Wolins' term, relationships, refers to positive sharing ties to others; insight refers to the ability to ask difficult questions and give honest answers (1993). Both terms appear to come very close to the definition of social-competence presented by Bernard (1991).

Table 5

Bernard's Attributes of Resilient Children

Terms	Definitions
Social-competence	The ability to elicit positive responses from others and to establish positive relationships
Problem Solving Skills	The ability to plan, resourcefulness and internal locus of control
Autonomy	The ability to act independently and with a sense of one's own identity
Sense of Purpose	Having educational aspirations, goals, determination, and a positive outlook

Note. From *Fostering Resilience in kids: Protective factors in the family, school and community*, by B. Bernard, 1991Portland, OR: Western

Regional Center for Drug Free Schools and Communities.

Table 6

The Wolins' Attributes of Resilient Children (Wolin & Wolin, 1993)

Terms	Definitions
Insight	The ability to ask difficult questions and to give honest answers
Independence	The establishment of boundaries between self and troubled parents
Relationships	Positive, sharing ties to others
Initiative	The ability to challenge oneself and take charge of difficult situations
Creativity	Looking at chaotic circumstances through positive lenses
Humor	Finding the humor in otherwise tragic events
Morality	The hope for positive outcomes for oneself and others

Note. From *The resilient self: How survivors of troubled families rise above adversity*, by S. Wolin and J. Wolin, 1993, New York: Vallard.

In many ways, the resiliencies described by Wolin and Wolin (1993) demonstrate the resiliencies presented by Bernard (1991). For example, social-competence can be demonstrated by establishing relationships and having insight. Problem solving skills, by definition, can be demonstrated through creativity, initiative or humor. Similarly, autonomy can be demonstrated by independence; and morality, by definition, may demonstrate a sense of purpose for self and others. Although there is variety among researchers regarding the exact terminology of resiliencies, the literature is consistent in articulating that various internal attributes tend to lead to positive behaviors consistent with resilience as displayed in Figure 4 (Bernard, 1997; Wolin & Wolin, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992).   Figure 4 is a compilation of resilience terminology.

Alva (1991) used the term academic invulnerability to describe resilience in students. These students "sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school, and ultimately dropping out of school" (p.19). Based on empirical studies in human development, The Search Institute (2003) developed an internal and external framework of 40 developmental assets that heighten the likelihood of academic and social success (Leffert et al., 1998). These assets include love in the home, a caring school climate and communities that value youth. Other assets include: a sense of purpose, interpersonal competence and a sense of power over circumstances.
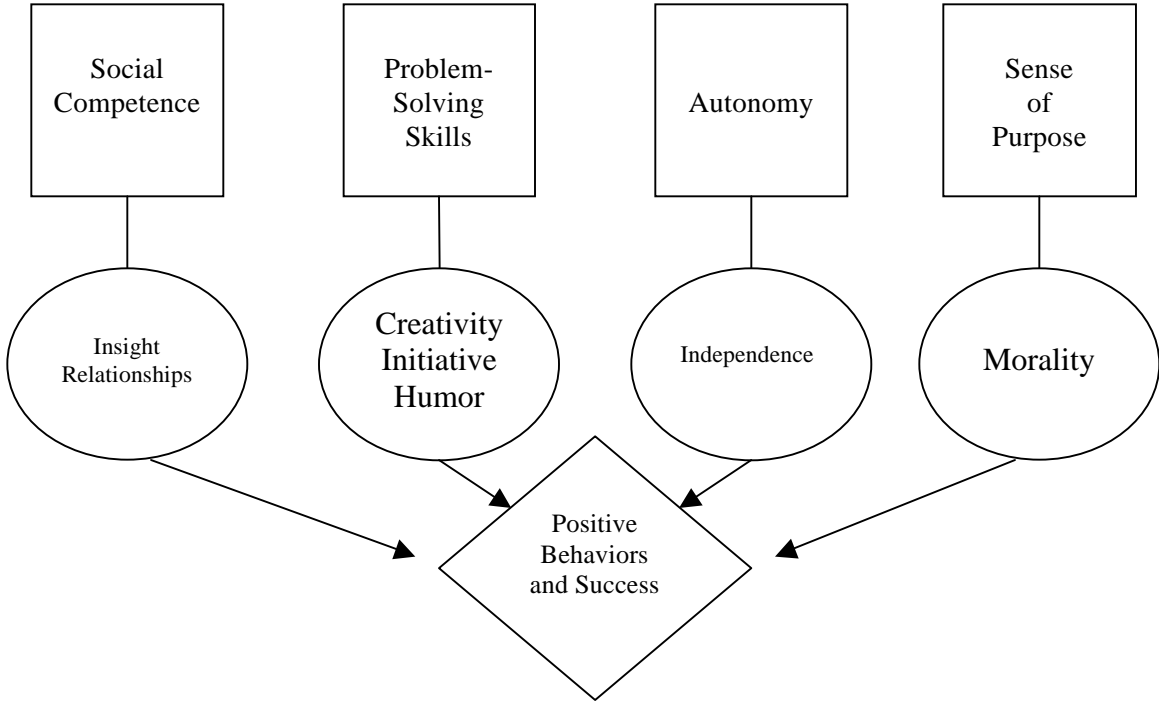
Figure 4. Several resilience factors in the literature lead to positive behaviors and success.

(Bernard, 1991; Wolin & Wolin, 1993)

Resilience: Trait, Process or Outcome.

There are inconsistencies in the usage of the term resilience in the literature. Researchers seem to disagree on whether the term resilience refers to a trait, a process, or an outcome (Glantz & Sloboda, 1999). Garmezy (1993) referred to resilience as a capacity, while Rutter (1990) defined it in terms of positive outcomes. Wolin and Wolin (1993) define resilience in terms of seven traits that "tend to cluster by personality type" (p. 6). Resilience has been used as an umbrella term by being correlated to almost all internal human phenomena that lead to successful outcomes (Kumpfer, 1999). However, recent researchers have added clarity to the resilience construct by defining it as a dynamic process involving a perpetual interplay between internal characteristics of the individual and external characteristics of the environment (Luthar, Cichetti, Becker, 2000). By inferring the psychological, physiological and sociological nature of the resilience construct, this definition takes into account the individuality of each person along with the importance of environmental context. In so doing, linkages between the resilience literature, and the concepts of locus of control and self-efficacy become less obfuscatory.

Links to Locus of Control and Self Efficacy

Locus of control refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the causes of outcomes (Lefcourt, 1992). According to Lefcourt, people who believe that circumstances are beyond their control are referred to in the literature as externals. Conversely, individuals who view themselves as completely responsible for their circumstances are referred to as internals (1992).

The Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS) reported perceived control as the key variable in the comparatively low achievement of students in predominately Black schools (Coleman, et al., 1966).

One view in subsequent control literature was that African-American students were more external than Caucasian students (Dyal, 1984). This external belief system found in African-American students could be a catalyst for the development of resilience in African-American children via the implementation of school programs and procedures designed to increase the number of external protective factors in the life of the student. Available disaggregated achievement data indicate that such measures may warrant consideration (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003)

It can be said with some confidence that self-efficacy is critical to a student's resilience (Martin, 2002). The internal beliefs of individuals manifest themselves externally (Bandura, 1986). If a child has a negative internal belief system, the result may be negative behaviors and negative results. Conversely, a positive outlook may result in positive behaviors and successful outcomes. Self-efficacy theorists assert that one's beliefs regarding the ability to achieve specific goals serve as powerful determinants of behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1997). These outcomes and behaviors may be characterized by those most consistent with resilience and those most consistent with non-resilience or risk (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Behaviors consistent with resilience include high academic achievement and the ability to function successfully in society (Werner & Smith, 1992). Behaviors consistent with non-resilience include failure in school, truancy, crime, and other maladaptive behaviors (Werner & Smith, 1992). Self-efficacy differentiates those who achieve from those who fail due to challenging circumstances. In school, for example, the beliefs that students develop about their

own academic abilities help to determine the actions they take in the classroom (Pajares &

Valiante, 1997).

Like perceptions of locus of control, self-efficacy beliefs may also predict academic

performance for students (Bandura, 1984). Self-efficacy affects what students do by influencing

the choices they make and how hard they exert themselves in the face of adversity (Pajares &

Valiant, 1997). Similarly, resiliencies such as social competence (Bernard, 1991), problem

solving skills (Bernard, 1991), sense of purpose (Bernard, 1991), initiative (Wolin & Wolin,

1993), creativity (Wolin & Wolin, 1993) and humor (Wolin & Wolin, 1993) are attributes

mentioned in resilience literature that may help to facilitate high levels of achievement in

students despite adversity. When students have confidence in their capabilities, high

achievement is more likely (Pajares & Valient, 1997). Like the resilience phenomenon, positive

beliefs regarding one's self-efficacy and an internal locus of control function as protective

factors which may buffer the impact of a variety of risk factors (Bandura, 1997; Chubb, Fertman

& Ross, 1997).

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

The relationship between risk factors and protective factors is "characteristically chaotic,

complex, relative, and contextual" (Ungar, 2004, p. 341). Risk factors refer to psychological,

biological, cognitive, or environmental conditions that may obstruct desired development in

children and cause a greater degree of vulnerability (Bernard, 1991; Rutter, 1987; Werner &

Smith, 1992). These factors are variables that lead directly to pathology and maladjustment

(Rutter, 1987). Such factors are relevant to educators in that there may be a positive correlation

between the number of risk factors and the propensity for self-destructive behavior (Gibbs &

Bennett, 1990).

Risk factors may arise from a variety of environments or contexts including homes, schools and communities (Bernard, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Risk factors may also emerge from the actions and beliefs of the child. For example, if a student believes that school is not important and has low attendance, the low attendance may become a risk factor. In other words, the low attendance rate might heighten the likelihood of failure. Given the variety of adverse circumstances that place youth at risk, context specific knowledge of processes that cause resilience in students is needed (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

Protective factors refer to characteristics that buffer or moderate the effect of risk (Garmezy, 1983; Jessor, Van Den Boss, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, M.S., 1995). Risk factors and protective factors interact perpetually from birth to adulthood (Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1992). The identification of protective factors that exist for the resilient child but are missing from the child deemed non-resilient is a basis for resilience research (Krovetz, 1999).

Protective factors are variables that work interdependently to shield children from the effects of negative environments (Rutter, 1987). Jessor, et al. assert that protective factors exist within internal and external clusters (1995). The internal cluster includes individual attitudes toward social deviance and self-perception. External clusters include characteristics of the family, home, and peer group. These clusters can reverse negative predictors of academic and social success by buffering the potential effects of the predictors (Rae-Grant, Thomas, Offord, & Boyle, 1988). For example, a child's intolerance toward social deviance may buffer the effects of a peer-group in which social-deviance is the norm.

Masten and Garmezy (1985) categorized protective variables into three areas that include characteristics of the individual, supportive relationships within the family, and supportive entities outside the family. Characteristics of the individual may represent an internal cluster

while supportive relationships and supportive entities may represent external clusters as defined

by (Jessor et al., 1995). Resilience research seeks answers to that which might tip the balance

between risk factors and protective factors (Gibbs & Bennett, 1990).

Educational policies and procedures should be designed to increase protective factors and

improve the students' perceptions and attitudes about school (Alva, 1991). Students at low risk

of academic failure experience greater satisfaction with their school than high risk students

(Reyes & Jason, 1993). Student recognition for involvement in conventional activities with the

school, families, or other extracurricular community outlets serves as a protective factor against

antisocial behavior (Jessor, et al., Rae-Grant, et al, 1989).

The Link to Education

The applicability of the study of resilience to the field of education hinges on the

supposition that many factors that make resilient behaviors more likely than non-resilient

behaviors are alterable (Bernard, 1993; Gordon & Song, 1994; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

These alterable factors include the resilience attributes articulated by Bernard (1991) and Wolin

& Wolin (1993). Other alterable factors include the positive use of time, school practices and

policies (McMillan & Reed, 1994).

Among the alterable school practices and policies, the classroom learning environment

has been consistently suggested as an important variable in ensuring the success of students

regardless of their risk factors (Pierce, 1994). In this way, the classroom environment could be

considered a potential protective factor. Additionally, the teacher is an important source in

helping students shape beliefs about their own ability to achieve regardless of external risk

factors (Pajares & Valiant, 1997). Thus, the actions of the teacher may serve as a protective

factor for the student (Bernard, 1991; Wolin & Wolin, 1993; Pajares & Valiant, 1997).

However, the most significant protective factor of resilient students is a basic, trusting, healthy relationship with an adult in the home, school or community (Werner, 1996).

Despite the prevalence of deficit-based literature on the factors which contribute to academic failure among minority children, limited attention has been given to those factors that promote educational achievement (Barbarin, 1993; Bowman & Howard, 1985). According to Luthar, Doernberger and Zigler (1993), few studies have been completed regarding resilience in urban minorities, despite numerous risk factors prevalent in these populations. Many research studies of resilience have been primarily longitudinal and epidemiological (Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1992).

<div align="center">A Survey of Resilience Research Findings</div>

Research analyzed for the purposes of this study were selected based on their relevance and potential applicability to the experiences of the participants. In this section, a discussion of a landmark study regarded by many as the foundational study on resilience will be presented. Next, an analysis of resilience within the contexts of the home, school and community will be shared. Following the analysis of studies, the methodologies and procedures used in the present study will be outlined and presented in Chapter 3.

Perhaps the most recognized study in the resilience literature is the Kauai longitudinal study conducted by Emmy E. Werner and Ruth S. Smith. The study began with a cohort of 837 children born in 1955 on the island of Kauai, the western-most point of the United States. A mixture of ethnic groups was represented in the sampling including: Japanese, Pilipino, and Hawaiian children.

The primary objectives of this longitudinal study were: (a) to document the lives of a cohort of students from birth through adulthood in a natural history fashion, and (b) to assess the

long-term consequences of multiple risk factors on the individuals' development and adaptation to life. The study monitored the impact of a variety of biological and psychological risk factors, stressful life events, and protective factors on the lives of the cohort at the following stages: (a) from birth to age 2, (b) from age 2 to 10 years, (c) from age 10 to 18 years, (d) from age 18 to 32 years, and (e) the ages of 31 to 32 years. Various qualitative and quantitative methods were used at each reporting stage. The results of the study were reported in a series of books including: *The Children of Kauai* (Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971), *Kauai's Children Come of Age* (Werner & Smith, 1977), *Vulnerable but Invincible* (Werner & Smith, 1989) and the present book *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood* (Werner & Smith, 1992). This final book was selected for analysis due to its reporting of cumulative data from the beginning until the end of the longitudinal study.

Data presented by Werner and Smith (1992) sparked interest in this area of inquiry. One out of every three members of the cohort they studied experienced moderate to severe degrees of perinatal stress, grew up in chronic poverty, and were reared by parents with little or no formal education. However, 33% of this subpopulation developed into competent, confident and caring young adults, despite multiple risk factors. Ninety-seven percent of the 1955 cohort graduated from high school. Compared with the national high school graduation rate, this was remarkable. The study further indicated that as the number of stressful life events increased, more protective factors were needed to ensure positive developmental outcomes in the children.

Werner and Smith (1992) presented data on 332 fewer members than the original cohort (N = 505). This represented 82% of the surviving 614 members of the cohort. Methodologies included structured interviews composed of 83 questions and questionnaires on work, marriage, and family life. Additionally, participants completed the Emotionality Activity Sociability

Temperament Survey for Adults and the Rotter's Locus of Control Scale. By age 31 to 32 years,

88% of men and 80% of women had education beyond the high school level. A regression

model was used to perform a discriminant function analysis of results of all data including those

from birth through the present study.

Interview results with the 31 to 32 year old males were reported in four age categories:

(a) no problems at age 18 (n = 126), (b) resilient at age 18 (n = 27), (c) delinquent by age 18 (n =

50), and (d) mental health problems by age 18 (n = 23). Participants who had no problems at age

18 or were resilient at age 18 were considered low risk. High risk participants were those who

were either delinquent by 18 or experienced mental health problems by age 18. The same four

categories were used to report the results of interviews with the 31 to 32-year-old women.

However, one additional category, teenage motherhood, was added for analysis. Female

participants who had no problems at age 18 (n = 137) and those who were resilient at age 18 (n =

36) were considered low risk participants. Teenage mothers (n = 26), delinquent females (n =

22) and those who had mental health problems by age 18 (n = 34) were considered high risk.

Public health records, educational transcripts, and social service agency records were used to

determine low risk and high risk participants.

The follow-up analysis of the cohort at ages 31 to 32 years was designed primarily to

trace the different paths that lead most men and women from an adverse childhood to successful

adaptation in adulthood (Werner & Smith, 1992). The study sought to determine how well

cohort members transitioned into the world of work, marriage and parenthood, and the resources

used to transcend stressful events in their lives. The semi-structured interview questionnaire

explored the manner in which men and women started occupations, managed homes, reared

children, socialized and engaged in civic responsibility. Adult adaptation was also gleaned from

district and circuit court records and mental health records. Criteria for rating the quality of adult

adaptation were based on the individuals' own account and community records.

Six criteria were used to define successful coping in early adulthood: (a) individual is

employed and satisfied with work or school achievement, (b) individual is very satisfied with

spouse or long-term partner with no record of divorce or abuse, (c) individual is satisfied with

role as a parent with no record of abuse or child neglect, (d) individual reports no conflicts with

siblings or parents, (e) individual has adult peers who provide emotional support, and (e)

individual is very satisfied with present life. Approximately 95% (n = 478) of the cohort met the

criteria for successful adult adaptation.

Stressful life events had significant correlations with coping problems of men ($p < .0001$)

and women ($p < .005$) in their early 30s. These life events included, but were not limited to,

being raised in poverty, the prolonged absence of a mother or father, and school failure. These

results are consistent with resilience literature that asserts that issues in the home, school and

community have some bearing on the overall resilience of an individual. It is important to note

that although community is not specified in the reporting of the correlation coefficients, it is

implied via the reporting of family income levels. Family income often dictates the type of

neighborhood one lives in (Greenberg, Schneider, & Choi, 1994).

Discriminant function analysis allowed Werner and Smith (1992) to predict good or poor

adult adaptation as sets of specific stressors were added for analysis. Discriminant function

analysis is used simply to determine which variables are most closely associated with specific

outcomes. These analyses were performed by gender and at each developmental age in order to

predict membership in a good or poor outcome group at age 32 years. At the later developmental

stages, the inclusion of stressful life events or stressors more accurately predicted the adult

outcomes at 87.5% for men with serious coping problems and 95.5% for men without such

problems ($R = .82$, $p < .0001$). Having an unmarried mother, the prolonged absence of a father,

school mobility between the ages of 6 years and 10 years and a need for school remediation were

strong predictors of adult outcomes for men.

The same analysis was conducted for the women in the cohort. When all available

information from birth to age 18 years was utilized for analysis, researchers were able to predict

73% of women with serious coping problems and 93% without coping problems in their early

30s ($R = .70$, $p < .005$). Stressful life events during adolescence including teen pregnancy,

financial problems in the home, and poor relationships with peers had the greatest bearing on

whether females would experience coping problems as adults.

Werner and Smith (1992) were also able to predict 100% of the men with criminal

records by age 32 years and 98.5% of those without when all stressful life events in the first 18

years of life were entered for analysis. Stressors in life that contributed most to criminal

behavior in males included the prolonged absence of a mother between the ages of 6 years and

10 years. The permanent absence of the mother and foster home placement between the ages of

11 years and 18 years were even greater predictors of criminal behavior. Failure in school was

also a significant predictor. For women in the cohort, adolescence, stressors significantly

associated with criminal behavior included the long-term absence of the mother, foster home

placement during adolescence, and failure in school. Aspects of the home and school were

significantly associated with criminal behavior in male and female members of the cohort.

The data collection methods used in this study allowed the researchers to capture nuances

beyond the reach of strictly quantitative measures. The scope of the study as measured by its

duration makes the possibility of replication highly unlikely. This limits cross-validation and the

degree to which the results can be generalized to other populations. However, the fact that the

subjects were studied over such an extensive time period with a variety of data sources helped to

present a clear profile of each individual in the cohort and to expose trends. This gives today's

educator a strong message regarding the need to develop protective factors in homes, schools and

surrounding communities.

<p align="center">*Aspects of Resilience in the Home*</p>

As stated previously, various factors in the home may contribute to one's risk or

resilience (Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Building on this premise, Nancy

Palmer (1997) studied the resilience of adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs). Palmer sought a

greater understanding of the transmission of alcoholism from parents to their children. As

suggested by the research and commentary of previous resilience researchers, she developed a

non-pathological approach to collecting data regarding the resilience of ACOAs by focusing on

the participants' strengths. The approach is called the Differential Resiliency Model (DRM).

Palmer (1997) sought to fill a void in the research on the resilience of ACOAs. With

most studies focusing on those who fall victim to alcoholism after being raised by alcoholics,

there was little understanding regarding the means by which certain ACOAs avoided becoming

alcoholic. The Differential Resiliency Model was developed in order to better understand and

convey the various attributes which may contribute to the resilience of an individual. The DRM

is a holistic framework that assumes that resilience is a complex process that occurs as one

navigates the challenges of life. Palmer used four descriptive terms to capture the types and

degrees of the resilience process: (a) anomic survival, (b) regenerative resilience, (c) adaptive

resilience, and (d) flourishing resilience.

Anomic survival refers to those individuals who live life in constant stress and chaos. In reference to the theoretical model presented in Chapter 1 guiding the present study, anomic survivors are those individuals who exhibit non-resilient behaviors. *Regenerative resilience* refers to the ability to integrate new coping strategies when confronted by challenges. However, those who demonstrate regenerative resilience do not fully internalize this ability into everyday life. In reference to the model presented on page nine of the present study, regenerative resilience may result in behaviors consistent with resilience or non-resilient behaviors, depending on the circumstance. *Adaptive resilience* refers to the ability to use effective coping strategies for a sustained period of time and *flourishing resilience* [italics added] refers to the consistent use of coping strategies regardless of the circumstances. In reference to the Figure 1 model on page nine of the present study, individuals with adaptive or flourishing resilience demonstrate a dynamic conversion process that results in behaviors consistent with resilience.

Palmer (1997) emphasized the difficulty in quantifying the means by which many adults thrive in spite of a childhood spent in an alcoholic family by posing the question of whether the horror of seeing a mother attempt suicide can be statistically measured. With the answer to this question being somewhat obvious, Palmer deployed a qualitative design in order to provide layered descriptions of real life events and outcomes.

Ten participants from 24 years of age to 35 years of age were selected for the study. Participants were screened via the Children of Alcoholic Screening Test (CAST). The CAST is a 30-item inventory designed to measure the participant's feelings and attitudes about the drinking habits of their parents. The internal consistency reliability of (CAST) yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .95. The instrument is considered very reliable in reporting alcohol abuse in the home. Generally, a cut-off score of six yes responses on the CAST is considered reliable in

the reporting of alcoholism in the home. Of the 10 participants selected for this study, 90% had

17 or more yes responses.

A purposive sampling method was used to insure a variety of characteristics in the

participants including age, race and sexual orientation. However, racial diversity in the sample

was not achieved. All interviews were tape recorded and proper protocols for human subjects

were followed. The interview protocol was independently reviewed by two raters and pre-tested

on one respondent matching the research participation criteria for construct validity. The

researcher's instructions for coding data were checked for reliability by two independent

interraters. The coded data were then matched with the researcher's coded data on the same

individual. A 93% interrater reliability for coding data was achieved. The goal was 60%.

Lastly, based on the information they coded, interraters categorized a respondent's resilience as:

(a) anomic survival, (b) regenerative resilience, (c) adaptive resilience, or (d) flourishing

resilience. After refinement, the researcher and interrater placed the participant in the same

category.

Based on the DRM, the researcher found varying degrees of coping and types of

resilience in the participants. One participant continued to live in the same anomic survival state

as he had as a child. However, this participant was the only one who clearly belonged in this

category due to his continuous substance abuse. Two of the respondents seemed to be in

transition from anomic survival to regenerative resilience. In the reporting of results, Palmer

(1997) focused on one of the two respondents in this particular category. The status of this

participant was considered to be particularly important due to the fact that she had lost a person

in her life who seemed to counterbalance the sexual abuse, violence, and alcoholism of her

mother. Although the terminology used in this study is somewhat different from previous

literature discussed, the reporting of the experience of this particular individual is consistent with the research of Werner and Smith (1992) in that one significant adult was able to buffer the impact of several risk factors. One participant was clearly in the regenerative resilience category. Another participant was in transition from regenerative to adaptive resilience. Three participants demonstrated adaptive resilience and two of the participants reached the stage of flourishing resilience.

An analysis of the placement of participants in categories showed that 90% of the participants were beyond anomic survival. At least 60% of the participants showed consistent use of coping strategies and sustained periods of stability. It is also important to note that the individuals who were categorized as flourishing indicated a spiritual element in their lives.

The DRM used in the study was specifically designed for social-workers, however, the results of this study have implications for the present study. Palmer's (1997) research helps to expose the impact of the home environment on individuals into adulthood and a need for a better understanding of risk factors from a variety of environments including the school and community. For example, the one participant who was categorized by *anomic survival* reported that he frequently stayed out late in the neighborhood to do drugs. However, this same participant reported that participation in drama, an activity commonly found in many schools, was the one outlet for which he gained the approval and admiration of others. Although this study lacked a clear explanation of exactly how transitions from one resilience category to another were captured, it was very clear in showing how elements of the home, school and community have a potential impact on the resilience of an individual.

The Impact of the Family

Gutman, Sameroff and Eccles (2002) investigated the effects of multiple risks and positive family interaction and social support factors on the achievement-related outcomes of African-American youth during early adolescence. Social support was defined as information leading the individual to believe that he or she is valued or loved. Grade-point average, number of absences, and achievement test scores were measurements of academic outcomes. Participants in this study were a part of the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context (MADIC) study of adolescents, their families and their schools.

Although 1948 families were contacted to participate in this study, only data from 837 female, African-American, primary caregivers and their early adolescent children were reported. Forty-eight percent of the adolescent participants were females (n = 402) and 52% were males (n = 435). There was a wide distribution of income levels for the participating families. However, only 7% lived at or below the U.S. poverty threshold. Approximately 65% of the participating families had annual income levels between $25,000 and $65,000. Fifty-seven percent of the families were considered two-parent households.

The age of the participating mothers ranged from 28 to 56 (M = 39).   Participants were interviewed by telephone and completed questionnaires. A multiple risk score was given to each family. The risk score was calculated on the basis of those factors that have proven to have a negative impact on positive adolescent development. These factors included: (a) maternal depression, (b) family income, (c) highest occupation in the household, (d) maternal education, (e) marital status, (f) number of children living in the home, (g) family stressful events, (h) income level of the neighborhood, (i) number of homes headed by females in the neighborhood and (j) the percent of the neighborhood receiving welfare benefits.

The number one was used to indicate the presence of risk and the number zero was used to indicate the absence of risk. Maternal education, marital status, number of children in the household, stressful events, family income, and highest occupation in the household were potential risk factors assessed during the interview. Maternal depression ($p = .82$), was measured in the self administered questionnaire. Census tract information was used to collect data on potential neighborhood risk factors. Regression analyses for each of the three achievement outcomes were completed to test the effects of multiple risks. Results showed that the multiple risk score was a significant predictor of grade-point average ($p \leq .001$), number of absences ($p \leq .001$) and math achievement test scores ($p \leq .05$). As exposure to risk factors increased, academic performance decreased.

Positive factors such as consistent discipline in the home ($p = .59$), democratic decision-making in the home ($p = .74$), teachers support ($p = .80$) and peer support ($p = .80$) were used in a hierarchical regression analysis to determine the interrelationships between multiple variable and the three achievement outcomes. Variables were entered into the equation in five steps: (1) adolescents' age and gender, (2) family processes and (3) social support factors, (4) the multiple risk score and (5) the interaction terms. After controlling for the age and gender of the adolescent, parental school involvement and consistent discipline were found to be significant in promoting academic success and were, therefore, important protective factors.

The results of the study indicated that adolescents had lower grade point averages, more absences and lower math achievement test scores as their exposure to risks increased. Secondly, findings suggest that the need for a specific protective factor is directly related to the nature of the achievement related outcome. Lastly, protective factors are magnified in the presence of multiple risks.

The study by Gutman, et al., (2002) illustrates the need for more in-depth analysis of issues related to resilience. The use of regression analyses exposed the complex interplay among risk factors and protective factors in multiple environments. Case-study analyses may provide additional insight into the contributing factors of risk and resilience in neighborhoods and schools. However, the heightened likelihood of academic failure resulting from issues in the home exposed by Gutman et al. has significant implications. School interventions that require blanket, *one-size-fits-all* approaches may not provide high risk students with the specific support they need. Partnerships between adults in the home and school may be needed to maximize protection from various risks. Protective factors, whether they are school-based or home-based, may have a greater chance of positive impact if they target specific risks.

Aspects of Resilience in Schools

Although the success or failure of students is dependent upon a variety of variables, it is clear that instructional practices and the overall learning environment of the school are contributing factors (Travis, 1995; Waxman, 1992; Waxman & Huang, 1997). Resilience research sheds light on the types of practices necessary to facilitate high achievement and social success in students regardless of risk factors. However, the merits of these studies must be continually examined to adequately determine the applicability of this area of research to the field of education.

Padron, Waxman and Huang (1999) compared the classroom instruction and learning environments of resilient and non-resilient students from predominately minority, urban elementary schools in the south central region of the United States. The sample consisted of teachers and 563 fourth and fifth grade students from 21 reading and language arts classes in 3 elementary schools. Approximately 47% of students were in fourth grade and 53% were fifth-

grade students. Nearly 53% of students were male and 47% were female. Hispanic students comprised approximately 78% of the sample. Caucasian students comprised 14%. African-American and Asian students represented 8% of the sample. The academic achievement of students in the three schools was lower than the state average and lower than other schools in the district.

Teachers were asked to identify populations of at risk students near the middle of the school year. Students were considered at risk if they: (a) came from families of low socioeconomic status, or (b) lived with a single parent or guardian. Gifted and special education students were excluded from the sample population to avoid ability difference effects. From this pool of students, teachers were asked to select up to three resilient students and three non-resilient students each. Resilient students (n = 57) were defined as students who demonstrated high achievement on both standardized tests and daily school work. Further, resilient students were defined as very motivated with excellent attendance. Non-resilient students (n = 56) were defined as unmotivated students with low attendance and low achievement on standardized tests and daily school work. Resilient and non-resilient students were observed by trained staff using the Classroom Observation Schedule (COS) designed to collect data regarding the classroom behavior of students during classroom instruction (Waxman,Wang, Lindvall, & Anderson, 1988). The COS has been found to be valid and reliable in other studies (Padron, Waxman, & Huang, 1999). Cohen's Kappa showed an interobserver coefficient of .96.

Due to the fact that the primary language of many of the students in the study was Spanish, the COS was modified to include a section to indicate the language used by the student. During each class period, each student was observed for 30 second intervals. Individual student observations included: (a) their interactions with the teachers and other students, (b) the selection

of activity, (c) the type of activity they were working on at the time of the observation, (d) the setting in which the observed behavior occurred, (e) their classroom manner, and (f) the language used by the student.

Although only 113 students were observed during classroom instruction, near the end of the school year a total of 563 students completed the My Class Inventory (MCI), a 30-item questionnaire that is designed to measure the students' perceptions of their classroom environment (Fraser, Anderson & Walberg, 1982).   The inventory was read to students in both English and Spanish. Students' perceptions were assessed in the following five areas: (a) *satisfaction*: the degree of students' enjoyment of class-work, (b) *friction*: the amount of quarreling among students, (c) *competition*: the degree of competitiveness among students, (d) *difficulty*: the extent to which students find the work in class challenging, and (e) *cohesion*: the manner in which students help and are friendly toward each other. Students provided either yes or no responses to statements in each of the areas.

Descriptive statistics were used to report the means and standard deviations of students' perceptions of their classroom learning environment scales with mean values ranging from M=1 to M=3 on each scale. Mean scale scores closest to the value of 3 were indicative of the students' agreement with the item on the scale. Scores were as follows: (a) Satisfaction ($M =$ 2.62, $SD = 0.54$), (b) Cohesion ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.54$), (c) Competition ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.54$), (d) Difficulty ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 0.63$), (e) Friction ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 0.54$). These results indicate that students in the three schools had generally a positive perception of their classroom learning environment, bonded well with fellow students, felt competitive with other students, found class-work easy and experienced occasional disagreements with other students.

MANOVAs were used to examine differences between resilient, average and non-resilient students on the five scales of the MY Class Inventory and revealed a significant multivariate effect, $F(10, 376) = 3.48$ ($p < .001$). Due to the significant multivariate effect, a follow-up procedure using a univariate ANOVA was performed. This revealed significant differences between resilient, average and non-resilient students on the Satisfaction ($p < .05$) and Difficulty ($p < .001$) scales of the My Class Inventory.

The researchers used a t test for independent samples to compare the classroom behaviors and resilient and non-resilient students (Padron, et al, 1999). The results indicated a significant difference in time on task between resilient and non-resilient students. Resilient students were observed exhibiting on task behaviors 85% of the time, compared to 61% for non-resilient students. Resilient students also interacted with teachers for instructional purposes more often than non-resilient students ($p < .05$). The results of this study also indicated that resilient elementary school students perceive a more positive instructional learning environment. These findings help to demonstrate the importance of the relationship between classroom environment and student resilience.

While the results of this study show the importance of how teachers view the potential of students, the findings seem somewhat predictable. In this study, teachers were asked simply to select resilient and non-resilient students. Although grades, socio-economic status of the home, motivation of the student and attendance were considered, the final designation of resilient or non-resilient status was based on the opinions of the teachers. In using teachers to select students, this research does not control for a key intervening variable, the expectations of the teachers. By not considering or controlling for perceptions of teachers or previous occurrences

between selected students and teachers, the researchers allow the possibility of a history threat to affect the validity of the study.

Based on previous research in resilience and teacher expectations, one might assume that students who were labeled by the teachers as resilient simply exhibited behaviors expected by the teachers. The same could be said for the non-resilient students. A more objective means of differentiation between resilient and non-resilient students would enhance the construct validity of this study. However, the use of two forms of data collection, classroom observations and surveys, controlled for mono-method bias threats to construct validity.

The lack of specificity regarding the student population selected for the study limits the possibility of its replication. Descriptors like "approximately," "nearly," and "about" were used to present the disaggregated percentages of participants in the study (p.70). Standardized tests were used as a measure of academic achievement. However, the researchers do not articulate the name of the standardized test used, nor the specific score ranges used to determine whether the achievement of students was considered high or low. The sampling and the means by which students were determined to be high or low achievers should have been more clearly defined.

As noted in the analysis of the study by Palmer (1997), the labeling of students as resilient or non-resilient may warrant caution. Although the study by Padron, et al. (1999) may be more applicable to today's urban educational settings than the work of Werner and Smith (1992), educators must be careful of how resilience in children is determined. According to Dr. Craig Noonan, Ph.D., an authority in the field of resilience:

> If we are to continue to encourage the movement of resiliency into mainstream thinking
> in education and the helping professions, we need to provide research evidence that it is
> an effective approach to reducing or eliminating the impact of traumatic environments

One of the best ways to do this is to measure resiliency and connect it with positive

outcomes. As a resiliency oriented professional, I am leery of measuring it in individuals

for fear that it could become another label that we apply to individuals that prevents us

and the individual from realizing our true potential (2004)

Noonan's comments indicate his reluctance to situate measures of resilience only as being within

students for fear that such measurements may cause the potential of some students to go

unrealized. Noonan's overall concerns are justified and understandable. However, his comment

that researchers should "measure resiliency and connect it with positive results" warrants caution

in that it may be construed, by some, to be an attempt to market this area of inquiry.

