

## **ABSTRACT**

**LEAK, JOHNNY.** A Qualitative Study of Resilience among African American Adolescent Male Students in North Carolina (Under the direction of Paul F. Bitting.)

The purpose of this study is to determine if patterns exist among at risk African American male students who defy the odds. This study focuses on at risk African American male students whose circumstances made it likely that they would fail in school. Yet in spite of adverse life conditions, these students exhibited outstanding academic performance. This study also examines why some at risk African American male students flourish in spite of environmental disadvantages. Additionally, the study explores the factors that influence resiliency development, which contribute to our capacity for designing interventions that will enhance student outcomes.

The present study identified characteristics of resilient African American adolescents such as social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future. A network of high achieving friends was characteristic of these African American male students. In addition, these successful students supported the concept of grouping in honors and advanced classes, had supportive adults in their lives, and participated in multiple extracurricular activities. As a means of dealing with social and academic pressures, they assumed bicultural identities and had interracial peer support systems. They also maintained peer and adult networks with which they shared their daily struggles. In addition, these resilient youth had a positive attitude towards school and embraced an achievement ideology. Besides these, resilient African American males exhibited temperamental characteristics that elicit positive responses from people who were around them. Such traits begin in early childhood and include a child who is affectionate, good-natured, and sociable. These successful African American male students were actively involved in extracurricular activities, such as hobbies, sports, school auxiliaries, clubs, or creative interests.

A Qualitative Study of Resilience among African American Adolescent Male Students in  
North Carolina

By

Johnny Leak

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

RALEIGH

2003

APPROVED BY:

---

---

---

---

Chairman of Advising Committee

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Johnny Leak hails from Durham, North Carolina. He was born in the Southeastern part of the United States during the 'baby boom era.' His formative years were spent in one of the larger cities in North Carolina. His public school experience began in a city school district and it ended end the county school system. After he graduated from Merrick-Moore High School, Leak enrolled in North Carolina Central University, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree. He majored in Art Education with a concentration in sociology.

Later he pursued study in the field of counseling and obtained a Master's of Arts degree from North Carolina Central University. During this period, he also worked with the Educational Services Section of the North Carolina Department of Corrections in several capacities. These included positions as an Exceptional Children's Coordinator, Guidance Counselor, and Assistant to the Chief of Educational Services.

Thereafter, Leak accepted a position as the Assistant Principal at C.A. Dillon School, which was a maximum-security training school. He developed special programs which were designed to boost student achievement, particularly for adjudicated youth, Since many of the students were also classified as exceptional children, the author continued studies in special education. In the ensuing period, he received a Master's degree in Special education.

The author began employment with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in 1990. Initially, he served as a consultant for a prominent drug and violence prevention program. During this period, he became involved with several at risk student initiatives. In 1993, he became a School Social Work and Safe and Drug Free Schools consultant. Later, he assumed responsibilities for some alternative and safe schools initiatives.

Leak initiated his studies on a part-time basis in the doctoral program at North Carolina State University. These studies were conducted in the School of Education, Department of Education Administration and Supervision.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the people who assisted me throughout this meaningful and rewarding experience. I realize that they are profoundly interested in the plight of an “endangered species”, the African-American male, and are committed to ameliorating circumstances, which potentially inhibit their success.

Ironically, my experience has been one of resilience. During the past decade, I have bounced back from a series of devastating events. These include the death of my wife and a considerable number of traumatic events. For my deliverance, I am grateful to God. My friends and family also deserve my gratitude. Indeed, they have been my springboards. Without their care and support, I could not have overcome.

I am grateful for the friendship and encouragement that Evelina Harris provided during a rough episode in my life. The untold sacrifices and countless days when I was dropped off at the library deserve my respect. I am also grateful for the long distance calls, which provided a necessary push and helped me stay on track.

I am also grateful for the members of my committee. A special thanks is extended to my advisor, Dr. Paul F. Bitting, who not only artfully guided me through the process, but also provided inspiration and advice, particularly in some of my most difficult days. He has been a strong advocate and a caring friend. During some of my dismal days, Dr. Bitting offered genuine understanding. The other members of my committee have availed their time and support. Their passion for excellence and dedication to education was an inspiration for this project. I would like to thank Dr. Kenneth H. Brinson and Dr. Anna V. Wilson for their encouragement and for their valuable comments on the earlier drafts of this study.

Most of all, I would like to thank the students, parents, and school personnel who made this research both possible and enjoyable. I hope that the findings of this study will promote greater understanding of the educational experience of African-American male

youth and promote better educational and social outcomes for this population.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| List of Tables .....  | vi   |
| Chapter I Introduction  |      |
| Definition of Risk .....  | 3    |
| Establishing an At Risk Profile .....                           | 5    |
| Risk Factors .....  | 5    |
| Demographic Characteristics .....                               | 7    |
| National Focus on African-American Students .....               | 8    |
| High Achieving African-American Students .....                  | 9    |
| Theoretical Framework .....                                     | 9    |
| Relationship of Family to Academic Achievement.....             | 11   |
| Relationship of Peers to Academic Achievement .....             | 12   |
| Relationship of School Environment to Academic Achievement..... | 13   |
| Relationship of Neighborhoods to Academic Achievement .....     | 15   |
| Statement of the Problem .....                                  | 15   |
| Perspective of Study .....                                      | 16   |
| Significance of the Study .....                                 | 17   |
| Limitations .....   | 19   |
| Definition of Terms .....                                       | 22   |
| Chapter 2 Review of the Literature .....                        | 24   |
| Moving from the Problem-Focused Model .....                     | 24   |
| Protective Factors .....  | 25   |
| The Concept of Resilience .....                                 | 27   |
| Elements of Resilience.....                                     | 28   |
| Profile of Resilient Youth .....                                | 32   |
| Characteristics of Resilient African American Youth .....       | 33   |
| Chapter 3 Methodology   |      |
| Research Methodology .....                                      | 36   |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Research Design .....                                    | 36  |
| Population and Sample .....                              | 38  |
| Data Collection Procedures .....                         | 39  |
| Data Collection .....                                    | 40  |
| Data Analysis .....                                      | 42  |
| Building and Establishing Trustworthiness.....           | 43  |
| Maintaining Confidentiality.....                         | 45  |
| Chapter 4 Results.....                                   | 47  |
| Setting of the Study .....                               | 48  |
| Setting of High Schools .....                            | 48  |
| Participants in Study .....                              | 50  |
| Chapter 5 Discussion, Conclusion, And Implications ..... | 127 |
| The Problem of the Study.....                            | 130 |
| Discussion of Findings .....                             | 130 |
| Implications .....                                       |     |
| 150  |     |
| Summary .....  | 158 |
| References.....  | 161 |
| Appendices   |     |
| Appendix A. Parental Consent Letter .....                | 185 |
| Appendix B. Request to Conduct Research Letter .....     | 186 |
| Appendix C. Personal Interview Guide .....               | 187 |
| Appendix D. Family Interview Guide .....                 | 188 |
| Appendix E. School Interview Guide .....                 | 189 |
| Appendix F. Directory Information .....                  | 191 |

## LIST OF TABLES

|         |  |     |
|---------|--|-----|
| Table 1 | Profile of Protective Factors .....                | 181 |
| Table 2 | Profile of Participants .....                      | 182 |
| Table 3 | Profile of Ethnicity, Gender and Grade Level ..... | 183 |
| Table 4 | Protective Factors .....                           | 184 |

## **A Qualitative Study of Resilience among African American Adolescent Male Students in North Carolina**

*“Just because a kitten is born in an oven, does not mean that it is destined to become a biscuit.” (Leak, 1994)*

### **Introduction**

The plight of African American males has drawn increasing attention in the media and in professional literature. The educational attainment of African American high school students lags behind that of European-American students on a number of measures, from reading, writing, math, and science proficiency to school retention rates, with males performing less well than females (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Harvey (1997) listed additional stressors that African American males face, including racism, involvement with the justice system, and other negative social and economic outcomes. Moreover, some authors argued that to be an African American male in the United States meant being a member of an “endangered species” (Gibbs, 1988; Irvine & York, 1993). Thus, being an African American male almost assured certain disadvantages.