At the core of resiliency theory in the context of education is the belief that resiliencies in

students should be recognized and built upon, not used to justify self-fulfilling prophecies of

failure. Noonan's (2004) concerns make clear the danger of having teachers simply designate

students as resilient or non-resilient.

Aspects of Resilience in the Community

Although it is important to understand the relationship between classroom environment

and resiliency in students, many other environmental factors are relevant. As the theoretical

framework for this study demonstrates on page 12, the child and the neighborhood are virtually

inseparable. Shumow, Vandell, and Posner (1999) sought to determine whether neighborhood

characteristics constitute a risk or contribute to the resilience of elementary school children. The

students (N = 168) were studied over a 3 year period from third to fifth grade. The students

attended one of nine schools selected on the basis of a high percentage of children who qualified

for lunch subsides. The sample was 48% African-American and 52% non-Hispanic European.

Male children comprised 47% of the sample and nearly 60% of the sample was eligible for

subsidized school lunches. The average level of education for the mother in each household was

12.8 years (*SD* = 2.0) and the average, yearly household income was $15,369. The average

income, educational level, number of female-headed households, and number of violent crimes

in neighborhoods were used to represent a measure of neighborhood risk.

Those individuals who reported having primary care responsibilities for the participating

students were asked to complete questionnaires and participate in phone interviews over the 3

year period. Of the 168 participants, 153 mothers had primary care responsibilities.

Grandmothers (n = 5), aunts (n = 2), fathers (n = 7) and stepmothers (n = 1) also participated in

the study. Respondents were compensated $35 for their time. Children completed

questionnaires while in school and researchers visited each school at the end of each school year.

School staff provided report card and achievement test information.

The Wisconsin Third Grade Reading Test was used as a third grade academic measure

and scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in reading and mathematics were averaged and used

as a measure in grade 5. Additionally, grades in the four core subject areas were recorded after

grading periods. A conduct grade of (G=1) was recorded if the child needed improvement.

Another grade (G=2) was recorded if conduct was considered satisfactory. Conduct grades

yielded a mean score of 1.88 (*SD* = .18) for third grade and a mean of 1.86 (*SD* = .19) for fifth

grade. Cronbach's alpha was .82 for third grade and .95 for fifth grade respectively.

At the end of third grade and fifth grade, teachers were asked to complete a Teacher

Rating Scale to measure child behavioral adjustment. Responses were on a five point scale

ranging from never to always. On the Teacher Rating Scale, the mean was 3.52 (*SD* = .66) at the

end of third grade and 3.70 (*SD* = .56) at the end of fifth grade. Cronbach's alpha was .94 and in

fifth grade .95. Standard deviations of the Teacher Rating Scale were .66 and .56 in grades three

and five respectively.

Census data were used to provide information on neighborhoods. Neighborhood contact

and teacher support were considered potential sources of resilience from the community. These

factors were measured using a 10-item questionnaire that asked, among other things, how often

children and their parents interacted with people in their neighborhoods. The Milwaukee Police

Department also provided information regarding neighborhood violent crimes at the end of third

grade ($M = 112.5$, $SD = 95.1$) and 5th grade ($M = 108.6$, SD $= 89.7$).

Analysis of data took place in three phases: (a) an assessment of the association between

neighborhood risk and academic achievement; (b) the analysis of potential sources of resilience

in neighborhoods with the highest risk; and (c) an analysis of intra-individual, familial and

community factors that predicted academic performance in fifth grade. Results indicated that in

fifth grade, academic performance was negatively associated with neighborhood risk ($p < .001$).

This may be indicative of increased negative influence of the community as children mature

(Shumow, Vandell & Posner, 1999). Additionally, in high risk neighborhoods, an average of

three violent crimes took place each week. In neighborhoods with the highest risk, neighborhood

contact was associated negatively with academic performance ($p < .01$), impulse control ($p <$

$.01$), parent involvement in school ($p < .01$) and family emotional support ($p < .05$).

The results of this study indicated that children who demonstrated better impulse control

and higher self-competence showed better academic performance. The study also showed that

children whose families were more involved in school demonstrated higher academic

achievement. Although community factors were considered as possible sources of resilience,

results suggested that contact with neighbors fostered risk, not resilience.

A major strength of this study was its treatment of context. Context was described as the notion that neighborhoods create structures that influence child development. The use of questionnaires, telephone interviews, and small compensation for families was an effective way to control for mortality threats to the validity of the study. This study offers educators an important snapshot of the plight of many urban students. Its results may be generalized to the subgroups targeted by the No Child Left Behind legislation. Additionally, a wealth of information other than the primary foci of the study was presented. For example, children in the study attended more than 40 different schools by fifth grade, indicative of an extremely high mobility rate among families.

The study also points to the need for school systems and local city governments to establish after-school programs and community services to support children in high risk neighborhoods. The fact that contact with neighbors fostered risk rather than resilience is a direct challenge to educational leaders and policymakers to work within neighborhoods, get parents involved, and establish structured support systems for children.

The extent to which a child is resilient or vulnerable is often dependent upon the magnitude or severity of protective factors and risk factors (Werner & Smith, 1992). Resilience and protective factors are the "positive counterparts" (p.3) to vulnerability and risk factors. Therefore, it is important that educational leaders have a firm understanding of both risk and protective factors and their influence on children. An understanding of these phenomena as children develop from childhood into adolescence may also be of some benefit.

The Influence of Caring Adults

When one considers the types of resources needed in many schools, cost is often a deciding factor (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Fortunately, for schools interested in providing

protective factors despite limited budgets, perhaps the most important protective factor for high

risk children is a positive relationship with one caring adult (Werner, 1996). Mentors may serve

as a beneficial, yet cost-effective, protective factor for economically-challenged schools and the

high risk students they serve.

Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro (2002) examined the effects that natural mentors

have on the resiliency of urban adolescents. Zimmerman, et al. asserted that "resilience theory

provides a framework for understanding why some youth who are exposed to a risk do not

exhibit the problem behavior associated with that risk (p. 222). Based on this assertion, the

authors tested the effectiveness of two resiliency models for delineating the impact of having a

natural mentor. The protective factor model and the compensatory model were the two models

assessed.

Zimmerman, et al. (2002) also measured the impact of having a natural mentor on (a)

problem behaviors of the participants, (b) school attitudes, (c) psychological distress, (d) the

problem behaviors of friends, (e) the perception of problem behavior norms, (f) the school

behavior of friends, and (g) perceptions of the school attitudes of friends. As the researchers

suggest, it is important to note that the influence of peers and natural mentors are phenomena

that may occur within the context of the community environment.

The sample was comprised of 770 adolescents who participated in the fourth wave of a

longitudinal study on dropout prevention. Grade-point-average spanned from 3.0 and below.

African-American students represented 79.6% of the population and females constituted 51.8%.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data including a one-hour interview,

and a written questionnaire completed by the participants.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the impact of having a natural mentor on targeted outcomes. Additionally, a four-step linear regression was used to determine whether having a mentor is more analogous to the compensatory model of resilience or the protective factor model of resilience. The difference between the two models is that the compensatory model simply suggests that certain positive factors may buffer the impact of risk factors, while the protective factor model suggests that variables may change outcomes by either lessening the effect of a risk factor or by increasing the impact of a compensatory or protective factor (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro, 2002).

Youth who reported having natural mentors indicated more positive attitudes about school than those without mentor, Hotelling's $F(3, 663) = 10.88$, $p < .001$. Adolescents with natural mentors were also associated with lower levels of problem behavior, Hotelling's $F(4, 727) = 2.96$, $p = .007$, when adjusting for race and sex, but not when all two-way and three-way interactions in the model were included, Hotelling's $F(4, 720) = 0.20$, $p = .939$. There was no association between having a natural mentor and psychological distress, Hotelling's $F(2, 757) = 0.16$, $p = .848$.

In the analysis of results of the regression for the determination of the most applicable resilience model, main effects were found for the problem behaviors of friends, $F(1, 654) = 182.01$, $p < .01$, and for perception of problem behavior norms, $F(1, 654) = 396.13$, $p < .01$, in predicting the problem behaviors of participants. In addition, having a natural mentor predicted problem behaviors when the problem behaviors of friends was added to the equation, $F(1, 653) = 5.74$, $p < .05$, as well as the perception of problem behavior norms, $F(1, 653)$ 6.71, $p < .05$. The interaction term yielded no further explanations; therefore, the compensatory model of resilience seemed to best fit natural mentors for problem behavior outcomes.

A (Risk x Mentor) interaction was found when the school behaviors of friends was added to the model as the risk factor, $F(1, 599) = 4.31$, $p < .05$. Since the interaction term was marginally significant, $F(1, 599) = 2.78$. $p = .10$, having a natural mentor fit both the compensatory and the protective factor models of resiliency. The fact that the type and degree of multiple risk variables from a variety of sources seemed to impact the degree to which a protective factor influenced the lives of adolescents seems to support the theoretical model presented in Chapter 1.

Although natural mentors seemed to help decrease use of marijuana and nonviolent delinquency, there was no relationship between having a natural mentor and anxiety or depression. As presented in the theoretical model in Chapter 1, the interplay between risk and protective factors results in a dynamic conversion process in individuals that may yield various possible results. A better understanding of this process may be achieved with more in-depth interviews. Although interviews were used by researchers in the study, the interview process was used primarily to create a dichotomous variable based on whether or not participants had a natural mentor.

The sample size of 770 was larger than that of similar studies. Also, the sophistication of the parametric statistical procedure used was beneficial in determining whether the interactions between multiple variables have a statistically significant effect. These factors enhance the validity of the study. Resiliency and student achievement are affected by the interrelationship of a variety of variables. The design of this study was such that many of these intricacies could be analyzed. The most significant limitation of the study, however, is the fact that all data were based on self-reports. The use of a variety of sources for information would enhance future efforts.

Recapping the Review of Resilience Literature

Both commentary and empirical studies on resilience are indicative of the fact that aspects of the home, school and community have some influence on the resilience of students. Risk factors and protective factors are in perpetual interaction. Positive behaviors and negative behaviors are the result of the manner in which the student processes risk factors and protective factors internally. The data consistently show that behaviors of adults in the home, school and community can help or hinder the resilience of students.

The research questions and purpose of this study articulated in Chapter 1 required that I delve into the perceptions of specific participants. The selection of participants and the methods used to discover their perceptions will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A single conversation with a wise man is worth

more than ten years of study. Chinese Proverb

In this chapter, an overview of the heuristic phenomenological method of qualitative research and a rationale for its use in this study is presented. The work of Irving Seidman (1998) was used as a comprehensive guide for understanding the process of capturing, analyzing and understanding qualitative interview data. His three-phased, semi-structured, interview process and its use in this study are also explained in this chapter. Additionally, the requirements for participation in the study and my role as the researcher and data collection instrument are discussed. A carefully constructed system of data management guided by the work of Colaizzi (1978) is presented in addition to steps taken to assure the trustworthiness of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, a brief examination of the perceived limitations of the study is provided.

The What and Why of Heuristic Phenomenology

The purpose of this study is to achieve a greater understanding of the resilience phenomenon directly from the perspective of students, determine implications for educational practice, and report findings in such a way that principals, teachers and paraprofessionals have a clearer understanding of how they may help to foster resilience in students. The following questions guided the inquiry:

1.	To what or to whom do students attribute their ability to get through challenging

	circumstances?

2.   How did aspects of life in the home, school, or community help or hinder the

students' social and academic success?

3.   What do participants perceive as possible ways of helping others in similar

circumstances?

Phenomenology was selected as the qualitative research methodology for this study. Qualitative

designs have been used in resilience studies to determine the characteristics of those who thrive

in the face of adversity and phenomena that helped or hindered their success (Colaizzi, 1978;

Margalit, 2003).

The literature lacks a degree of clarity in its treatment of phenomenological inquiry.

Phenomenological research does not allude to one specific methodological format (Seidman,

1998). Phenomenology is also discussed as a philosophy as well as a methodology (Stewart &

Mickunas, 1974). For this reason, it is important that researchers clarify philosophical and

methodological aspects of the use of phenomenology.

Heuristics is a type of phenomenological research that requires the researcher to use

personal insight to illuminate phenomena for which the researcher has "intense interest" (Patton,

1990, p.7). When I considered my own limitations as a researcher, I realized that it was

impossible to divorce myself from my own life experiences in an attempt to further understand

the concept of resilience. Self reflection is often a catalyst for the most significant awareness of

a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). "One cannot talk about the nature of a reality without

including reference to one's experience of that reality" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 38). The

heuristic approach allows both researcher and participant to share in the journey of discovery

through in-depth interviews and reflection (Patton, 1990). I was, therefore, guided

philosophically by the heuristic approach and acknowledged the reality of my own experiences in the process of attempting to understand the lived experiences of participants in this study.

I grew up in a predominantly African-American neighborhood in the southern United States. Most of the adults in my neighborhood were skilled workers. I clearly remember the decline of my neighborhood. The area of the city in which I grew and developed as a young man suffered from an onslaught of drug distribution and drug abuse. Additionally, skilled workers often struggled to remain employed and their families began to struggle with poverty during my childhood. As the economy of the city weakened, children in neighborhoods like mine suffered. I was fortunate to have been raised by parents who were educators. Without their continuous support in the home, I may have become one of the many African-American men who fail to reach their social and academic potential due to a variety of risk factors. My experiences as a child witnessing the decline of my community gave me a degree of insight into the lives of the participants in this study.

The Potential Dissonance between Bracketing and Heuristics

Bracketing refers to the need for the qualitative researcher to focus carefully on the experiences of participants when engaging in research (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). "Bracketing requires that we work to become aware of our own assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions, and then, that we strive to put them aside – to bracket them – in order to be open and receptive to what we are attempting to understand" (p.50). At first glance, this strategy may seem to contradict the heuristic approach due to what some might consider an apparent absence of subjectivity when bracketing. "Heuristic research is a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experiences…that requires a *subjective* [*italics added*] process of reflecting, exploring, sifting and elucidating the nature of the

phenomenon under investigation" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40). It is, therefore,

important to note that bracketing does not require the complete exclusion of subjectivity from the

qualitative research process (Ely, et.al, 1991).

In heuristic inquiry, the researcher gains greater understanding of a phenomenon by

reflecting on personal experiences of that phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The process does not

allow for the synthesis of the researcher's experiences with those of the participant in the

interpretation of data or presentation of findings (1990). Therefore, there is no direct conflict

between the suggested need for bracketing in phenomenological research and the use of

heuristics. As the researcher, I reflected on my own experiences related to the resilience

phenomenon. However, these experiences were bracketed from the experiences of the

participants in the analysis and reporting of data.

Summation of Rational for the Use of Heuristic Phenomenology.

It is difficult to quantify the horror of seeing a tragic event or the feeling of hopelessness

one might feel living a life plagued by risk factors in the home, school or community (Palmer,

1997; Polkinghorne, 1989). Therefore, "the tale is best told by the men and women who have

struggled and often succeeded against the odds" (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 15). The heuristic

phenomenology allows participants to tell their own stories through carefully planned, semi-

structured interviews designed to stimulate reflection on the part of the researcher and the

participants (Seidman, 1998).

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedures</div>

This study followed a three-step, phenomenological interview design (Seidman, 1998).

The process involved three separate interviews with each participant. Each interview was 90

minutes in duration. The interviews took place in facilities selected collaboratively with the

participant that allowed for privacy, open dialogue and focus. Conference-rooms on college

campuses were common venues for interviews. I was also able to use a conference-room that

belongs to a local business man when students were in town. Again, the main purpose of these

locations was to allow privacy, open-dialogue and focus.   An interview guide was developed for

the three interviews (see Appendices A, B, C). The interview guide consisted of a brief

introduction followed by semi-structured interview questions. Many of the interview questions

were designed to allow a conversational tone to be established and themes to emerge (Patton,

1990).

       The questions were structured in such a way that predetermined answers to questions on

the part of the researcher were minimized (Patton, 1990). This helped reduce my own biases.

The first interview was designed primarily to establish the context of the participant's

experiences (Seidman, 1998). The second interview allowed the participant to reconstruct and

reflect on the details of those experiences and the third interview was designed to encourage the

participants to reflect on what those experiences mean to themselves and others (1998). Prior to

the commencement of the interview process, a group of four high school seniors who fit the

profile of the participants were asked to review all interview questions for clarity to insure that

participants would fully understand the questions asked during the three-interview process.

These students affirmed the clarity of my initial questions.

       In the first interview, the participant's resilience was placed in context. Consistent with

the heuristic approach, I began the interview with a brief overview of resilience by sharing

lessons learned from a friend who was hurt in a train accident. I then asked participants to

reconstruct their early experiences in the home, school and community through high school

(Seidman, 1998). In following the suggestions articulated by Seidman (1998), I asked questions

in such a way that the participants mentally and verbally reconstructed life events. This allowed

for much more in-depth qualitative data analysis (Silverman, 1993).

Following the first interview, I asked the participants to begin a reflection log.

Participants were given the option of writing down any ideas or thoughts between interviews that

might provide a better contextual understanding of their home, school and community

experiences. I received no data from that potential source. I also maintained notes to record

reactions to the data presented in interviews and emerging themes upon which to build in the

following interviews. The log also included life experiences of mine that might emerge upon

personal reflection and review of the interview data. Guiding questions for the first interview

can be found in Appendix A.

The purpose of the second interview was to concentrate on the concrete details of the

participants experiences in the area of inquiry (Seidman, 1998). Building upon the contextual

information provided in the first interview, my intent was to inquire more specifically into the

participants' experiences and interactions in the home, school and community. Participants were

asked to describe and reflect on their relationships with others in the home, school and

community. They were also asked about what aspects of each environment helped or hindered

their social and academic success. As noted by Shumow, Vandell, and Posner (1999),

relationships with adults in the community may hinder success. Aspects of the home and the

school may either help or hinder success (Padron, Waxman & Huang, 1999, Werner & Smith,

1992). The second interview went beyond the establishment of context in the first interview and

explored the participants' perceptions of specific phenomena. Participants were given the option

of recording any additional thoughts that might have arisen between interviews regarding things

that helped or hindered their success. Guiding questions for the second interview can be found

in Appendix B.

The purpose of the third interview was to allow the participant to "reflect on the meaning

of their experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 12). Interview questions were structured in such a way

that participants made meaning by speculating on what adults in the home, school and

community can do to help other students get through challenging circumstances. Participants

were asked to describe in detail the internal conversion process that helped them to overcome

obstacles. "Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the

factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation" (Seidman, 1998, p. 12).

The description of the internal conversion processes that led to their success, the reflection on

how factors in their lives interacted to bring them to the present and descriptions from previous

interviews provided an in-depth delineation of those factors that helped or hindered the resilience

of the participants. Questions in the third interview were context specific based on information

from the first two interviews. A guide for questions from the third interview can be found in

Appendix C.

In addition to interviewing the participants, I conducted field-work by visiting all of the

housing areas described by the participants. I made observations of the surroundings and had

discussions with residents when possible. I did not take field notes during these visits. It was

strongly recommended by one of the participants that I simply blend into the community in order

to gain trust. I wore casual clothes and introduced myself as a concerned educator to those with

whom I spoke.

All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their participation in the study in a

written document (see Appendix D). The schedule of the interviews was subject to the

availability of the participants and presented a major challenge during the data collection

process. There was a period of at least one week between each of the three interviews for each

participant. This spacing was designed to allow time for reflection (Seidman, 1998).

<div align="center">Participants and Setting</div>

This study sought to achieve a greater understanding of the resilience phenomenon

directly from the perspective of young adults who have achieved academic and social success

despite the presence of risk factors. A heuristic phenomenological was employed to explore the

life experiences of six young adults. Young adults selected for participation in this study were

individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 who participated in the Achievable Dream Program.

An Achievable Dream is a K-12 program that targets only students with specific risk factors. All

students who participate in the program have poverty as a risk factor. This is based on the

qualification for free or reduced price lunch.

Criteria for the selection of study participants are outlined in Table 7. Only students with

the risk factors and resilience characteristics listed in Table 7 were eligible for participation in

the study. This population was selected for the present study due to access to the sample and the

trust I have established with students during my years with the program. A certain degree of

trust and rapport is necessary for an informative interview of this type (Seidman, 1998). This

trust was essential in gaining access to the extremely sensitive information sought during the

interview process. The absence of trust may cause interview data to lack depth. Although the

potential participants knew me, at the time of the interviews I was no longer involved in the

governance or operations of the Achievable Dream Program.

Table 7

Student Selection Criteria for Participation in the Study

Risk Factors		Evidence of Resilience
		Achievement
• Poverty	_____	• At least a 2.5 grade-point average in school
		• Honors/AP/IB classes
		Attendance
• Single-Parent Home	_____	• 90% Attendance in high school
		Behavior
• Lived in Low-income Community		• Less than three discipline referrals per year while in high school
	_____	Education
		• Admission to 2 or 4 year college

I was removed from the selection of potential students for participation in the study and relied on the current Director of An Achievable Dream and the current High School/College Coordinator of the program. A meeting was scheduled to discuss the study. During the meeting, I provided an overview of the study including: proposed research questions, rationale for the methodology selected and criteria for participants in the study. An Achievable Dream staff members provided the names and contact information of 10 suitable candidates for participation in the study. I contacted the potential participants via stamped mail, e-mail or by phone to determine their willingness to participate. Personal visits were made where possible.   Each participant was required to sign a letter of consent in order to be eligible to participate in the study. The participants received $20 at the end of each interview.

<div align="center">My Feasibility Experience</div>

Lincoln and Guba (1985) are very clear in their assertion that the qualitative researcher is often unconsciously unaware. As researchers, we sometimes don't know what we don't know (1985). It is often important to conduct mini-versions of research to determine if the proposed research process answers the specified research questions. These mini-versions are called pilot studies and are designed to determine the feasibility of the research project (Seidman, 1998).

To determine the feasibility of my phenomenological study, I conducted two separate interviews. With research questions in mind, I had dinner with two former Achievable Dream students, one male and one female. Both students met the requirements for research participants outlined in Table 7. I explained that my research would involve conversations with students who shared similar characteristics. I also explained the resilience construct. During the dinner, the students and I talked about their experiences in college and reflected on their perceptions of what helped or hindered their success prior to attending college. Based on the questions I asked, both

students responded with information that could be used to answer the research questions of this study. At the end of dinner, I scheduled a time for a more formal interview with the male student.

The use of interviewing in research often has "unanticipated twists and turns" and one never knows what may be discovered (Seidman, 1998, p. 32). The next interview with the male student took place in an empty lounge area of a college dormitory. The interview was purposefully conversational and non-threatening. Notes were not taken and the conversation was not recorded. Toward the end of the interview, the student unexpectedly shared a very private matter that I was completely unaware of in the 5 years I had known him. He shared the difficulty this matter caused his life in the neighborhood in which he grew up.

It was quite evident that the manner in which the student was sometimes treated by others in the community was perceived by him as a risk factor. My feasibility experience made it very clear to me that *we really don't know what we don't know* [italics added]. I have known this student for several years and never knew of his struggle. The information garnered during the two conversations with this young man led me to believe that further study of the resilience phenomenon using my proposed design would answer the research questions of this study.

Data Collection Process

After much research and self reflection, the data collection process selected for this study was based on Colaizzi's procedural steps (1978). The steps include each of the following:

1.   Each of the three interviews with each participant was transcribed.

2.   All phrases that pertained to the research questions were coded.

3.   I deciphered each pertinent phrase.

4.   I formulated themes based on the phrases.

5.   A full, narrative description of the experiences of each participant was developed

based on the information provided by participants.

6.   Following each interview, I shared a transcribed copy of the interview with the

participant for confirmation of its validity.

Sorting the Data for the Emergence of Themes

Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed. I cross-reference each transcription

with the related audio tape to insure that all statements were accurate. A copy of each transcribed

interview was given to each participant for confirmation of validity. Following confirmation, a

hard-copy of each transcription was filed as a research artifact for analysis.

Pen and paper were used to take notes during each interview. Notes were dated and

labeled according to a data-sorting number given to each participant. The participants were

numbered according to the schedule of the first series of interviews. The first participant

interviewed was assigned the data-sorting number of 1 for the duration of the study. Each of the

following participants was numbered accordingly. This number was used to file and sort data,

thus preventing accidental mixing of interview information. I also maintained a plastic, portable

file box in which I stored transcriptions and audio-tapes.

I deciphered each transcribed response and assigned a number to each response. A

number zero was assigned to lines that did not yield information pertinent to the research

questions. The number one was given to information that helped to establish the context of the

lived experiences of each participant. Additionally, I numbered each response chronologically.

This was essential to the written narrative process and created ongoing reference points for

analysis. Finally, all lines, other than those labeled one or zero, were categorized according to

the transcription numbers, lettered-codes and descriptions listed in Table 8. Several responses

had more than one applicable number. For example, when Elisha stated, "Nobody really paid

attention to me" (Elisha, Interview 1), this response was given two numbers due to the fact that

it provided *context* [italics added] and expressed a potential *risk-factor* [italics added].

Additionally, Elisha's response was coded as RFH, Risk-factor in the Home, due to the fact that

the comment was Elisha's description of how she was sometimes treated in her home. This

complex coding process was extremely helpful in my discovery of emerging themes.

The transcribed lines were then color-coded. Lines with the number zero were highlighted in

pink. Lines with the number one were highlighted in blue. All other numbered lines were

highlighted in yellow. The ten codes listed in Table 8 were used to sort data according to: (1)

whether a phenomenon served as a risk factor or protective factor; (2) whether the phenomenon

took place within the context of the home, school or community; and (3) whether it helps to

explain the internal conversion process of each participant. Phenomena that helped a student get

through challenging circumstances were coded as protective factors. Phenomena that hindered

social or academic success were coded as risk factors. Any adult behaviors perceived by the

participants as helpful were coded accordingly. I also determined whether the information

provided during the interview was indicative of the internal conversion process presented within

the theoretical framework in Chapter 1. Transcriptions, notes and codes were continuously

cross-referenced to insure that the lived experiences of each participant were accurately captured

in written narrative form. Based on a comprehensive analysis of data, I documented the

perceptions of each participant.

Table 8

Interview Data Codes

Code Description	Transcription Number	Index Card Data Code	Related Research Question
Risk Factor in the Home	100	RFH	2
Risk Factor in the School	200	RFS	2
Risk Factor in the Community	300	RFC	2
Protective Factor in the Home	400	PFH	1,2,3
Protective Factor in the School	500	PFS	1,2,3
Protective Factor in the Community	600	PFC	1,2,3
Internal Conversion Process	700	ICP	1
Adult Help in the Home	800	AHH	1,2,3
Adult Help in the School	900	AHS	1,2,3
Adult Help in the Community	1000	AHC	1,2,3
Unanticipated Aspect of Resilience	2000	UAR	1,2,3

To Read and Believe: Addressing the Issue of Validity

"A measurement instrument is valid to the extent that it measures what it purports to measure" (Huck, 2000, p. 100). Many qualitative researchers have argued that the concepts of validity and reliability may not be applicable to qualitative research (Seidman, 1998). The degree to which the data collected is credible, transferable or dependable is deemed by some to be more appropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). "Authenticity rather than reliability is often the issue in qualitative research" (Silverman, 1993, p. 10). As with other qualitative research, the design of this study was structured with constant consideration of whether the reader should be able to believe what is discovered and reported.

Credibility refers to the accuracy of the data collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, the likelihood of accuracy can be improved by increasing the length of the interactions between researcher and participant (1985). Issues of validity, reliability, transferability or credibility all serve as targets for the researcher. The consideration of these factors forced me to consider the manner in which the data would be collected, analyzed, and presented.

In order to accurately address these issues, I revisited the stated purpose of this study: to achieve a greater understanding of the resilience phenomenon directly from the perspective of students, determine implications for educational practice, and report findings in such a way that principals, teachers and paraprofessionals have a clearer understanding of how they may help to foster resilience in students. In consideration of the stated purpose of this study, the philosophical foundations of heuristic phenomenology and the limitations of the researcher, I believe that following the criteria set forth by Polkinghorne (1983) lead to discovery of trustworthy findings.

In recognizing the relativity of the traditional research concepts of validity and reliability, Polkinghorne (1983) presented four considerations for the interpretation of qualitative research: (a) *vividness*, (b) *accuracy*, (c) *richness* and (d) *elegance*. In this study, vivid descriptions of the lived experiences of participants were written to cognitively attach readers to the experiences of the participants. The presentation of vivid descriptions supported by direct quotes was used to enhance the accuracy and believability of the findings. My goal was to advance the lived experiences of the participants with such richness that the reader would be able to imagine the experiences of the participant and, when possible, form an emotional connection with those experiences. Finally, I sought to achieve the standard of elegance by presenting the findings with such lucidity that readers accept my conclusions. The criteria articulated by Polkinghorne (1983) is philosophically aligned with heuristics and was best suited to accomplish the stated purpose of this study. This approach allowed me to construct powerful narratives about the resilience of participants based on the participants' perspectives, not my own opinions.

In Keeping with Traditions of Validity.

By interviewing more than one participant and allowing reflection time between interviews for each participant, I was able to connect and cross-reference the experiences of each participant. "If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity" (Seidman, 1998, p. 17). Data was triangulated via comparative analysis of the information provided in the three interviews by each participant. Transferability is enhanced through the articulation of overarching themes in Chapter 4 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My efforts to ensure the accuracy and believability of results are analogous to the methodological plurality that seems to be prevalent in phenomenological research (Braddock,

2001). "What are needed are not formulaic approaches to enhancing either validity or

trustworthiness but understanding of and respect for the issues that underlie those terms"

(Seidman, 1998, p. 20). An understanding and respect for issues surrounding validity helped to

guide my research.

In Keeping with Traditions of Trustworthiness

The concern for trustworthiness is part of all qualitative research (Ely et al., 1991).

Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least that the processes of the research

are carried out fairly, and that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the

people who are studied. The entire endeavor must be grounded in ethical principles about how

data are collected and analyzed, how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how

participants are involved, and how results are communicated. (p. 93). All but one of these

considerations has been discussed in previous sections of this document. This leaves only the

issue of how I dealt with my own assumptions and subjectivity.

Consistent with other qualitative research studies, I served as the primary research tool. I

used audiotape, pen and paper to capture data. The analysis of data and subsequent emergence

of themes were based on the analysis of information captured on tape and in notations. My

opinions and my own experiences with the concept of resilience were removed from the analysis

of data. My previous experiences were used during the investigative process. This, as discussed

previously, is consistent with heuristic phenomenology.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: THE LIVES OF THE RESILIENT

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us"

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the need for further investigation of the

resilience phenomena, relevant literature and commentary on the topic, findings from critical

research studies and the methodology used in the present study. In Chapter 4, I discuss the

community in which the participants lived during childhood based on the collective recollections

of participants. I then introduce the participants in the study and provide a narrative of the lived

experiences of each participant. In an effort to shed light on exactly how participants were able

to overcome potentially debilitating risk-factors, I present their experiences within the theoretical

model presented in Chapter 1. The model is an amalgamation of research and commentary on

the subject of resilience and its use helps to present findings with greater clarity. Lastly, I

present recommendations from the participants regarding their perceptions of ways to help

children in similar circumstances. I discuss overarching themes that emerged from my analysis

of qualitative data in Chapter 5.

Due to the use of non-standard English by the participants, I periodically elucidate

comments from the participants for clarity and understanding. Qualitative researchers should not

make value judgments regarding the type of communication used by participants. "Instead the

aim should be to understand the skills that the participants deploy and the functions of the

communication patterns that are discovered" (Silverman, 1993, p. 192). The participants' use of

non-standard English and specific terms offers insight into the form of language used in their

communities and, therefore, a clearer depiction of their lived experiences.

The following research questions guided the analysis of data for emerging themes:

1.   To what or to whom do students attribute their ability to get through challenging

circumstances?

2.   How did aspects of life in the home, school, or community help or hinder the

students' social and academic success?

3.   What do participants perceive as possible ways of helping others in similar

circumstances?

The methodology (Seidman, 1998) used in the collection of data coupled with the process

(Colaizzi, 1978) guiding its analysis and presentation does not require intricate

quantitative formulas or *polysyllabic* [italics added] descriptions of phenomena. This

study was designed to present perceptions directly from the perspectives of young adults

and report findings in such a way that principals, teachers and paraprofessionals have a clearer

understanding of how they may help to foster resilience in students.

<div style="text-align:center">Life at the Bottom: The Participants Describe their Community</div>

All participants in this study lived within the same area of a city in the southeastern

United States. This area of the city is predominately African-American. The participants grew

up no more than two miles from each other. Reports of crime in this area were common and it is

still regarded by members of the community as the most dangerous area of the city. Drug dealers

and prostitutes can be seen exchanging money with their customers at any given time.

Three main roads take travelers to and from this area of the city and public housing can

be found on virtually every block. When I asked Jerome to describe one of the public housing

areas, he replied, "Dickerson Courts . . . it's trash. I wouldn't recommend it to nobody. Low-

income area, rats and all that. It's dirty. It's filthy out there" (Jerome, Interview 1). When

sharing his perceptions of this area of the city, Jerome referred to each public housing section as

a neighborhood. "Every neighborhood got its drunks. Every neighborhood got its crack-heads,

and every neighborhood got a older dude that missed his chance to do what he wanted to do"

(Interview 1). Jerome's reference to crack-heads refers to individuals who are drug-dependent

on a highly addictive form of cocaine called crack (Pace-Schott et al, 2008). Avery, another

participant, stated that on Friday nights in his neighborhood you would see people "smoking and

drinking and selling drugs" (Avery, Interview 1).

All of the participants spent at least part of their lives in one or more of the public

housing projects in this area. The crime, poverty and daily struggles of the families from this

part of the city caused residents to give the area a name. People call this area of the city *The*

Bottom.

Life in *The Bottom* was replete with challenges. Children played in the midst

of drug use and the commission of other crimes. Avery described a field very near his apartment

where children commonly played while adults sold drugs. "Yeah . . . across the field,

that's where they . . . had the weed and stuff like that" (Avery, Interview 1). When I asked what

I

might see walking down the streets of his childhood, Avery replied, "you see people playing and

drugs" (Avery, Interview 1). He added clarity to his description of life in this area of the city by

commenting, "it's mean in the streets" (Interview 1). With a chilling, yet calm demeanor, Avery

shared the horror of seeing death in his neighborhood. He stated "I seen somebody dead too, but

I ain't see when they did it" (Interview 1). With this statement, Avery was sharing the fact that

he did not see the incident that resulted in the death of a boy in his neighborhood. However, at

age 15, he and his friends saw the dead body in his neighborhood.

This kind of experience was not limited to just one of the participants. Jerome recalled a similar experience at a very young age, stating, "When I was little I seen my first dead body out there on my way to the bus stop" (Jerome, Interview 1). Upon further questioning, Jerome remembered hearing a gunshot the previous night. He was an elementary school student at the time. He described the experience in the following way:

> And this was when I was going to Dunbar . . . probably like around second grade when I seen it. Cause we had heard the shooting the night before, like early in the morning. And my grandma got all of us dressed and take us to the bus stop, and my bus stop was like on this corner, like across the street there's like a fence. Like right now it's the park area. And it's like right by the power lines and stuff that we seen him out there (Interview 1)

Jerome and his friends typically played at the bus stop each morning before school. As he reflected on this incident, Jerome sadly shared his perception of the age of the murder victim and additional graphic details about the incident. He commented:

> Had to be young, but he was laying on his face. I mean, we seen the blood like in the street. I'm guessing he must have ran or somebody must have shot him or something like that and laid him down. But you could see like the blood across the street like drying up in the street right there . . . we used to play football at the bus stop every day before the bus came, and we happen to be in the area – that's when all of us seen it (Interview 1)

The recollections of Jerome and Avery show their perceptions of the potential risks faced by children in this area of the city where drug use and violence were common.

Recollections of community risk-factors were not limited to Jerome and Avery. Police responses to crime in the neighborhood were perceived as common. Susan remembered seeing the police often. She recalled, "I saw the police all the time near our house. I saw the police all

the time" (Susan, Interview 1). She also recalled having a neighbor who appeared to be addicted

to crack-cocaine. When discussing a family that lived in the same building as her family Susan

said, "it was four kids, one guy, three girls, and a grandmother. And their mother came in and

out . . . she was a crack addict" (Interview 1).

The children in Susan's building made life difficult for her and her sisters at times. Susan

recalled, "It was like all the kids in Ridley Circle used to be against us for some reason" (Susan,

Interview 1). Susan remembered the fact that children would often attempt to take money from

her and seemed to have very little guidance from their parents. In describing the children and

their families in her neighborhood, Susan said "they used to get suspended and like their parents,

their mamas and dads, didn't care . . . they used to run their parents" (Interview 1).   Susan's

reference to the children *"running"* [italics added] their parents reflected her belief that some

children had very little guidance from their parents. In describing the relationship between

children and their parents, Susan said "They ran over them" (Interview 1). According to Susan,

many children in her neighborhood were raising themselves.

According to the perceptions of participants, growing up in neighborhoods where

children were not guided by responsible adults created potential risk of physical harm. Elisha, a

female participant, recalled fighting a neighborhood boy who was much larger than she was.

People in the neighborhood did not intervene. Instead, they watched. She stated:

> Every time there was a fight in the neighborhood, the whole neighborhood would come
>
> around and watch it. So, everybody came out and just watched it. That was one time I
>
> got beat up 'cause he was big . . . he kept like slamming me to the ground and I just
>
> kept getting back up and fighting him (Elisha, Interview 1)

Yvonne grew up very close to a housing-project near Elisha's home. She recalled the day she moved to the area by stating, "That's a bad memory . . . I remember one time I got in a fight. I think I had got in a fight over my bike" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Similar to Jerome and Avery, Yvonne remembered violence in the neighborhood. She commented, "Anybody could get shot. One girl I went to high school with got shot inside her house. And, then, during the same day or same week, this man was shot just walking down the street. Then, the drug-dealers really took over the neighborhood" (Interview 1).

Both Yvonne and Susan used the term "*Bey-Bey's kids*" (Interview 1) to describe children in this area of the city. The term was made popular by Robin Harris, an African-American comedian, who co-authored a screen-play about his experiences with young children (Carroll, Wilhite, Smith Harris, 1992). The term is often used in urban vernacular to describe children with behavior problems.

Although the participants lived in relatively close proximity to each other, interaction between individuals from different housing projects was limited to common neighborhood landmarks like bus-stops and store-fronts. John described the different housing areas as communities within the larger down-town community.   He shared the fact that children from different housing projects did not communicate. John stated,

> And they would not talk. Yes. That's why I said it was a community, but separate
>
> communities . . . if you lived in Dickerson Court, you pretty much stayed to yourself
>
> . . . Dickerson Court. If you stayed in Ridley Circle, you pretty much stayed (John,
>
> Interview 1)

Although the entire downtown area was regarded by many residents as dangerous, participants perceived some housing projects to be more dangerous than others. Yvonne

compared her experiences with other children in two different housing projects after her family

moved. She recalled, "In Ridley Circle, if we had stuff, they would ask to play with it. But, in

Newsome Park, they would try to destroy it . . . it wasn't like a community" (Yvonne, Interview

1).

Despite the fact that participants in the study grew up in relatively close proximity, they

were not friends and did not report social interactions with each other. The combined

perceptions of participants provide a more complete description of the broader context in which

their lived experiences took place. The following distinct descriptions of the participants

explore lived experiences in their homes, schools and community with greater specificity.

<div align="center">Meet the Resilient</div>

Participants in this study were assigned a number that corresponded with the order of the

first series of interviews. This number was used to assist in the sorting of data from interviews

and is referred to as a data sorting number. Table 9 provides the participants' data sorting

numbers, pseudonyms, age, and academic classification at the time of the study for each

participant.

Table 9

Biographical Information of the Participants

Data Sorting Number	Pseudonym	Age	Academic Classification
1	Avery	20	Sophomore
2	Jerome	21	Sophomore
3	Elisha	22	Senior
4	Yvonne	20	Sophomore
5	Susan	19	Sophomore
6	John	23	Graduate Student

Avery's Story: Focus is the Key

ACHIEVEMENT

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Risk Factors	Protective Factors

-Poverty
-Peers
-Hunger
-Neighborhood
 Crime

-Mother
-Father's
 Family
-Good Teachers
-Maturity

Avery's
Focus

HOME   **SCHOOL**

**Resilient
Behaviors**
- Good Grades
-Good Conduct
-Good Behavior
-Sports
- Attending
 College

**Non-Resilient
Behaviors**
-Fighting
-Probation
due to gun
possession

COMMUNITY

FAILURE
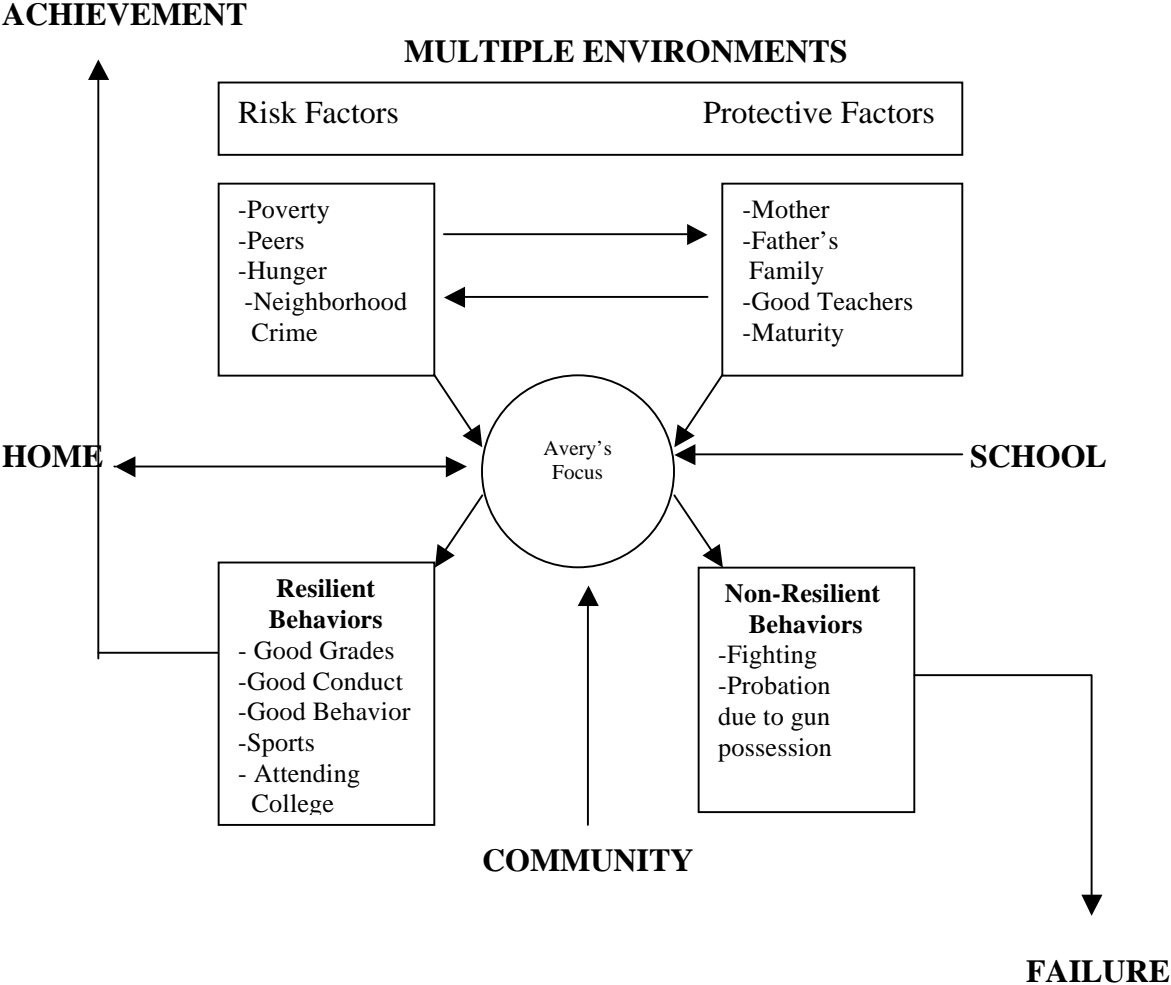
Figure 5. Avery's dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient and

non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

Avery is a soft-spoken, college athlete. Many of his current friends consider him introverted. When asked about the reasons for this perception, he stated, "I really don't talk to people. I mean, I got better over the years, but a lot of times, I just sit back and let other people talk" (Avery, Interview 2). At the time of the interviews, he attended school on an athletic scholarship. He is a young man of very few words. Avery seemed more comfortable with one-word or single-sentence responses to interview questions. However, he speaks with great confidence and conviction. He also commands attention when he enters a room. Avery spent his childhood living as a middle child with two sisters and his mother. His father was in and out of jail for much of his life. Avery spent his early years in an apartment of a housing project and later moved to a larger home in the same violent neighborhood.

Avery's mother raised her three children alone with occasional support from family members and child-support from one father of her three children. Avery's father was, in Avery's words, a "hustler" (Avery, Interview 1). The term hustler is used to describe individuals involved in the sale of drugs. Avery was the only child among his many cousins who attended college. He commented, "really . . . they say I'm the only one that went to school" (Interview 1). He later clarified his statement while reflecting on his friends and family. He stated, "Yeah, except for like one of my cousins. Everybody else in the penitentiary" (Interview 1).

His father's family provided a kind of unconventional support one sometimes needs in tough neighborhoods. In Avery's neighborhood, crime was not perceived by some citizens as a matter of choice. For some, it was a way of life. Avery recalled that for many people, crime was the only way to survive. He shared his perception that the criminals in the neighborhood were not, to him, bad people. He stated, "most of the people who committed crimes, they just had to

do it . . . that's the only way they had . . . They really wasn't bad people. It was just something they had to do. They had to live" (Avery, Interview 1).

When asked whether or not he was ever recruited by others to sell drugs or commit crimes, Avery replied, "they know not to say that to me though, cause my people would take offense to it" (Avery, Interview 1). He shared further, "my daddy's side really like got a lot of respect . . . in the streets and stuff" (Interview 1). Despite the prevalence of crime and drug use in the area in which Avery grew up, he was never encouraged or recruited to participate in criminal activities. This was due, in part, to the perception in the community that Avery's family would take adverse action against anyone who attempted to recruit Avery into a life of crime. Additionally, Avery's family, particularly those involved in criminal activities, encouraged him to "stay focused" (Interview 2). He recalled, "they always told me that street life was not good . . . you don't need to be in it. Just stay focused on school" (Interview 3). Avery's two sisters also avoided lives of crime. His elder sister, aged 27, is a licensed practical nurse with two children. His younger sister is now 14.

Avery clearly remembered difficult days at home when there was very little food to share between himself and his two siblings. He intimated, "We're starving. You know what I mean" (Interview 2)? He described these times with apparent sadness in his voice; "Sometimes you don't know what you're gonna' eat" (Avery, Interview 1). He and his sisters often shared meals. In describing some of his more difficult times, he stated the following:

I mean, my mama would give us some money, but, you know, we had to split the food.

And there really weren't no meal to yourself . . . a lot of times there wasn't no meal to

yourself 'cause ends weren't meeting . . . it wasn't no extra money (Interview 1).

Avery's reference to *ends not meeting* [italics added] gives clarity to his perception that his family had very little money. Some days were more challenging than others. Avery remembered tough times when he was 10 years old. "It started getting serious, you know what I'm saying, when I was like 10 . . . we didn't have nothing to drink and we were hungry" (Interview 1). At this young age, Avery spent many days surviving with his sisters with very little food to eat in the home and very little money. He clearly remembered, "Yeah, you open a cabinet you see canned goods. There's nothing in the refrigerator" (Interview 1).

His mother did not commit crimes in order to provide for her family and worked menial jobs during Avery's childhood. When asked about his mother's work ethic, Avery replied, "She never stopped working" (Avery, Interview, 2). He elaborated on this description of his mother by stating, "She's a strong person. I mean, she don't depend on anybody to help . . . she going to take care of the family, regardless" (Interview 2). Avery indicated that his mother made many other sacrifices. He recalled, "When she had my sister . . . she dropped out of school . . . to take care of us" (Interview 2). In his opinion, among the many sacrifices made by his mother, she ceased the pursuit of her own dreams in order to take care of her family. Avery's mother had high expectations for her children that included doing well in school and coming home at a certain hour (Interview 3).

Avery and his sisters learned to be independent early in life. He remembered himself and his sisters being very supportive of each other. "We always looked out for each other . . . we never . . . depended on my mom cause . . . she was doing what she could" (Interview 1). Despite the lack of basic needs in the home, Avery, like his mother, avoided the temptation of crime. He worked odd jobs as soon as he was old enough to get a worker's permit. He stated, "When I got to the age to work, that's when I started working" (Interview 1). There were days when the need

for money in the home was so desperate that Avery worked cash-only, temporary jobs that did not require a worker's permit. When asked how he made money before the age of 15, he replied, "I worked before that, like on a construction site . . . but it really wasn't like no stable job" (Interview 1). This was very difficult work. Avery remembered, "I was out there in the sun when it's like 100 degrees. You're sitting there hanging drywall and laying bricks. Your arms, I remember one day my arms tightened up on me. I was lifting the bricks and my arms . . . locked" (Interview 2). Even today in this part of the city, men can sometimes be seen on street corners lining up to be picked up as day-laborers on construction sites. This type of work was a choice Avery was forced to make before the age of 15-years-old.

With hunger in the home, the lure of easy money from the sale of drugs was always nearby. Avery stated, "I was hanging around people who were selling drugs, like a lot of my friends, but I just didn't . . . I was focused" (Avery, Interview 1). When asked whether he could have become involved in drug sales, Avery replied, "I could have . . . I just didn't" (Interview 1). Avery did admit that the struggles of not having enough food to eat made crime a sometimes tempting option. He elaborated on the temptation by sharing, "people's family doing bad, you gotta' earn a living somehow. Those are like the biggest things. Not living how you want to live- not living comfortable" (Interview 1). According to Avery, crime was a necessity for many in his neighborhood. The cycle of crime and incarceration left them few other choices according to Avery. He explained:

> the only way they could make money was by the crimes they were committing. That's how they felt. But at the same time, I mean, I guess they felt they had to make more money than a regular job would give them, so that's the only way. There's no chances. Some of them had charges, so they had no choice but to sell drugs. That's how they felt

'cause they can't find a good job because the jobs wouldn't accept them (Avery,

Interview 2).

With this comment, Avery was expressing his general perception that a criminal record was job-

prohibitive for many people in his community.

The daily struggles precipitated by poverty caused Avery to rationalize the criminal acts

of many in his community empathetically. He explained his view of their criminality by stating,

"they're not a criminal in my eyes honestly. I mean, the stuff they doing, people call them

criminals . . . but sometimes it's just how it is" (Avery, Interview 2). According to Avery, the

benefits of selling drugs could be noticed quickly due to the fast and voluminous income. He

recalled the indicators of success from drug sales, stating "I mean, one day they was looking bad.

The next day . . . they got chains and cars and eating good and gaining weight and everything"

(Interview 2). Avery's reference to chains refers to the jewelry sometimes worn by drug dealers

in his neighborhood. The hunger Avery endured in his home made selling drugs tempting at

times. Avery commented, "I seen how easy the money can get . . . I thought I knew ways I can

get away with it, but I just didn't do it" (Avery, Interview 3).

Avery's childhood was not completely free of crime. He had a negative interaction with

legal authorities at the age of 11-years-old. He reluctantly shared with me a time in his life when

he was charged by the police for carrying a gun. According to Avery, a crime took place in his

neighborhood and police began random checks of individuals around the area. He stated, "they

stopped me and checked me for stuff. And then I got caught with it" (Avery, Interview 1). It

was later proven that Avery was not involved with the incident in question. However, he did

have a gun and was given a year of probation by a juvenile judge. The probation had special

requirements. "I got put on a year probation. I had to go to classes" (Interview 1). When asked

what he intended to do with the gun, Avery replied, "nothing really" (Interview 1). It is

important to reiterate that Avery was very guarded about this incident and was hesitant to

elaborate on the circumstances surrounding it. He simply stated, "Yeah, a lot of people don't

know" (Interview 1). Avery regarded the gun incident as a turning point in life. He stated, "I

was either gonna keep getting into trouble, or I was gonna just focus on . . . doing the right thing"

(Interview 3).

In addition to the gun violation, Avery remembered fighting very often during his

younger years. When describing his survival in the neighborhood, Avery stated, "I mean, you're

always challenged, especially when I was younger. I used to fight a lot" (Avery, Interview 1).

When asked what caused the fights, Avery replied, "people talking, talking wrong. I mean,

saying stuff they don't need to say to me, or saying something to somebody I'm with" (Interview

1). This type of behavior occurred in his neighborhood during Avery's middle school years.

Avery remembered the incidents took place during a very specific age range and shared, "About

10 to 12, that's when I fought the most" (Interview, 1).

Despite the daily struggles for survival in Avery's home, there were good days. When

asked about the happiest days of his life, Avery described the days when his mother would get

her income-tax return check. Avery jokingly stated that it felt like they had "won the lottery"

(Avery, Interview 1). During these rare occasions, the empty refrigerators and hunger

disappeared. Avery smiled as he stated, "You could buy what you wanted then. You have the

money. You can buy you some clothes, eat good, everything" (Interview 1). Food and clothing

were not taken for granted in Avery's family. His mother's tax return was the closest experience

Avery had to a vacation. As soon as the money ran out, the family resumed their daily struggle.

A typical day in the home was simple and uneventful. Avery shared, "I sat in the house with my

mama and talked to her, something like that. But we really didn't like take trips nowhere or

nothing like that" (Interview 1).

According to Avery, none of the individuals from his neighborhood peer-group achieved

his level of academic and social success. When asked about the whereabouts of people he

considers friends, Avery replied, "the feds, the penitentiary" (Avery, Interview 1). One of his

closest friends, Donte´, is currently imprisoned for robbery. Despite Avery's warnings, Donte´

committed the crime, was caught, and later charged as an adult. Avery recalled, "It was him and

somebody else, but I told him *don't do it*" (Interview 1). Calvin, another peer, is also

imprisoned. Avery stated, "He got accused of murder. I think he beat the charge though. He

beat the charge. He's in there for a gun charge now" (Interview 1). The community had a

devastating impact on many of Avery's friends. Avery stated that "the environment . . . all the

surroundings . . . my community" was the one thing that could have prevented him from

achieving success (Interview 3).

Several of Avery's peers became involved in criminal activities despite noteworthy

academic ability. According to Avery, his cousin Antwan demonstrated high academic ability at

a very early age. In describing Antwan, Avery stated, "Yeah, he didn't graduate, but he's the

smartest guy I know" (Avery, Interview 1). He elaborated on Antwan's ability by stating, "He

was taking algebra in 6th grade." Avery also recalled that Antwan participated in the Talented

and Gifted program in elementary and middle school. Avery believed that the lure of easy

money was too powerful for Antwan and others to avoid. When asked what might cause a young

man like Antwan with such high academic potential to commit criminal acts, Avery forcefully

articulated, "people's family doing bad " (Interview 1). Avery then seemed to regain his

composure and later described Antwan's plight further by emphasizing the mental processes and

daily struggle Antwan's life. Avery stated, "wondering what he's gonna eat, not having good clothes like he wanted, stuff like that" (Interview 1). Avery and Antwan remain close. Avery disclosed that Antwan writes to him often from prison and still encourages him to this day. He stated Antwan says, "Keep doing your thing man" (Interview 2). Antwan's reference to "doing your thing" is his way of encouraging Avery to continue his current path in college.

Avery felt that his negative experiences with the legal system early in life may have caused him to refrain from criminal activity in his later years. He stated, "that's when I started realizing how life was" (Avery, Interview, 2). Of all the risk factors prevalent in Avery's life, he viewed the gun incident as the most potentially damaging (Interview 2).

Avery reflected on possible reasons for his ability to avoid crimes by recalling that he associated with older people, thus he knew of the potential perils of criminal activity. He recalled, "I always . . . related to older people . . . I always hung around older people" (Avery, Interview 1). Avery's gun charge at the age of 11-years-old gave him experiences that many of his friends encountered later in life. Avery stated, "I was ahead of my time 'cause I was going through stuff . . . at 10 that people go through at 16" (Interview 1). Avery reflected on his feelings at the time of his gun incident and stated, "It didn't scare me. I just ain't want to hurt my mom or mess with my family's name . . . I calmed down a little, like right after that. I didn't want to hurt her" (Interview 1). In attempting to recall what specific actions he took to avoid criminal activities, Avery stated, "I just stayed focused, I guess. I just stayed focused" (Interview 1).

Despite their criminal activities, Avery continued to associate socially with his peer-group. He shared, "I was still hanging with my people who were doing wrong, but I wasn't . . . getting into trouble or nothing" (Avery, Interview 1). Avery unsuccessfully encouraged his

friends to avoid criminal activities. He regretfully shared, "I talked to everybody, but they got to make their own decisions" (Interview 1).

Unlike many of his friends, grades were always important to Avery. From kindergarten through twelfth-grade, Avery wanted to be academically successful. He jokingly shared that he never wanted his classroom peers to say, "*Oh, you're stupid* or *you see what he got on his report card*" (Avery Interview, 2). He viewed grades, not sports, as his most important asset for admission to college. When discussing his viewpoint that grades were more important than participation in sports, Avery recalled, "That's why I didn't play in ninth grade, trying to get my G.P.A. up" (Interview 1). When asked who made the decision to bypass basketball for one year to focus on academics, Avery replied succinctly, "me" (Interview 1). Avery commented, "I wanted to have a better life where I wouldn't have to worry" (Interview 3).

In Avery's opinion, academic achievement was always more important than athletic success in the schools he attended. Competitive sports were not allowed in his middle school. In his high school, athletes were not given preferential academic treatment. He laughed as he shared, "People be saying teachers give people grades. I never got them" (Interview 1). According to Avery, grades were earned through effort in all of the schools he attended prior to college.

Avery shared that he had several teachers who helped him as he matriculated through elementary, middle and high school. According to Avery, his teachers "shared their stories" and "taught you like the stuff was real" (Avery, Interview 3). He stated that most of his teachers made him feel "smart" (Avery, Interview 2). He fondly recalled his first-grade teacher, Mr. Harrison, who seemed to recognize his potential at the early age of six. Avery shared, "he was the one that really realized I was a leader" (Avery, Interview 1). According to Avery, Mr.

Harrison kept him focused on academic achievement. Avery remembered that Mr. Harrison had

a very structured classroom. Avery recalled, "He controlled his classroom" (Interview 2).

Avery elaborated, "He made sure we did our work and we didn't misbehave" (Interview 2).

Avery smiled for the first time in the entire interview process when he mentioned his 4th grade

teacher, Mrs. Luter.

Avery also shared recollections of two other teachers: Mr. Blackmon and Mr. Reid. He

stated, "They're the ones that really . . . pushed me . . . before we went to high school. So they

really let me know I could do it, as far as basketball and school" (Avery, Interview 1). He

remembered that Mr. Blackmon and Mr. Reid talked often about "staying focused" and not

allowing peers to have a negative impact on your life (Interview 1). Avery also recalled that

these teachers, Mr. Blackmon and Mr. Reid, were a part of his life at a time when he felt his

greatest temptations to commit crimes, ages 10 thru 13. Avery commented that he had many

good teachers. He commented that teachers "always showed they cared for me . . . they showed

me in their actions" (Interview 3).

This same type of encouragement continued when Avery entered high school. He

recalled how one of his counselors, Miss Vreeland, helped to keep him on the right path. Avery

shared that Miss Vreeland's actions included, "checking on my grades, things like that. Making

sure my attitude was right 'cause I had a bad temper" (Avery, Interview 2).

Avery was over six feet tall by age 13. He played football and basketball in his

neighborhood, but did not participate in organized sports until he reached 10th grade. His height

made him conspicuous to most coaches and he was encouraged to try out for the high school

basketball team. Avery noticed his own talent prior to high school. In comparing his ability to

that of his peers, Avery stated, "I could do something other people couldn't on the court. So, I realized . . . I was good" (Avery, Interview 1).

As previously indicated, Avery considered academics to be more important than athletics and chose to forgo participation in basketball during his 9th grade year. Avery believes that basketball played an extremely important role in his development into a student-athlete at the college level. However, he indicated that he believes he would have attended college regardless of his participation in high school basketball. Avery clearly articulated his perceived benefits from participation in the sport by stating, "it took me to another level, probably made me focus more on school . . . I had to make a certain grade-point-average to get in college" (Avery, Interview 2). Avery felt that his schools prepared him for college. Regarding his level of preparation for college by his previous schools, Avery commented, "I felt they did everything they could . . . college, to me, is like a repeat of high school, with, a little bit of extra work" (Interview 3).

Avery continues to balance his participation in sports with academic requirements and currently maintains a college grade-point-average of 3.3. When we ended our interviews, Avery told me to try to see him play basketball during the upcoming season. He confidently commented, "This is going to be my year, Mr. Hodge." Avery believes that a lesson that other children can learn from his life is "Never give up" (Avery, Interview 3). Avery was fueled by an inner drive and focus. When asked about the keys to his success, he stated, "I guess it's just in me. I guess I just wanted a better life" (Interview 3). Avery seemed pleased with what he has been able to accomplish in spite of his challenging circumstances. He proudly commented, "It feels better when you're coming from nothing and you achieve something" (Interview 3).

Table 10

Avery's Help and Hindrances

Helpful Aspects of Avery's Life	Hindering Aspects of Avery's Life
Avery's Focus	Criminal Temptation
The Perception that Education is Important	Negative Peers
Mother's Work Ethic	Hunger in the Home
Good Schools	The Lure of Easy Money
Good Educators	Poverty
Father's Protective Family	Probation for Gun Charge
Basketball	

Jerome's Story: Pleasing Grandma and Proving Mama Wrong

ACHIEVEMENT

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Risk Factors	Protective Factors

-Poverty
-Abusive Father
-Community
 crime
-Criminal Peers

-Working
 mother
-Supportive
 grandmother
-Caring
 Teachers

Prove
Mother
Wrong &
Please
Grandma

HOME

SCHOOL

**Resilient
Behaviors**
-Remained in
School
-Good Grades
-Crime Free

**Non-Resilient
Behaviors**
- Decline in
high school
grades
-Desire to quit
high school

COMMUNITY

FAILURE

Figure 6. Jerome's dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient and

non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

Jerome is small in stature, but he carries himself with an almost intimidating intensity. When I welcomed him into my office to begin our interviews, he gave me an extremely firm handshake and made direct eye contact with me. As he walked into our building, he held his fists with the type of tension one might expect to see in a person facing imminent bodily harm. At the time of the interviews, he was a 21-year-old college student majoring in Information Technology. His fierce countenance and somewhat menacing mannerisms perhaps reflect life in a community where the appearance of toughness may have been a prerequisite for survival.

Jerome's life was a struggle for as long as he could remember. He spent most of his childhood living in the home of his grandmother with his younger siblings and cousins. During his elementary school years, his mother worked two jobs and attended night-school with the goal of moving her family away from their crime-riddled section of the community. That goal took several years to accomplished, leaving Jerome and his siblings exposed to several risk-factors. His earliest memories involved his abusive father beating his mother. "My earliest memory, I mean, it seem like yesterday . . . my earliest memory is stuck in my head. I remember my daddy beating up my mama" (Jerome, Interview 1).

Like many other adults in Jerome's neighborhood, his father was addicted to cocaine. When referring to memories of his father beating his mother, Jerome stated, "My daddy was on powder . . . he just beat her up in front of us" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome's reference to *powder* is a term used in this city to describe cocaine. His father was in prison for most of Jerome's childhood.

During the few times in Jerome's life that his father was not imprisoned, Jerome's mother attempted to keep the family connected by visiting his father wherever he lived at the time or allowing him to visit his children. Her attempts often yielded negative results. Jerome painfully

remembered a visit to his father's apartment that occurred when he was approximately 6-years-old. He recalled:

> As soon as we walked in the house, he was eating some French fries. He threw the plate
>
> at the wall and he missed. And he just ran and started beating her up. I don't know what
>
> it was about. But he did it in front of me, my brother and my sister (Interview 1)

Jerome's early memories of his father predominantly involve the physical abuse of his mother and his father's use of alcohol and drugs. He stated, "All I remember is him beating her up" (Jerome, Interview 1). He quantified this statement by commenting, "like, a lot of times" (Interview 1). Jerome recalled that his perception of his father changed after the attack against his mom. He also recalled that he too was attacked by his father for attempting to help his mother during a violent incident. He stated, "I just looked at him completely different from then. It's like he ain't even got control. And then when I tried to help her out, he slammed me to the floor" (Interview 2).

 In addition to Jerome's memories of his father's cocaine use, he recalled his use of alcohol. He stated, "My dad, he was a drunk too" (Interview 1). Jerome recalled that his father's use of the combination of alcohol and cocaine had potentially dangerous consequences, stating "I was scared of him. When he start sniffing his coke and drinking, he was out of control " (Interview 1).

While reflecting on his father, Jerome intimated that his father has never accomplished anything in his own relatively young life. Jerome described his father's whereabouts stating, "locked up right now. Thirty-eight and locked up. He ain't really do nothing with his life" (Jerome, Interview 1). At the time of the interviews, Jerome's father was making attempts to re-enter their lives. Jerome shared, "He got other problems. He back in jail. But he . . . trying to

make up for lost time" (Interview 2). In comparing his father today, with the actions of his past,

Jerome concluded that, "he was a completely different person back then . . . so I guess he trying

to straighten up. He . . . missed all of us growing up basically" (Interview 2).

Jerome's recollection of his father's age of 38 is indicative of the fact that his father was

17-years-old when Jerome was born. When asked how much of Jerome's life his dad spent

imprisoned, Jerome replied, "Wow, most of my life. I'm 21 now. He's been out probably like 4,

maybe 5 years of my life" (Interview 1). Of Jerome's 21 years of life, his father has been

imprisoned for 16 to 17 years. Jerome's younger brother followed a pattern similar to his

father's. When asked about his brother's current whereabouts, Jerome replied, "He acts just like

my dad" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome added, "My dad is in Indian Creek Correctional Facility,

but my brother over at the city jail" (Interview 1).

During the many years that Jerome's father was imprisoned and his mother worked

multiple jobs, Jerome lived in a small, three-bedroom apartment in a housing project with his

grandmother. His mother lived in a separate apartment in another part of the city. "I stayed with

my grandma most all of my life" (Jerome, Interview 1). "She was like my legal guardian"

(Interview 1). At first, the apartment provided adequate living-space for Jerome, his siblings,

one cousin and his grandmother. This lasted until Jerome's aunt was evicted from her home and

was forced to move into the apartment. This created very crowded living conditions. Jerome

recalled the living conditions with a slight grimace, "Yeah, we started off five of us, 'till my aunt

had got put out. Then all of us moved in the house" (Interview 1). Jerome verbally tallied the

number of family members in the home: "Ten children and about 4 adults. 'Cause my uncle kept

staying there too . . . we was packed in there" (Interview 1).

With 14 people living in a three-bedroom apartment, sleeping accommodations were very challenging. Jerome recalled, "We had . . . mattresses on the floor. Like, if we had a bedroom, we'd take one of the mattresses off, put the mattress on the floor. We had pallets and all that. Some of us slept downstairs and some of us slept upstairs" (Jerome, Interview 1). He added, "there was two sets of bunk beds, double-stacked" (Interview 2). Jerome's uncle would sometimes make Jerome and the other children "double-up" on the mattresses of the bunk beds so that he could enter the room to have sex with his female companion (Interview 1). Jerome, as a child, had full view of this activity. He stated, "I could look down from my bunk bed and see them doing it" (Jerome, Interview 2).

When asked which of the four adults served as the leader of the home, Jerome responded, "my grandma" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome recalled that she tried to keep order in the home by having clear requirements for Jerome and his siblings. Jerome remembered playing video games at home after school. His recollection also included his grandmother's rules. "She really had a collar on us" (Interview 1). He stated that each day, his grandmother required that they "clean up and do their homework" (Interview 1). There was a temporary break in Jerome's tense demeanor as he shared the fact that his grandmother "made me do my homework" (Interview 1).

Jerome's mother visited his grandmother's home each night and attempted to get Jerome to spend the night at her home on many occasions. Jerome preferred the relative discomfort of his grandmother's crowed home. He rationalized the fact that his mother's busy schedule required that he spend much of his life with his grandmother by stating, "she was going to school. I mean, I knew where she was. She showed her face. She spent time with me, but I was still more attached to my grandma" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome recalled his mother's schedule stating, "My mom, she worked in the yard, the shipyard, so she was up like 4 o'clock in

the morning. Then she had a night job too (Interview 2). Jerome described his feelings for his

mother and grandmother by stating, "I really consider my grandma my mom" (Jerome, Interview

1).

Jerome understood why his mother worked two jobs and attended school. He opined,

"basically, she was trying to put it together for us" (Jerome, Interview, 1). He showed a degree

of empathy for his mother's plight as an abused, single mother by stating, "She had to do what

she had to do" (Interview 1). Jerome's mother wanted to raise her children in a safer section of

the community. This required her to work additional hours and acquire as much education as

possible. His mother's concerns about her children living in the part of the community where

her mother lived were justified based on Jerome's recollection.

Jerome recalled the many dangers that he and the other children in his grandmother's

home faced while living in that particular housing area. He stated, "I could see the crack-heads

at night sitting out there talking to themselves every night when we was out there" (Jerome,

Interview 1). As stated previously, *crack-head* [italics added] is a term used to describe a person

who is addicted an extremely habit-forming type of cocaine (Pace-Schott et.al, 2008). Jerome

described the area succinctly, "Crack-heads, the shooting, the fighting. I seen all that" (Interview

1). Jerome expressed sadness as he shared his recollections of seeing homeless adults in his

neighborhood who were addicted to this debilitating drug called crack. He emphasized their

plight stating, "I mean, it's sad. You know what I'm saying? I mean, you're sitting out there all

by yourself, talking to yourself" (Jerome, Interview 1).

In Jerome's section of the community, children inevitably came into direct contact with

adults who were addicted to crack-cocaine. Jerome described the prevalence of this potentially

dangerous contact by stating, "whether I go to the store or to the bus stop, they gonna be out

there cause they ain't got nowhere to go. They might wander around all night. Just walk. No

destination. Always bumping into them" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome stated that he often

received encouragement from addicted citizens in the city streets. He recalled, "They'd tell me

stay in school, get your education, there ain't nothing out here good for you. Just keep doing

what you're doing and it's gonna pay off" (Interview 1). Jerome specifically remembered a

homeless adult who would always advise young boys to avoid drug use and illicit sex.