Considerable concern was raised over the poor academic performance of African American students, particularly for males. A barrage of negative experiences, which potentially contributed to school failure, often plagued these children. Many African American youth faced numerous barriers to academic achievement and success due to disproportionate rates of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment. Specifically, minority children who live with a single parent and in chronic poverty, are assumed to be least likely to experience academic success. Since a disproportionately high number of African American youth who live in poverty have increased chances of negative outcomes, the search for factors that foster positive trajectories for low-income urban African American youth is particularly important.

In addition, numerous studies indicate that the highest percentage of these at risk youth is found in inner-city schools, where the worst social and economic conditions exist (Hodgkinson, 1991; Peng, Wang, & Walberg, 1992). Indicators such as the high crime rates,

unemployment, broken families, density of liquor stores, and concentrated poverty describe the critical status of students who are currently living in our nation's urban neighborhoods. Deleterious conditions of underachievement, student and teacher alienation, and high dropout rates are also prevalent in urban school districts. Consequently, those students attending inner-city schools represent the most imperiled group of growing numbers of students at risk of failure (Boyd, 1991).

Furthermore, the transition to high school presents definite challenges for many minorities. Low-income minority children, particularly African Americans, are susceptible to declines in academic motivation and performance during the transition to the ninth grade, which may not be recovered in the subsequent years of high school (Eccles et. al, 1991, 1993; Reyes et. al, 1994). Researchers also found that African American males liked school less as they got older, their grades dropped, and they were more likely to experience behavior problems (Simmons et. al, 1991). French et. al, (2000) pointed out that the discrepancy between adolescent needs and transitions in the school environment makes the transition a race/ethnicity consciousness-raising experience, in that it makes an adolescent begin to think about what it means to be a minority adolescent (p. 589).

Although environmental disadvantages and stress can lead to behavioral, academic, and psychological difficulties among children (Luthar & Zigler, 1991), many children are able to overcome adverse influences and become well-adapted individuals (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostolny, & Pardo, 1992; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Safyer, 1994). Urban African American adolescents are at particular risk of negative developmental outcomes. However, not all African American adolescents fall victim to the negative influences in their environment. Instead, many youth rise above expectations, and their lives take positive trajectories. The important question then is "Why do some African American children excel in spite of their adverse circumstances, while others do not?" Rutter (1979) pointed out, this "is an important issue to investigate. Many children do not succumb to the effects of deprivation, and it is important that we determine why this is so and what is it that protects them from the hazards they face" (p. 70).

Despite these incredible hardships and the presence of several at-risk factors, some African American male high school students go on to achieve, while others succumb to risk factors. Although, a significant number of youth fit the profile of at risk students, for some reason they do not succumb to negative environmental factors. Little is known about these African American adolescents who possess correlates of failure, yet in spite of their circumstances, they excel.

### **Definition of At Risk**

Generally defined, risk identifies negative or potentially negative conditions that inhibit or threaten normal development (Keogh & Weisner, 1993, p. 4). Ramey, Trohanis, and Hostler (1982) defined risk as a comparative and relative term used to express the likelihood of a current or future development or handicap that, at present, is uncertain (p. 8). The term “at risk” originated from a medical model (Presseisen (1988). The model implies that the individual is “at risk of something.” Therefore, it implies that there is a threatening condition surrounding these students, and that the condition is not necessarily inherent in these students. The medical perspective allows for interventions to reduce the threat, thereby increasing the chances of avoiding the condition. Groups included in “at risk” categories are ethnic minorities, male students, students of low socioeconomic status, and students experiencing various forms of stress or instability.

The term “at risk” has been used in education to describe urban youth, even though, this term often applies to the conditions of their lives (Richardson & Colfer, 1990). However, in labeling youth "at risk," we often blame the students for their own educational failure. Berry (1989, p. 288) reveals that "the old labels of the past that have inferred cognitive, motivational, self-esteem, and learning deficits of Black children, youth, and college-age young adults should be looked at with a jaundiced eye". While risk implies the potential for negative outcomes, it denotes that negative outcomes may be avoided.

Researchers have typically focused on the consequences or outcomes associated with the experience of negative life events. For example, African American at risk students

experience a barrage of negative life events. Urban African American youth are represented disproportionately among the chronically poor (Duncan & Yeung, 1995; Huston, McLloyd, & Garcia Coll, 1994; Jessor, 1993; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993). Poverty rates for African American youth are three to four times those for European American youth (Garrett, Ng'andu, & Ferron, 1994). Over 46 percent of African American children and adolescents live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). Furthermore, although most poor individuals are poor for only a short period of time, this is less true for African American youth (Gottschalk, McLanahan, & Sandefur, 1994). Disadvantaged African American youth are more likely to live in chronic poverty and to live in ethnically and socio-economically isolated urban neighborhoods (Huston et al., 1994).

Furthermore, living in an urban setting contributes to the stress for African American adolescents. Disproportionate numbers of at risk students are found in these schools, while substandard social and economic conditions are also evidenced in urban neighborhoods (Hodgkinson, 1991; Peng, Wang, & Walberg, 1992). Nowhere are the social implications of increasing numbers of disadvantaged families in urban settings more prevalent than in the large, urban school districts where the deleterious conditions of underachievement, teacher alienation, and high dropout rates exist. Other indicators like the high levels of crime, unemployment, drug abuse, broken families, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, density of liquor stores, and high rates of poverty clearly describe the critical status of students who are currently living in our nation's urban neighborhoods. Consequently, those students attending urban schools represent the most imperiled group of our increasing numbers of students at risk of failure (Boyd, 1991).

Although some students are in at risk situations, they are not “at risk.” Despite incredible hardships and the presence of at-risk factors, some students have developed characteristics that enable them to succeed. They appear to develop stable, healthy personas and are able to recover from or adapt to life's stressors and problems (Winfield 1991).

Considerable research has identified some children whose lives expose them to multiple risks, who in fact ‘defy the odds’ and go on to lead successful lives. However,

limited research has helped to identify those internal and external factors or mechanisms, particularly for African American male students, which appear to protect children from the consequences of risk. Most studies focused on understanding differences between groups, generally comparing middle-class European-Americans with poor minority students. Despite the inappropriateness of those comparisons, the results are that we have learned little about how African American male succeed against tremendous odds.

### **Establishing an at risk youth profile**

Previous research has focused attention on establishing the “at risk” profile. To clarify the term “at risk”, the following definition of an at risk student was given by McCann and Austin (1988, p.1, 2) who define the at risk student with three characteristics:

- 1) students who, for whatever reason, are at risk of not achieving the goals of education, of not meeting local and state standards for high school graduation, of not acquiring the knowledge, skill and disposition to become productive members of society;
- 2) students whose behaviors interfere with their education and other students who require disciplinary action, and;
- 3) students whose family or community background may place them at risk, for example, children born to teenage mothers.

Rumberger’s (1983) in depth study clearly stresses the difficulty in portraying the typical at risk student.

### **Risk Factors**

At-risk students are characterized by risk factors or attributes associated with increased chances of academic, personal, and social failure. Werner and Smith (1992) described risk factors as “biological or psychosocial hazards that increase the likelihood of a negative developmental outcome in a group of people” (p.3). A wide range of student, family, school, community, and societal risk factors appears in the research literature (Johnson, 1997; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Wells, 1990). Risk factors are characteristics and

circumstances that incline students to experience risk outcomes (Johnson, 1994). It is estimated that over seven million American adolescents, one in four, are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors and school failure, while another seven million are at moderate risk (Husain & Cantwell, 1992). Student-based risk factors include cognitive and behavioral problems such as language differences, school absenteeism, & substance abuse (Ruff, 1993; Connell, Spencer, & Abner, 1994; Johnson, 1998). School-based risk factors include curricular rigidity, limited school resources, and lack of appropriate programs (Irby, Davis & Haney, 1991; Hensen, 1995; Johnson, 1998). Other characteristics include poor social and emotional performance, and racial conflict (Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994, p.204). Family-related risk factors involve a variety of parent and sibling characteristics including substance abuse, criminal activity, violence, and inadequate parenting skills (Richardson, Casanova, Placier, & Guilfoyle, 1989; Johnson, 1996;). Community-based risk factors typically reflect poverty, crime, and lack of community resources (Dryfoos, 1991; Wang & Reynolds, 1995). Societal risk factors involve public attitudes and policies that negatively impact students, especially students of ethnic minority and/or low socioeconomic status (Diaz-Rico, 1993; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Johnson, 1998;). Such student, family, school, community, and societal risk factors, in dynamic combination and with varying degrees of intensity, render children and youth at risk for negative school and life experiences (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989; Johnson, 1997).