According to Jerome, some of the most destitute adults in the community would implore the

children not to follow their example of adulthood. Despite the attempts of addicted adults to

encourage children to make better decisions in life, the residual effects of drug and alcohol abuse

in the community were unavoidable for some.

In addition to constant public drug and alcohol use in the neighborhood, there was also

continuous violence. Jerome remembered being afraid in his neighborhood. He stated, "People

shoot out there every day over stupid stuff" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome believed that many

criminals in the neighborhoods surrounding his grandmother's housing project had low regard

for human life. He recalled that people from different housing projects were in constant conflict.

"They'd shoot at each other all the time" (Interview 1). At this point in the discussion, Jerome's

eyes became slightly filled with tears. He shared that the violence in the neighborhood

eventually had a direct and devastating impact on his family. One of his cousins who lived in his

grandmother's home with Jerome as a child was violently murdered later in life at a

neighborhood store. Jerome mournfully described the incident by stating, "My cousin died. He

got killed in around 2001. He got shot 16 times putting minutes on his cell phone" (Interview 1).

It was common for impoverished individuals who did not qualify for standard cell-phone

contracts to purchase pre-paid minutes in neighborhood stores.

Jerome recalled that his cousin had talent in rap music and dropped out of school. He

recalled, "He was in love with the money and I guess he thought he could get money quicker

than going to school. His mom was poor . . . He wanted his own money" (Jerome, Interview 1).

This desire to have his own money led Jerome's cousin to drug-dealing. Jerome referred to

drug-dealing as "hustling" (Interview 1). Jerome does not know for sure whether the drug-

dealing lead to his cousin's tragic death. Jerome reflected on the incident by saying, "Nobody

get shot 16 times in a convenience store and don't nobody get arrested for it" (Interview 2).

Jerome recalled that the owners of the store seemed to show little empathy for the loss of life.

He stated that after the shooting, they "just mopped up his blood and just opened the store right

back up" (Interview 2).

Jerome stated that the crimes in the neighborhood and those against his family negatively

impacted his outlook on life. After the shooting of his cousin, Jerome recalled, "I lost mad faith"

(Jerome, Interview 2). The term *mad* [italics added] is used as an adjective by Jerome in this

context to describe the large amount of faith he lost as a result of the crimes in his neighborhood.

Jerome's cousin was not the only victim of a crime in his family. Jerome sadly recalled the day

his grandmother was robbed.

> I think the thing that really messed my head up was the day my grandmother got her first-
>
> of-the-month check. And when she went to cash it, after she cashed it, a dude took her
>
> purse from her. Some dude . . . took her purse. Took every bit, about $1,000 from her.
>
> And they do that to a old lady? They don't care down there (Interview 2)
>
> As a result of the incident, Jerome's grandmother was unable to go shopping for

groceries and Jerome bitterly recalled, "we starved" (Jerome, Interview, 2). Jerome also felt that

this incident showed a decline in the neighborhood. Jerome stated that the crime "showed it got

worse, 'cause, I mean, most people . . . got respect for . . . the elderly people" (Interview 2).

Jerome shared, "After that, grandma basically kept us in the house a whole bunch" (Interview 2).

He continued, "we might have got to play in the back yard every now and then, if she was out

there. But other than that, we couldn't do much of nothing (Interview 2).

Jerome's grandmother tried to provide a safe and supportive home environment for her

10 grandchildren. However, she focused much of her discipline on Jerome and his two siblings.

When asked whether she employed the same type of discipline to the other children in the home,

Jerome replied, "Nah, cause their parents stayed with them" (Jerome, Interview 2). The parents

of the other grandchildren did not share her values. Jerome's cousins in the home did not have

curfews and were allowed to stay outside in the neighborhood for longer periods of time. This

was true even after the robbery of his grandmother. Jerome explained that this may have

contributed to their later social failures stating, "I guess . . . more stuff happen at late night

anyway, so they probably picked up on what they saw" (Interview 2).

Jerome shared that none of the four adults living in his grandmother's home contributed

financially to the daily expenses of the family. The result was that there was a very limited

amount of food to eat in the home. Jerome remembered:

> Ain't hardly nobody worked. I mean, my mom worked, but there was a whole bunch of
>
> mouths to feed. We were brought up on Oodles of Noodle basically. That's what we ate
>
> every night, Oodles of Noodles and cereal in the morning (Jerome, Interview 1)

Having 10 young mouths to feed on a limited income forced Jerome's grandmother to be, "real

tight with money" (Interview 1).

Jerome recalled that his grandmother would occasionally rely on neighbors to feed the

family. He stated, "My grand-mama knew people in the neighborhood, but it was embarrassing

to go over there and ask for food . . . I had pride issues, but I let them go. I used to hate when

she'd say *Can you go over there and get some bread from them"* (Jerome, Interview 2). At other

times, Jerome's grandmother would send notes to neighbors for food. Jerome recalled, "She sent

me out with a little note or something. *My grandma told me to give you this"* (Interview 2).

Jerome recalled that he was sometimes teased by neighborhood children. He said children would

say, "*Ya'll came to our house and got some food yesterday"* (Interview 2). The embarrassment

was still somewhat apparent during our interviews. He recalled, "It hurt my feelings" (Interview

3). The teasing was also a form of motivation. Jerome explained, "That kind of made me . . .

want to get away from that and do something . . . I had to get away from there" (Interview 3).

The actions of the adults in the home caused additional challenges for Jerome and the

other children, particularly during times that his grandmother was not at home. Jerome shared

that his uncle "started stealing her money . . . and a lot of stuff started missing and stuff like that"

(Jerome, Interview 2). Jerome recalled that his uncle and his uncle's girlfriend packaged and

used drugs in the kitchen of his grandmother's home when his grandmother was out of the home.

Jerome remembered the first time he stumbled upon his uncle using drugs. Jerome stated, "They

was in the kitchen and they rushed us out. They was in there sniffing when we got there, so they

pushed all of us outside cause it smelled like burning rubber. They was in there shooting up"

(Interview 1). This incident occurred when Jerome was 12-years-old. The term "shooting up"

sometimes refers to the use of heroine.

Jerome also remembered his uncle's violent temper as a result of this drug use. Jerome

recalled, "He got real violent, you know what I'm saying (Jerome, Interview 2)? Jerome recalled

that his uncle had a propensity for intimidation of the children in the home. He recalled, "He'd

bully us around all the time" (Interview 2).

The abuse of heroin and cocaine in the home by Jerome's uncle caused additional hardships on the family. The addiction required money. Jerome's uncle and his uncle's girlfriend stole from the family to feed their drug habits. Jerome remembered one year when they stole his and his sister's school clothes. Jerome recalled, "My uncle's girlfriend . . . stole the clothes and she . . . sold them. So we didn't have school clothes" (Jerome, Interview 1). By sharing this incident, Jerome was describing a common occurrence in the down-town area where addiction is prevalent. In some cases, addicts steal from their own family members, children included, in order to get enough money to buy drugs and satisfy the severe cravings of their addiction.

Despite the use of drugs in the home, Jerome's grandmother provided structure for the children in the home. There were rules that Jerome and the other children had to follow. Homework was important. On a typical day, Jerome would arrive home from school and play video games. He recalled, "and after a while, probably like two hours, then most of the time we'd turn it off, get my lessons, take my bath, and get ready to go to sleep" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome did not describe his grandmother as a strict person. He recalled with a smile, "I ain't gonna say she's strict. She just understood . . . she gave me some freedom as long as I had everything I had to do done first, like my homework and stuff like that" (Interview 1). The result was that Jerome made good grades for most of his school years.

Jerome recalled with pride, "I mean, like, primary and middle school, I was a honor roll student" (Interview 1). He remembered that good grades meant rewards from his grandmother. He shared, "I got money for it. I got a couple dollars for my As" (Interview 1). Jerome recalled that this reward system made a difference. He laughed as he shared, "I wanted that money for that report card" (Interview 1). When asked how much money his grandmother gave him for his

As, Jerome replied, "probably $5 for every A I had, or something like that. But, . . . that was like a lot of money to me back then.

Jerome was the only one of the 10 children in the home to attend college. He was not able to articulate the current circumstances of all 10 of the children, but he was able to share revealing information. He stated, "Let's see, one's dead . . . four of them locked up. And I had a girl cousin. She's got three kids. She stays with her friend now. She got put out" (Interview 1). Jerome paused as he recalled the current circumstances of the other children who grew up in his grandmother's house. When asked about his sister, Jerome replied, "My sister, she dropped out of school. She's just hanging around the house now" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome also referenced two of his cousins who could have attended college, but made other choices. Jerome commented, "I'm the only one. My cousin could have went to college, but he smoke all day. He had a scholarship to play basketball. My other cousin went to Pheobus. She had a track scholarship. She ain't take it" (Jerome, Interview 1). When asked what his cousins currently do, Jerome replied, "smoking, that's all they do. Smoking weed every day" (Interview 1). Weed is a term used to refer to marijuana.

When Jerome reached approximately sixth grade, he eventually moved to his mother's home. The home was less crowded than his grandmother's apartment and the neighborhood, though still down-town, was quiet. The conflicts between Jerome's mother and father continued while Jerome's father remained incarcerated. A main source of contention between the parents was religion. Jerome explained, "My mom is a Christian. My dad's a Muslim" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome recalled that his grandmother explained faith in terms that he could easily understand. He recounted, "I ain't got to be in church to believe" (Jerome, Interview 1).

The conflict that Jerome's parents had over religion was another in a varied list of conflicts. When asked if his parents ever got along, Jerome replied, "All I remember is him beating her up" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome's father was released from prison while Jerome attended high school. Jerome's mother forbade him from seeing his father. There were times when Jerome's father would write to him from prison. Jerome shared "whenever he send me a letter or something like that, I would never get it (Interview, 2). The desire of Jerome's mother to keep her children away from his father was, in Jerome's opinion, the result of his father's abusive history. Jerome repeated his perception of his relationship with his father when he was in elementary school with clarity by stating, "I was scared of him." He referenced his father's drug abuse and added, "They say when you do that . . . you act completely different (Interview 2). As far as Jerome was concerned, the only positive male role-model that he had in his home life was his grandfather. He shared that he developed a relationship with his grandfather after he moved to his mother's home. All of the other men in his home life were disappointing to Jerome.

Jerome emotionally and graphically described his disappointment regarding one of his uncles who was awarded a $3-million-dollar settlement after being hurt on his job as a fisherman. Jerome explained:

He got a $3 million dollar settlement . . . he blows the money like it ain't nothing and still comes borrowing from his mama . . . he trick his money up on prostitutes and stuff like that. He was more interested in chasing the women and smoking weed all the time. So, that's what he did (Jerome, Interview 2).

Jerome intimated that this uncle fathered 13 children. Jerome summed up his feelings for his uncle by stating "He was a bully- a bully and a drug user. He stole from my grandma, he

disrespect my grandma, and he don't do for his kids" (Jerome, Interview, 2). Jerome's

grandmother currently has custody of five of his uncle's 13 children and receives no financial

support from her son. When asked about his uncle's current whereabouts, Jerome explained, "he

locked up now" (Interview, 2).

Jerome's grandmother eventually paid a price for her charitable acts for her family.

Although she reprimanded the individuals in her home for their drug-use, she allowed them to

remain in her house. Individuals who live in public housing can be evicted if they, or members

of their family, are convicted of drug-related charges. Jerome showed anger as he explained,

"my cousin, the one that was staying with my grandma, he caught crack charges and she got put

out (Interview, 2). So she came to stay with us. So my grandma brought her and five kids she

had custody of to our house" (Jerome, Interview 1). It is important to note that in this area of the

city, when people are charged with a crime, it is sometimes referred to as "*catching a charge*"

[italics added] by residents.

Along with bitter memories, Jerome was able to recall happy times from his early

childhood. Despite the crime and drug-use inside his grandmother's home and in the

community, Jerome recalled that he "felt safe inside her house" (Jerome, Interview 1). Having

10 children in the home provided lots of playmates. Jerome recalled, "We played football. He

added, "We stuck together" (Interview 1). Jerome smiled as he reflected on this time in his life.

He said, "That was just joy. We did a lot of stuff out there" (Interview, 2). Upon additional

reflection, Jerome shared that those early years were the best years of his life. He stated, "I wish

we could go back to them times, sometimes" (Interview, 2).

The fact that his grandmother and five small children had to move in with his mother

caused tension in the home. Prior to the move, Jerome described his mother's home as "quiet"

and "boring" (Jerome, Interview, 1). Jerome described the feelings between his mother and grandmother after the move, stating "She felt like she wasn't welcome 'cause my mom and her used to bump heads all the time with all the kids being there" (Interview, 1). Jerome developed resentment for his mother over the years due, in part, to her strict rules, arguments with his grandmother and the manner in which she spoke to her children. Jerome shared, "Like, right now, we get along good. But . . . when I was growing up, I couldn't stand her. I used to hate my mama" (Interview 1). Jerome partially blamed his mother for the fact that his brother turned to a life of crime and is currently imprisoned. He remembered her verbal abuse toward his brother:

> She used to tell him he *ain't gonna be shit just like your damn daddy*. Every day, *you're just like your daddy. Keep on, you're gonna be right in there with your damn daddy . . .* That's not good. He absorbed all it in his head. So I guess eventually he figured *I ain't gonna be shit. I'm gonna be just like my daddy.* Oh well. And followed in his footsteps (Interview 1).

Jerome described his brother as a "fast stick-up kid. If you got it and he want it, he gonna take it" (Jerome, Interview 2). Jerome believed that his brother's peers were also a negative influence. Jerome's peers in his schools were academically focused. His brother, on the other hand, had another type of group. Jerome remembered that his brother, "hung out with that crowd more, so he picked up on what they learned" (Interview 2). His brother eventually began to get paid by drug-dealers to attack other residents in the down-town area. Jerome explained, "he beat somebody up, and they buy him this, buy him that" (Interview 2).

As Jerome grew older, his relationship with his mother declined. He recalled a conversation with his mother about college. Jerome commented, "I figured she was going to help me. She was like *I ain't got no money to help you go to college*" (Jerome, Interview 1). His

home life during his high school years became progressively more challenging due to ongoing

clashes with his mother. He explained, "that's when she started telling me *you're gonna be just*

like your damn daddy too" (Interview 1).

The high academic achievement Jerome described prior to high school began to decline

during his tenth grade year. He also suspected his mom of using drugs. He recalled, "Now, I

think then she was on that stuff." He explained further "I went and stayed with my dad and his

girlfriend so I, like bounced around a couple of nights. Some days I missed school 'cause I

couldn't get down there" (Jerome, Interview 1).   Jerome left the mother he hated to live with a

father he once feared. Although his home circumstances were challenging, Jerome still managed

to study. He recalled, "I studied in high school and still didn't get the grades I got in middle

school" (Interview 1). When asked to describe his tenth grade year, Jerome replied, "It was

hell."

Bouncing around meant living with his father and mother in separate homes. During part

of his high school years, Jerome's father was not imprisoned. Jerome recalled that his father

seemed to be a changed man after multiple incarcerations. Jerome described the change like this,

"He was more mellow. He was more chilled" (Jerome, Interview, 2). Jerome recalled that his

father had refrained from using cocaine when he resorted to selling it. Jerome explained his

father's cessation from drugs with a common statement about the drug trade, "You know you

can't use and sell" (Interview 2). Jerome was forced to choose between the verbal abuse of his

mother and the drug dealing of his father. Jerome shared that his father would prepare and sell

cocaine right out of his house. He recalled, "A lot of prostitutes and stuff came to the house"

(Interview 2). Jerome felt more comfortable with his father during his high school years. He

recalled that his mother's verbal attacks were very hurtful. Jerome shared his feeling about his mother's verbal abuse in the following way:

I got tired of hearing it. I mean, that's your mama. Ain't nobody supposed to talk to their kid like that anyway. I mean, you're supposed to be happy for your kids- period. You ain't supposed to . . . put your kids down. I mean, it hurt (Interview 2)

Jerome considered dropping out of high school. At this time in his life, he shared that "he hated school" (Interview 1). He felt conflict in his home life and social pressures in high school. Jerome remembered, "High school was like a fashion show. We didn't have a lot of money, so other people had better clothes and that caused a lot of conflict too 'cause they talk about you - your clothes, compared with everybody else's" (Jerome, Interview 1).

Jerome's elementary and middle schools required that students wear uniforms. He shared, "Yeah, we had all black shoes with uniforms, slacks. We couldn't just run up in anything. High school was much different. Jerome recalled, "I wanted things I couldn't afford" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome stopped participating in football due to his desire to have nice clothes. He regretfully recalled, "So, I left football alone 'cause I wanted to dress like everybody else" (Interview, 1).

Jerome, began to work at age 15. He described his job as "a little, small, under-the-table job I did" (Jerome, Interview 1). He explained, "I worked in the restaurant called *The Train Station*" (Interview 1). Jerome's desire to fit in socially by wearing nicer clothes was a source of frustration. However, he articulated the main reason for his desire to drop out of high school as "my relationship with my mama" (Interview 1). He added, "All of my cousins dropped out of high school" (Interview 1).

Jerome's grandmother encouraged him not to drop out of high school. His grandmother asked, "*Do you know how many people you disappointing"* (Jerome, Interview 1) His grandmother also told him, "*You'd be disappointing me, your aunts, and everybody else*" (Interview 1). Jerome explained, "I'd disappoint anyone before I disappoint my grandma anyway. I care what she says" (Jerome, Interview 1). He explained that his grandmother's motivation is what got him into college.

When describing his feelings about his grandmother and the influence she had on his life, Jerome shared, "she got, like, a lot of say-so in my life. I'd take her word over my mama's word" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome explained, "I like my grandma better than I like my mama" (Interview 2).   Jerome also shared that his grandmother took actions to demonstrate the importance of education. He laughed as he shared the futility of trying not to discuss his report-cards with his grandmother. He stated, "'Cause you know when you come home from school, she already know the report card's there anyway. Ain't no getting around that, period. If you ain't bring your report card home, she'd call the school" (Interview, 2).

Another source of encouragement was Jerome's desire to prove his mother wrong about her assertion that he would become imprisoned like his father. He recalled that during his high school years, his mother constantly berated him by comparing him to his father. He remembered her constant comment and stated, "Every time I do something, no matter what I did, *you're just like your damn daddy* (Jerome, Interview 2). Jerome recalled the consistency with which his mother used this particular warning. Jerome recalled, "Everything I did, she tied to my daddy" (Interview, 1). Jerome later shared his reaction to his mother's chastisement by stating "I got tired of it, and wanted to shut her up" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome stated emphatically,

I want to prove my mama wrong. I don't want to be like everybody else sitting around.

Look, most of my friends dead or locked up. My brother locked up. I don't want to get

locked up. I want to do something. I want my own money, and I want to make money

from something I'm comfortable doing (Interview 1).

Jerome continued to explain his motivation by stating, "I want to prove her wrong. Then again, I

want to do something for my grandma too. That's like the biggest motivation behind me"

(Interview 1). Additional motivation came from the plight of many of his peers. He explained,

"All my friends, now they're either locked up or they're selling drugs. All . . . the gangsters,

everybody died eventually" (Interview 3)

Jerome relaxed during the interview process when asked about his teachers and educators

who helped him as he matriculated through school. Jerome said simply, "I loved my teachers"

(Jerome, Interview 1). When given the opportunity to clarify his statement, Jerome repeated,

"Yeah, I loved my teachers" (Interview 1). He added, I had a handful of good teachers

(Interview 2). He also remembered his high school counselors, Miss Hill and Miss Vreeland.

He described their support by stating:

I could go to their office and talk to them. We'd sit around, talk about school.

They'd give me a little feedback, honest. And they . . . help me fill out applications and

résumés and stuff like that. Stuff I need to do, they help me do all that. They help me get

all my paperwork together to send off.

Jerome also indicated that he had positive experiences with educators in elementary and

middle school. He fondly recalled his math teacher, Mr. Robert Berry, and shared, "He had a

way of like teaching us and making it fun too . . . I absorb more when it's fun, like when I know

what I'm doing" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome extended his description of Mr. Berry's teaching

methods by stating, "He ain't just put it up there and tell us to do it. He like made games out of it, so you're having fun and learning at the same time" (Interview 1). Jerome took algebra in eighth grade. He commented, "I loved algebra . . . he made it fun . . . so I could . . . comprehend it . . . I tend to learn better with hand-on stuff (Interview 3). Jerome smiled as he described Mr. Berry. He commented, "Mr. Berry was the coolest dude. I liked Mr. Berry. I mean, he was like a father to me . . . he made me feel good" (Interview 3).

Jerome also recalled Mr. Coward who would always say, "Jerome, you can do better than this. And if you need me, you can talk to me after class" (Jerome, Interview 1). Jerome added, "I believed him because when he told me I could talk to him, I came after class and he was there. He ain't brush me off or nothing like that. He meant what he said" (Interview 1). Jerome had similar experiences in elementary school with Miss Haynes. Jerome recalled, "She was just real nice" (Interview 1). Jerome remembered, "I just felt special around her anyway, just the way she talked to me. She was like real motivational, too" (Interview 2). When asked what kinds of things his teachers would say to him, Jerome replied, "I'm very intelligent and stuff like that. So when they seen something that wasn't like me, they said something to me about it. They asked me if I had a problem going on or something like that at home" (Interview 1).

Jerome was in a job-related accident that caused him to take a semester away from college. At the time of the interviews, he planned to return to school and complete his studies. His younger brother was eventually released from prison, but soon returned after being charged with murder. Jerome continues to balance life's challenges with a deep desire to make his grandmother proud by finishing college. Jerome's relationships with his parents have improved over time. He described his relationship with his father by stating, "I hated him earlier, but I love him now" (Jerome, Interview 2). When referring to his relationship with his mother,

Jerome stated, "She's special to me. I think we get along better now though. And I think if it weren't for her taking me through all that, I'd probably be lazy now . . . I wouldn't want to go out and do anything" (Interview 2). Jerome still attributes his graduation from high school and admission to college to his desire to "basically prove her wrong" (Interview 2).

Jerome still maintains close ties with his grandmother and a very healthy respect for elderly people. He stated, "I go see my grandma every day" (Jerome, Interview 2). He recalled his grandmother's advice on dealing with the elderly, stating "she used to tell me to respect the elderly people cause they done been through everything you done been through" (Jerome, Interview, 2).

Many of Jerome's friends who are still in the neighborhood have completely rejected him since he decided to go to college. He intensely shared their comments which included, "*you think you better than everybody else* . . . [obscenity]. *Don't come around here*" (Jerome, Interview 2). He explained, "that's real pressure when you hearing people talk bad about you" (Interview 3). However, Jerome remains optimistic. He stated, "I . . . made it this far . . . I ain't gonna stop. I'm gonna keep moving" (Jerome, Interview 2). When asked what has helped him most in achieving social and academic success, Jerome replied, "My grandma for pushing me. My mama for giving me all that negativity . . . My purpose is shutting my mom up and doing it to make my grandma smile" (Interview 2). I ended my interviews with Jerome in the same manner in which we started, a firm handshake and eye contact.

Table 11

Jerome's Help and Hindrances

Helpful Aspects of Jerome's Life	Hindering Aspects of Jerome's Life
Mother's Work Ethic	Drug Abuse in the Home by Adults
Verbally Abusive Mother	Abusive Father
Supportive Grandmother	Verbally Abusive Mother
Supportive Grandfather	Neighborhood Crime
Caring Educators	Negative Role-models Outside of School
Desire to Make Good Grades	Negative Peers
Desire to Prove His Mother Wrong	Father Incarcerated for Most of his Life
Desire to Please His Grandmother	Poor Living Conditions

Elisha's Story: Faith is the Key

ACHIEVEMENT

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Risk Factors	Protective Factors

- Violence in
  Community
- Lack of
  Resources
- No Family
  Support

- Supportive
  Teachers
- Work Ethic
- Faith
- Desire

HOME

Faith

SCHOOL

**Resilient
Behaviors**
- Responsible
  for Siblings
- Great Grades
- IB Program

**Non-Resilient
Behaviors**
- Fights
- Testing the
  Patience of
  Teachers

COMMUNITY

FAILURE
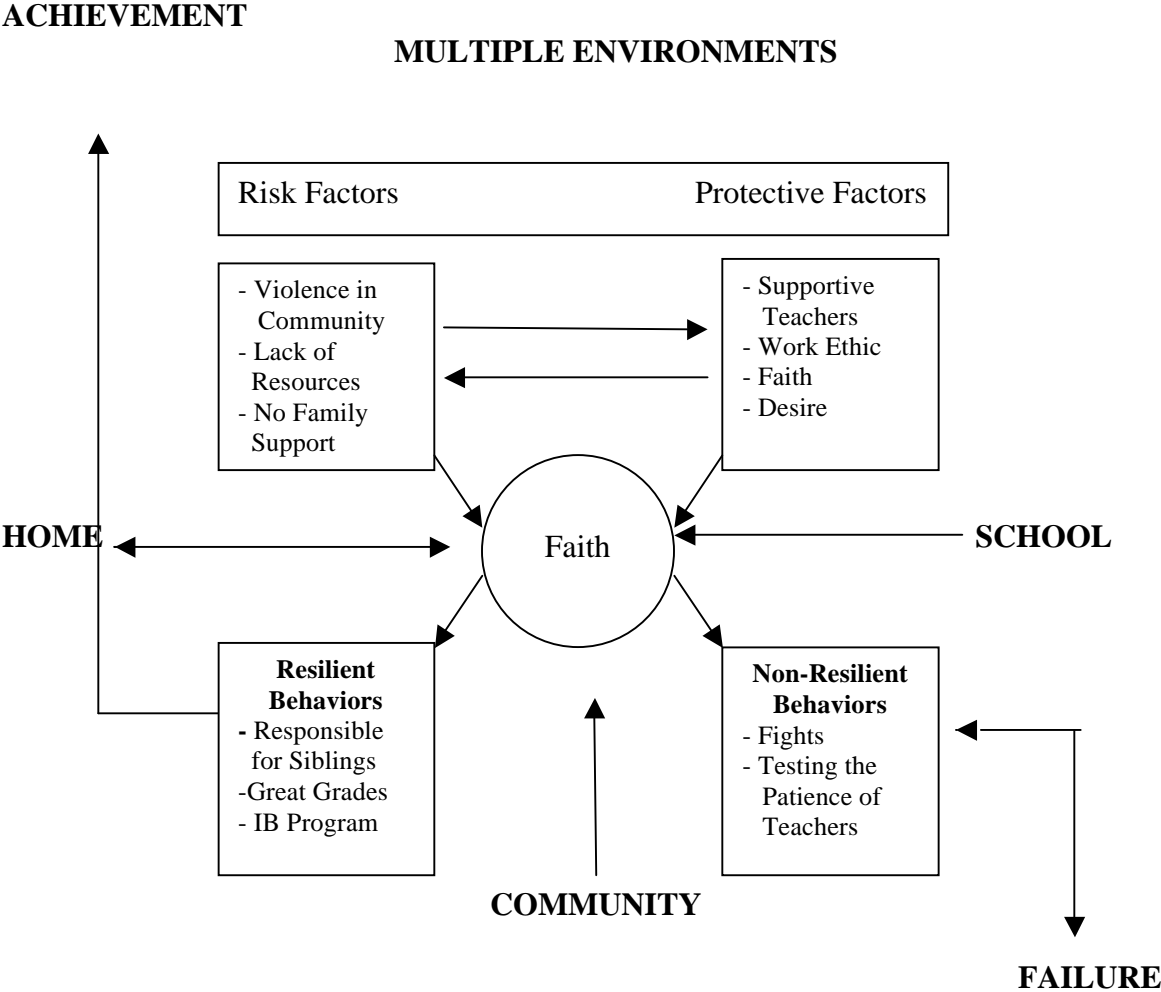
Figure 7. Elisha's dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient and

non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

Prior to the present study, my first encounter with Elisha took place during her sophomore year in high school. As a former track athlete, I was asked by a colleague to talk to her about the benefits of remaining involved in athletics in her pursuit of college admission. I clearly recall that her times in the 100-meter dash were quite impressive. When I finally met Elisha, I was shocked to discover that the powerful, dominant sprinter I was told so much about was, at the time, 5 ft. tall and extremely petite.   I clearly remember her explaining that she would like to remain on the team, but home responsibilities and the requirements of the International Baccalaureate program were too much to balance with participation in sports. My colleague thanked me for my efforts and expressed to me that Elisha was one of the most determined students he had ever encountered. Her participation in this research study helped to illuminate what he meant by that statement. At the time of my initial meeting with Elisha when she was a high school student, I was completely unaware of the home challenges she endured while maintaining athletic and academic excellence.

Elisha spent most of her life in a housing project called Dickerson Courts. She was the middle child of nine children. Elisha explained that her birth order meant that she had the experience of living with all of her siblings at some point in her life. She explained "I lived with the four oldest siblings because I'm the middle child. So, at a point I was in the house with them.   And then all of them grew up and they moved" (Elisha, Interview 1). After her elder siblings moved out of the house, Elisha became the eldest child in the home. All nine children were raised by Elisha's mother as a single parent.

Elisha encouraged herself at an early age by convincing herself that she would one day become "something" (Elisha, Interview 2). She commented, "It was a task to actually get my mind to understand, '*no I'm not playing; this is what I am going to do*'" (Interview, 2). Elisha

recalled, "Even when I was little, I used to think that I would be like Martin Luther King" (Interview 2). She exclaimed, "I knew I had to get to the next level" (Interview 2).

Elisha perceived that being the middle child in such a large family meant that she did not receive adequate affection from her mother. She recalled, "Even though I was a Christmas child, when my mom got everybody's gifts, I felt real slighted" (Elisha, Interview 2). She explained, "I've never told my mom *I love you* and she never said that to me either" (Interview, 2). Elisha laughed as she intimated that being the middle child felt "like crap" (Interview, 2). She commented, "I remember always being looked over . . . nobody really paid attention to me" (Interview 1). Elisha perceived that the difficulties she endured with family relationships have helped her. She explained, "I would say it worked out for the good. It helped me . . . just with life. I don't have to worry about people liking me. If you don't like me then 'oh well', I already had to deal with that (Interview 2).

When Elisha's elder siblings left the home, her mother gave her many responsibilities. Elisha commented, "My mom would put all the responsibility on me as if I was like the head of the household" (Elisha, Interview 2). She recalled:

> My mom expected me to do everything . . . I would get so frustrated because my mom would never acknowledge the stuff that I was doing. I would wake up, give my brothers baths, get them dressed . . . I would have to cook dinner. I would have to clean up. I would have to do a lot of stuff (Interview 1)

Elisha perceived herself as a surrogate parent for her younger brothers. She stated, "I was basically like the mother to my three little brothers and sister" (Interview 1). She lovingly shared, "They're my babies" (Interview 2). She remembered, "I would have to miss school to make sure that my little brothers would get home if my mom had to go . . . to social services"

(Interview 2). She recalled, "I started taking care of the kids when I was nine . . . my sister was able to go outside and do whatever she wanted to do and I would have to stay in the house and watch the kids" (Interview 2).

Elisha also recalled that hindrances were prevalent in her home during her younger years. One of her older brothers was a drug dealer with a bad temper. She recalled, "I remember my mama kept saying, *He's selling drugs in the house*" (Elisha, Interview 2). Elisha remembered, "He had it in the closet and tried to keep it away from us" (Interview 2). She described his temper the following way, "I remember him throwing weights and stuff down the stairs at us" (Interview 1). Elisha remembered one particular incident involving her older brother. She intimated, "He was running from the cops, and he ran and fell into a ditch and broke his leg" (Interview 1). She also reiterated his temper stating, "I remember going to jail . . . to see my brother. I remember that . . . he was real angry all the time" (Interview 1).

Elisha's mother attempted to shield the rest of her children from the antics of her older son. Elisha recalled, "I remember her fussing at him because he brought a gun in the house" (Elisha, Interview 1). Elisha also remembered the large sums of money from drug dealing that her brother would bring into the home. She stated, "I remember seeing big wads of money folded up and it had rubber bands around it" (Interview 1).   She commented on her mother's stress and state of mind during these times by stating, "I know she was probably upset, just because of the stuff that he did" (Interview 1).

There was also friction between Elisha's mother and her oldest sister. Elisha recalled that her oldest sister became pregnant at the age of 17. Elisha articulated her sister's plight stating, "She tried to move in with her boyfriend, and then he started beating on her" (Elisha, Interview 1). Elisha recalled that her mother refused to allow her sister to move back into their apartment

after the beatings, despite desperate pleas from her sister. Elisha explained, "My mom made her

. . . the black sheep of the family . . . we couldn't talk to her or anything" (Interview 1).

The incarceration of Elisha's eldest brother, and the pregnancy and ex-communication of

her eldest sister did not shield Elisha from serious challenges in the home. She shared, "I had my

sister that was right above me who would torture me" (Elisha, Interview 2). Elisha recalled that

her sister who is three years older would, "always give me a hard time and I don't know why.

Like, I remember we would fight, fistfight in the house" (Interview 1). She explained the

treatment by her sister further by stating, "My sister would tie me up to the dresser; like, tie my

arms and my legs to the dresser . . . if I tried to move, the dresser would come down on me"

(Interview 1). When asked whether her mother would take action against her sister for this type

of treatment, Elisha seemed to empathize with the plight of her mother by stating, "I guess . . .

she couldn't look at everything that was going on and punish people for everything" (Interview

1). When asked whether she got along with anyone in her home during her early childhood

years, Elisha replied, "No" (Interview 1).

Elisha also lacked access to her extended family members who lived in close proximity to

her home. She recalled the fun times she once had at her aunt's home. Elisha smiled as she

reflected on those days and stated:

I liked going to my aunt's house because we would have big get-togethers . . . on

the 4th of July. And all of the grown-ups would sit at their table and play cards . . .

and I would just play with my cousins . . . my cousin Jeffery, I got along with him . . .

He's in college now. He's supposed to be graduating next year (Elisha, Interview 1).

Elisha explained that her mother stopped going to family get-togethers and forbade her

and her siblings from any contact with her extended family. She exclaimed, "It made me angry,

I couldn't understand why we couldn't associate with them anymore" (Elisha, Interview 2). The separation from the extended family was complete. Elisha shared that it meant "no more talking to my aunts and uncles . . . I couldn't even speak to my aunt if I saw her on the street. My mom would tell us that we couldn't speak" (Interview 1). This forced separation was difficult for Elisha, "She explained, "I always wanted my family to be together" (Interview 2). Elisha's mom explained to her that her extended family members "were condemned to hell" (Interview 2).

Before and after this separation from the extended family, Elisha, her mother, her youngest sister and three younger brothers lived in what could be described as impoverished desolation. Elisha vividly recalled the additional challenges her family faced while living in their apartment. She described her living conditions in the following way: "That apartment, it was condemned to me because we would have to . . . put the oven on to heat up the house. And all of us would sleep in one room, like right above the kitchen, so we could be warm" (Elisha, Interview 1). She recalled, "It was cold in the whole house" (Interview 1). Elisha added clarity by describing the house as "cold, freezing cold. It was freezing cold in that house in the winter time. I'd go to sleep sometimes with a coat on" (Interview 1). Elisha shared that she and her siblings would sometimes joke about the fact that they wore coats to bed at night by asking each other, *Where you goin'*? She explained, "I even tell my friends today . . . I had so much fun during those times . . . we became closer because you would have to be bundled up together in a room" (Interview 2). One might presume that a coat meant that a person was preparing to go outside during the winter. Elisha wore her coat to sleep.