Although an accumulation of risk factors increases the likelihood of problems, it does not make them inevitable. Risk factors, whether based in school, familial or community deficiencies, may not lead to unfavorable outcomes (Benard, 1993; Connell et al., 1994). Except in the most acute circumstances (Manning & Baruth, 1995), risk implies vulnerability rather than a certainty that students will experience negative outcomes (Ruff, 1993). Against the odds, some at risk youth actually succeed in school and in life (Garnezy, 1991; Johnson, 1997; Reed, McMillan, & McBee, 1995). Therefore, risk factors are viewed as increasing the probability that students will experience adverse outcomes (Johnson, 1998). Hence, understanding the characteristics and circumstances that place students at risk will contribute to the development of strategies that minimize or inhibit the harmful consequences of risk factors.

Researchers cited various limitations of the risk-focused approach. The most frequent criticism of the epidemiological risk approach is that it gives information about only one part of the conditions that put youth at risk (Magnusson, 1995), thus implying a certainty of negative outcomes (Benard, 1991). Since this approach identifies the roots of pathology, it fails to provide insight into adaptive processes through which one third to one half of children who face multiple risks overcome the odds (Segal, 1983). Moreover, few professionals or parents would support the notion that “problem-free youth” are “fully-prepared youth” (Zeldin, Pittman, Price, & Irby, 1994, p. 3). Thus, fostering positive youth development is viewed as more than simply helping children avoid problems (Moore & Gleib, 1995). Most parents and professionals also hope to help children develop competencies that will help them succeed in life.

On the other hand, the risk-focused ecological approach offered that educational performance has not one, but many causes. However, practitioners often look for a single factor, instead of a multidimensional approach to ameliorate risks.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

Frequently, descriptions of at risk children use characteristics, such as racial background and social class, as risk indicators. However, Hare (1988) found fault with this approach. The researcher insists that using the term in this manner blames the victim, since it suggests that causes for being at risk stem from the child, his or her background, or his or her culture instead of political, social, and economic conditions.

There is evidence in the literature in support of a relationship between poverty, ethnicity, and academic achievement (Steinberg et al., 1992). Over 75 percent of impoverished children function below average in reading and math, with 50 percent in the lower quartile (Summ & Fogg, 1991). A greater percentage of African Americans as compared to European-Americans live below the poverty level (Coll et al., 1996). Poverty, academic failure and high crime rates are some of the conditions faced by many urban

adolescents (Dryfoos, 1990). Moreover, urban poverty places children at risk for negative outcomes. Only 35 percent of these adolescents are able to make the transition to adulthood (Summ & Fogg, 1991).

Aside from poverty, African American adolescents may be “at risk” for academic failure due to stresses associated with minority status (Jones & Watson, 1990). Most studies agree that minorities and poor children are disproportionately at risk in school settings (Ford, 1992; Johnston, & Viadero, 2000). In addition, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will evidence greater ethnic diversity in the United States than in any other period in the nation's history (Siteram, & Prosser, 1998). As population patterns change, so will the number of at risk students increase.

### **National Focus on African American Students**

Several researchers claim that inner-city schools have large proportions of at-risk students (Johnson, 1997; Manning & Baruth, 1995). Concomitantly, disproportionate numbers of African American reside in urban areas. Urban students face scores of problems that mirror their daily lives and that place them at risk for failure in school and in life. Wang and Reynolds (1995, p. 8) suggest that problems of great severity exist for many children and youth in America's cities, particularly the urban communities. Their families, their neighborhoods, and the community agencies that serve inner-city youth, including schools, are often lack resources and spirit. The problem of inadequate learning and competence, the widespread academic failure in the schools is often woven into a complex pattern of problems.

The realities of urban education are dismal. Researchers point out that: 40 percent of African American and Hispanic children live in poverty (Dalaker & Naifeh, 1998), urban students are also more likely to attend schools with high concentrations of poor children than their rural and suburban peers (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Furthermore, Kozol (1991) explains that urban children receive an education in schools with fewer resources than the schools of their more affluent peers, and there tends to be high transience at nearly every elementary school in poor neighborhoods because some children make multiple transfers

during a school year.

### **High Achieving African American Students**

In spite of disproportionate numbers of impoverished African American students who perform poorly, some of these students manage to excel. Ford and Harris (1990) examined the relevant literature on minority gifted children, particularly African Americans, discovered that of 4,109 published articles on high-achieving youth since 1924, less than 2 percent addressed minority children. Rather than focusing on why African American students are failing, Clark (1983) identified factors that contributed to their extraordinary academic success. Clark found that high-achieving African American students had parents who: (a) were vigorous in their parent involvement efforts; (b) kept abreast of their children's academic progress; (c) set high and realistic expectations for their children; (d) held positive achievement orientations; (e) established clear and specific boundaries; and (f) maintained positive parent-child relation, which included nurture, support, respect, and open communication. Bloom (1985) found that parents who hold high achievement standards for their children pressure them to achieve by stressing a strong and positive work ethic and valuing intellectual pursuits. These numbers are disheartening because less information means less understanding of the academic achievement needs of African American youth.

The parents of high achieving African American students instill the notion that learning is inevitably linked with earning and the viability of the American dream (Clark, 1991; Ford, 1993). In support of this premise, national earnings data from 1996 show a positive association between educational and economic attainment. For example, high school dropouts earned an average of \$14,013, high school graduates \$21,431, those with baccalaureate degrees \$36,980, and those with master's-level graduate degrees \$47,609 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). However, the status attainment model has been more successful in explaining the relationship between education and economic attainment for European-American males than it has for minorities (Fitzgerald, 1985, p. 8).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), which views the individual as developing within a complex system of relationships that are affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment. The environment is viewed as a series of nested systems:

- the microsystem consists of the immediate environment where the individual is physically present (e.g., home, peer group, school, neighborhood),
- the mesosystems consists of interactions and connections between microsystem settings,
- the exosystem consists of settings in the wider society, and
- The macro system consists of the values, laws, customs within the community and nation.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory maintains that human development is influenced by the interactions an individual has within various microsystems, such as the family and school. As a result, children are shaped not only by their personal attributes, but also by the transitions environments in which they develop. In the literature, these support systems are frequently referred to as 'protective factors.' (See Table 4).

Although some students are in at risk situations, they are not "at risk". Bronfenbrenner's theory has the potential to explain why some African American adolescent males display resilient behaviors, yet they excel in the face of adverse life circumstances. The ecological theory holds that changes in the adolescent's exosystem and macrosystem elements influence other ecological systems operating in the child's life. As a result, when elements in one system changes, elements in another system either react and interact. The ecological system theory explanations for why some children are at risk while others are not. Thus, it deflects blame for the circumstances away from the child and his family because the theory indicates the sources of risk are located in the larger social environment (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992).

Research on the academic achievement of African American youth offered support for the usefulness of an ecological approach. Economic conditions, the condition of the neighborhood, family relationships, and the school environment influenced student

achievement. For example, the stresses associated with poverty have a variety of effects on (McLloyd, 1990), impacting parental support, and other factors that affect academic achievement (Jenkins, 1989).

### **The Relationship of Family to Academic Achievement**

Few studies have explored the influence of family variables on academic achievement. Many African American parents placed great importance on educational attainment, hard work and good moral values. Peters (1985) reported that African American parents identified educational attainment as the primary strategy for their children to help them succeed in a racially prejudiced society. In a study by Clark (1983), high achieving African American high school seniors came from homes where parents were warm and supportive, set clear limits on behavior, strongly encouraged academic achievement, and carefully monitored their children's activities. The parents of high achieving African American exhibited optimism and faith in their children's ability to perform well. They frequently communicated with the school, their children's older siblings, and members of the community about academic preparation and progress. On the other hand, parents of low-achieving students were overwhelmed by stress, felt they had little control, and exhibited signs of depression. In addition, a spirit of defeat was evidenced in their homes.