The roach infestation was so severe that Elisha referred to the bugs as "relatives" (Elisha, Interview 1). They were a daily part of her life. She shared:

We had so many other relatives, meaning roaches. We had so many roaches in our

house . . . I remember my mom would . . . when we'd fall asleep she would go

through the whole house and put tissue in our ears so the roaches wouldn't crawl in our

ears . . . One time a roach crawled in my mouth while I was sleeping . . . It had to be God.

I woke up coughing, and so the roach just came out (Interview, 1)

Elisha explained the day-to-day hindrances caused by the roaches further by stating, "We

used to have to check our book-bags and stuff before we leave home, make sure roaches wasn't

in our book-bags (Elisha, Interview 1). She joked, "I probably took a roach or two to class every

now and then (Interview 1). She recalled, "I would shake my book-bag out and then put all my

stuff back" (Interview 1). Elisha estimated the approximate number of roaches to clearly

describe the challenge. She estimated:

thousands of roaches. And we would bomb our house, you know, that stuff they tell

you about on TV . . . We would leave, bomb our house, and, like, when we come back,

dead roaches everywhere, and we'd have to clean it up. But it would still be a lot of

roaches in the house . . . they would come from your neighbor's house (Interview 1)

Maintenance in Elisha's housing project presented other challenges for the family. Elisha

reminisced about those who were responsible for home repairs stating, "The people would come

in to fix stuff and they wouldn't really fix the things in the house that were messed up. We had

some days the water would be ice cold so we'd have to warm the water up to take a bath"

(Elisha, Interview 1). The summer heat presented other hindrances. Elisha clearly remembered

the discomfort of the heat. The family could not use the air-conditioning unit because, according

to Elisha, "When she cut the AC on, everything else in the house shut down" (Interview 1).

Summers were particularly bothersome for Elisha. She explained, "We'd just sweat. And I have eczema . . . So in the summer time my eczema would break out and . . . my skin would become inflamed" (Interview 1). These hindrances angered Elisha. She described her frustration at the time by explaining that she would sometimes say to herself, "I can't believe that we live in crap like this" (Interview 2). She explained, "The majority of the time, I tried not to be mad about the situation and just keep going and knowing where I would be later" (Interview 2). She explained, "I knew it was temporary" (Interview 2).

Elisha explained that her neighborhood sometimes provided somewhat of an escape from the hindrances she described inside her home. She stated, "I would go outside and play . . . I would run a lot. I would play basketball outside . . . I was a tomboy" (Elisha, Interview 1). However, the community could be dangerous. Even as a petite, young girl, Elisha was forced to fight in her neighborhood. She stated, "People would just start fights all the time" (Interview 1). She recalled comments from the community members who sometimes watched her fight. Elisha described one of her fights by stating, "A lot of people came. And I remember some people talking . . . *She's little. She's getting beat up, but she's strong*" (Interview 1). Elisha commented on the necessity of fighting: "I'd fight because I had to fight; and you couldn't let people know you were scared" (Interview 1). She recalled, "I had a terrible temper when I was younger" (Interview 1).

Elisha described herself as "a rough child" (Elisha, Interview 2). She recalled, "when I first started playing basketball, a lot of the team would think I was tough, even the grown men. She explained her toughness in the following way, "If I got hurt, I would keep going – get back up and keep going – just act like it never happened. That was just part of me because I didn't like to let anything bother me" (Interview, 2). While reflecting on the hindrances of her past

Elisha explained, "Well . . . now I'm learning to slowly and gradually deal with some of the things that I've repressed from the past, but that was just something I had to do" (Interview 2). The details of certain aspects of her past life appeared, at times, to be difficult to share. For example, when asked about visiting her brother in jail, Elisha replied, "It's another thing I choose not to remember, so I can't remember it" (Interview 2). She described the process she used to deal with many of the hindrances of her past by stating, "I just block it out" (Interview 2). She added, "God gives me peace" (Interview 2).

Elisha described her neighborhood as "crazy" and "dangerous" (Elisha, Interview 1). She remembered seeing, "drug dealers, prostitutes and dirty kids" in her community (Interview 1). She recalled one particular street near her home stating, "A lot of people got killed on 19th Street." Elisha recalled, "I've heard gunshots. I've seen guns. I've seen people with their guns" (Interview 1). She remembered a shooting incident in her neighborhood during her high school years. She stated, "They were shooting in broad daylight." Elisha reflected on the potential danger of the incident and stated, "If I had come earlier, then I could have been in the midst of a cross-fire or something" (Interview 1). Soon after the shooting incident, Elisha arrived near her home that day. She recalled, "The police were there, and . . . they had the body bag" (Interview 1). She explained further, "We had a couple of drive-bys" (Interview 1).

Elisha loved sports and played basketball regularly with neighborhood drug dealers. She recalled seeing the cycle of crime begin with children in her neighborhood. She stated, "I've seen kids start selling drugs. This one kid asked me if I wanted to start selling" (Elisha, Interview 1). The young man told Elisha, "You can make . . . $2,000 a week" (Interview 1). The lure of easy money was tempting. Elisha recalled, "It was real tempting at times. Like when you realize you don't have a piece of lint in your pocket and that you can easily get some

money, it was real tempting (Interview 3). Elisha also recalled a prostitute who lived near her.

She stated, "I remember this one lady in my neighborhood . . . I was just talking to her . . . she

went and changed clothes . . . She came back out the house, and she had like this see-through

outfit on" (Interview 1). Elisha remembered that the woman stated, "*I'm about to go make some*

money . . . I'm gonna have to go up here on the corner" (Interview 1). Elisha showed emotion as

she shared the fact that the woman left her two-year-old son alone at home in pampers.

Elisha shared her perception of the reasons for the prevalence of risk-factors in

neighborhoods like hers in the following way:

> people are pressured into those situations because there aren't a lot of businesses . . . in
>
> those areas because businesses flock to other areas where they can get customers . . . they
>
> don't go to poor areas. So poor people can't get jobs. So they're forced to . . . sell
>
> drugs or to prostitute (Interview 1)

Elisha recalled hearing the struggles of the prostitute who left her child home alone and stated, "I

was shocked from that . . . she was telling me how hard her life was and I got so sad" (Elisha,

Interview 1). Elisha, at a very early age, felt such empathy for her community that she began to

encourage older community members to refrain from the trappings of crime. She explained that

she would tell them, "You can do it. It might be hard but you can go back to school" (Interview

2). Elisha was driven. She shared, "I just wanted to help people" (Interview 3).

Despite the many risk-factors in her community, Elisha reported that she always felt safe

in her community due to her faith in God. She stated, "I always knew that God was looking after

me, so I never cared . . . even with gunshots outside" (Elisha, Interview 1). She commented, "I

think it was just God hanging over my life the entire time (Interview 2). Elisha professed a deep

faith, but expressed discomfort in discussing her experiences in her neighborhood church. She

bitterly recalled, "I was never accepted in church due to stuff that I will not speak on" (Interview 1). She explained that "her family was "rejected by the congregation" (Interview 1), and described the pastor of the church in the following way, "Evil. He was just evil. I'll leave it at that" (Interview 2).

Elisha explained that the treatment by church members caused inner conflict. She shared, "I hated going to church with a passion. But I still loved God. Still I do read my Bible. But I hated going to that church. And we weren't allowed to go to any other churches" (Interview 1). She fought tears as she recalled her mother's belief that "this was the only true church" (Interview 1). She stated, "I knew something was wrong with that church (Interview 2). Elisha described her mother as follows: "My mom is not a bad person . . . My mom tries . . . but she's easily influenced by other people in her life (Interview 2).

Elisha shared several positive educational experiences. When describing her experiences in school, she stated, "It was just fun. Everything was just happy. The environment was just happy" (Elisha, Interview, 2). She was able to recall her pre-school teacher's affection for students stating, "She was very welcoming" (Interview 1). She explained further, "She was really nice. She was real nice and I felt like I could go to her" (Interview 1). Elisha also recalled a teacher's assistant named Miss Lois. Elisha smiled as she commented on the affection displayed by this educator. She stated, "I . . . remember her because in my family we don't show a lot of affection at all, no affection in our family. And I just remember her hugging me . . . and it was just different for me . . . it was a good thing." Elisha shared that Miss Lois made her feel, "like I was loved" (Interview 2).

Elisha felt that all of her teachers liked her. She explained, "When I would come to school, my teachers would be all excited to see me" (Elisha, Interview 2). One teacher, Miss

Brockley, allowed her to be her assistant. She stated, "I just remember being her teacher's pet" (Interview 1). Elisha recalled that her teachers, despite her circumstances, "would always say that I had a whole lot of potential" (Interview 1). She said that her track coach "called me his daughter and would . . . go out of his way to try to do stuff for me (Interview 2). She shared, "when I got to college, he made sure I had a refrigerator for my room" (Interview 2).

Elisha perceived that teachers like Miss Haynes were helpful. Elisha recalled, "She's a White lady . . . I remember she got engaged and then she got married. She was very affectionate too. You could tell that she loved her job, that she loved working with kids" Elisha said, "She was always bragging about me to everyone" Elisha affirmed that she felt loved by this teacher and she affirmed that the school replaced the affection she was missing at home (Interview, 2). Elisha explained further, "My mom is not a very affectionate person . . . there was . . . somebody to actually hug me . . . at the school (Interview, 2). She referred to one of her teachers as her God-mother and explained, "she adopted me" (Interview 2).

Elisha was competitive in sports and in the classroom. She shared, "I remember my best friend in fourth grade was a White girl named Jackie . . . we would always compete . . . with grades and stuff, and both of us would get straight As" (Elisha, Interview 1). Elisha completed her homework assignments at home. She recalled, "I would either sit in the kitchen or I would sit in my brother's room while they were playing video games . . . and do my homework in there" (Interview 1). It was difficult for Elisha to explain her academic success in light of so many risk factors. She commented, "I really don't know. I don't know . . . I just knew I had to keep my grades up" (Interview 2).

Despite her positive relationships with teachers, Elisha was not a perfectly well-behaved student. She explained that she would sometimes test the patience of her teachers to determine if they really cared for her. She shared:

> "I would just act a fool to see if they really cared . . . you can tell when teachers care.
>
> Like you act a fool and the teacher acts like they're really concerned about what's going
>
> on with you . . . And then there's those who yell at you. You see them in the
>
> teacher's lounge talking bad about you. They don't care about you (Interview 2)

She went on to explain that many urban children aren't fortunate to have caring educators in their lives who look past their behaviors to see their potential. She explained the lack of patience of educators by stating, "You make one mistake, you do one thing wrong and you're a bad child for the rest of the time" (Interview 2).   She sadly explained that her younger brother routinely tests the patience and support of his teachers. According to Elisha, "A lot of his teachers don't understand him (Interview 2).

As Elisha got older, her ability to help her mother at home with her younger siblings was limited due to her school work-load. She stated, "Once I got into the IB program, I stopped doing as much because I had to do so much work . . . and my mom would get upset . . . she'd want me to miss school so that I could be home for them" (Interview 1). Elisha said to her mother, "Are you going to pay for me to get into college . . . I can't do that sitting around keeping kids all day (Interview 2).   She explained that she knew in her own mind, "There's no way I can get to college if I don't get the grades that I need" (Interview 2).

> I guess it was a shock for my mom to actually see me graduate high school, then make it
>
> to college because I am doing what I said I was going to do. I would tell my mom,

'*I'm going to get you out of these projects.*' And she was just like, '*okay, okay.*'

(Interview 1)

Elisha explained that she was forced to choose between home and success in school (Elisha, Interview 2). When Elisha went to high school and was unable to help with her siblings, Elisha's mother regarded her commitment to education as disobedient and rebellious (Interview 2). Elisha explained, "My mom wouldn't say, '*You can do it*'" (Interview 2). Elisha recalled, "My mom would try to find all kinds of ways and reasons why I should quit track, why I shouldn't continue the IB program" (Interview 2). Elisha explained, "I think there's kinda a little bit of jealously with my mom" (Interview 2).

Elisha preferred the school environment over her home environment. She recalled saying to her family, "If you all want to sit here and argue at home, let me go to school where I can just have a good time. It's so calm there" (Elisha, Interview 3). School was a way for Elisha to escape the hindrances of home. She explained, "At times, I just hated going home" (Interview 3). "I stayed at school as long as I could" (Interview 3).

Elisha explained that her lack of resources was a hindrance to her success in the International Baccalaureate program. Elisha complained, "I did not have a computer at home" (Elisha, Interview 2). When she needed to type or print a paper, she did the work at school. Her participation in the International Baccalaureate program meant that many of Elisha's classmates were from more affluent homes. She recalled, "I didn't want anybody to know that I was from the projects" (Interview 2). Elisha's lack of basic resources was also a source of motivation. She explained that it made her want to prove herself. She shared, "I was like *there's no way these kids are gonna' sit here and say they're better than me simply because I don't . . . have the money they have*" (Interview 3).

Elisha's self-determination, along with the support of her teachers, caused her to remain in the International Baccalaureate program. Elisha fondly recalled her Biology teacher who once pulled her aside and said, "*You know what? You can be a doctor*" (Elisha, Interview 3). Elisha explained that hearing this from her teacher made her think to herself, "*Yes, I can go to college and major in biology*" (Interview 3). Elisha felt that if her biology teacher, Ms. Coltrane, believed she was talented enough to be a doctor, it had to be true. She explained, "I felt like Ms. Coltrane knew everything" (Interview 3). Elisha also recalled that at a very early age in school, she was required to recite a banner that said, "*I can go to college if I work hard*" (Interview 3). According to Elisha, her recollection of the words on that banner fueled her efforts later in life. When describing how she feels when facing a challenge, Elisha smiled and stated, "There's a drive in me that just keeps making me go forward. Just keeps making me work. I can't stop myself" (Interview 3).

Elisha's mother ex-communicated her when she left for college. She stated, "she won't talk to me . . . I can't go home (Interview 2). Elisha eventually graduated from college and was admitted to graduate school. I received an invitation to her wedding. As she walked down the aisle to exchange wedding vows, the person who sat in the space designated for her mother was a former teacher. He mother did not attend the ceremony.

Table 12

Elisha's Help and Hindrances

Helpful Aspects of Elisha's Life	Hindering Aspects of Elisha's Life
Self-Discipline	Violence in the Community
Self-Determination	Violence in the Home
Supportive Educators	Lack of Affection in the Home
Available Resources in the School	Poor Living Conditions
Positive Outlook	Lack of Resources in the Home
Recognition of the Importance of Education	Parental Responsibilities in the Home
Faith	Rejection by the Church

Yvonne's Story: I am Just as Good as Anyone

ACHIEVEMENT

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Risk Factors	Protective Factors

-Community Violence
-Alcohol Use in Home
-Drug Sales in Neighborhood

-Supportive Mother
-Supportive Teachers
-Faith
- Love

HOME

Desire to Prove Herself Equal

SCHOOL

Resilient Behaviors
-Good Grades
-Graduation
-Strong Work Ethic

Non-Resilient Behaviors
-Discipline Issues in Elementary School

COMMUNITY

FAILURE

Figure 8. Yvonne's dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient and non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

It was bright and beautiful afternoon the day that I began my interviews with Yvonne. She had a very demanding schedule at Virginia Commonwealth University and was working to put herself through college. I received a phone call and a voice full of energy announced, "Mr. Hodge I'm almost there." I walked to the front of the office building as a car carrying two people with smiling faces entered the parking lot. It was Yvonne and her mother. I greeted them both and was immediately stricken by Yvonne's enthusiasm. After she thanked me for the opportunity to participate in the study, she commented, "I can't wait to get started." This brief introduction foreshadowed the high energy and positive outlook possessed by Yvonne that became more apparent as the interviews progressed.

Yvonne spent most of her childhood in two housing projects on the east end of the city. "I grew up with my mother and I had three older sisters. One was 11 years older than me and the other was 12 years older than me. My other sister is a year and four months older than me" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Yvonne lived in her first housing project until the age of eight. Her family then moved to another neighborhood nearby. This move was precipitated by Yvonne's mother's desire to avoid the increased violence in the area. Yvonne shared, "She said the violence was becoming a little bit too extreme" (Interview 1).

Yvonne recalled many happy times in her first home. She seemed to disagree with her mother's perception of violence in the neighborhood. She reflected, "When you are young, you just remember having fun. And I miss it so much. I still miss it sometimes" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Yvonne could not seem to hold back the joy with which she described a typical summer day of her life prior to the age of 8-years-old. "I would be the first one on the block to wake up. And I would just go knocking on everybody's door asking could they come outside . . . we would

play ball, Kick Ball, Mother-May-I, Green-Light-Red-Light. We played so many games"
(Interview 1).

Yvonne described her first community as a nurturing neighborhood where, "everybody
kind of watched out for other people's kids" (Yvonne, Interview 1). She shared, "If somebody
got into trouble or was doing something they weren't supposed to do, they would let my mama
know" (Interview, 1). Yvonne stated, "Everybody knew everybody in that little area" (Interview
1). She also recalled the laughter and the music of the neighborhood at the time. She described
what one might see in the streets in the following way: "There would be people eating crabs . . .
and talking really loud and stuff . . . you would hear music. It would probably be oldies-but
goodies" (Interview 1). Her mother, on the other hand, had to face the bitter realities of crime in
the neighborhood.

Yvonne recalled visiting a friend's home nearby that had been the scene of dangerous
gun violence. She recalled, "someone actually shot up that house. And you could see the bullets
. . . it was like four or five bullet holes that went through the door" (Yvonne, Interview 1).
Crimes were not limited to the property of neighbors. Yvonne sadly reminisced about the
murder of a cab-driver that took place right in front of her home. She recalled the police
investigation that followed. Yvonne stated, "I remember seeing the yellow tape" (Interview 1).
She further explained, "I think he was robbed and then shot in the head" (Interview 2). Yvonne
recalled another incident when a shooting took place so close to her home that she could hear the
gunshots and, she shared, "you could see the powder from the gunshot. And they were right
outside" (Interview 1).

Yvonne bitterly shared how incidents like the murder of the cab-driver in front of her
home made her feel about some of the people in her neighborhood. "It made me feel that . . .

there's people out there who don't have a conscience, who just don't really care . . . my mom

was just talking about it the other day and she was . . . saying how nice of a guy he was"

(Yvonne, Interview 2). This comment from her mother was in reference to the cab-driver.

Yvonne shared details about other close brushes with violence in the community. She stated, "I

saw fights. I remember one time, my mama . . . was about to get into a fight. She was about to

stab somebody" (Interview 1).

Other dangers loomed in certain sections of the neighborhood. Yvonne remembered, "It

was other crimes too, but Ridley Circle was . . . divided into three sections . . . I don't think most

of the crime occurred in our section. If it did, I was too young to remember . . . I know they had

a lot of rapists around there too" (Yvonne, Interview 1). She recalled, "we kind of stayed around

where we lived . . . We didn't go all out to . . . different neighborhood. So I kind of felt safe

even though it was rapists out there" (Interview 2).

Drugs sales were commonplace in the community. Yvonne remembered, "I saw the

drug-dealers . . . I saw how they . . . exchanged it without getting caught . . . I saw one of them

put the stuff on the ground. Then, the other one ran and got money. And then they made their

little transaction" (Interview 1). Yvonne's description of drug sales in her neighborhood alludes

to a common strategy used by drug dealers to limit the likelihood of being caught in possession

of illegal drugs. Yvonne explained that in order to arrest an individual for the sale of drugs, "the

cop would have to see them exchanging drugs directly for money at the same time" (Interview

1).

The dangers in the neighborhood caused Yvonne's mother to take strict precautions to

protect her family. Yvonne recalled, "She would say *make sure you lock the door*" (Interview

1). Yvonne also recalled the vigilance with which her mother attempted to keep her children

supervised in her absence. "We had three baby-sitters" (Interview 1). "My mother didn't like to leave us home by ourselves" (Interview 1).

Yvonne recalled that her babysitters were very caring. She shared that her mother "had to know them to trust them with us" (Yvonne, Interview 1). When asked about her experiences in one of her babysitter's home, Yvonne recalled, "it was a lot of fun . . . She treated me and her kids the same . . . We would watch T.V. and stuff . . . She never beat us" (Interview 1).

In many ways, Yvonne's life inside her home was in stark contrast with the many risk factors found in the broader community. Yvonne described one of the apartments she lived in with great pride. She exclaimed:

> Oh, it was nice. I always tell my mom that the second one was one of the prettiest, well
>
> decorated houses we ever stayed in. We had . . . a floor television. I remember, it was
>
> . . . red and black . . . We had all of our furniture. All of it matched (Interview 1)

Despite the many risk factors prevalent outside the home, Yvonne remembered a very happy childhood. She shared, "I think I had one of the best childhoods ever" (Interview 1). She felt very fortunate as a child. She recalled:

> My mama made sure we had everything. We always looked nice and our house always
>
> looked nice. When people would come and fix our house, they would say y*a'll don't*
>
> *need to be staying here, ya'll need to be in a house or something*. We had a car. When
>
> we were in middle school, we had an ever nicer car- a luxury car (Interview 1)

Yvonne enthusiastically shared her recollection of how wonderful the Christmas holidays were in her home. She recalled, "All of the Christmas days were the best days. We got everything we wanted and extra stuff" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Yvonne recalled that other children in her neighborhood were not as fortunate. She stated, "You could tell some people

didn't get that much for Christmas" (Interview 1). In contrast, Yvonne and her sisters received

all that their hearts desired. She recalled, "the living room was always so crowed-- a whole

bunch of clothes. We would always get one jogging suit, always get pajamas . . . more than what

we asked for"(Interview 2).

Yvonne's mother and father had joint-custody of Yvonne and her sisters. They separated

early in Yvonne's life. Yvonne described her father as "M.I.A." during her elementary years

(Yvonne, Interview 1). M.I.A. means *missing in action [italics added]* and is a term used to

describe a person's absence from a specific situation. Yvonne's use of the term in this context is

indicative of her perception that her father was not a major part of her life during her early years.

She expressed frustration with his dishonesty. She recalled, "He used to tell a lot of lies"

(Interview 2). However, his involvement in her life increased as Yvonne got older. She

described her relationship with her father as "strong" (Interview 1) during her high school years.

She also recalled that he always remembered her and her sisters during the holidays.

Yvonne's mother and father had a brief but bitter custody battle early in her life. Yvonne

recalled that her father filed for custody of the children because, "my mama was drinking and

because . . . a cab driver had got shot in front of our door and there was a lot of violence around

there" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Yvonne's mother won the custody battle. However, Yvonne's

father's concerns regarding her mother's drinking had some merit.

During the course of Yvonne's upbringing, her mother had three live-in male

companions. Yvonne recalled that all of the men treated her and her sisters very nicely.

However, one of the men abused alcohol in the home. His treatment of her mother changed

when he was under the influence of alcohol. Yvonne remembered, he was nice to her sometimes

too, but when he started drinking, that's when he would get real mean (Interview 2). His

drinking caused conflicts in the home. The conflicts seemed to escalate when Yvonne's mother

indulged in drinking alcohol.

Yvonne remembered one incident when her mother's companion physically abused her

mother. This was not a common occurrence. Yvonne shared, "when he hit her it was just that

one time that I can recall" (Interview 2). Yvonne's mother wore sunglasses to hide the black-eye

she received from the gentleman living in her house at the time. This relationship eventually

ended when Yvonne's mother stopped drinking alcohol.

Yvonne explained:

> If somebody stops doing something but the other person continues doing that, it's kind of
>
> hard for them to accept you as a new person. So that's kind of like how it broke off
>
> because he did not know how to accept her as a person who didn't drink (Interview 2)

Yvonne believed that her mother stopped drinking alcohol because "she started to see the effects

of alcohol and how it was kind of having a big toll on her life" (Interview 2). Yvonne's mother

later began a long-term relationship with another gentleman that remained intact. Yvonne's

relationship with her father and the relationships her mother had with men in her home caused a

degree of inner conflict in Yvonne. She shared, "I have a hard time trusting people of the

opposite sex, a very hard time" (Yvonne, Interview 2).

Yvonne's fond recollections of her childhood community changed when she described

the second housing project in which she and her family lived. She recalled, "I hated it. I wanted

to move . . . I just didn't feel comfortable in my own neighborhood" (Yvonne, Interview 2). The

area was called Newsome Park. She recalled that the neighborhood became progressively worse

as she got older. She stated:

Actually, I had a lot of fun in Newsome Park during my middle school days even though there were some bad kids. There was a recreational soccer team and basketball team. But, the people that we grew up with, some of those people were the same people who were drug dealers out there. Some of those drug dealers didn't even live in Newsome Park. There were a lot of gunshots (Interview2)

The gunshots became so commonplace that they became barely noticeable. Yvonne chuckled as she explained her thinking at the time, "that's a gunshot-- no big deal" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Yvonne explained how she survived and was inspired by the constant threat of neighborhood violence in the following way:

You just learn to adjust and to pray, hope it don't come in your house and get

up and just continue with your day. Turn off all the lights. You just

learn to live with it. But then it's an inspiration to not want to ever have to live there

for the rest of your life (Interview 2)

Despite the violence in her former neighborhood, Ridley Circle, Yvonne sensed a difference in the people in Newsome Park. She contrasted the two neighborhoods by stating, "I didn't like Newsome Park as much . . . It was fun. But it was not as fun as Ridley Circle" (Yvonne, Interview 1). She expounded, "In Newsome Park, it seemed like a lot of those people were only about crime, drugs, and bad stuff" (Interview 1). She recalled differences in the children in the two neighborhoods stating, "I knew a girl who was twelve who said, *I already lost my virginity.* And that's all they talked about" (Interview 1). She recalled, "when I was in Ridley Circle, I don't even remember talking about sex at all" (Interview 1).

Yvonne believed that Newsome Park lacked the sense of community that she remembered in Ridley Circle. She indicated that her perceptions of the differences in the two

neighborhoods may have been due, in part, to the fact that she became more aware of potential dangers in her surroundings as she got older. She stated that as she matured, "I realized what could happen to anybody. Anybody could get shot. Anybody's house could get robbed" (Yvonne, Interview 1). Things got progressively worse in the neighborhood as Yvonne matriculated through high school. Yvonne recalled, "the older people was being put in jail and the younger people growing up started using drugs and doing crimes (Interview 2).

Yvonne reflected on the stress and worry she felt in her neighborhood as she matured. She recalled, "When we were in elementary and middle school it wasn't bad. But when we got in high school that's when it started, some of the problems" (Yvonne, Interview 2). One of the problems involved a conflict between Yvonne's mother and a neighborhood drug-dealer. Yvonne shared, "She took a warrant out on one of them, and he had to serve a little time. And you know how people are. They want to get revenge" (Interview 2). Yvonne shared that the drug-dealer was sentenced to jail time due to his actions against her mother. She recalled, "he kept harassing her . . . once they really banged her car up . . . they messed it up twice" (Interview 1).

Despite challenges in the community, Yvonne remembered that her mother worked multiple jobs to provide for her family. Her mother also had a structured home. Yvonne recalled, "she made sure everything was in order. She made sure that we abided by her rules and she worked extra hard. She showed everybody love (Yvonne, Interview 1). Yvonne described her mother as "very determined. She would persevere. She never gave up. If her eye or heart is on a goal, she will make sure that she achieves it" (Interview 1). Yvonne believed that she learned to work hard by watching her mother. She explained this belief in the following way:

Cause we see her always having two or three jobs, making ends meet, always having

a nice place to stay. She has two cars, always look nice, always respected herself. She

was very big on morals and very big on character (Interview 1)

Yvonne expressed a very high regard for her mother. She commented, "She's just everything,

next to God" (Interview 2).

Yvonne also recalled positive relationships with adults in her schools. Her fourth-grade

teacher, Ms. Woods was very encouraging. Yvonne believed her positive feedback had an

impact on her academic performance. Yvonne recalled, "I guess it was the comments she would

say when I would do a really good job . . . she made me feel smart" (Yvonne, Interview 1).

Yvonne fondly recalled her teaching style stating, "I used to love her. I used to love the way she

taught-how she would . . . integrate games into the lesson plans and just the kind of relationship

she would have with the students (Interview 2). When reflecting on other teachers, Yvonne

shared, "I had a lot of great teachers" (Interview 1). She recalled a comment her teacher, Mr.

Griffin, shared with her mother when Yvonne was in elementary school. Yvonne shared, "I

remember he told my mom that if he ever had a daughter, he would want her to be just like me

that was a comment that always stuck with me" (Interview 1).

Yvonne recalled the actions of several other teachers. She remembered Mr. Blackmon

and Mr. Reid from her years in middle school. She stated:

I used to love them. They would talk about real-life situations. And they would be

honest . . . They would always encourage not only me, but the other students to exceed

beyond what's expected . . . Since most of us did grow up downtown, it was

not expected for us to graduate. But they pushed us. They gave us reasons to want to

succeed and excel-to go farther in life (Interview 1)

She also recalled a summer school teacher named Mr. Liner. She shared, "He always made me feel stellar- like I was just wonderful. He made me laugh. He made me feel good about myself" (Interview 1). The comments and encouragement from teachers came at a time in Yvonne's life when she did not feel good about herself. This was due, in part, to the fact that Yvonne was a self-described slow learner. She recalled:

> When I was . . . in kindergarten, first, second and third grade, I used to get into trouble a lot . . . I remember that reading and math were not my strong points. So, I used to have to get extra help in those areas. And sometimes I was embarrassed to get help. I didn't want to feel like I was one of the slow kids . . . I would have to see a tutor or a teacher's assistant. I would get help from tutors, get in trouble, then probably get kicked out of the class. That's the honest truth (Interview 1).

Despite Yvonne's behavior issues, she recalled that her early elementary school teachers were very kind. She recalled, "They used to give us hugs and stuff" (Interview 1). The difficulty Yvonne experienced as a learner caused her to feel inadequate. She explained that her learning difficulties made her feel, "like I was stupid. And I thought that everybody else was smarter than me" (Interview 2). This feeling of inadequacy remained with Yvonne. She recalled, "I remember feeling like that when I was in high school" (Yvonne, Interview 2). Her teachers, however, made her feel more confident despite her learning difficulties. Yvonne recalled that Ms. Woods was helpful. She stated:

> no matter how difficult something was . . . she always had a easy way of explaining it to you . . . and she never made me feel like I was stupid even though I kind of thought that way of myself. She just had a lot of faith in me, and…it made me believe that I could do things too" (Interview 2)

Yvonne explained her general feelings about the teachers she had in school in the following way:

> I feel like they had a lot of faith in me, and that inspired me to want to achieve and to
> get rid of the boundaries that surrounded . . . me. I felt loved by them, and they always
> supported me . . . Their smile and hugs always made me feel comfortable and just made
> me feel like they were like a second family (Interview 2)

In addition to Yvonne's difficulty learning, she was also teased by classmates. She explained, "when I was in middle school, I used to get teased a lot because I was dark . . . especially by a lot of boys in my class" (Yvonne, Interview 3). This teasing hurt Yvonne deeply. She recalled, "in the summer time, I tried to . . . bleach my skin" (Interview 3). Yvonne shared that her mother comforted her after she was teased. She commented, "She would let me know that I was beautiful in spite of what they said (Interview 3).

Yvonne used her own negative feelings about herself as motivation. She explained that her feelings of academic inadequacy "made me work hard" (Yvonne, Interview 2). Yvonne perceived these negative feelings about herself as essential to her success. She shared, "it was almost something I needed to make me try harder and to make me work hard at accomplishing a goal . . ." (Interview 2). Yvonne explained that she had to work harder than other students to make good grades. She intimated, "Even though I have good grades, people may think that I'm that kind of smart person who automatically gets things,…but I'm not that kind of smart person…I work hard and study hard and . . . that is the kind of person . . . I am (Interview 2). Yvonne's feelings of inadequacy made her want to prove that she had the ability to excel. She explained, "It's just my competitive mindset" (Interview 3). "I wanted to do better . . . study harder, do something more than the person beside me . . . take that extra step and put forth extra effort" (Interview 3).

Yvonne explained that her grandmother helped her to develop a deep faith. Yvonne

viewed her faith as essential to her ability to deal with stress. She explained, "when I pray, I

know God is going to deliver me" (Yvonne, Interview 2). This faith continues to help her. She

shared, I just cast that care and burden . . . and that's it, I never doubt him (Interview 2). She

believes that her faith, support from family and support from teachers helped her to overcome the

hindrances in her life. She explained that no matter how many obstacles she faced in life, "the

love and support outweighed it" (Interview 2). Yvonne shared her perception that love can

"outweigh all of the negative things that you can ever see, because that sticks with you forever

and that is what makes me strong" (Interview 2).

Yvonne plans to complete her undergraduate studies and pursue a career in journalism.

The enthusiasm and positive disposition with which Yvonne approaches her life is contagious.

She shared that working and attending school full-time is challenging. The hindrances of her

past help to fuel her work ethic. She explained, "every time . . . the thoughts come to my mind

that college is too hard or this work is too hard or I don't feel like studying, I'm like . . . *you*

don't want to go back where you came from, so put in that extra hour studying and . . . it'll be all

right (Yvonne, Interview 2). Yvonne's self-determination is evident. She explained, "I just

cannot find it in my heart ever to give up . . . that's not even a part of my character. I just want

something better in life" (Interview 3).

Table 13

Yvonne's Help and Hindrances

Helpful Aspects of Yvonne's Life	Hindering Aspects of Yvonne's Life
Protective and Supportive Mother	Community Violence
Good Teachers	Alcohol Use in the Home
Good Relationships with Neighbors	Drug Sales in Community
Hardworking Mother	Teasing from Peers
Strong Personal Work-Ethic	Feelings of Inadequacy
Good Living Conditions with Essentials	Discipline Issues Early in Life

Susan's Story: Positive Self Talk

ACHIEVEMENT

MULTIPLE EINVRONMENTS

Risk Factors   Protective Factors

- Victim of
  Violence
-Homelessness
-Crime in
  Community

-Protective
  Mother
-Supportive
  Grandparents
-Caring Teachers

HOME   Positive Self Talk & Desire to Please   **SCHOOL**

Resilient Behaviors
- Good Grades
- Participation
  in School
  Activities
-Attendance

Non-Resilient Behaviors
-Suicidal
  Thoughts

FAILURE

COMMUNITY

Figure 9. Susan's dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient and

non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

Susan's Story

It was early on a Saturday morning that I began my interviews with Susan. She was at home for the weekend from the campus of Hampton University to help care for her mother and provide guidance to her younger siblings. Her mother was recovering from a violent attack during which she was shot 13 times by a man who robbed her. Susan explained the number of bullets in the following way, "She was shot . . . they think about 13 . . . but they only took nine out" (Susan, Interview 2).

Susan asked that I pick her up from her home and drop her off at Wendy's, a local fast-food restaurant, after the interview. As I drove through the downtown community to Susan's home, I observed symptoms of abject poverty. There were individuals dressed in tattered clothing who were aimlessly walking the streets. My attention was drawn to an elderly woman who was pushing a rusted grocery cart along a sidewalk. The grocery cart contained what appeared to be bottled water, blankets and pillows. I thought that these might be her only belongings. I arrived at Susan's home and blew my car's horn. Susan, only 5ft. tall and full of energy, bounced out of her front door and jogged toward my car. She was wearing a Wendy's uniform. I was shocked.

When Susan asked to be dropped off at Wendy's during our phone conversation earlier, I honestly thought that she might be meeting a college friend. I was not aware that in addition to helping her family on weekends, Susan worked at Wendy's while attending Hampton University as a full-time student. Susan entered my vehicle with a big smile and began to talk about everything from the war in Iraq to her plans for life after Hampton University. I didn't have to say a word. I simply nodded and listened as the thoughts and ideas poured from Susan. She later commented during an interview, "I'm always talking or moving" (Susan, Interview 1). As I

drove my car to the office where the interviews took place, I smiled and thought to myself, *I think I may need extra tape for this interview.*

Susan was the youngest participant in the study. However, she had a very difficult time remembering certain aspects of her childhood. After attempting to recall her childhood home she commented, "I don't remember certain neighborhoods I lived in. I guess I kind of blocked it out of my head" (Susan, Interview 1). She recalled that she moved numerous times during the course of her life. She stated, "in high school alone, I moved a hundred times" (Interview 1).

The moves were difficult for Susan. She described the consistency of the moves by stating, "We wind up going over to my granddaddy's for while. We wind up going to one of my mama's friend's house for a while" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan recalled that the moves were also damaging to her mother's friendships. She said that her mother would say, "*If you ever want to break up a friendship then move in with your friend*" (Interview 1). Susan indicated that she felt homeless and stated, "I moved around a lot but there was maybe one or two times when we were actually home. We really didn't have anywhere to live . . . I still, to this day, can't believe that I came . . . out of that" (Interview 3).

The constant moves from house to house made Susan question herself and the relevance of her hard work in school. She recalled that she used to say to herself, "*What am I doing? What am I going to school for? What am I . . . on the honor roll for? . . . Nobody cares . . . I don't have no home. I'm homeless*" (Interview 1). Susan ultimately believed that the constant moving may have helped her. She intimated, "I learned how to be chameleon. I learned how to adapt to so many different things like a whole different neighborhood of kids" (Interview 2).

Susan's mother struggled to keep her family together during the moves. She stated, "We were still together. She wouldn't break us apart. We were still together and we were going from

house to house" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan recalled one of the more difficult moves. Her

mother did not have the credit rating to get a bank loan. She attempted to purchase a home

directly from a home-owner and was swindled. Susan recalled:

> we were staying there and she was paying him . . . I think the bank or some other place
>
> owned it, and they just foreclosed and we had to leave within a week. All that stuff we
>
> had and, we had to go . . . that was another unstable time where . . . we were homeless.
>
> We had nowhere to go (Interview 1)

When attempting to recall the name of one of the many housing projects she lived in,

Susan stated, "It wasn't Aqua Vista. It was the one before that and I can't think of the exact

name of it" (Susan, Interview 1). She could, however, remember its location. She remembered,

"It was way down at The Bottom" (Interview 1). The Bottom refers to the area of the city where

most of the housing projects are clustered. One of the many homes she lived in gave her a clear

vantage point from which to view the experiences of downtown citizens. She recalled, "where I

lived, you could see everything. I lived on the end corner . . . I guess you could say the east-end

corner" (Interview 1). After describing several of her homes, Susan summed up the majority of

them by stating, "Yeah, these are projects too. All of those are projects" (Interview 1).

Her mother raised five children as a single parent with the occasional help of Susan's

grand-parents who lived close by. Susan stated that her family struggled financially. She

recalled, "We have five kids by five different parents . . . she never once got child-support for

any one of them" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan recalled that her mother was very protective of her

and her five siblings. Susan stated, "my mom didn't let us play- I think up until my high school

years, my mom didn't let us play with other kids" (Susan, Interview 1). She explained further,

"We couldn't go in other people's houses unless she was going in there with us . . . We didn't go

in other people's houses. We didn't spend the night with anybody. We didn't even spend the

night with our own aunts and uncles" (Interview 1). Susan's mother was strict and did not show

affection. Susan stated, "I did not have a hugging mother" (Interview 1). As Susan got older,

she learned to appreciate her mother more. She shared, "I respect her now, but I hated her for a

long time" (Interview 2).

 Susan's hatred of her mother seemed to stem from an incident involving a man her

mother was dating. The man was suspected of illegal activity by local law enforcement. Susan

recalled the fear she felt when the authorities came to arrest the man at her home. She shared her

fear and frustration in the following way:

> the vice squad . . . came and they busted the door . . . and I remember running
>
> upstairs hiding in the closet . . . I was very afraid and it became another one of my
>
> disappointments in my mom. And that took me a long time to get over. *You let the*
>
> *outside world come in to me. The same world that you say we can't go into* (Susan,
>
> Interview 2)

Susan believed that her mother's actions contradicted the rules and lessons she taught her and her

siblings. She stated, "People outside the home started coming in and the people inside the home

started acting crazy . . . my mom forgot that she had taught me all this stuff about men. *Now*

you're doing the complete opposite" (Interview 2).

 Despite her mother's decisions in her personal life, Susan recalled that her mother sought

to shelter her from risk factors in the neighborhood. When asked about life in her community,

Susan replied, "I saw things, but they weren't anything to me 'cause I didn't see them a lot . . . I

guess you could say my mom kept us sheltered, like she didn't want us to know we were living

in the projects. Like, somebody had to tell me I was living in the projects, 'cause I didn't know"

(Interview 1). Susan's mother required that her children remain relatively close to whatever home they lived in at the time. Susan recalled, "If she could look out the window and see you or hear you, then you're perfectly fine" (Interview 1).

Susan remembered a constant police presence in her neighborhood. She recalled, "I seen the police all the time" (Susan, Interview 1). She explained, "On my block . . . they always had . . . domestic disputes" (Interview 1). Susan recalled a great deal of violence in the homes nearby. She remembered one neighbor's home specifically and stated, "They always had fights in their house, with the kids and the parents" (Interview 1). Susan recalled that her mother tried to separate her from the violence in the community. She stated that whenever they saw police lights while playing outside, "my mom would tell us to come in or she'd come get us" (Interview 1).

In addition to violence in the neighborhood, Susan also recalled the prevalence of drug use and drug addiction in families. She remembered one neighborhood home in which both the mother and grandmother of her peers were addicted to crack-cocaine. She recalled, "It was four kids, one guy and three girls and a grandmother. And their mother came in and out 'cause she was a crack addict" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan explained one of the ways in which the grandmother would generate money to feed her crack habit. She stated, "I remember hearing that their grandmother was a crack addict too . . . She'd get food-stamps and she used to sell them to my mama . . . she'd sell her food stamps so she can get . . . crack" (Interview 1).

Susan shared further details of the plight of these particular neighbors. She recalled the reason the mother of the family was in and out of the home. Susan stated, "She was coming in and out 'cause she was getting in and out of jail, and the grandmother was keeping the kids . . . the grandmother was kind of doing the same thing that the mother was doing" (Interview 1).

Susan recalled the relative age of the two crack-addicted ladies and stated, "They were pretty young, I guess you could say . . . my grandmother didn't look like their grandmother" (Interview 1). She also recalled the disposition of the grandmother in the home and stated, "She used to be mean" (Interview 1).

Susan recalled that her peers who lived in the home with crack-addicted guardians were violent. She recalled, "They fought every last one of me and my brothers and sisters. Of course, I lost because . . . kids were bigger than me" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan remembered that many of these violent conflicts were unprovoked. She stated, "They used to bang your head. They used to fight dirty. They'd jump you . . . I don't know what reason" (Interview 1). Susan recalled that the children would often rob her and her siblings. She recalled, "They knew our mama gave us money to go to school or something. They'll take it" (Interview 1). When Susan complained of the attacks to her mother, her mother would reply, "*Why you telling me? Go tell their parents*" (Interview 1). Susan remembered that many of the children in her neighborhood lacked guidance from their parents. She recalled, "they used to get suspended from school . . . their mamas and dads didn't care . . . they used to argue" (Interview 1).

Susan felt unsafe in her neighborhood. She was very cautious about leaving her home. She recalled, "their ain't no telling what's going to happen to you" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan remembered, "You knew the guys that stood on the corner were drug-dealers" (Interview 1). Susan's mother attempted to protect her family from contact with these individuals. Susan recalled, "They used to walk from one end to the other end, and my mama would tell them "*Don't you ever stand in front of my house*, and they'd respect her after that" (Interview 1). Alcohol use was also common in Susan's neighborhood. Susan stated, "Everybody drank alcohol" (Interview 1). Susan shared that her mother required that she and her siblings pick up

the empty beer bottles left in front of her yard by neighbors. Susan felt out of place in her

neighborhood. She stated, "I remember feeling like I don't belong here . . . I used to cry a lot . . .

I have a lot of bad memories . . . I used to cry all the time" (Interview 1). She explained, "I used

to hide up under my bed and cry . . . I just wanted to get away" (Interview 1). Susan detached

herself from her surroundings. She stated:

> I knew this is not where I was supposed to be living. I always knew there were bigger
>
> and better things . . . I was also very good at ignoring and blocking out. So even though
>
> I knew . . . the crack addicts lived next door . . . it was to the point where they weren't
>
> living next door to me *in my mind* [italics added]. I didn't live here. This is my house
>
> and whoever I wanted to be in the neighborhood was in that neighborhood. I didn't see
>
> anything else . . . even if I saw them . . . *This is my life. This is my community. This is*
>
> *my world* . . . I blocked it out . . . because I was somebody special. I was somebody
>
> great.   There was something about me that wasn't like everybody else and if I do bad
>
> stuff . . . then I'm lost. I had to win. I had to win! (Interview 2)

Books also served as a type of escape for Susan. Books were very important to her

mother. Susan recalled, "She always came to our book fairs at our schools" (Susan, Interview 1).

She explained, "she'd give you money for some books . . . you had to earn your money for your

ice cream" (Interview 1). Susan enthusiastically exclaimed, "I love books" (Interview 2). She

laughed as she explained how books were an escape. She stated:

> Cinderella? I didn't see . . . crack-addicts in Cinderella . . . I started reading stuff like
>
> that in the third grade . . . Where is any of this stuff on the block? I was kind of like in
>
> my own fairy-tale land. I felt it. But these books kind of confirmed it. (Interview 2)

Despite personal financial challenges and crime in the neighborhood, Susan's mother attempted to instill a sense of pride in Susan and her siblings. Susan reiterated the fact that she had to maintain the front yard and described her mother's philosophy in the following way:

just because you live in the projects don't mean you got to act like you live in the

projects or . . . that you got to look like you live in the projects. And, if your house is

clean in the inside, then make sure it's clean on the outside (Susan, Interview 1)

Susan expressed disgust with the fact that children in her neighborhood were considered by some to be at-risk. She stated, "I would . . . read in the paper that we were at-risk kids . . . I used to get so pissed about that. I wasn't at-risk" (Interview 1). Susan recalled that her mother would constantly say to her, "*You're not a stereotype. Defy the odds*" (Interview 1). Susan perceived her mother's actions during times of struggle as instructive. She commented, "We learned because our mama never gave up on us" (Interview 1).

Regardless of the financial challenges faced by her family, Susan believed that her family adapted to the challenges relatively well. There were times when power and water were inoperable in their home. Susan recalled, "I remember . . . coming home and finding the water was cut off . . . we drank bottled water in big old gallons" (Susan, Interview 1). To bathe and wash dishes with the bottled water, Susan recalled "we heated it up from the stove" (Interview 1). Susan shared in a very matter of fact manner the way her family handled the lack of power in the home. She stated, "and the lights going off? We had candles" (Interview 1).

Susan recalled her mother's strength during the numerous difficult times her family faced. She shared, "I still haven't seen my mom cry. I have never seen her cry about anything" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan recalled that her mother attempted to comfort her children during family crises. She remembered that in the midst of their most difficult times, "Mama made us

feel all right" (Interview 1). Susan proudly reflected on her mother and stated "She might have switched jobs a lot too, but she always had one" (Interview 1). Susan recalled a few of her mother's jobs and stated, "she was going to school, she worked at Williams Auto, and she also . . . worked in the club" (Interview 1).

Susan had fond memories of the times she spent with her grandparents. Although her grandmother died when Susan was very young, she retained very clear memories. She described her grandmother as a "strong woman" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan explained, "My joyous memories were always at my grandparents' house, 'cause when I get there, even now, there's a smell and a feeling that you have when you're there and it just makes you happy" (Interview, 1). Susan shared that her grandmother, prior to succumbing to cancer, tried make a strong impression on her. She stated:

> I remember my grandma used to make floats for us . . . she used to sit us at the counter and talk to us when we had our floats . . . we used to laugh and joke and play, talk about what went on in school, talk about what she wanted us to do . . . now that I think about it . . . she knew she wasn't going to be there for so long but she was trying (Interview 1)

Susan smiled as she recalled her experiences with her grandparents. She shared, "I remember . . . the joyous memories . . . my granddaddy and my grandma always dancing. She continued, "they'd let the music play and sometimes there wasn't even music playing, they'd just be dancing . . . every time I think about that, I get so happy" (Interview 1).

Susan maintained relationships with elderly people throughout her life. Susan fondly recalled one of her elderly neighbors. She shared, "there used to be this old lady named Miss Mildred, and . . . my mama used to make me and my brothers and sisters . . . help her out"

(Susan, Interview 1). This relationship lasted for several years. Susan recalled, "up until I was

in about 10th grade I was still doing it. Even after I moved away I would always go back and

help her" (Interview 1). Susan shed tears during the interview when she reflected on her

relationship with Miss Mildred. Through her tears, she described Miss Mildred in the following

way: "she was a diabetic and she had heart problems too. So, I used to go over there and just

talk with her" (Interview 1).

Susan enjoyed spending time with the elderly. She explained, "I used to do stuff like that

for older people" (Susan, Interview 1). Despite her family's multiple moves, Susan recalled,

"The elderly always had an interest in me on whatever block it was" (Interview 2). She

explained further, "When kids were outside acting crazy . . . I had to be in there helping them. I

was safe . . . one of the reasons I always came is I loved their stories" (Interview 2).

During times of homelessness, Susan became frustrated. She recalled that she hated

hearing her friends from school argue with their parents over things she considered trivial. She

recalled, "I'm hearing my friends complain to their parents about not getting this or not having

this . . . I just get so angry and I just blow up" (Susan, Interview 1). She remembered that she

would hear these complaints from friends and think to herself, "*You have no earthly idea*"

(Susan, Interview 1). Susan felt bitterness during her family's most challenging times and

almost gave up. The challenges were such that Susan often had to talk herself out of committing

suicide. She explained:

> I promise you throughout my life I don't know how many times I have been
>
> suicidal. How many times have I said *I'm giving up*? A million and then some.
>
> You can't even count it. Each time I cry, I'll go through whatever I'm going
>
> through . . . Then there's those thoughts. *This is not you. You are needed. There*

something out here for you to do. You can't give up. I just knew I'm supposed to be

great. *I am great. There's something about me. I'm a warrior. I can't give up. I'm*

a person. I'm a queen... (Interview 2).

Susan described just how close she came to committing suicide and how she overcame the urge

in the following way:

There's always this calming spirit . . . it's been times when I've had the belt around

my neck. It's been times when I've been there. I'm about to do it. It's been times

where I am on the roof and I'm jumping. There's been times I am gonna' take these

pills. It's been times I'm gonna throw myself off . . . but I never make those moves. I

never fully go through with it because there's something (Interview 2)

Susan recalled having suicidal thoughts as early as 5-years old. When asked if the support of her

teachers and people like her granddad prevented her from killing herself, she replied. "of course.

I think that . . . is one of the reasons why I didn't ever go through with it" (Interview 2).

Susan shared her deep frustration and personal thoughts during troubling times. She

stated, "*I'm smiling and going to school. I don't want to smile no more. I don't want to be on*

honor roll. I don't want to do . . . work. Why I got to do homework if I ain't got a home" (Susan,

Interview 1). Susan believed that her relationships with teachers were instrumental in helping

her maintain good grades. She described her "best" (Interview 1) memories are those from

school. Susan stated, "I had a good school experience . . . from childhood to even now I had . . .

the greatest teachers. For some reason, I always got put with . . . the greatest teachers on earth"

(Interview 1).   She reiterated, "I think every teacher I've ever had was great" (Interview 2).

Susan clearly remembered the passion of her teachers. She shared, "They made us feel

like we were their own kids" (Interview 1). Susan recalled her third grade teacher, Ms. Boone

and stated "I loved her to death . . . she taught us how to make homemade applesauce" (Susan, Interview 1). Her relationships with teachers caused her to keep artifacts of her school-work as she moved from home to home. She stated, "I got work from when I was in kindergarten . . . I guess moving from place to place you just try to . . . hold onto stuff like that" (Interview 1). Reflecting on her schoolwork helped her. She stated, "when I was homeless or when I was mad . . . I just go look at . . . my old work . . . and you get caught up" (Interview 1). Susan's reference to getting "caught up" is a local colloquialism that refers to a form of deflection. In the context of Susan's experience, reflecting on her schoolwork helped to take her mind off of the fact that she was homeless.

Susan's also fondly remembered Ms. Miller, her fourth-grade teacher. She recalled, "she used to take me home with her sometimes" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan remembered the fun she had at Ms. Miller's home. She stated, "I used to go to her house and she used to make peach pancakes" (Interview 1). This particular bond was very strong. Susan described her relationship with Miller in the following way: "she was like my mom, you know, like my mom away from mom's home" (Interview 1). Susan desired to please her teachers through academic achievement. She stated, "I used always tell myself *you can do better* . . . when I got my first B I think I was in like sixth grade and it hurt me" (Interview 1).

Susan associated her academic performance with her relationships with teachers. She explained, "by me being good and doing what I'm supposed to in school, then I'm making them happy too . . . I always wanted to make people happy" (Susan, Interview 1). Susan also felt that participation in extracurricular activities was helpful. She explained, "I did like 20 million activities at one time. And people were like *how could you do it*? It is because I needed to. It . . . helped me escape" (Interview 2). She explained further, "the reason I wanted to stay at

school until 10 o'clock at night and got there at 6:50 in the morning. I said, '*I don't want to go home'*" (Interview 2). Susan shared that the praise she received from teachers for doing well in school kept her going through tough times. She explained, "I love that. That's kind of my food. That's my nourishment" (Interview 2).

Susan recalled that she was required to recite positive quotes written on banners in the gymnasium daily in elementary and middle school. She explained how the words on the banners impacted her life. She explained:

> *I am someone special. Believe in yourself. If you believe it, you can achieve it.*
>
> . . . they stick in my head like when something's going wrong, when something's going bad, what do I hear? I hear these banners. *Say no to drugs*. I still, to this day, have not experienced any drug (Susan, Interview 3)

It is important to note that there was a noticeable change in Susan's countenance during shifts in our discussion from her home-life to school. She seemed to enjoy sharing information about her teachers. When asked about her relationships with her teachers and counselors she stated succinctly, "I love them" (Susan, Interview 2). She mentioned the fact that several of her elementary teachers, like Ms. Miller, were Caucasian. She recalled, "that was one of the first Caucasian women . . . that let me know they believed in us just as much as anybody else did. She treated me as though I was her child" (Interview 2). Susan continued:

> Race doesn't matter. . . I was her kid. We were her kids. We went to the movies with her. We went out to dinner . . . She wasn't just a teacher. She was a friend. That was another mother. I have a lot of those (Interview 2).

Susan went on to describe her high school counselor, Ms. Laverne Hill. Susan shouted:

"Ms. Lavern Hill. Oh, Laverne! . . . I can't call Ms. Hill mother but she is like a good aunt. She reminds me of my Aunt Barbara. Like they're on the same level. Never disappointed me. I guess you could say she loved me" (Interview 2). Susan shared one of the many lessons she learned from Ms. Hill by imitating Ms. Hill. Susan pointed her finger toward me and stated, "'*You don't have to accept that. You have decisions to make. You have a choice. It's all about choices.'* That's her thing" (Interview 2). Susan recalled that Ms. Hill encouraged all of the students she worked with. She commented, "She wants the best for everybody. She didn't treat me any different than she treated everybody else" (Interview 2).

Susan recalled memorable quotes and characteristics of many of her teachers. Mr. Reid, another elementary teacher, made a strong impression on Susan. She described Mr. Reid as, "my challenger" (Susan, Interview 2). Mr. Reid was tough on his students. Susan recalled his high expectations.   Susan laughed as she stated, "I couldn't stand him" (Interview 2). She recalled, "One of the things that I always loved about him . . . he loved his wife . . . He loved Courtney . . . He loved her and I loved that . . . I had never seen a man, especially a Black man, speak of one woman so heavenly" (Susan, Interview 2).

Susan remembered that Mr. Reid shared his own life's story with the children. She recalled:

> He used to tell us about where he really came from. Down in Cleveland. He used
>
> to tell us he had lights out and food-stamps. He showed us pictures and everything.
>
> We know about his sisters-all of his sisters . . . He came from exactly where we came
>
> from- and he went to school . . . It was hard for him to go to college but he
>
> went to college. Graduated college. Became a teacher. I mean he told us the
>
> real raw truth. I had never seen any person do that before him (Susan, Interview 2)

Mr. Reid was one of a group of gentlemen that Susan affectionately referred to as "a quartet" (Interview 2). The group included: Mr. Reid, Mr. Newsome, Mr. Blackmon and a middle school math teacher named Mr. Hayden. Susan recalled, "they were the strongest men on earth . . . they were poised. They loved songs. They loved hip-hop. They were great" (Interview 2).

Susan endured many challenging circumstances while growing up. Upon reflecting on how she was able to thrive in spite of challenges, Susan stated, "I realize 25% me, 25% your guidance whoever it is, 25% your community people and 25% teachers" (Susan, Interview 2). These were the factors that Susan believed buffered her from a variety of risk factors. Susan intimated that her struggles, in some ways, helped her. She explained:

It just makes me . . . able to relate a lot better. Believe it or not, I feel like the more

you go through-it's crazy now, but I feel like the stuff I went through, it makes me the

person that I am today and it makes me so much better of a person . . . I can cope with

things a lot better than some other people can . . . like who can cope with their mother

being shot and not being able to work for the rest of her life anymore, or having to take

care of your brothers and sisters . . . they still depend on me. My mom still depends on

me sometimes (Interview 3)

Susan had very little to say about her father. She described him as "an alcoholic" (Susan, Interview 1) and "a liar" (Interview 1). When we ended our series of interviews, Susan stated, "Mr. Hodge, I hope they pay attention." To that I asked, "Who are you referring to?" She answered, "The people who read this. This means something." At that time Susan's life, she was busy studying for exams and, as usual, managing challenges. She was still focused on her ultimate goal. She shared, "I want to own my own pharmacy one day" (Susan, Interview 3).

Despite the difficult memories that stemmed from the circumstances of her childhood, Susan was

working on processing those memories and moving forward. Susan stated:

>They still hurt to this day . . . I think I'm working on my issues as time goes by and
>
>that's…what humans do. That's what mature people do. First you have to accept them.
>
>You have to know them. You have to understand them. It's a long process
>
>to get over certain things (Interview 2)

Table 14

Susan's Help and Hindrances

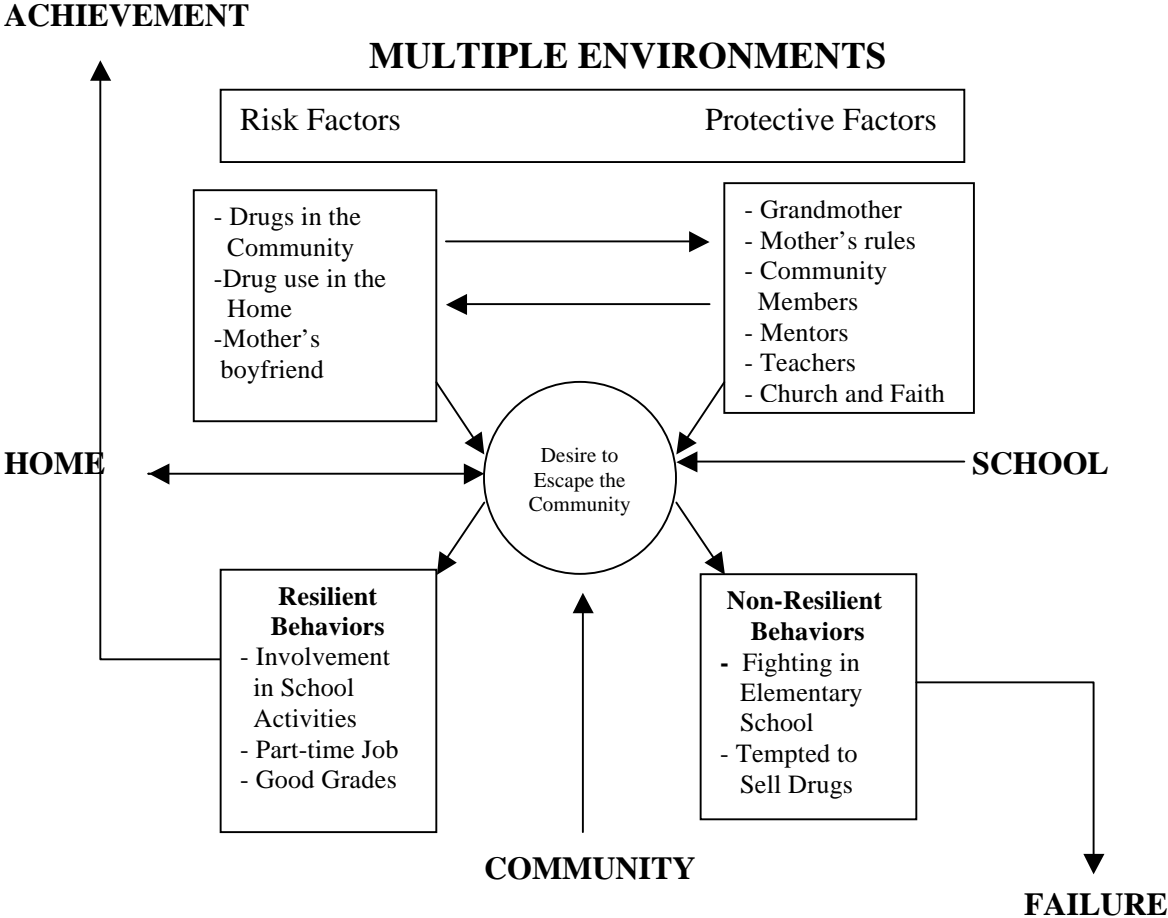| Helpful Aspects of Susan's Life	Hindering Aspects of Susan's Life
Protective Mother	Drug Use in the Community
Supportive Grandparents	Violence in the Community
Supportive Elders in the Community	Violent Peers
Caring Teachers	Homelessness

John's Story

Figure 10. John's dynamic conversion of risk factors and protective factors into resilient and

non-resilient behaviors in multiple environments.

John and I decided that it was best to meet on his college campus for our interviews. It was a challenge to find time in John's busy schedule. Once I arrived on campus, it was extremely difficult to find a parking space. I also lacked the requisite parking-pass for visitors. I called John and he gave me directions to a better parking lot. This lot required yet another type of parking-pass. John assured me, "Mr. Hodge. Don't worry. I've gotcha' covered."

John and I walked from the parking-lot to the administrative office. John walked with military-like deportment: perfect posture, eyes forward, chest out and with purpose. He welcomed everyone we saw with a smile and a hello. I felt as if I was walking with a pop-icon. John knew and greeted virtually every student we passed on the way to the office. Everyone, two professors included, gave him either hug or a handshake. When we arrived at the office, John walked directly to the desk of an older woman who was busy typing a document. When she saw John, she enthusiastically commented to John, "It's so good to see you." John whispered something in her ear. She responded, "no problem at all" and immediately handed John a small piece of paper. John walked to where I was observing and handed me a special, all-access parking pass. This experience made it apparent to me that John knew the importance of relationships.

John was raised by his single mother and lived in the downtown area of the city for most of his life. His mother's boyfriend lived with the family along with John's two older brothers. During John's early years, he lived in the Harbor Homes housing projects. John recalled feeling safe and very close with some of his neighbors at the time. He remembered the appearance of his Harbor Homes apartment. He described it as, "Plain. Very basic. Not a lot of decorations. Physically, no carpet. Everything was pretty much tile. Occasional roaches" (John, Interview 1). John laughed as he shared an incident involving a roach. He stated, "I remember waking up

at one point and there was a roach on me . . . I have vivid memories of roaches" (Interview 1).

John did not view the roaches as a major problem. He stated, "It just seemed like the norm"

(Interview 1).

During his years in the apartment, John was forced to alternate sleeping arrangements

with his two brothers. He stated, "I remember this vividly . . . we had two beds and . . . a

sleeping bag. And we alternated around . . . monthly" (John, Interview 1). Although there were

occasional problems with roaches, Jerome commented that his apartment was neat. He recalled,

"It was a clean apartment" (Interview 1).

John's mother had strict rules for John. He remembered, "I could not go across the street.

I could not go outside of this square perimeter" (John, Interview 1). These rules gave John a

sense of security. He recalled, "I did feel safe. And I think it's because my mother kept us

closer" (Interview 1). John's mother required that he remain within a certain area outside the

home. He stated, "There were two side-walks and . . . a little play area" (Interview 1). He

recalled, "We knew not to go past this distance" (Interview 1). John's peers in the neighborhood

were not bound to the same types of rules. He opined, "their parents did not care as much"

(Interview 1).

John recalled close relationships with five families within the housing project. The

families shared resources. John recalled that the neighbors were:

> Friendly- were willing to give a helping hand. Because the thing was everyone pretty
>
> much came from the same situation. No one really had a lot of money. It was known.
>
> Otherwise, we would not be living there . . . The adults would play with the kids. It was
>
> a nice deal (John, Interview 1)

John recalled a very structured daily routine when he lived in Harbor Homes. His mother made

sacrifices to care for her children. He intimated:

> Typical day at Harbor Homes . . . Wake up early in the morning . . . My mother would
>
> do everything for us. . . Cook something in the morning. We didn't have a lot. But one
>
> thing she always made sure of was that we had food to eat, even if she denied herself.
>
> There were a lot of times she did not eat so her kids could eat . . . she would dress us,
>
> clean up after us . . . I remember her cleaning up after us. I'd . . . leave my dirty clothes
>
> out. She'd come pick it up. She'd iron for us. I mean she literally did everything
>
> (Interview 1)

John appreciated his mother's sacrifices, but he felt her actions limited him in some ways. He

explained, "I think it hurt me. I didn't know how to do a lot of things when I got on my own.

She would do everything" (Interview 1).

John's mother had a boyfriend who lived with the family. John shared that the

relationship between his mother and her boyfriend was turbulent at times. He explained, "My

mother's boyfriend was not the most likable person" (Interview 1). John remembered many

arguments between the two adults. He recalled:

> I remember my mom and her boyfriend getting into a lot of arguments. They would cuss
>
> each other out . . . She would hit him . . . I remember a vivid memory. I remember
>
> going to court. My mom was in court for some situations with him . . . I remember
>
> going to my grandmother's house because my mom had to stay in jail overnight . . . for
>
> something that should not have happened (Interview 1)

John believed that the arguments were due, in part, to the consistent use of alcohol and

drugs by the couple. He disclosed, "My mom . . . just drank beer. That was it. He drank beer,

smoked cigarettes, drugs- all of the above" (John, Interview 1). John had clear memories of the

boyfriend's drug use. He clarified his statement by stating, "I don't know if marijuana as much.

But, I know cocaine. I mean, I've even walked in on him doing it" (Interview 1). When I asked

John what kinds of drugs were used by his mother's boyfriend, John replied, "Everything you

can possibly think of, he did it" (Interview 1). Despite the constant arguments, the relationship

between John's mother and her boyfriend endured. John commented, "The arguing was normal

. . . but yet, in the midst of the arguing, you could tell they loved each other" (Interview 1).

John's family kept in close contact with his grandmother who was a 10-minute walk

away from their apartment. He stated that most of his friends lived on the street where his

grandmother's home was located. Visits to his grandmother's house were a part of his family's

daily routine. He recalled, "We would get home from school, pack up, walk to grandma's house"

(John, Interview 1). He explained further, "At times it felt like my primary home . . . I remember

being at my grandmother's house a lot more than being at home . . . my home back at Harbor

Homes was just a place to sleep" (Interview 1).

Tragedy struck when John's grandmother died. Her death resulted in a dramatic change

in John's life. He explained, "My grandmother passed away during my fourth grade year and

she left the house to my mother. So, we moved in" (Interview 1). According to John, this was

initially an improvement in living conditions. The home was a duplex. John described it in the

following way, "It's a family house . . . It's one house downstairs- then a house upstairs . . .

Upstairs was my uncle's . . . my grandmother had the downstairs part" (Interview 1).

Although the family moved, John stated that his mother's strict rules still applied. He

recalled, "Even though we were on 22nd street, we had to stay within this square perimeter. That

did not change. We could not leave the street unless we were going to church" (John, Interview

1). These rules were not applicable to John's eldest brother. He recalled, "those rules did not

apply to him" (Interview 1).

John had many friends and peers on his new street. He stated, "I would say it was about

20 of us kids on this one street . . . we all went to school together which was awesome. I miss it

a lot" (John, Interview 1). John felt closer to his neighbors near his grandmother's home. He

explained, "The people on the street looked out for each other (Interview 2). He described the

community in the following way:

> more of a community than Harbor Homes. One lady across the street . . . cooked Sunday
>
> dinner every Sunday. And we could go get snacks and eat over there every Sunday. I
>
> mean, 'til this day. Every Sunday. She'd go out of town sometimes, but she'd be back
>
> on Sunday just to cook that meal . . . I joined church when I moved there. So, I had a
>
> church community-- the church around the corner. And I . . . became active in the church
>
> and it kind of kept me focused-- on track. So church was key (Interview 1)

There were several supportive people in John's new neighborhood. These neighbors

helped to buffer the difficult circumstances that John began to endure during his high school

years. He recalled, "I felt safe, at least in the early stages" (John, Interview 1). John described

his neighbors in the following way:

> "I remember going to Ms. Shirley. But it wasn't just Ms. Shirley-- Ms. Shirley, Ms.
>
> Bess and Ms. Betty- those three. Ms. Betty . . . would do anything for our family.
>
> Ms. Shirley wouldn't per-se do *anything* [italic added] for our family but she cooked.
>
> Ms. Betty was the moral support- the greatest woman . . . Just there, to this day, She's
>
> like my grandmother in place of my grandmother who passed away . . . It was an
>
> awesome experience (Interview 1)

The passing of John's grandmother left a void in his family. John believed that her death was the beginning of a downward spiral for his family. He emotionally questioned, "I just wonder how things would have been if my grandmother had lived 5 years longer" (John, Interview 2). He described his grandmother as "strong" (Interview 2) and "positive" (Interview 2). As John matriculated through middle and high school, the neighborhood succumbed to an onslaught of increased drug use by members of the community. John recalled, "In high school, I hated being home . . . when the bus would take me home, I was like *oh God, I have to go here*" (John, Interview 1). John characterized his neighborhood during his high school years as "drug infested and unsupportive" (Interview 1).

John described the types of things that took place on a daily basis in the neighborhood. He commented, "you would see a lot of young people with sagging pants standing on corners trying to sell . . . You would see trash . . . You would see a lot of crack-heads . . . I started not to feel safe . . . it's not an ideal place" (John, Interview 1). John's reference to "sagging pants" (Interview 1) is an allusion to a very popular way of wearing pants in urban communities. It's called *saggin'* [italics added] and involves wearing pants below the waist-line.

Drug sales were not just prevalent in the neighborhood. John's older brothers began to sell drugs from inside his grandmother's home. John was outraged. He sternly shared his anger and stated, "Drug traffic in my house? A house that my grandmother would not even allow people to smoke cigarettes in growing up- there's drugs" (John, Interview 1)? His brother's activities placed the family and the home in harm's way on a daily basis. John explained, "You've got crack-heads coming to the front steps for my brothers. I'm sitting here seeing them . . . count it out and divide it and bag it up" (Interview 1). Many of the crack-heads came inside the home. John remembered the traffic of people and stated, "the traffic flowed in and out"

(Interview 1). John's mother allowed this activity in the home. His brother had a large drug

clientele. John recalled that he sold to everyone, he explained, "to even my mom's boyfriend.