Thornton et al. (1990) asked parents to specify achievement related socialization strategies they used with their children. Almost one-fourth of the parents reported that they placed an emphasis on high achievement and hard work. Marshall (1995) also found that African American parents emphasized education, religion, self-esteem, and hard work. In a study of African American adolescents' perceptions of their parents' achievement orientation, Ford (1993) found that demographic variables, such as primary caregiver and parents' level of education, occupation, and employment status, had little relationship to students' commitment to academic achievement. These studies suggested that parental values and encouragement were as relevant as traditional measures of socioeconomic status in influencing academic achievement among low-income African American students.

On the other hand, economic conditions within the family impacted student

achievement. Using free and reduced price lunch programs as a proxy for SES of student or parental income, researchers (Caldas & Bankston, 1999) reported that the SES of the student was an important predictor of student achievement. They found that student participation in free and reduced lunch programs had a negative impact on academic achievement.

### **The Relationship of Peers to Academic Achievement**

Adolescent relationship with peers affected their beliefs about the values of school, their own academic competence, their motivation and subsequent academic achievement (Bernt & Keffee, 1995; Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 1992). For example, Berndt et al. (1990) found that peers do influence achievement motivation, particularly when they have a close, positive relationship. Other researchers (Slaughter & Epps, 1987) found that family influence on school achievement becomes weaker during middle school and high school as compared with the elementary school years. Parents continued to be most influential regarding children's long-term educational plans. Peers, however, exerted more influence on daily behaviors. Nonetheless, students who received both parental and peer academic support were more likely to have academic success (Steinberg et al., 1992).

Many African American students found few peers who encouraged academic pursuit. Steinberg et al. (1992) found that many high-performing African American students avoided contact with other African Americans and chose instead to spend time with those from other ethnic groups. They experienced a conflict between wanting to be popular with same-ethnicity peers and the desire to perform well in school. Moreover, high-achieving African American students tended to identify with the beliefs and values of the dominate culture than less successful students (Fordham, 1988; and Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Some adolescents experienced negative social consequences from their peers for conforming to the values and behaviors desired by teachers (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Although students knew that teachers reward certain behaviors (Juvenen & Murdock, 1993), they were often cognizant of peer group norms that discouraged commitment to academic task (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). For that reason successful urban high school students often disengaged from students who tried to pull them

towards behaviors that would undermine success (Farrel, 1990; 1994).

For high achieving African American students, negative peer pressure was a threat to their success. Fordham (1998) found that African American students who were committed to school success devised unique strategies to cope with negative peer pressure. One of these was the “raceless persona”; some students minimized contact with other African Americans and for the most part adopted “white” values. Kunjufu (1988) found that some high-achieving African Americans become class clowns in order to conceal their academic abilities. Clark (1991) identified other students who lived dual lives, while adopting the norms and values of the majority culture to achieve success in school, but embraced African American cultural norms outside of school in order to attain social acceptance. Kennedy (1995) found different patterns of peer popularity for African American males and females. Females’ popularity correlated with academic success, while males’ popularity correlated with athletic success. In contrast to the research of Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Kennedy found a small but significant relationship between grades and popularity among African American students.

### **The Relationship of School Environment to Academic Achievement**

School related factors affected the academic performance of African American students. Researchers found that the educational experiences of European-American students were influenced by socioeconomic factors, whereas the educational outcomes for African American students were more related to school factors (Kennedy, 1992). Thus, the poor quality of classroom instruction coupled with the quality of their school environment found in many urban schools negatively affected their academic achievement (Montgomery & Rossi, 1994). Furthermore, the school climate or environment arguably was one of the primary problems of urban schools (Bliss, 1993). Hence, the school environment either facilitated or constrained classroom instruction and student learning (Shields, 1991). Several researchers found numerous features of schools and classrooms that were alienating to students and consequently drove students out of school rather than keeping them in (Erickson, 1987; Kagan, 1990; Newmann, 1989; Waxman, 1992).

Rutter et al. (1979) examined a relationship between the school environment and student achievement. They found that children in discordant and disadvantaged homes were more likely to perform better if they attended schools that had good academic records and attentive, caring teachers. Therefore, schools were capable of providing students with positive experiences that were associated with either success or failure. However, positive experiences needed not necessarily to involve academic success but was more likely associated with sporting or musical achievement, getting positions of responsibility in the school, developing a good relationship with a teacher or social success among classmates (Rutter, 1984). The earlier work of West and Farrington (1973) supported this view. They maintained that children needed to experience achievement in school through success, which was best supported through a practical and relevant curriculum and attentive school personnel. Other researchers supported this view (Berliner, 1986; Berliner & Rosenshine, 1989; Seligman, 1995; Marsh & Craven, 1998).

Although some researchers examined the impact of the school environment, several studies indicated that teacher expectations powerfully impacted student achievement (Good, 1981). The study by Werner and Smith (1988) also focused on the important role that teachers can play in resilient children's lives. Researchers (Geary, 1988; Coburn & Nelson, 1989) found that among the most frequently encountered non-family positive role models, favorite teachers who took a personal interest in them, were not just academic instructors but they were also confidants and positive models for personal identification. However, some teachers showed little interest in minority students. Moreover, some teachers had lower expectations for minority and low income students (Hale-Benson, 1986). Teachers who expected less often subtly communicated a sense of inadequacy to students, especially if these expectations were different, depending on race. Research showed that some teachers held higher expectations and attributed greater academic skills to European-American students than to African American students in the same classroom (Ritts, Patterson, & Tubbs, 1992). On the other hand, when teachers expected students to do well, the students rose to the level of expectation (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992).

Several school related factors influenced the student achievement. The transition from middle to high school was especially challenging for some minority students. Students, who experienced frequent moves were more often adversely impacted by the new physical environment, new teachers with different expectations, and new peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The size of the high school (structure and population), as compared to the previous school, often contributed to students' ability to adapt and to achieve. Some students often felt lost and forgotten in high school (Cottrell, 1992). As a consequence, the absenteeism increased which led to lower grades and eventually caused dropping out of school.

### **The Relationship of Neighborhoods to Academic Achievement**

Researchers found that African American families had neighborhood experiences that differed dramatically from those of their European American counterparts (Duncan & Aber, 1997). For example, African American families were ten times more likely to live in urban neighborhoods where at least 30% of the residents were poor (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). African American families also lived in communities with disproportionate levels of crime and violence (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Children from low-income neighborhoods generally performed far more poorly, academically than their middleclass counterparts. Dornbusch et al. (1991) found that community characteristics influenced children and families. Alas, African Americans often resided in communities with scores of social problems. In a study of the effect of community structure on the behavior of adolescents, conduct problems was found to be higher in children from underprivileged neighborhoods (Simons et al., 1996). In these neighborhoods, parents had little control over their environment and adolescents showed increased involvement with troublesome and deviant peers. In addition, the psychological well-being of male adolescents was lower in more underprivileged communities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although research into resiliency and factors associated with it has increased (Brooks, 1994; Smith & Prior, 1995), more studies are needed on African Americans. Only a

few studies have focused on African Americans (Geary, 1988; Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991; Cook, 2000; Ford, 1993; 1994). Additionally, Luthar, Doernberger, and Zigler (1993) indicated that while urban youth were often at risk for multiple behavioral problems, few studies have been undertaken regarding resiliency within this group. Rutter (cited in Garmezy, 1985) indicated that “many children do not succumb to depravation, and it is important that we determine why this is so and what is it that protects them from the hazards they face” (p.217). Barbarin (1993) posed, How African American children are able to survive and thrive in the face of adversity required more attention.

Furthermore, research on resilience often neglected a population for which overcoming adverse conditions was a constant activity, namely African Americans. Given that the concept of resiliency was based on the influence of protective factors, resources unique to this group are imperative. Additionally, literature on resilience fell short of details about how protective mechanisms operated in the daily lives of African American male adolescents. Even though educational achievement has long been considered as signifying resiliency among adolescents limited attention has been given to the factors that promote achievement among urban adolescents (Barbarin, 1993).