And to crack-heads in the community. It was deep" (Interview 1). John's use of the word

"*deep*" [italics added] in this context is a colloquialism that alludes to John's belief that the

situation in his home was grave.

His mother's boyfriend also became an issue for the family. John commented, "he was

strung out on drugs" (John, Interview 2). The boyfriend would steal from the children to feed his

drug habit. John recalled, "He would steal from us. And I would get so pissed off. I mean- I

would tell my mother about it . . . that was my video game. We would . . . save up and buy.

He'd sell it" (Interview 2). John remembered that her boyfriend would try to sell almost

anything in order to make enough money for his drugs. John remembered, "just little things like

a video game- he would try to sell on the street. Make some money just to smoke some crack for

the night" (Interview 2). John shared that money was also stolen from the family. He explained:

> in my immediate household, no one had a bank account . . . My mom would stash . . .
>
> money in the house…But sometimes he use to figure out her stash spots. So she had to
>
> really start thinking where to hide her money. But, this is her house! (Interview 2)

John was bitterly disappointed in his mother at that time. He recalled, "I even told her-- *I*

hate you…she was losing control of her kids" (John, Interview 1). John's home was a

microcosm of the impact of drugs on the community. John stated, "The community seemed like

it was falling apart" (John, Interview 1). The family across the street endured similar challenges.

John recalled playing with members of the Smithen family as a younger child. Unfortunately,

their mother eventually became addicted to crack-cocaine and her son began to sell drugs with

John's brother. This had a devastating impact on the six children in the Smithen home. John

recalled, "the family was just torn apart . . . They had issues . . . None of them graduated. They all were stressed" (Interview 1).

John's older brothers were partners in the drug trade. To them, it was easy money. John despised the fact that they decided to become drug dealers. However, he recalled that they respected his desire to refrain from criminal activity. He stated, "They did have respect for me . . . whatever room I was in, they would not do anything in . . . wherever I was, they would make accommodations for me" (John, Interview 1). The life of John's eldest brother and his peers began to slowly unravel as drug-use in the community increased. John explained:

> Some of my brother's friends were killed, jailed. A lot of people I know are in jail that hung with my brother. These are people I grew up with. And now the whole Smithen Family . . . each of the brothers have been in and out of jail . . . The girls, they all have kids-two or three children. And they are my age (Interview 1)

John quietly articulated the difficulty of watching his male and female friends in the Smithen family surrender to the temptations of crime or get involved with undesirables. He commented, "Abusive relationships . . . running from the law. It was tough to see everyone I grew up with just not doing well" (Interview 1).

John witnessed a life-threatening event involving his older brother that solidified his desire to free himself from the circumstances of his neighborhood. John recalled:

> My brother got shot at over some drugs . . . He owed somebody money and he did not have it . . . He was ducking the person and running away from them. I remember a bullet being shot. I remember it flying down the street and it went into this lady's house . . . That showed me that I gotta make it. I gotta get out of the hood . . . That was a really bad day (John, Interview 1)

This incident strengthened John's resolve. From that moment forward, John worked hard to avoid the dismal circumstances in his home. At age 15, John got a job at a local McDonald's restaurant. He also became more involved in extracurricular activities in school. John proudly shared, "I bought my own car. I worked at McDonald's for six months . . . I'm a big budget person. I don't blow my money . . . I worked about 35 hours a week" (Interview 1). His job at McDonald's helped him to avoid the chaos of his home.

John kept himself very busy. He clarified that he worked at McDonald's, "while in school, while being in two clubs and playing sports" (John, Interview 1). He often stayed after school and went directly to his job site after school. He reiterated, "I hated being at home. I didn't hate my family, but I hated being at home . . . I would stay after school . . . That was my escape (Interview 1).

The church was also a safe place for John to spend his time. He described how the church impacted the young members of the congregation and community. He commented:

> Well, providing activities. Just keeping us busy . . . We sung in the choir . . . we'd go visit different churches to sing at other churches . . . we'd go on different events-- Bush Gardens, King's Dominion . . . parties at the church, vacation bible school. There was always some type of outlet, always (John, Interview 2)

John commented that the church was "key" (Interview 1) in helping him as a child.

John was the only person in his family with a car. The car gave him the ability to avoid his home more easily. However, he remained loyal to his family and provided them with financial support while in high school. He recalled, "There were times I had to pay the phone bill, light bill . . . in addition to paying a car payment, insurance payment" (John, Interview 1). John felt like the leader of his family in many ways. He commented, "I was the glue" (Interview

1). John's busy schedule allowed him to get home late enough to experience relative peace in the home. He explained, "I would be gone all day. So literally home was like a place to sleep" (Interview 1). John recalled, "I'd get off at 11 at night . . . come home . . . and watch T.V. . . . stuff don't happen at night . . . things are cool" (Interview 1).

School was also helpful in helping John avoid his home. He stated, "My way of escape was getting involved" (John, Interview 1). However, there were some days that John had nothing on his schedule. In those instances, the elders in his community supported him. John explained, "I could always study at Ms. Betty's house . . . I appreciate older people . . . She supported me. She would cook me something and we would sit down and talk . . . She got involved" (Interview 1). John commented, "She was a helping hand when most of my family wouldn't" (Interview 1).

John became a well-rounded, high achieving student. He accomplished many things in music, academics, and athletics. John sadly explained:

> I won all these fine arts awards . . . leadership awards . . . city-wide awards . . . I went 28 and 1 playing tennis . . . I wasn't supported by my family . . . And this hurts me to this day . . . I would get involved in so much and no one from my family showed up (John, Interview 1)

John's success was so well-known in his community that neighbors chastised his mother for not attending his special events. He recalled, "my mom is getting pressured from the community . . . they were like*, that's your son. I dream for my son to be doing what John is doing"* (Interview 1).

In addition to Ms. Betty and Ms. Shirley, members of his community's church were very helpful. John mentioned Mrs. Goodrich. He explained, "She was the youth director, and her husband today is my mentor. He's the one that I modeled myself after" (John, Interview 1).

John intimated, "I feel like . . . if my church was not there, I would have strayed" (Interview 1).

John also had supportive friends in his peer group. He recalled, "My girlfriend kept me

accountable. We kept each other accountable" (Interview 1). John also mentioned two other

friends, Jaques and Jamel. He explained, "I'd say those two in particular because they wanted to

do well" (Interview 1). John was selective about his relationships with people. He stated, "I

think the key for me was to surround myself with positive people. You need that support"

(Interview 1). He explained, "Well, the drive is going to ultimately get you there . . . but you

need people pushing you" (Interview 2).

John actively recruited people to be a part of his support system. He enthusiastically

described his mentor, Mr. Goodrich, and explained how he developed their relationship. John

commented:

> Mr. Goodrich . . . loves to help people. Positive, full of energy, successful. He's 32,
>
> family-oriented and he's been through a lot. But, in the midst of trials he has, he just
>
> keeps going . . . And he's my mentor . . . he's accepted that role in my life now. It
>
> was a learned role because he did not know what a mentor was. And I told him, pretty
>
> much, how I viewed him: I *think you are an awesome person- talk to me . . .keep me*
>
> *going* (Interview 2)

Educators also played a role in pushing John. John recalled their commitment to teaching

lessons about life. He explained, "It wasn't just the content. They wanted to teach life lessons

too" (John, Interview 2). Mrs. Simmons, his high school chorus teacher, was a positive example.

He stated, "I love her! She is like everything man. Like mama, chorus teacher . . . she helped to

develop my talent. She is a very strong spiritual lady-- very strong . . . her faith pretty much

dictates the way she lives" (Interview 2). John also commented about staff members from the

Achievable Dream program. John participated in the program in its initial phases when it was a

summer tennis program. He recalled, "We would go every morning, recite the banners . . . We

would always go up every day and say what we wanted to be when we grow up . . . The staff was

very close to me . . . they worked beyond the 9 to 5" (Interview 2). John was able to remember

the banner quotes over 10 years later. He enthusiastically recited each one:

> Proud to be drug free. Be cool, stay in school. Nothing was ever achieved without
>
> enthusiasm. It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice. Decisions are
>
> up to me. I can go to college if I would hard. An Achievable Dream loves me. I am
>
> someone special. I will say no to guns. I will say no to drugs.

He laughed as he explained, "I was in fourth grade when I learned that . . . It's like being

brainwashed . . . literally" (Interview 3).

John recalled the hard work of Ms. Clayton, an educator from the Achievable Dream

program. John explained, "You could tell she was there for the right reasons. You could tell she

wanted each and every one of us to be success. I saw that. And even when she left, she still kept

in touch with some of us. And she wanted us to do well" (John, Interview 2). John believed that

Ms. Clayton went beyond the call of duty. He commented, "She came to your house. I recall

times when she would visit my house. She tried to help my mom . . . She wanted to help and my

mom knew it" (Interview 2).

John set goals for himself early in his life. Attending college was one of these goals.

John recalled that his participation in An Achievable Dream was originally described to him and

his mother as his ticket to an all-expenses-paid college education. He was placed in the program

after getting into fights. He explained, "people would pick on me and I would retaliate. And I

really hurt one boy" (John, Interview 1). John was informed during his Junior year in high

school that the Achievable Dream program would only cover tuition. John described this as one

of the worst times of his life because attending college was so important. John commented that

hearing this news made selling drugs to cover college expenses a tempting option. He recalled,

"That's the first moment in my life that I thought about doing it" (Interview 1). John got through

this turbulent time with the support of several key individuals.

 John was emotional when he explained the role that people played in helping him

throughout his life. He metaphorically described himself as the driver of his life:

> "Think about it. Put it in the context of driving a car. You're the driver, but
>
> if your engine fails, you're not getting anywhere. Ok? But, if my mentor is the
>
> engine, I'll keep running. Ok, boom! My battery is dead. I stop . . . Ms Betty is the
>
> battery . . . Now she keeps it going. So, you need all these pieces to keep it going.
>
> I'm just the driver. I'm trying to get from point A to point B . . . I used to write my goals
>
> out. This is where I want to be. I've pretty much accomplished all the goals I had
>
> written on my wall in high school . . . But If I need some water in my car, I need the
>
> water. That's when I'm getting on the phone to get some encouragement. Or, I go to
>
> church and hear a sermon . . . It's the little things. I'm the driver. (John, Interview 2).

John believed that other keys to his success include "faith" (Interview 2) and "work ethic"

(Interview 2).

John and I had our last interviews only weeks after he graduated from Old Dominion

University. He was excited about his future. John proudly informed me that he was admitted to

Ohio State University. When I repeated "*Ohio State University*", John corrected me. He said

jokingly, "Mr. Hodge! Don't forget the *The*! It's The Ohio State University." As was the case

in his childhood, John's plans were clear and he was still escaping. He commented, "My future

plans? I plan to get away from here. I'm moving to Ohio. I'm going to *The* [italics added] Ohio State University to pursue a master's degree in Higher Education Administration and Student Affairs- exploring the Ph.D. route" (John, Interview 3). As I walked away from our last meeting, John stated, "I'm gonna' call you If I need you." I said to myself, *perhaps he is recruiting me as a mentor*. I looked forward to hearing about John's future.

Table 15

John's Help and Hindrances

Helpful Aspects of John's Life	Hindering Aspects of John's Life
Mother's Rules Early in Life	Constant Arguments in the Home
Supportive Grandmother	Drug and Alcohol Use in the Home
Supportive Educators	Mother's Boyfriend
Faith	Fighting in School Early in Life
Work Ethic	Temptation to Sell Drugs for College Tuition

Recommendations from Participants

This study was designed to gain a greater understanding of the resilience phenomenon

from the perspectives of young adults who have demonstrated several characteristics of

resilience. These characteristics include, among other attributes, the ability to translate negative

risk factors into positive action steps (Gibbs & Bennett, 1990). The opinions of the participants

may provide educational practitioners with a powerful narrative from which additional research

questions can be derived and effective strategies developed.

Three research questions guided this study. The third question inquired about the

perceptions of participants regarding ways in which adults can help children who may face some

of the same challenging circumstances as the participants. These circumstances included several

residual effects of poverty including, but not limited to, illegal drug use in the home, hunger and

crime in the community. It is clear that such circumstances hinder many children, particularly

African-American children, from attaining social and academic success.

Graduation rates and admission to two or four-year colleges are two of the many areas in

which impoverished African-American children fall behind their more affluent Caucasian

counterparts. However, the current graduation rates among all high school students, regardless

of ethnicity and socio-economic status, are unacceptable. "Approximately one-third of all high

school students in the United States fail to graduate. For Blacks and Hispanics, the rate rises to

50%" (Swanson, 2007, p. 91). These deplorable graduation rates and other gaps in achievement

have forced educators to seek out solutions that may help a larger number of students succeed.

The opinions of the students themselves are believed to be potentially the best resource in

determining and addressing the factors that contribute to academic and social failure (2007). The

same can be said of resilience. It is possible that potential strategies that can help facilitate

resilience in *all* [italics added] children can be gleaned from the recommendations posited by youth who have overcome risk-factors.

There were six participants in this study. All participants were African-American, eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and from single-parent homes. The participants lived in an area of the city in which a preponderance of crime took place. In spite of these risk factors, all participants graduated from high school, maintained at least a 2.5 grade-point-average and were admitted to a 4-year college or university. These accomplishments may be indicative of resilience in the participants (Werner and Smith, 1992). With appropriate support from adults and the existence of other protective factors in their lives, children who face challenges can thrive in spite of a variety of risk factors (Bernard, 1993, 1991; Boyd, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). The participants in this study provided several recommendations that may help to make success more attainable for children who face similar risk-factors in their lives. The recommendations included suggestions and, in some cases, the rationale from the perspectives of participants.

Participants unanimously believed that working with children who face risk factors in the home, school or community may require a special kind of adult. Children sometimes bring a tremendous amount of emotional and psychological baggage to school and must be treated with care. Susan, for example, contemplated suicide on several occasions during the most challenging times in her life. The magnitude of the role adults may play in helping female youth in similar circumstances cannot be overstated (Everall, Altrows & Paulson, 2006). The consideration of Susan's challenging life as a homeless teen can help us to clearly comprehend the importance of the positive adults she had in her life who may have buffered the risk of suicide.

Susan believed that it may be important for schools and social-service programs to work with children *and their guardians* [italics added]. She suggested that such efforts can help to "show the children and show the adults who don't know . . . that there is a world outside those challenges" (Susan, Interview 3). Susan described working with children as "a molding process" that is "more than a job" (Interview 3). Susan also strongly recommended home visits.

Several of the participants concurred with Susan assertion that home visits and connections between school-staff and parents are essential. Jerome exclaimed, "Go to their neighborhoods . . . You got to be bold . . . and you have to really listen . . . get some feedback" (Jerome, Interview 3). Elisha also suggested that feedback from the community may be helpful. She commented, "I would have a team along with me and have people dispersed out into the community to go to houses. Maybe take surveys. See how people feel about what's going on" (Elisha, Interview 3). Susan explained, "If you have to go into that situation and see how it really is to really understand that child, then that's what you do . . . Make sure that adult knows that you care as much as they do" (Susan, Interview 3). Susan recalled that her family certainly needed this type of assurance when her mother was in intensive care after being almost fatally wounded in a gun attack. "To know our students, we must first know their communities and acknowledge their challenges" (San Antonio, 2008, p. 74).

Elisha also recommended that educators create partnerships with parents by providing them with learning opportunities. Her rationale was that "parents can't really support . . . their children if they don't have a sense of the educational realm" (Elisha, Interview 3). Partnerships with parents, school-staff and mentors can help to facilitate the "social scaffolding" that impoverished children need to be successful (Mehan, Hubbard, Lintz and Okamoto, 1996;

Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro, 2002). The school is, in fact, a different world for

many children and their parents.

Avery had strong feelings about the role of parents in the educational process. He

suggested that parents should talk to their children about school on a daily basis. He

recommended that they should, "have a conversation with them . . . and . . . let them know that

you're there for them- that you want to know what's going on in their life" (Avery, Interview 3).

Elisha's recommendations were somewhat similar. She commented, "Reaching people is not

research, it's ministry" (Elisha, Interview 3). It is important to note that Elisha regarded her faith

as essential in helping her to overcome the many obstacles she faced throughout her childhood.

Elisha lived in a roach-infested apartment and was responsible for caring for her younger

brothers. Elisha's mother resented the amount of time that Elisha spent on school work. Elisha

felt that if her mother had grasped the importance of education, she probably would not have

placed so much responsibility on Elisha.

Elisha commented, "You actually have to care, like my teachers cared" (Elisha, Interview

2). She believed that teachers should seek to educate children holistically and focus on life-skills

in addition to state standards. Elisha explained, "A lot of teachers are focused on SOLs so much

that they miss out on the kids (Interview 3). John concurred with Elisha's opinion. He recalled

his former math teacher, Mr. Hayden. John shared, "One thing I can remember about Mr.

Hayden and being in class with him, he taught math, but he also talked about life. He talked

about life lessons" (John, Interview 3).

Susan advocated for a strong emphasis on character in school. She shared that students

sometimes need very strong messages in order to get themselves back on the right track. She

thought that there may be limited circumstances in which former convicts may be able to reach

certain children. Susan explained, "there's a student who . . . is going down the wrong path and their path is juvenile detention. Who better to help them than somebody who was there" (Susan, Interview 3)? In past years, there was a special program coordinated by the school district and the local sheriff's department that involved a tour of the city's jail and conversations with convicts for students who were chronic behavior problems.

Students who are considered non-resilient are often not as engaged in class as students who are considered resilient (Waxman & Huang, 1997). Although some resilience literature examines the habits of the students in classroom settings, it may be beneficial for educators to consider what pedagogical adjustments can be deployed by teachers to help students become more engaged. Elisha explained, "I want the classroom to be more interactive because I couldn't sit for three hours" (Elisha, Interview 3). She laughed as she recalled her need for hands-on activities. She recalled that without hands-on activities, she "stopped learning after the first 15 minutes of class" (Interview 3).

Elisha remembered that music was a tremendous tool for helping her to remember important content. She shared, "every song that any teacher has used in the classroom where I've been, I haven't forgotten it (Elisha, Interview 3). She explained, "This is how I teach myself to learn" (Interview 3). Yvonne developed a similar method. She explained, "I felt like I had to work hard for everything because . . . kids in the class . . . got it at a quicker pace than I did. I had to find ways to understand it" (Interview 1).

Elisha believed that enthusiasm on the part of teachers is very important. She affirmed that her best teachers were enthusiastic about the content they taught and applied classroom information to everyday life (Elisha, Interview 3). This helps students to retain information through understanding the relevance of what is being taught in class (McNulty, Russell, Quaglia,

2007). Students often ask themselves, *why does this information matter*? A focus on relevance

gives them the answer to that question. Teachers who use engaging strategies, enthusiasm and

establish positive relationships with children are called turnaround teachers in the resilience

literature (Bernard, 1991).

Yvonne suggested that reward systems in school may be motivational for children. She

explained that the awards she won for showing good character taught her valuable lessons about

life. These awards helped her to feel "smart" and realize "that hard work paid off" (Yvonne,

Interview 2).

Yvonne also made additional suggestions. She explained that students facing challenges

similar to those that she faced in life need, "more guidance counselors, smaller classes . . . and

teachers to require classroom participation of students" (Yvonne, Interview 3).   This may help to

enhance the relationships between teachers and students. Avery discussed the need for

individual attention. He explained that teachers should "focus on every student, not just the class

as a whole" (Avery, Interview 3). Yvonne commented that children without positive

relationships with adults may wind up in dangerous circumstances. She explained the

importance of these relationships in the following way: "You don't have to have a lot, but you

need to have them because if you don't . . . you go seeking them in other places. I know that's

one of the . . . reasons why people join gangs" (Interview 3). Yvonne's assertion that "you don't

have to have a lot" in her comment regarding relationships with adults is consistent with the

resilience literature. In many cases, a positive relationship with one adult is sufficient to buffer

the impact of a variety of risk factors (Werner & Smith, 1992, Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Avery is a Physical Education major. He recommended a recreational center for the

community. He strongly suggested that adults in the center talk to the children about the

challenges the children face at home and the community. He believed that adults should "discuss

. . . what is going on in their environment and provide some solutions . . . to help them" (Avery,

Interview 3). Avery believed adults should help children to understand the long-term

consequences of negative actions. He commented, "It's not cool to get into trouble because it'll

come back on you in the long run" (Interview 3).

Participants suggested that the hiring of anyone slated to work with children should be

done carefully. Susan believed in the importance of carefully interviewing anyone who is going

to work with children. She explained, "You kind of know when somebody is gonna be there for

the kids . . . not just doing this so they can put it on their résumé'" (Susan, Interview 3). Jerome

felt that it is very important for adults to be able to relate to the students who face challenging

circumstances and provide honest advice. He explained that the community is dangerous. Kids

need to be told "don't let the neighborhood bring them down . . . there ain't nothing here for

you" (Jerome, Interview 3).   Avery commented, "I would get somebody that can relate to them

. . . then I'd have the person discuss . . . what's right and what's wrong" (Avery, Interview 3).

Such a person would be able to say "I've been through the same things they're going through

now" (Avery, Interview 3). Elisha stated, "If you're not sincere, you're not getting hired"

(Elisha, Interview 3).

Participants in the study provided very thoughtful suggestions for adults who are

interested in helping students born into difficult circumstances. Their suggestions spanned from

the school to the home and community. Several of the comments from participants were

consistent with research literature on resilience. The participants also provided information that

may be instructive to those in school leadership roles. The school administration must create and

sustain programs, policies and procedures designed to help facilitate the success of all students,

regardless of the circumstances faced by the students. This is a tall order. The recommendations provided by participants were heart-felt, sincere and potentially useful.

In the following chapter, I first present major themes that arose from my analysis of qualitative data. I will then present my conclusions, implications, reflection, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, REFLECTION & RECOMMENDATIONS

"I truly believe that we can overcome any hurdle that lies before us and create the life we want

to live. I have seen it happen time and time again."

(Gillian Anderson)

In the discussion section of the present chapter, I present relevant themes that emerged

from the analysis of qualitative data. The themes are discussed within the context of the lived

experiences of the participants and relevant research. It is important to note that this study was

designed to discover perceptions from the perspective of participants. Therefore, the data are

void of educational *terms of art* [italics added] like Positive Behavior Interventions or

Differentiated Instruction. For example, Jerome lacked the knowledge of pedagogy to clearly

articulate the strategies used by his math teacher, Mr. Berry. According to Jerome, Mr. Berry

made math fun (Interview, 1). This was one of Jerome's descriptions of the teaching

methodologies used by his math teacher. Subsequent to the discussion of themes, I discuss the

meaning of resilience as described by participants and the meaning of the concept in relevant

literature. Finally, I present implications for educational leaders, personal reflections and

recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The participants in the present study shared various types of internal driving forces that

helped to propel them in positive life directions. Their lived experiences may indicate that

resilience is one or several mental dispositions that can be facilitated and supported by external

support. This study was designed to capture, analyze and present the perceptions of the

participants. Therefore, the recommendations presented in the previous chapter came directly

from the participants. By making recommendations, the participants in this study acted as

shareholders in the articulation, development and implementation of effective future practices.

My interpretation of what the data may mean for educational practitioners will be discussed in

the implications section of this chapter.

Three major themes emerged from the research process. The themes included: the

residual impact of poverty, the support of educators, elders and mothers, and the power of self-

determination. Each of these themes was, to varying degrees, prevalent in the lives, experiences

and opinions of all participants. Each theme became clear after the analysis of data.

The Residual Impact of Poverty

In what is widely regarded as the definitive study of resilience, the Kauai study, Werner

and Smith (1992) presented variables that predicted the early delinquency of men and women

who participated in their study. Delinquency in early ages was noted to be a predictor of social

failure in adult life. Viewed within the theoretical model presented in the present study, early

delinquency may place children on a trajectory of social and academic failure. The socio-

economic status of the participants in the Kauai study was among the most powerful predictors

of early delinquency in male and female participants. Socio-economic status contributed to the

risk of participants. In the absence of protective factors that buffered risks, the phenomena

directly attributable to socio-economic status presented serious challenges for the participants in

the present study and could have had a detrimental impact on their lives.

In many ways, the participants in the present study fit the generalized profile of

America's impoverished children articulated by Rothstein (2008). Many of the risk factors faced

by the participants were due, in part, to the fact that they were members of impoverished families

and lived in low-income communities. The literature is clear that poverty in the home may place

students at risk of academic failure and may be considered a risk-factor (Bernard, 1991; Werner& Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Students most at risk of school failure live in communities with the most challenging economic conditions (Cuban, 1989; Hodgkinson, 1991; Peng, Wang & Walberg, 1992). The socio-economic status of families may determine where a person lives, who their neighbors are, where a child goes to school and the availability of basic resources in the home (Rothstein, 2008). The participants in the present study were subject to a variety of risk factors in their homes and community environments. External environments directly influence one's ability to overcome challenges (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becher, 2000). Table 16 provides examples of risk factors that participants in the present study were exposed to during their childhood. Table 16 also helps to demonstrate the residual impact of poverty. Participants were exposed to these challenges due, in part, to their socio-economic status.

Living in impoverished neighborhoods and substandard homes places children in close proximity to various risk factors (Shumow, Vandell & Posner, 1999). Elisha's house, for example, was inundated with roaches to such an extent that her mother made provisions to prevent the bugs from entering Elisha's ears. Neighborhoods have risk factors that directly influence the development of children. They represent the context in which lived experiences of children take place. Avery, Jerome, Elisha, Yvonne, Susan, and John had family members, friends or neighbors who were either addicted to or involved in the sale of crack-cocaine. The sale and use of drugs in the presence of children may represent a significant risk factor (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). As stated previously, in the cases of the participants in the present study, certain risk-factors may be directly attributable to the fact that the participants came from impoverished families and lived in impoverished communities.

Table 16

Community Risk Factors Faced by Participants

Participants	Examples of Community Risk Factors
Avery	Saw a dead body in his community
Jerome	Saw a dead body at his bus stop
Susan	Had neighbors who attempted to rob her of her money
Elisha	Was violently slammed to the ground during a neighborhood fight
Yvonne	Recalled that a taxi-driver was murdered near her home
John	Saw drug addicts in his neighborhood regularly

Avery spent many evenings hungry, having to split meals with his siblings. Jerome also articulated the fact that he lacked sufficient nutrition in the home at various times in his life. This lack of food can be attributed to the socio-economic status of their families. The lack of basic nutritional needs in the home is a risk factor that can also be linked health problems (Werner & Smith, 1992). In the Kauai study, 30% of the men and women who were raised in impoverished homes and lacked basic nutritional needs during childhood reported serious health problems later in life.

Other factors in the lives of the participants can be attributed, in part, to poverty. Jerome, for example, lived in his grandmother's home with 13 other people. Jerome's cousin was violently murdered in a community store near Jerome's home. All participants in the present study witnessed the commission of crimes in their neighborhood at some point in their lives. Additionally, all participants were subjected to some form of violence. This violence ranged from physical abuse by family members to fights with peers in the community. The theoretical framework of the present study demonstrates that the community has a continuous and direct impact on the child.

The socio-economic status of the family often dictates the community in which a child lives (Shumow et al., 1999; Werner & Smith, 1992). This means that poverty may influence whether a child is exposed to a variety of risk factors that may lead to social and academic failure. A community where poverty is prevalent may negatively impact the academic achievement of its children. Since the implementation of the Title I Compensatory Education Program of 1965, there has been a constant gap in achievement between impoverished children and their more affluent counterparts (McDill & Natriello, 1998). Although interactions with community members were considered potential sources of resilience by Shumow et al, results

indicated that contact with neighbors in impoverished neighborhoods fostered risk, not resilience in urban youth. This does not imply that there is a causal relationship between poverty and each specific risk factor articulated by the participants in the present study. However, poverty did play a role in the links between each participant and the risk-factors they described. Rothstein (2008) stated:

> Poor children are, in general, not read to aloud as often or exposed to complex language and large vocabularies. Their parents have low-wage jobs and are more frequently laid off, causing family stress and more arbitrary discipline. The neighborhoods through with these children walk to school and in which they play have more crime and drugs and fewer adult role models with professional careers. (p. 8)

The interactions between risk factors and protective factors are persistent and dynamic (Ungar, 2004). Risk factors refer to those phenomena that heighten the likelihood of social and academic failure (Bernard, 1991, 1997; Werner and Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Those phenomena that buffer or attenuate the impact of risk factors are referred to as protective factors (Bernard, 1997; Bernard, 1991; Jessor, Van Den Boss, Vanderryn, Costa & Turbin, 1995; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Via the analysis of qualitative data, the support of educators, elders and mothers and the power of self-determination emerged as thematic buffers to the risk factors articulated by the participants.

The Support of Educators, Elders and Mothers

The relationship between risk factors and protective factors is extremely complex (Ungar, 2004). It is difficult to express quantitatively the relationship between a person's challenging home-life and, for example, their supportive middle school science teacher. It is similarly difficult to quantify exactly how individuals thrive in the face of significant risk factors. In a

study of adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs), Palmer (1997) placed particular emphasis on the

fact that the dynamic relationship between risk factors and protective factors can be somewhat

ambiguous. However, resilience literature indicates that the negative impact of a challenging

home-life and other risks can be buffered by a positive relationship with a teacher, elder, mother

or significant adult in the life of a child (Bandura, 1997; Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Werner

& Smith, 1992, 1996; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Werner and Smith (1992) concluded that a variety of supportive adults or *alternate*

caregivers [italics added] can buffer the negative impact of risk factors. In their discussion of

protective factors and adult adaptation, Werner and Smith asserted that an association with

caring adults outside the family was "a significant protective factor for both high risk boys and

girls who made a successful transition in to adulthood" (p. 178). Additionally, Werner and

Smith listed several alternate caregivers. The list included: "grandparents, uncles, aunts,

neighbors, parents of boy or girlfriends, youth leaders, and members of church groups" (p. 178).

Caring teachers were also a significant buffer for risk factors. In their description of the specific

type of caring teacher, Werner and Smith contended, "This teacher served not only as an

academic instructor, but also as a confidant and important role model with whom a student could

identify" (1992, p. 178). Table 17 presents each of the participants in the present study and an

example of a caring adult who played a positive role in their life by helping to buffer risk factors.

Each participant in the present study recalled the positive roles played by educators in

their lives. Placed within the context of the description of teachers presented by Werner and

Smith (1992), the educators in the lives of the participants appear analogous to the definition

presented in the literature. The participants recalled the actions of some of their teachers in

specific detail. Avery recalled that his first grade teacher, Mr. Harrison, kept him focused.

Jerome shared that his eighth grade algebra teachers used hands-on activities that helped Jerome's mathematical understanding. Elisha remembered the day her high school Biology teacher, Ms. Coltrane, told her that she was intelligent enough to become a doctor. Yvonne reminisced about one of her elementary teachers, Ms. Woods, who was extremely effective in explaining concepts that Yvonne felt were too complex. Susan intimated that one of her elementary teachers, Ms. Miller, took her home and treated her as if she was part of the family. John described his high school chorus teacher, Mrs. Simmons, as a teacher and a mother-figure. The roles of specific educators in the lives of participants seem to match one or more of the characteristics of caring educators presented by Werner and Smith: academic instructor, confidant and important role model.

The participants in this study were surrounded by others who faced similar risk-factors. Avery, for example, had a cousin, Antwan, who faced similar challenges precipitated by poverty. His cousin became involved in criminal activity and is currently imprisoned. Avery resisted the temptation to become actively involved in crimes. Jerome was raised with several cousins in his grandmother's home. He is the only one of the group to be admitted to college. Susan had four siblings who faced the devastation of homelessness. Yet, she has attained the highest level of academic scholarship among those in her family. Elisha was successful in middle and high school. Her brother, who grew up in the same home and faced similar risk factors, was a drug-dealer. John was involved in school activities and graduated from high school with honors. Both of John's brothers sold drugs out of the family home and failed academically and socially.

Table 17

Examples of Caring Adults and their Roles in the Lives of Participants

Participants	Caring Adult	Role in the Life of Participants
Avery	Supportive Educator	Made Avery Feel Smart
Jerome	Grandmother	Raised Jerome and Cousins
Elisha	Supportive Educator	Made Elisha Feel Loved
Yvonne	Supportive Educator	Encouraged Yvonne
Susan	Her Mother	Established Boundaries
John	Caring Youth Minister	Provided a Safe Outlet

In each of these cases, a combination of internal and external factors combined to help the participants achieve social and academic success despite the presence of a variety of risk factors. Their success despite the presence of risks is the essence of resilience (Barbarin, 1993; Bernard, 1997; Bernard, 1993; Bingenheimer & Notaro, 2002; Garmezy, 1996; Kumpfer, 1999; Masten, 1994; Rutter, 1979; Ungar, 2004; Werner, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992).

The dynamic interplay between risk factors and protective factors in their lives helps to explain the differences between the participants in the present study and the siblings, cousins and peers that surrounded them. Protective factors during childhood and adolescent years have a direct impact on the ability to cope with challenges later in life (Werner & Smith, 1992). The participants in this study were able to avoid the pitfalls of the community and make the decisions necessary for social and academic success, unlike many of their peers and siblings. This appeared to be, in part, due to specific protective factors present in the lives of participants. All participants in the present study reported feeling supported by either one or a combination of adults including educators, elders or their mothers.

The literature does not specify that a caring adult in the life of a child must have a specific title or role. There is no indication that the caring adult in the life of the child must be a father, mother, teacher or coach. The nature of the relationship is more important than the role or title of the adult (Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Wolin & Wolin asserted the following:

> Relationships are intimate and fulfilling ties to other people. Proof that you can love and be loved, relationships are a direct compensation for the affirmation that troubled families deny their children. Early on, resilient children search out love by connecting or attracting the attention of available adults . . . they later branch out into

active recruiting-enlisting a friend, neighbor, teacher, policeman, or minister as a parent

substitute (p. 111)

It is important to note the use of the word *love* [italics added] in the Wolin description of

relationships. "Resilient children . . . make families of their own" (p. 121). All participants in

the present study reported positive relationships with educators. Jerome, Elisha, Yvonne, Susan

and John expressed the feeling of love *for or from* [italics added] the educators in their lives.

Several of the participants described their teachers and counselors in familial terms. Susan said

that her counselor, Ms. Hill, was like an aunt. She mentioned that her elementary teacher, Ms.

Miller, treated her like she was one of her own children. Elisha shared that a teacher's assistant,

Ms. Lois, made her feel loved. John said that his chorus teacher, Ms. Simmons was like a

mother. All participants reported very positive, close bonds with educators and enjoyed the

instructional strategies used in their schools. Although the siblings and peers mentioned by the

participants faced similar risk factors, it is unclear if they were exposed to positive, caring adults

in their schools or elsewhere. A difference may be that resilient children do not reject their help.

They are receptive to and, in some cases, recruit adults into their lives (Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

The participants in the present study were receptive to the assistance, support and encouragement

of the positive adults in their lives. In other words, they recognized and formed attachments with

adults who became buffers to their risks.

Elders played a positive role in the lives of participants. Jerome mentioned that the only

positive male in his life outside of school was his grandfather. Jerome attributed much of his

success to his desire to please his grandmother. Avery also described a positive relationship with

his grandfather. Susan recalled the strength of her grandmother and the support of her

grandfather. Susan recalled the wonderful stories shared with her by elders in the community.