Extensive research focused on the academic achievement of middle-class mainstream students. Little, however, is known about the environmental characteristics that promote resilience in impoverished urban African American male students. Although, the experiences of many middle-class mainstream student were identified as contributing to academic success, such were beyond the reaches of children who came from low SES and minority families. Since most studies focused on the academic achievement of middle class students, little was known about the influences that stimulated academic achievement in students with limited economic and social resources. Even less was known about African American males who excelled academically. For this reason, the premise of this study was that much can be learned directly from urban African- American male students who were classified as being at risk but were resilient. These students were doing well in school despite the odds against them.

## **Perspective of Study**

In order to understand the protective mechanisms and their operation in African American adolescent male students, this study took a different approach. The objective of the study was to examine the internal and external characteristics, which contributed to African American student's academic success. While the study explored the lives of African American students whose background characteristics met the profile of an "at risk" student, it focused on students who excelled academically rather than dropped out of school. The following research questions were posed:

1. What are the demographic and biological characteristics of the academically successful African American male high school student?
2. What is everyday life like for these students?
3. What group identity do these African American male students create for themselves?
4. What role does family play in their overall life style?
5. What role does school play in their overall life style?
6. What role do teachers play in their overall life style?
7. What role do peers play in their overall life style?
8. What other factors (e.g. church, community) are important in their overall life style?
9. What is the relation of a student's school identity with family identity?
10. What factors contribute to their academic success?
11. Do teachers and school personnel perceive these students differently from other students?
12. How do these students construct themselves as academic successes?
13. What can be learned from these students that will provide insights into possible instructional or environmental adaptations which might increase the proportion of students who complete high school?

Research questions in a qualitative study "define how the purpose or goals will be carried out" (LeCompte & Priesle, 1993, p.37). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stated, "research questions act to frame the focus of the study".

## **Significance of the Study**

This research focused on African American male students who were placed at risk of failure yet managed to become successful. This research was significant in that little research focuses on the success of urban at-risk African American students, especially using qualitative approaches. Students who did not succeed academically have been studied, but far less was known about students who succeed despite substantial barriers (Mortensen, 1993; Mortensen & Wu, 1990).

Although several researchers examined the success of Hispanic students and other minorities, few studies involved the academic success of at-risk African American male students, especially those from urban settings. For example, Alva (1991) examined the characteristics of a cohort of tenth grade Hispanic students and found that resilient students reported higher levels of educational support from their teachers and friends. These students more likely (a) felt encouraged and prepared to attend college, (b) enjoyed coming to school and being involved in school activities, (c) experienced fewer conflicts and difficulties in their interactions with other students, and (d) experienced fewer family conflicts (p.31). In a similar study, Gonzales and Padilla (1997) identified factors that contributed to academic achievement in Hispanic high school students. They found that a sense of belonging to the school and student grade point average were the only significant predictors of academic resilience in Hispanic high school students. Paula Cordeiro (1990) studied characteristics which contributed to the academic success of Hispanic students whose background characteristics met the profile of an “at risk“ student. The study involved 20 at risk student from two inner-city urban high schools who excelled academically. Cordeiro found that Hispanic participants had caregivers and role models that provided supportive and nurturing relationships. They also sought peers with similar educational aspirations and distanced themselves from low achieving peers. Friendships with other achieving Hispanic students, particularly in middle school, were crucial to their success. Cordeiro also found that, in order for Hispanic achievers to succeed, they had to construct an identity at school that allowed them to separate themselves from both the school culture and the minority Latino culture of their neighborhoods. In addition, the Hispanic students in Cordeiro's (1990) study assumed

responsibility for academic success alone, without full consideration or support from their families.

The largest study of resiliency in at-risk children was the longitudinal study of a multiracial cohort of 698 infants born on the island of Kauai, Hawaii (Werner, 1989, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). This analysis of the development of these high-risk individuals from childhood to adulthood resulted in the identification of three types of protective factors (Werner, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). The first characteristic was having at least average intelligence and attitudes, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, that elicited positive responses from others. The second characteristic was having strong and positive relationships within the extended family that provided support in times of adversity. The third characteristic was having external support systems at school, work, or church that rewarded competence. These characteristics closely replicated those cited by Garmezy (1985).

Some African American male students experience success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities. It is important to know why these African American male students excelled. This framework will enable us to identify specifically alter factors that foster success for African American male students.

The present research added significantly to the current small body of literature regarding African American male adolescents who succeed in spite of adverse circumstances. Although considerable attention has been focused on children who succeed despite tremendous odds, little attention has been focused on the African American male. By extending the research regarding urban at risk African American male students who excel instead of dropping out, this research will provide information that will be useful to educators in reform efforts and intervention strategies. More specifically, educators should find this study useful in providing information targeted to students who are at risk of school failure.

The study used qualitative research. It allowed the researcher to understand and to

enter the world of the resilient at-risk African American male students. The research approach obtained participant generated conceptualizations primarily through semi-structured interviews.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to the present study. First, the study was limited to African American adolescent students. However, African American adolescents living in low-income families are not a homogeneous group. Second, the findings can not be extended beyond urban settings. Third, the study focused on a small number of urban at-risk African American male students. The present study was undertaken only in one state, therefore, the results might not be generalizable throughout the nation. Whereas, the consistency of the results from other studies indicated that there are not many regional differences in at risk African American male students. The findings may not have implications for other populations of at risk student. The study was also limited by the researcher's ability to gather data regarding a larger sample of the at-risk high achieving African American male student population. Next, the researcher was also be limited by the fact that observations and participation with these at-risk African American male students will only occurred for a period of five months. For these reasons, it is important to examine other populations for purpose of comparison.

These limitations are not to be viewed as weaknesses disregarding the findings of the study. Instead, they must be viewed as starting points for other work.

Since this researcher is also an African American male, who during his public school experience could have been considered at risk, he was aware of his own biases. The researcher experienced considerable adversities during various phases of his public school experience. These stressors commenced during his formative years. Growing up in an economically disadvantaged urban setting exposed him to considerable stressful life events. Although his parents shielded him from negative trajectories, the inner-city setting was prone to high levels of crime, violence and poverty. As a product of an intact family with six male

siblings, the small house was cramped during his early elementary school years. Although sounds of laughter, play and sometimes pain bounced from each wall, the researcher had a hard time studying. But he found ways to read and to draw. In fact, these learning experiences became ways that he was able to rise above his adversities.

The latter half of the elementary school experienced was spent in a larger house in the outskirts of the city. When the family moved, the young male sorely missed his friends. It pained him that he would not likely interact with them again. On top of everything else, the community changed within a few years. The once tranquil close knitted suburban community eroded after it was annexed into the city. By the time I entered junior high school, my mother, who by then was the sole support of the family, struggled financially. On a factory worker's salary, she struggled to support seven African American males. To make matters worse, she developed some major medical problems, which included a series of heart attacks. As a result, the family slipped into the shadows of deprivation. During this period, the family was unable to afford enrichment materials and experiences that were needed to enhance the educational experience. Nonetheless, he received strong encouragement from his mother, an aunt, an uncle, and several neighbors. In addition, an unlikely teacher took him under his wings and became his mentor and a role model. Since his peers often called him a "prep," because he intensely loved visual and literary arts, it was highly improbable that he would become associated with a vocational teacher. Even so, the teacher provided considerable guidance, after school and during weekends. This support helped him to hold onto his dreams. The vocational teacher's modeling and support were especially helpful after the death of my father.

By the time he reached junior high school, his mother, the sole supporter of the household, experienced serious financial strain. He witnessed his family slip from nearly well-off to a step away from deprivation. To make matters worse, his mother had a series of heart attacks and three major operations within four years. In fact, she was not only unable to work for several months, but she was also unable to attend his high school graduation. She encouraged him to succeed and intensely monitored his progress, but she could not attend the graduation. He vividly recalled the emptiness that he felt on graduation night when his

mother was not there. But that feeling dissipated when his closest aunt and confidant arrived. She said, “If you don’t mind I will play two roles tonight-mine and your mothers. So, both of us should be doubly pleased.” These adversities were indicative of what the researcher faced as a child. In spite of these and other hardships, he was able to succeed academically and socially.

Aside from serious financial stressors at various points, the researcher had chronic asthma for most of his public school years. This condition seriously inhibited his activities. In fact, it caused self-esteem problems. His parents, however, encouraged him to participate in extracurricular activities, which enhanced his self-perception. In fact, he garnered considerable respect from his peers and teacher as a result of his talents.

Over the years, the researcher observed several African American males, who were likely to succumb to negative trajectories, Yet, they ultimately excelled. Coupled with his inquisitiveness, the researcher launched this study.

Because of my own adversities, it is important for me to understand the inherent realities of an at risk student. It is also important for me to listen to their stories and to examine the characteristics that helped them to become resilient. Hence, the researcher self-critically acknowledges the identity of the experimental subject. In addition, the researcher is reluctant to abandon the scientific epistemology that denies the observer as a unique, historically situated person, therefore researcher resists the dismissal of his own personal and political attributes. Fine, Weis, Powell, and Wong (1997) indicated that the researcher’s self-awareness of his own racial membership or self-construal of race more generally, could open the way for intentional reflexive analysis. In contrast, these researchers pointed out when European American conducts the investigation there is especially danger if the investigator is a stranger. They maintained that the mere presence of a European American investigator, even a friendly one, often elicits certain attitudes from African American subjects. These attitudes include the African American’s determination not to let a white person know anything about him, as well as the way that the African American subject is proficient in interpreting the moods of European American and in devising ways and means to placate

him.

## **Definition of Terms**

For purpose of the study, this glossary provides definitions for frequently used terms.

**Adolescence:** A phase of life when most of a person's biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered childlike to what is considered adultlike (Lerner & Spanier, 1980).

### **African**

**American:** For purpose of this study, a person of African descent who was born and reared in the United States.

**At-risk:** People who, because of a wide range of personal, familial, or academic circumstances, may experience school failure or unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk following factors. Circumstances which often place students at risk may include but are not limited to: a) not meeting state/local proficiency standards; b) grade retention; c) unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs; d) alienation from school life; unchallenging curricula and/or instruction; e) tardiness and/or poor school attendance; f) negative peer influence; g) unmanageable behavior; h) substance abuse and other health risk behaviors; i) abuse and neglect; j) adequate parental, family, and/or school support; and k) limited English proficiency (N.C. State School Board of Education, 2000).

**Minority:** A group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics are singled out from others in society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (Wirth, 1972; p.137).

**Resilience:** The attainment of positive developmental outcomes in the face of adversity (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

**School**

**success:** Students who have maintained a high school grade point average of B or better. In general, these students do well academically and behaviorally. They are successful in their school, extracurricular, and social activities, and presumably they are college bound.

**CHAPTER TWO****REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Positive adaptation despite negative ecological influences has been referred to as resilience. Research on resilience focused on factors that enabled individuals to adapt successfully to the environment, despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1987; Trueba, 1987). Two essential elements required for the development of resilience included exposure to risk factors and the presence of protective factors (Rutter, 1993). Risk factors increased the likelihood of psychopathology in an individual (Grizenko & Pawliuk, 1994). These factors are internal (for example, low intelligence) or external (for example, community violence). On the other hand, protective factors enabled the individual to counter the effects of risk factors (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996).

In education, research on resilience has gained recognition as an important framework from which we can understand why some students experience success in school. However, similar students from the same disadvantaged backgrounds and neighborhoods have not been successful in school.

With educational involvement as an indicator of resilience, this study explores the ameliorating effect of protective factors on competence and mastery in the educational domain in the presence of risk factors. Research was limited on how these factors promote

educational achievement in African American adolescents, particularly those in urban environments (Spencer, Cole, DuPree, Glymph, & Pierre, 1993).

### **Moving from the Problem-Focused Model**

Researchers often adhere to a problem-focused model, which identified risk factors, to address the needs of at-risk students. Such approaches were reactive, since these strategies were designed to help people who were already in trouble. The problem-focus model offered little help to educators and policymakers to reduce the need for special programs for at-risk students. However, a proactive approach was based on building resiliency, since it emphasizes strengthening the environment, not fixing students.

Several researchers followed a problem-focused approach to studying risks for the development of problem behaviors. This pathological approach identified problems and risks associated with stressful life events. Seifer et al (1992) suggested that risk factors were cumulative, and were related to certain adjustment outcomes. Therefore, the more protective factors that were present in a child's life, the more likely they were to display resilience. In addition, these internal and external assets appear to transcend ethnic, social class, geographical and historical boundaries (Comprehensive Training to Assure Resiliency in Students, 1996). For that reason, the number of risk factors was important, rather than which risk factors. Researchers pointed to three main categories of factors, which included personality factors, social support availability, and family cohesion. In contrast, the identification of protective factors, which affected youth, was important for the development of interventions to reduce negative outcomes associated with adversity (Nettle & Pleck, 1994; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Given the dissatisfaction with a problem-focused model, a small body of researchers focused on assets in individuals and systems instead of on deficits. This approach was considered to have greater potential for educators. It was, however, only just beginning to make inroads into educational thinking.

This study involved children who may be classified as being at risk because of a

variety of individual, family and environmental factors. However, rather than focusing on the children who were casualties of these negative factors, the studies focused instead on those who had not succumbed.

### **Protective Factors**

Protective factors have been viewed in relation to three basic systems- family, school and community. (See Table 1). In relation to the family, some protective factor, which are identified in literature, are related to the quality of care and support the individual experience at different phases prior to adulthood. In relation to the community, youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods are often considered more at risk than children from more affluent areas. However, some community characteristics seem to operate as protective factors, which buffer them from the effects of adversity.

In relation to school, supportive teachers and relevant curriculum seem to ameliorate certain risks. Researchers underscored the importance of identifying which protective factors ameliorated certain risks (Winfield, 1991; Connell, Spencer, & Abner, 1994; Nettles & Pleck, 1994; Wang & Gordon, 1994; Connell, Spencer, Dupree, Swanson, & Cunningham, 1996; Wang & Gordon, 1994; Winfield, 1991; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994) Researchers have theorized that protective factors functioned at three levels: individual, familial, and societal (Garmezy, 1985; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Rutter, 1987). These elements may work together to protect an individual from the impact of negative environmental circumstances (Rutter, 1987). To a large extent, the lack of these elements makes a person vulnerable to negative outcomes. For example, a child who feels alienated by teachers and peers may be susceptible to the acting out in class, which contributes to self-destructive behavior and dropping out.

Researchers usually identified two factors as being essential in the development of resilience. The first was the existence of biological, psychological, and environmental risk factors that increased an individual's vulnerability. The second was the presence of protective factors (personal, social, familial, and institutional safety nets) that helped an individual

counter and resist the effects of personal vulnerabilities and environmental hazards (Kumpfer, 1993; Masten et al., 1990). These protective factors increased a person's resilience potential at any given time (Kumpfer, 1993; Masten et al., 1990). Resiliency theory was based on identifying the protective factors within the family, school, and community.

The focus on protective factors may help explain why some children maintain self-concept and self-efficacy when faced with the same adversities that often lead others to give up (Rutter, 1987). Research on resilient students was important for the development of interventions to reduce negative outcomes associated with adverse circumstances (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Nettles & Pleck, 1994).

### **The Concept of Resilience**

Instead of focusing on individual deficit, several researchers focused on individual strengths. Thus, the concept of resilience emerged. Benard (1991) defined resilience as a set of qualities, or protective mechanisms that caused successful adaptation despite the presence of risk factors during the course of development. Similarly, Linqanti (1992) described resilience as:

“... that quality in children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in their lives, do not succumb to the school failure, substance abuse, mental health, and juvenile delinquency problems they are at greater risk of experiencing.” (Linqanti, 1992, p. 2)

Masten et al. (1990) explained resilience in broader terms. They saw it as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. However, resilience was not a distinct characteristic that children either possessed or did not possess. Furthermore, children were resilient at different points in their lives based on the interaction and accumulation of individual and environmental factors. As indicated by Rutter (1990), “Resilience cannot be seen as a fixed attribute of the individual. If circumstances change, the risk alters” (p. 184).

Resilience suggested an “in-spite of” response (Rubin, 1996; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Resilience is inherent in the way human beings deal with life changes and other complex life

situations (Rutter, 1985). Moreover, resilience is viewed as the ability to respond positively to life conditions, stress, and trauma in such a way that enabled the individual to bounce back and to approach life with positive actions.