John, when faced with the loss of his grandmother, recruited others to fill the void. His action is an example of the recruitment of supportive adults (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). John mentioned Ms. Shirley and Ms. Betty as supportive elders in his life. These elders appeared to play key roles in helping to buffer the many risk factors in the lives of participants.

There is no indication in the literature that grandparents or elders are significantly more effective as buffers to risks than any other caring adult. However, grandparents and elders emerged as key buffers to the risks encountered by the participants in the present study. The presence of elders in the lives of children in urban areas may be due, in part, to the socio-economic status of the child. In June of 2008, the Children's Defense Fund released its report on the impact of socio-economic status on adult imprisonment. According to the report, poverty, exacerbated by race, is the largest driving force behind the crisis of impoverished children entering the prison population as adults (Children's Defense Fund [CDF], 2008). As a result, many of America's impoverished children are being raised by single mothers and grandparents.

The fact that all participants in the present study were raised, in part, by single mothers may have necessitated the need for the involvement of grandparents and other elders. Additionally, all participants in the present study are African-American. The 2008 CDF report also indicates that African-Americans are more likely to endure imprisonment than any other population in the United States. They are also much more likely to be born into poverty. These factors, poverty and imprisoned fathers, may have increased the likelihood of the involvement of elders in the lives of participants.

Jerome's father was imprisoned. His mother allowed Jerome to live at his grandmother's home. Once Jerome's mother achieved better financial stability, Jerome and his grandmother moved in with her. In Jerome's case, his mother's socio-economic status and his father's

periodic imprisonment may have increased the likelihood of his grandmother's involvement in

his life. Susan was also raised by a single mother. Her mother needed the help of Susan's

grandparents to maintain safety and stability for Susan and her siblings. Family stability may be

a key protective factor in the lives of at-risk youth (Werner, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin

& Wolin, 1993). Further, Werner and Smith assert:

> The majority of the delinquent youth on Kauai who did not go on to commit any adult
>
> crimes . . . had grown up in intact families during their teens. One of their elders (a
>
> parent, grandparent, uncle, or aunt) provided structure and stability in their lives (p. 194)

John's recollections provide another example of how the socio-economic status of a

participant's mother may have been related to the involvement of grandparents. John was raised

by a single mother. John recalled visiting his grandmother's home daily in his early childhood.

John's perception of his grandmother's involvement was very positive. He viewed his

grandmother as a stabilizing force in his life. When his grandmother died, there was a void of

support in John's life. However, John gained the support of other grandmother figures like Ms.

Shirley and Ms. Betty in his community. These community elders filled the void caused by the

death of John's grandmother. John recalled that Ms. Betty would cook for him and provided a

safe and quiet place for him to study. By recognizing and accepting the support of elders like

Ms. Shirley and Ms. Betty, John demonstrated his ability to recruit protective factors into his life

(Wolin & Wolin, 1993). There is no indication in resilience literature that the low socio-

economic status of a family makes the involvement of elders more likely. However, summary

reports from Children's Defense Fund link poverty to single motherhood, imprisonment and the

involvement of grandparents (CDF, 2008).

Each participant was raised by a single-mother. The data did not yield any indication of a significant, positive relationship between any of the participants and their fathers. However, all participants except Elisha reported seeing their mothers work multiple jobs. Additionally, each participant indicated that their mothers established boundaries, rules and expectations in the home. John, for example, recalled that his brother could go anywhere in the neighborhood, and John could not. John's brother resorted to a life of crime. John is a college graduate. In John's case, the rules that John was required by his mother to follow may have buffered neighborhood risks. Jerome recalled the fact that his mother worked hard and attended school. Jerome's mother had more than one job. His cousins from the same home did not have parents who worked. In the case of Jerome's cousins, there was no parental example of a strong work-ethic. Jerome was the only young person in his family to attend college.

Avery described his mother as a strong person who never stopped working. Avery also recalled that his mother had high expectations. Avery's grades mattered to his mother. Susan recalled her mother's strength during her family's most difficult periods. Her mother was a source of comfort during her times of need. Susan also recalled that her mother established expectations for her children that did not seem apparent in neighboring families. Additionally, her mother worked hard. Yvonne intimated how neat and clean her home remained. Yvonne also recalled her mother's work-ethic. She fondly recalled that her mother kept a well-decorated home. Although the participants did not indicate that their mothers were the most important protective factor in their lives, the work-ethic demonstrated and rules, boundaries and expectations established by their mothers served as positive example.

The support of educators, elders, and mothers buffered the risk of social and academic failure for the participants in the present study. It is important to iterate the fact that resilience is

multidimensional and the title or role of an adult does not increase or decrease their ability to serve as a protective factor in the life of a child (Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1993; Wolin & Wolin, 1992). The nature of the relationship between the adult and the child is far more important in facilitating a child's social and academic success. A positive relationship between a child and a caring adult fosters resilience (Barbarin, 1993; Bernard, 1993, 1997; Garmezy, 1996; Masten, 1994; Rutter, 1979; Werner, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1993; Wolin & Wolin, 1992). The participants in the present study indicated that the support of educators, elders, and mothers buffered many of the risks they encountered while growing up in a crime-filled community. Research is clear that the presence of protective factors does not guarantee resilience. Resilience involves the continuous interaction of risk factors and protective factors in multiple contexts (Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1993; Wolin & Wolin, 1992). External protective factors have no impact on resilience unless met with a degree of internal focus, acceptance and determination on the part of the individual (Bandura, 1997; Bernard, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). In a study of former incarcerated adolescent youth, qualitative researchers noted "determination, positive outlook and approach to life, and strong future orientation" as indicators of resilience (Todis, Bullis, D'ambrosio, Shultz & Waintrup, 2001, p. 135). The self-determination of the participants in the present study played a key role in their ability to overcome adversity.

The Power of Self-Determination

For the purposes of this study, resilience is defined as a dynamic internal conversion process that helps individuals overcome the impact of negative circumstances in the home, school or community. There is an "interrelatedness and interdependency" between individuals and social systems within multiple environments (Queralt, 1996, p. 17). Risk factors and

protective factors in the home, school or community may help or hinder academic achievement and social success (Bernard, 1997, 1993, 1991; Frieberg, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Success, failure, risk and resilience appear to hinge on the manner in which the individual internally processes the external phenomena of life (Bernard, 1997, 1993, 1991; Frieberg, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993) Resilient individuals demonstrate self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), possess an internal locus of control (Lefcourt, 1992), and view external risk-factors with optimism and *self-determination* [italics added] (Werner & Smith, 1992). This optimism and self-determination can be facilitated by relationships with caring adults (1992)

Participants in the present study participated in the Achievable Dream program during at least part of their elementary, middle or high school years. The program has evolved since its inception in 1994. It started as a summer tennis program and evolved into a K-8 academy. In 1998, the program added intensive support for its high school students. Due to their varying ages, the participants in the present study had very different experiences as participants in the Achievable Dream program. As the program dramatically evolved, experiences for students in the program changed.

One consistent aspect of the Achievable Dream program is the recitation of the program banners by participating students. The banners represent the program's vision and philosophy for its students. From the time of the program's existence as a summer program until its establishment of a comprehensive K-8 academy, all program participants were required to enthusiastically recite the banners on a daily basis. John and Elisha recalled reciting the banners during their experiences as summer program participants. The banners are often a topic of

discussion when program participants from different eras meet. Table 18 presents the banners of the Achievable Dream program.

Day after day, regardless of the weather or the day's agenda, these banners were recited by the staff and students of the Achievable Dream program. John recalled hearing the banners in his mind when challenged by potential risk-factors in his life. Elisha also shared that she internalized the words on the banners and believed them to be true. As a keynote speaker at a yearly fund-raising event for the Achievable Dream program, John, almost a decade after he recited the banners during the summer tennis program, clearly and enthusiastically recited the banners *from memory* [italics added] to the amazement of many of his former teachers.

The banners were developed by the Achievable Dream program as a method of setting a positive tone for daily events. The banners were also designed to help children realize that despite their challenges in the home or community, they have the power to overcome obstacles. Program administrators and teachers continuously sought to help children believe that anything is possible with hard work. Additionally, the program sought to help children view challenges at home and in the community as temporary obstacles. Elisha shared that she knew the challenges she faced at home were temporary. The elan articulated by Elisha and demonstrated by other participants in this study is indicative of why *self determination* [italics added] emerged as a theme. All participants described a degree of self-determination in dealing with life's challenges. In their longitudinal study of children from Kauai, Werner and Smith (1992) concluded:

Table 18

Achievable Dream Program Banners

Banner Number	Banner Quotation Recited by Participants
Banner Number 1	Proud to Be Drug Free
Banner Number 2	Be Cool and Stay in School
Banner Number 3	Nothing was Ever Achieved Without Enthusiasm
Banner Number 4	It's Nice to Be Important, But It's More Important to Be Nice
Banner Number 5	Believe In Yourself
Banner Number 6	I Can Go to College If I Work Hard
Banner Number 7	I Will Say No to Guns
Banner Number 8	I Will Say No to Drugs
Banner Number 9	I Can Go To College if I Work Hard
Banner Number 10	An Achievable Dream Loves Me

the central component in the lives of the resilient individuals in the study which

contributed to their effective coping in adulthood appeared to be a confidence that

the odds can be surmounted. Some of the luckier ones developed such hopefulness

early in their lives, in contact with caring adults. Many of their troubled peers had a

second chance at developing a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy in adulthood by

virtue of apparent chance encounters with persons who opened up opportunities and

gave meaning to their lives. (p. 207)

Data from the present study indicate that participants gained the type of self-esteem and self-

efficacy mentioned in Werner and Smith's (1992) conclusion during their childhood years.

Although the direct source of this self-determination is somewhat equivocal, the fact that the

participants were all admitted to a 4-year college despite the presence of numerous risk-factors

demonstrates resilience and self-determination consistent with relevant literature (Bernard, 1997,

1993, 1991; Frieberg, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

The participants in the present study faced several types of risk factors. Avery was

hungry on several nights of his life. Elisha lacked basic classroom needs. Jerome wanted to quit

school. Elisha's mother was against her participation in the International Baccalaureate program.

Yvonne's home was surrounded by crime and negativity. Susan's homelessness caused her to

consider suicide. John hated going home and often sought to avoid his house. In each of these

situations, there are children in similar circumstances who fail. However, each of the participants

in this study succeeded despite these and a myriad of other risk-factors present in their lives.

Each participant attributed their success to the support of significant adults and one of several

internal phenomena. These internal phenomena collectively are described here as self-

determination. Table 19 presents the participants and the internal phenomena they articulated as essential to their success.

Avery attributed his success to his focus. Jerome desired to prove his mother wrong and please his grandmother. Elisha had religious faith and a desire to escape the plight of her home. Yvonne had a desire to prove herself equal to her peers. Susan used positive self-talk in the midst of contemplating suicide. John had a desire to escape his troubled home and community. All of the phenomena expressed by the participants are internal, reflecting an internal locus-of-control and degree of self-efficacy in each participant (Bandura, 1997; Lefcourt, 1992). The internal phenomena articulated by the participants are indicative of a degree of self-determination. This is due to the fact that each of internal phenomena involved choice on the part of the participant.

Avery, for example, chose to focus on his future instead of succumbing to the risk factors in his life. Instead of following the direction of his cousins, Jerome made the choice to prove his mother wrong and attend college. Yvonne could have become discouraged by the fact that she felt less intelligent than many of her peers. Instead, Yvonne chose to work extremely hard and prove herself be equal to her peers. Susan could have committed suicide like so many other young people. Instead, she chose to use positive self-talk as a source of motivation. John could have become involved in the sale of drugs like his brothers. Instead, John chose to work at a fast-food restaurant and concentrated on his studies. The manner in which each participant internally processed life's challenges, coupled with the support of significant adults, helped participants achieve results consistent with resilience presented in relevant literature (Bernard, 1997, 1993, 1991; Frieberg, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Table 19

Internal Keys to Success

Participants	Internal Keys to Success and Resilience
Avery	Focus
Jerome	Desire to Prove his Mother Wrong
Elisha	Religious Faith and a Desire to Escape
Yvonne	A Desire to Prove Herself Equal to Peers
Susan	Positive Self-Talk
John	Desired to Escape Troubled Community

Resilience and Resiliencies of Participants

Resilience terminologies remain inconsistent in the literature. Definitional ambiguity has been referred to as a "thorny issue" by researchers (Ungar, 2004, p. 347). This issue arose during the analysis of data in the present study. Bernard (1991) has presented four attributes of resilient children. They include: social-competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose. Steven and Sybil Wolin (1993) adduced seven resiliencies following clinical interviews with 25 individuals defined as resilient survivors. The resiliencies include: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality. The definitions of resilience and the various types of resiliencies found in the literature are extensive. Theorists have not agreed upon one definitive definition for resilience or one complete list of resiliencies. It is, therefore, somewhat problematic to attempt to place the perceptions articulated by participants in the present study squarely within the vast definitional parameters of resilience literature. Placed in the most simplistic terms, internal phenomena that buffer or lessen the impact of risk factors may be referred to as resiliencies (Bernard, 1997, 1993, 1991; Frieberg, 1994; Wolin and Wolin, 1993).

Conclusion

This study was designed to discover the perceptions of students regarding those factors that inhibited or contributed to their resilience. The purpose of this study was to achieve a greater understanding of the resilience phenomenon directly from the perspective of students, determine implications for educational practice and report findings in such a way that principals, teachers and paraprofessionals have a clearer understanding of how they may help to foster resilience in students.

The following questions guided this study:

1. To what or to whom do students attribute their ability to get through challenging circumstances?

2. How did aspects of life in the home, school, or community help or hinder the students' social and academic success?

3. What do participants perceive as possible ways of helping others in similar circumstances?

Six participants were selected for participation in this study. Their participation in the study was contingent upon the existence of specific risk factors. Each participant qualified for free or reduced-price lunch while in school, came from a single-parent home and lived in a low-income community. Grade-point average, attendance, behavior and admission to college were considered as indicators of resilience for inclusion in the study.

Participants attributed their ability to get through challenging circumstances to a variety of phenomena. These phenomena included internal and external protective factors. Positive relationships and ongoing support from educators, elders and mothers emerged as key elements in the descriptions of how participants were able to get through challenging circumstances. Based on their descriptions, we can conclude that the roles played by these individuals were more important than their titles. Consequently, these same roles could have been played by community leaders, school principals, clergy members, older siblings, social-workers, adult neighbors, etc. In each case, the nature of the relationship was the essential element. Participants viewed these adults as supportive for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, love, ongoing support, encouragement, enthusiasm, and the ability to illicit trust on the part of participants. The individuals and the roles they played in the lives of participants make them external protective-factors for the participants in the study.

In addition to the existence of external protective factors, several internal phenomena contributed to the participants' ability to get through challenging circumstances. These phenomena may be considered resiliencies and reflect a degree of self-determination on the part of participants. These phenomena included: focus, a desire to prove one's negative parent wrong, faith, a desire to escape one's home, a desire to prove oneself equal to peers, positive self-talk, and a desire to escape one's community. The participants in this study chose to act on thoughts and desires that lead to positive outcomes. Each participant graduated from high school and was admitted to a four-year college. These things were accomplished despite the presence of a plethora of risk factors present in participants' homes and community.

Those individuals who achieve social and academic success despite the presence of risk factors are believed to be resilient. The good citizenship of participants, and their academic achievement are indicative of their resilience. Several aspects of their life helped students achieve results consistent with resilience. Each participant had a positive relationship with an adult in the home, school or community. The nature of these relationships helped participants to endure the hindrances they encountered. Participants regarded their experiences in school to be generally positive. One participant, Yvonne, indicated that she was teased by peers in school. However, Yvonne also reported having several encouraging teachers. In this case, the school was both a help and hindrance. In all other cases, the school was regarded as a source of help in their journey toward social and academic success. The presence of encouraging teachers and counselors made the schools key to the success of participants.

The home environment helped and hindered participants. Generally speaking, homes were regarded as safe. However, each participant articulated at least one of several hindrances found in the home. The lack of food in Avery's home made it a hindrance. The lack of adequate

space in Jerome's home made it a hindrance. The presence of irresponsible adults in Avery's

home was also the source of risk, and therefore a hindrance. The infestation of roaches and lack

of support in Elisha's home made it a hindrance. The location of Yvonne's home in a crime-

filled neighborhood made it a hindrance. Susan's homelessness was a hindrance in her life. The

fact that John's brothers sold drugs in his home made his home an unsafe hindrance. Yet, in

each case, positive relationships with significant adults in the home, school, or community

helped to buffer the impact of the hindrances present in the lives of participants.

Although the community was the source of supportive adults in John's case, the

community in which participants' lived was generally regarded as a hindrance by all participants.

The community is known as the most dangerous part of the city in which the participants lived.

The area is known as *The Bottom*. This name has both a literal and figurative meaning. It is

literally the lowest point of the city and represents the figurative *bottom* [italics added] of the

social barrel for its residents. The violence and drug-use in this part of the city exposed

participants to a variety of risks that could have, at any point, derailed their progress toward

college admission.

In chapter 4, I presented recommendations from participants regarding possible ways of

helping other children in similar circumstances. I was pleased by the participants' willingness to

offer honest opinions, unpolished solutions. All participants agreed that adults who are hired to

work with children from impoverished backgrounds should be hired carefully. The emotional

challenges endured by children in similar circumstances requires a high level of patience and

understanding on the part of adults. Participants also strongly believed that school personnel

should collaborate with guardians. This may require, according to participants, home visits by

school personnel.   This type of collaboration would also give educational practitioners a deeper

understanding of the plight of children at home. I made countless home visits as Director of An Achievable Dream. Still, I lacked a full appreciation of just how difficult life was for children in our program. For example, I had a very good relationship with Susan's mother. However, I had no idea that Susan's family was homeless at various times during her high school years.

Participants felt that parents should be trained in ways to help children achieve in school. We sometimes take for granted that parents have the skills required to help their children. Participants also suggested that teachers focus on life-skills in addition to state standards. Many of the teachers that had the most positive impact on participants taught more than academic content. Participants felt that many of their best teachers taught them about life.

The participants offered clear descriptions of what and who helped them get through challenging circumstances. They also clearly articulated their opinions regarding phenomena that helped or hindered their social and academic success. The recommendations provided by participants regarding possible ways in which to help students in similar circumstances are logical and, in some instances, consistent with current research. I thoroughly enjoyed my dialogue with participants and feel that their perceptions may be helpful in the development and implementation of strategies that may help children in similar circumstances.

<div align="center">Implications for Educational Leaders</div>

In the No Child Left Behind era, with its focus on the performance of *all* [italics added] children, it is clearly imperative for educators to remember that we are working with children who need love and support along with the use of effective pedagogy. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized to larger populations, the experiences articulated by the participants are instructive and gave me a deep concern for children in the United States who are currently facing similar circumstances. It was difficult for me to read and review this research document

without an emotional response. One reason for this type of response is due, in part, to the fact

that I know the participants and remain moved by their stories. However, another reason is due

to the fact that I believe many other children are enduring the same types of struggles on a daily

basis in virtually every major city in the United States.

Educational leaders must develop hiring processes and procedures that help determine

whether prospective teachers have the requisite dispositions to teach children who face

challenges similar to those faced by study participants. Content expertise and pedagogical

knowledge is not sufficient. The opinions of the participants in this study indicate that educators

must overtly demonstrate that they care about their students. Students sometimes test educators

in an effort to determine if they really care. Elisha, for example, said that she purposely

misbehaved in class to determine if her teachers really cared about her. In many schools in the

United States, Elisha would have simply been suspended for her behavior. According to the

Children's Defense Fund (2008), impoverished, African-American children are

disproportionately suspended from school in virtually every state. Perhaps a greater

understanding of the plight of students would lead to fewer suspensions and higher academic

achievement.

There are staff-development implications as a result of the perceptions presented by

participants. Jerome recalled that his math teacher made algebra fun and used hands-on

activities to improve understanding. It is important to note that Jerome was taking Algebra in

eighth grade. In other words, he was taking a high school credit course while still in middle

school. This represents a high level of rigor. Educational leaders must expose staff to training in

teaching methodologies that increase the numbers of underrepresented children in high level

classes. I have done extensive work with the Florida Partnership of The College Board. The gap

between the number of impoverished children in AP classes and their more affluent counterparts is a constant challenge. The closure of these types of gaps will not take place through osmosis. School leaders must collect and disaggregate data, analyze data, set goals and develop action steps that are informed by data and the relevant research. School leaders must also insure that staffs are trained in ways to effectively deliver content while developing positive relationships with students.

Contact and collaboration with families and communities is essential to the success of many children facing challenging circumstances. Participants stressed the need for collaboration between schools, homes and communities. This may mean, in the case of impoverished children, that schools do far more than make phone calls and send home flyers. Direct contact and collaboration with the home may be essential to the success of children facing the challenges poverty. This contact and collaboration may take place in venues other than the school. Schools must insure that their message gets to homes by taking the message directly to challenging neighborhoods. This might take the shape of PTA meetings in neighborhood churches or housing development centers.

Our beliefs about children and their ability to overcome obstacles and achieve at high levels may have a major impact on the resilience of children. The children in the present study reported that many of their teachers overtly demonstrated confidence in children regardless of circumstances at home or in the community. It appears important that children believe that their teachers have confidence in them. The participants reported that several of their teachers made them feel smart. This served as a helpful buffer to risks faced by participants. Educational leaders must implement effective hiring, staffing and training practices to ensure that students are exposed to teachers with the skills and dispositions needed to help lead them to social and

academic success. The data presented in this study suggests that caring educators, teachers who use engaging instructional strategies, extracurricular activities and partnerships between the school and home may help to facilitate resilience in children faced with a variety of risk factors.

Personal Reflections

When I began my interviews with the participants selected for the study, I had a healthy respect for each individual. After visiting their community, taking copious notes and an analysis of 27 hours of transcribed interviews, my respect for the participants progressed to reverence. Their stories, their accomplishments and their resilience have motivated me in many ways. I can't help but to think about other children who currently face circumstances that are equally challenging. I hope that someone helps these children to tap into their resilience. It's 7:00 a.m. in the morning. Right now, somewhere in America, there is a little boy like Avery who is walking to school. Last night, this little boy had a night similar to those that Avery described. His mother was working and there was very little food in his home. He and his sister had to split their dinner just as Avery did in his childhood. I hope that this little boy attends a school with a comprehensive breakfast program. Such a program would allow him to get a good start by calming the disruptive hunger pangs that cause him to struggle to concentrate in class.

Somewhere else in America, there is a little boy who had a night similar to the one Jerome described. His father has just been released from jail. His father reentered his life and resumed the abuse of alcohol and cocaine. The father, heavily influenced by his consumption of this toxic mix, lashed out at his family, physically beating the mother and the little boy. I hope this little boy has what Jerome had. I hope he has teachers that he loves--teachers like Mr. Berry who make the lessons fun and engaging such that the boy can temporarily forget the abuse he endured last night. I hope the leadership at his school ensures that all teachers use similar

instructional strategies to address the learning needs of other children who face similar circumstances.

I cannot help but to think that there are thousands of Elisha's in this country. These are little girls who are forced by their parents to take on adult responsibilities in the home. Like Elisha, they are praying. They keep their younger siblings while enduring almost horrific infestations of roaches in their homes. I hope the leadership in their schools will ensure that this little girl has teachers who show her affection and give her encouragement on a daily basis.

I believe that there are thousands of little girls like Yvonne in America's schools. In my own career I have seen the tragic impact of poverty coupled with peer bullying. For many children, it is a devastating combination. I hope that little girls currently facing the challenges that Yvonne faced have school leaders who implement character development and conflict resolution programs in their schools. This may help little girls like Yvonne cope and resolve potential conflicts with others.

Right now, as I type this paragraph, there are untold numbers of children like Susan who are homeless. In many cases, the school is unaware of the family's circumstances. It is often the case that girls facing similar circumstances fall victim to social predators who promise a more comfortable life. I hope that the educational leaders in their schools establish relationships and open lines of communication with families so that they can help address their needs. This type of situation may also require contacts with social-services, Housing and Urban Development, and local churches to ensure that families like Susan's get the help they need.

How many children in this country are like John and don't want to go home? Many of these children simply seek the kind of family support that John lacked. Unlike John, children facing similar circumstances often seek the support of gangs. Gangs, unfortunately, provide a

type of family structure that is attractive to children in crisis

(http://www.gangsandkids.com/gwhyjoin.html). I hope that children facing circumstances

similar to John's have educational leaders who ensure that children have teachers who encourage

them and offer a variety of extracurricular activities and organizations for children to join.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

The participants in this study expanded my curiosity regarding the resilience

phenomenon. Resilience will remain my primary area of inquiry for the duration of my career. I

have learned so much during this research process. Still, there is much more to discover. We are

still at the threshold of resilience research. Further research involving collaboration across

academic disciplines may yield greater clarity to the study of resilience. The study of resilience

between medical caregivers and patients may give insight to educational researchers who desire

to explore ways in which to facilitate better relationships between educators and students.

Collaborations between educational theorists and researchers in psychiatry may help to shed light

on degrees of resilience in individuals.

With regard to educational literature, it remains unclear whether resilience refers to a

process, characteristic, or end result. Does resilience refer to the manner in which I overcome

challenges? Is resilience a descriptive characteristic indicative of the fact that I have overcome

obstacles? Or, does resilience refer to that which occurs after I have overcome? For example, is

college graduation after a life of poverty considered resilience? The answer to these questions is

an ambiguous yes. Greater clarity is needed in resilience terminology. A meta-analysis of terms

may be useful in illuminating resilience descriptors. It is still unclear whether children are born

resilient, make themselves resilient, or are made resilient by external protective factors. Future

research should be designed to delineate the various possible types, degrees, and stages of

resilience. It may also be beneficial to determine if certain social phenomena or instructional strategies may predispose children to become more resilient.

Yvonne's story, for example, demonstrates the lack of clarity in resilience research. Yvonne had a challenging childhood in many ways. However, there are children throughout the United States who endure far greater challenges. Still, the literature does not clarify whether the fact that Yvonne's life was easier means that Yvonne is more or less resilient than those who apparently endured far greater risk factors with fewer protective factors to buffer those risks. Resilience, as it is presented in much of the educational literature, appears to be relative to specific contexts. One could argue that a child with a horrible home-life and poor grades is incredibly resilient simply because he has been able to attend school on a regular basis.

Can resilience, self-efficacy, and internal locus-of-control be taught? A unifying theory between these three areas of research may be beneficial to educational practitioners. There may be programs, policies and procedures in place that make resilience more likely for students facing adversity. Greater clarity regarding what educators can do to support and facilitate resilience is needed.

I believe that this study should be continued and replicated. Similarly to the Kauai study, I would like to interview participants at age 32. This type of longitudinal approach would allow for more insightful reflection on the part of participants. The participants are, in many ways, on their own. I am curious about what the future holds for them and how they will navigate future risk factors. If the study is replicated with another group of students, I strongly recommend the addition of interviews with adults who the students describe as supportive. This may give some degree of clarity as to the manner in which they supported children at risk of failure.

Resilience may be a psychological predisposition that can be facilitated or suppressed by a variety of factors. The participants in this study demonstrate that some children can thrive in the face of challenging circumstances. It appears that when internal driving forces meet with supportive external factors, children can overcome severe risk factors.

I believe that all children have the capacity to overcome many of life's challenges with the help of caring adults. It is a moral imperative for educators to help children see the great possibilities of their future. The participants in this study believed that they could one day achieve great things in spite of their circumstances. It was this belief, this conviction, coupled with the support of key adults that set them on a trajectory toward social and academic success. With a greater understanding of the resilience phenomenon, perhaps educators can help other children see the possibility of greatness in their future, regardless of their circumstances. I believe that helping children develop a vision for their future may help to foster resilience. "It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future . . . And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence" (Frankl, 1963, p. 96).

Finally, the past few years of my life have been extremely challenging for me and my family. I have lost all of my grandparents, uncles, and several other family members. On February 14, 2008, my mother died suddenly. Her death devastated my family. Still, I press forward. I owe my ability to continue moving forward to the example set for me by the participants in this study. They endured far greater challenges as children than I have as an adult. They are, in many ways, my heroes.

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Appendix A
Interview Guide: First Interview

As you know, I am a student at Virginia Tech. I am researching resiliency. Resiliency refers to the ability to bounce back from adverse circumstances. I first became interested in the ability to thrive in the face of challenges through a friendship with a person named Chuck. Let me tell you a little about Chuck.

You were selected for this study because you have been successful despite challenges that hold many students back. Like you, I have overcome many obstacles. It is my hope that from our discussions, adults can learn more about how to help students overcome obstacles.

As we discussed previously, I will take notes and record the interview. However, your identity be protected at all times. I trust that you are going to be honest and open with me and I need you to trust that I will protect your identity.

This interview will last approximately 90 minutes. The first interview will focus on context.

Do you have any questions for me?

With your permission I would like to turn on the tape recorder to begin our journey.

1. Please state your age and the university you currently attend.
2. For the purposes of the tape, are you male or female?
3. I can remember back as far as my 4th birthday party, tell me about your earliest memory from your childhood.
4. Describe the homes you lived in.
5. Did you move a lot?
6. Tell me about each home and each neighborhood.
7. What do you remember about some of the people in your neighborhood?
8. What is your earliest memory of your neighborhood?
9. What kinds of things did you do for fun?
10. How did you feel living there? Safe? Happy? Loved?
11. Tell me about the people in your neighborhood at the time.
12. Describe a typical day for you at home when you were a small child.
13. How many siblings do you have?
14. How many family members lived in your home when you were growing up and who were they?
15. Who was the leader of your home and why?
16. Tell me about the most joyful day of your childhood.
17. Tell me about the worst day of your childhood.
18. Tell me about you best friends growing up. How did you have fun?
19. Tell me about your earliest memory of school.
20. Was your school near your house?
21. Tell me about a typical day at school.
22. Did the friends you had at home go to the same school?

Appendix A Continued

21. Where grades important to you?
22. Tell me about your middle and high school report cards.
23. Tell me about your first few report cards.
24. When you got your report card, who did you show it to?
25. Growing up, did you feel intelligent? Why or why not?
26. What kinds of things did you do after school?
27. Where you limited in where you could go?
28. Complete this statement. It's Friday night in my neighborhood, as I walk the street, this is what I see.
29. Have all of your friends from your childhood made it as far as you have? Why? Or Why not?
30. Are all of your friends still around?
31. When did you decide to go to college and who helped you?
32. Tell me about your weekends. What did your family do on weekends?
33. What kinds of things did you see on the weekends?
34. Did you feel safe? Why or Why not?
35. Did you belong to any community groups growing up? Tell me about them.
36. How did you get to school growing up?
37. Did you like going to school? Why? Why Not?
38. Tell me what you remember about the schools you attended: Elementary, Middle, High School.
39. Tell me about your favorite school.
40. Tell me about some of your favorite teachers.
41. Tell me about some of the obstacles you overcame as you grew up.

Appendix B

Interview Guide: Second Interview

As you know, I am a student at Virginia Tech. I am researching resiliency. Resiliency refers to the ability to bounce back from adverse circumstances.

As we discussed previously, I will take notes and record the interview. However, your identity be protected at all times. I trust that you are going to be honest and open with me and I need you to trust that I will protect your identity.

Most of our questions today will be based on our first discussion.

Do you have any questions for me?

With your permission I would like to turn on the tape recorder to continue our journey.

1. We've talked about resilience a little and we've had our first interview, can you think of anything you would like to add to our discussion?
2. Was there anything in your home growing up that could have held you back from getting to college? Explain.
3. What about your neighborhood/community. Was there anything that could have held you back?
4. Risk factors put people at risk of failure. Tell me about the risk factors of your life.
5. What or who helped you to overcome the things you have overcome?
6. Do you think you were supposed to make it? Why or why not.
7. Who was the smartest kid in your neighborhood? Where is he/she now?
8. Who was the toughest kid in your neighborhood? Where is he/she now?
9. Who were the student and adult leaders in your community?
10. Did you have goals growing up? What made you set goals? Have you achieved most of them?
11. Name the three things that really could have held you back from reaching your goals.
12. Was it ok to be smart in your home, school, and community?
13. What would have made your life easier growing up?
14. Tell me about some of the people who helped you become what you have become today. Who are they and what did they do to help you?
15. Was there anyone in your life who held you from going as far as you could go?

- Read Questions from Interview 1 Log

Appendix C

Interview Guide: Third Interview

I can't believe we have made it this far. Thank you for staying with me through the research project. As we discussed previously, I will take notes and record the interview. However, your identity will be protected at all times. I trust that you are going to be honest and open with me and I need you to trust that I will protect your identity.

This interview will last approximately 90 minutes. The first interview focused on context. The second interview will focus on the details of your lived experiences.

Do you have any questions for me?

With your permission I would like to turn on the tape recorder to take the final steps of our journey.

Interview 3 questions were based on the information provided in the first two interviews. Participants were also given scenarios and asked to offer ways in which to help students who face circumstances similar to the ones the participants faced growing up.

1.   Scenario: You have been placed in charge of a community outreach program to train adults in the community on how to best help children get through challenges. Describe what your program might include. What training would you require of employees?

2.   Scenario: You have been made the superintendent of a school system. What would you require of school employees in helping students get through challenging circumstances?

3.   Scenario: You are now a social worker required to perform home visits and train parents on how to best support their children in getting through challenging circumstances. Describe what this training might include.

4.   Describe the ideal home for children to get the skills needed for social and academic success.

5.   Describe the ideal school for children to get the skills needed for social and academic success.

6.   Describe the ideal school for children to get the skills needed for social and academic success.

Appendix D

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects
Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Let Our Youth Speak: A Phenomenological Analysis of Resilience in Students with Multiple Risk Factors

Investigators: John W. Hodge (Primary Investigator), Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Dr. Jean B. Crockett, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Purpose

I am being invited to voluntarily participate in a research project. The purpose of the study is to gain a more complete understanding of resilience from the perspective of young adults. There will be six participants in the study. Each participant in the study will be at least 18 years of age and was accepted to a 4-year college or university.

Procedures

I agree to participate in 3 taped interviews. The interviews will be approximately 90 minutes in duration. I will maintain a research log for the entire three interview process. I understand that I am to write information in the research log only if I feel it will add clarity to the answers provided during the interview process.

Risks

There are no more than minimum risks associated with participation, including emotional distress during the study.

Benefits

The benefits of this study include a more in-depth understanding of those factors that helped or hindered academic success directly from the perspective of young adults. The results of the study may provide insight into factors to consider for future qualitative and quantitative research. By signing this consent form, I assert that I have not been forced, coerced or encouraged to participate in this study for personal gain. I will be provided a copy of each transcribed interview for my review.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be assured. All tapes and transcripts will be kept strictly confidential. All data collected will be locked in a file to insure confidentiality. Excerpts from some of the transcripts may be used in the final dissertation document. I understand that a surname will be used to substitute my real name.

Compensation
I understand that I will receive a cash payment of $20 for each of the three interviews conducted during the study.

Freedom to Withdraw
I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. If I choose to withdraw, I will be compensated for the interviews provided.

Subject's Permission
I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____   _____
Subject's Name (Please Print)   (Date)

_____
Subject's Signature

Should I have any pertinent questions or concerns about this research project or the rights of research subjects, I many contact:

John W. Hodge	Principal Researcher	757-879-5808 jhodge@vt.edu
Jean B. Crockett	Faculty Advisor	540-231-4546 crocketj@vt.edu
David M. Moore	Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Rights	540-231-4991 moored@vt.edu

This Informed Consent is valid from June 2005 to July 2006.