Several researchers described the attributes of resilient individuals. Joseph (1994) indicates that a resilient person is one who is “responsible, positive, self-reliant, committed, and socially skillful” (p.33). Resilient children usually have four attributes in common (Benard, 1991; 1993; 1995):

- a) social competence (the ability to elicit positive responses from others, thus establishing positive relationships with both adults and peers);
- b) problem-solving skills (planning that facilitates seeing oneself in control and resourcefulness in seeking help from others);
- c) autonomy (a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment); and
- d) a sense of purpose and future (goals, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness and a sense of a bright future).

A definition of resilience that moved beyond individual attributes was the intent of this study. Since resilience involved diverse and complex phenomena, understanding resilience required sustained effort of many investigators with different perspectives and expertise (Masten, 1994, p.21).

## **Elements of Resilience**

The factors related to resilience were organized into four categories: individual attributes, positive use of time, family, and school factors (Peng et al., 1992; McMillian and Reed, 1993).

### ***Individual Attributes***

Resilient at-risk students possessed characteristics that elicited positive responses

from persons around them. These personality traits began in early childhood and were manifested in adolescence when youth searched for new experiences and became autonomous. This began a succession of positive responses that enabled these students to reach out to other people and expect help. As a result, their positive attitudes were often rewarded with helpful reactions from people around them. Thus, they viewed the world as a positive place in spite of the difficulties that they faced. Their positive attitudes include respecting others, coming to class prepared, participating in class and extracurricular activities, and knowing how to play the school game.

High intrinsic motivation and self-discipline enabled resilient at-risk students to succeed. In a study of tenth grade students from low-income families, Peng et al. (1992) found that the locus of control was a significant predictor of academic success. Thus, students with higher academic achievement had more self-discipline. In addition, researchers found that successful students had higher ambitions than non-resilient students. Resilient students were motivated by the desire to succeed, to be self-starting, and to be personally accountable for their outcomes. These students valued a strong sense of self-efficacy. They viewed themselves as being successful in view of the fact that they chose to be successful. Therefore, they gave credit to themselves.

Resilient students had clear, realistic goals and optimistic about the future. They had hope. Despite the adverse circumstances in their lives, these students were confident that they could accomplish their goals. Their unfavorable situations reminded them of the importance of educational attainment. As a result, adverse situations became “reality checks” because they motivated them towards their goals.

### ***Positive Use of Time***

Several researchers examined the use of time by resilient students. McMillan and Reed (1993) studied hobbies, activities, and participation in clubs, church, or other organizations of resilient students. They found that resilient students used their time positively and were meaningfully involved in school and other activities. Their active

participation did not leave much free time. Involvement in extracurricular events at school and in other activities seems to provide a safe haven for resilient students. Hobbies, creative interests, and sports promoted the growth of self-confidence and belief in their ability to succeed (Geary, 1988; Coburn & Nelson, 1989; McMillan and Reed, 1993). Successes in these activities were important in enhancing self-esteem, since they provided recognition and a sense of accomplishment.

Philliber (1986) pointed out that the volunteer work of at-risk students of at-risk students offered purpose to their difficult lives. Volunteering also increased their caring about others. In addition, students learned that there were people that they could help through these experiences.

### ***Family Factors***

Among the characteristics of resilient children and adolescents were close relationships with caring parental figures who had high expectations (Garmezy, 1985; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). A sense of trust was developed, which was very important in interactions with teachers and peers. Family bonding and cohesiveness, the degree to which family members felt close and spend time together, also helped adolescents avoid negative outcomes. Researchers found that young people who had close relationships with their families were less likely to be involved in antisocial peer networks (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991).

Family composition had no significant relationship to at-risk students' success or failure (Peng et al. 1992). Students living with both parents did not necessarily have a higher level of resiliency than students in single-parent households or other family configurations. Instead, good parent-child relationships and supportive attachments acted as protective factors from the environment. Parents who were committed to their children provided informal counseling, support, and helped in achieving success. Such parental commitment enhanced the feeling of coherence within the family unit. Werner (1984) maintained that strong family ties helped at-risk students to believe that life made sense and that they had

some control over their own lives. This sense of meaning became a powerful motivation for many resilient at-risk students.

Finally, several researchers found that the educational background of parents was related to student resiliency. Peng et al. (1992) found that less than 11 percent of students whose parents had less than a high school education were classified as resilient students as compared with 23 percent of students whose parents had a high school education or beyond.

### ***School Factors***

Resilient students often found support in school. These students generally enjoyed school. They involved themselves in classroom discussions and activities. Many resilient children were also involved in at least one extracurricular event, which became an informal source of support. The extracurricular event not only increased involvement, belonging, and self-esteem, it also provided a network of people who had a common bond and work in cooperation with each other (Werner 1984; Coburn & Nelson 1989). Extracurricular events at school, especially sports, seemed to moderate the powerful and widespread peer pressure not to perform well. Many resilient students felt that they should be involved with a nonacademic activity in order to “fit in” with the majority of students. As a result, involvement reinforced the resilient at-risk student's positive engagement in school (Geary 1988).

Teachers played an important role in the success of resilient students. In three qualitative studies, resilient at-risk students mentioned school staff who had taken a personal interest in them as being important to their success (Geary 1988; Coburn & Nelson 1989; McMillan & Reed 1993). Both interpersonal relations and professional competence were important to at-risk students. They cited the following interpersonal qualities of a teacher as being important: being caring, having respect for them as persons and as learners, being able to get along with them, listening without being intrusive, taking them seriously, being

available and understanding, helping and providing encouragement, and laughing with them. Resilient students looked for specific qualities in educators. These qualities included the ability to represent and advance the goals of the system and the school. The student expected teachers to be willing to listen to the motivations behind inappropriate behavior before disciplinary actions were taken. They also expected fairness in grading and instruction, as well as praise and encouragement. These qualities not only encouraged resilient students to succeed academically, but they also assisted them in developing social competencies (Werner 1984). Students felt that they could talk to “good” teachers and counselors about almost anything. In addition, They felt good teachers or counselor listened without judging the student. These school personnel “pushed” students and were very supportive.

### **Profile of Resilient Youth**

A growing body of research described a profile children who have bounced back from adverse circumstances. These children had the appearance of invulnerability, yet they excelled. These children were generally intelligent, highly motivated, and androgenous. McMillan and Reed (1994) offered a profile of the resilient student.

Resilient at-risk students had a set of personality traits, temperament, and beliefs that promoted academic success. They had self-discipline, healthy internal attributes, took personal responsibility for their successes and failures and they had a strong sense of self-efficacy. Resilient students also felt that they were successful because they opted to be successful and because they worked hard to accomplish their scholastic aims. In addition, these students felt good about their ability and their future prospects. Furthermore, their strong sense of hope was accompanied by a belief that doing well in school was connected to doing well in life. Benard, (1993) found that resilient children “work well, love well, and expect well”(p.44). They developed coherence, which was a basic belief that life made sense and that they can control their lives (Antonovsky, 1979). This sense of control allowed them to maintain order and structure in their life.

These students had strong systems of support and encouragement. Their systems were evident in the way that students connected to others, both in or out of school. Support

systems were often found in association with extracurricular activities. Resilient students were actively involved in positive activities that promoted a sense of success, support, and recognition. Activities, such as hobbies, gave them reasons to feel proud. They also provided a solace when other aspects of their lives were troubling. Thus, their involvement in academic and extracurricular activities helped them to maintain positive engagement in school.

Resilient students had a close bond with a caregiver or significant adult with whom they developed a trusting relationship. These adults held high expectations for them. They also provided firmness, support, and encouragement. In return, these students highly esteemed these adults because they genuinely care about their well being.

Important environmental factors contributed to the strong, resilient personalities and beliefs, which were critical to these students. Environmental factors often enabled students to develop self-efficacy, goals, and personal responsibility.

### **Characteristics of Resilient African American Youth**

A review of the scant resiliency literature on African American youth showed that resilient students had self-discipline, had a strong belief in themselves, participated in extracurricular activities, possessed good coping skills, had strong family values, and were often actively involved in religious activities (Ford, 1994). These characteristics were found in resilient youth in general. Resilient African American youth, however, also had characteristics that are culturally specific. They often assumed a bi-cultural identity or put on a facade of racelessness (Clark, 1991; Ford, 1993). In addition, these youth strongly believed in the American dream (Clark, 1991; Ford, 1993). Furthermore, researchers found that emotional and physical support from their African American peers contributed to their resiliency (Garmezy, 1991; Ford, 1994).

Although some researchers insisted that resilient African American children possessed several of the characteristics of resilient youth in general, they particularly

possessed autonomy, competence, independence, and self-sufficiency. Even so, the profiles of resilient African American youth were different. For example, Smith (1985) maintained that each culture had its own barometer for measuring traumatic life events. Therefore, what was stressful in one culture or to one individual was not necessarily stressful to another. Likewise, factors that constituted a risk factor for one person was not necessarily stressful for another with different characteristics or environmental milieu (Chess, 1989).

Geary (1988) found that resilient African American youth who were successful in high school often exhausted considerable efforts in their academic pursuits, exhibited a strong belief in themselves, participated in class and extracurricular activities, and had good coping skills, motivation, and determination. In addition, these youth often participated in religious affairs, had positive school experiences and strong family values (McLoyd, 1990, Taylor, 1991). Positive and strong peer relations were also major signs of competence that contributed to resilience among African American youth. For instance, Garmezy (1991) reported that African American youth coped more effectively with difficulties when they had someone with whom to share their daily struggles. The ability to make new friends, develop good relationships, and be accepted by peers was associated with school success. Such social skills and competencies were positively related to school adjustments (Ladd, 1990; and Berndt and Keefe, 1992). Some researchers (Wentzel, 1991; and Ladd, 1990) also determined that these were also connected with academic outcomes. When faced with serious problems, African American males often sought solace and assistance from same sex peers rather than from parents (Coates, 1987). The strength and mutual support that African American peers found in each other, especially emotional and physical support, fostered resilience. These characteristics were especially important for minority youth because of the issues they faced, such as disproportionate rates of poverty, unemployment, racism and other forms of discrimination.

In summary, numerous studies have identified factors associated with resilience in general. These models of resilience may be based on the following factors, which are divided into individual, family, school, and community attributes:

### **Individual Attributes**

- Easy going temperamental disposition (Garmezy, 1985)
- High intelligence, articulate and expressive (Masten et al., 1990)
- Confidence that their internal and external worlds are controllable (Kumpfer, 1993)
- Problem solving skills (Werner & Smith, 1982)
- Sense of direction or mission (Beardlee, 1989)
- Sense of humor (Kumpfer, 1993)

### **Family Factors**

- Positive relationship with at least one caring adult (Rutter, 1979)
- Positive family environment and bonding
- High but realistic parental expectations (Benard, 1991)
- Family responsibilities (Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992)
- Positive parental modeling of coping (Bandura, 1977)
- Extended support networks, including family and friends (Werner & Smith, 1982)

### **School Factors**

- Caring and supportive teachers (Kumpfer, 1993)
- Opportunities for involvement (Riessman, 1990)
- High but realistic expectations for student performance (Riessman, 1990)
- Extracurricula activities (Werner, 1992)

### **Community Factors**

- Positive community norms (Garmezy, 1993)
- Community resources (Werner & Smith, 1982) .

The exploration of resilience is highly relevant in the field of education. Since the

present study examines resilience from an ecological framework, practitioners may use the dynamic perspectives of participants to derive meaning for programs and services to promote resilience in urban African American males.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter consisted of four fundamental areas. In the initial part, the research design was provided. This section discussed qualitative research design, as it was used in the study. The second part incorporated a description of the research population and sample. It contained the selection of sites, identification of respondents, data collection procedures and the thrust of the study. This part focused on data collection methods. The fourth section included building and establishing trustworthiness, maintaining confidentiality and human rights.

#### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to determine if patterns existed among at risk African American adolescent male students who defied the odds. This inquiry focused on at risk African American adolescent male students whose situations made it likely that they would fail in school. Yet in spite of adverse life conditions, these students exhibited outstanding performance. The research also examines why some at risk African American male students flourished in the face of social and educational disadvantages. This study explored the factors that influenced resiliency development, which contributed to the capacity for designing interventions that benefit children.

A qualitative research method (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) was chosen for the study, because it was valued as a method of inquiry for exploratory studies to "identify variables and generate hypotheses germane to populations and groups that have been previously overlooked" (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996, p. 539). Qualitative research seeks to describe and explain the particular phenomenon under investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In qualitative research, the questions and problems were derived from real world observations, dilemmas, and questions, and took the form of wide-ranging inquiries (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Qualitative research produced descriptive data from people's own written or spoken words (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Strauss & Corbin, (1990) indicated that a study that uncovered the nature of experiences with a social phenomenon was a type of qualitative research. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) described qualitative research as a term, which include several research strategies including interviews, field observations, and case studies. All of the methods have the following characteristics: 1) the research is an integral part of the data, 2) the design of the study develops during the study, 3) the design can be adjusted or changed as the study progresses, 4) the researcher conducts the study in the natural setting, 5) the researcher is the instrument, and 6) theories emerge as part of the process, evolving from the data as they are collected.

The researcher entered the research with some idea about what he planned do, but detailed procedures did not form prior to data collection. Unlike traditional researchers who view the design of a study as part of the planning stage of research, the stages were not as distinct in this qualitative study. Design decisions were made throughout the study. Thus, decisions were made at the end and the beginning of the study. Although the most intensive period of data analysis occurred in the later stages, data analysis was an ongoing part of the research. Decisions about the design and analysis were made together.

The researcher began study with no hypotheses to test or specific questions to answer, believing that finding the questions were products of data collection. Thus, the study itself structured the research, not preconceived ideas or meticulous research design.

The researcher's approach was derived from his own orientation as an African American male. However, regardless of what was personally known as an African American male, the researcher was still an outsider and could not know the participant's point of view and experiences. Therefore, the researcher's personal beliefs and values were reflected not only in the selection of the methodology, but also in the selection of the research topic. In other words, what was studied had personal significance. Krieger (1991) argued that knowledge of the external world constituted a small part of what our total knowledge can be. For this reason, the researcher sought to understand the world of urban African American male students.

This is a qualitative study that will use narrative analysis as the specific methodological instrument (Denzin, 1989; Riessman, 1993). A semi-structured interview format and an interview guide was used to direct data gathering (Bodgan & Biklen, 1982). The respondents were interviewed, the tape recorded interviews were transcribed, and the resulting data were analyzed as text. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

In analyzing the language used by participants, their interpretations of their daily lives, and their actual behaviors, the researcher had two focal points. First, the focus was on the perspective through which participants made sense of the world. These perspectives included their values, norms, and assumptions maintained within their cultural groups. In this study, culture was regarded as the creative construction, which all people within produced within small groups. To produce this culture, people drew upon diverse sources including themes learned in the home, neighborhood, and through other social interactions. Themes were learned from their teachers and peers whose home and neighborhood context often differed from their own.

## **Population and Sample**

## **Selection of School Sites**

Two high schools in the Wake County Schools were used in the study. At the time of the study, there are five high schools in which more than 20 percent of the population were African American. High schools were chosen according to such factors as percentage of African American students and the willingness of those involved to participate.

## **Identification of Respondents**

With the purpose of identifying respondents for the study, the following procedures were applied. After receiving permission to conduct the study from the Research and Development Office of the Wake County Schools, an initial contact was made with the principal of four high schools. Two high schools provided demographic data and other information that contained a representative list of high functioning at risk African American male students. The researcher requested access to the school counselor or the dean of students, who provided additional information. These personnel provided preliminary or directory information and the names of urban African American male students she/he believed would fall into the category of at-risk, but who demonstrated academic success. These lists were used initially, however as investigation proceeded, other participants were added or deleted via interviews and observations. In addition, the researcher investigated documents, such as honor roll lists, rosters in honors classes, the school newsletter, and news paper accounts in order to identify respondents. To avoid wasting time, the researcher gained access to public records prior to conducting interviews.

The eight targeted students were selected from a list of at risk resilient African American adolescent male students. School counselors, deans and school social workers maintained lists. These students defied the odds and demonstrated remarkable academic success. Hence, these students were resilience. For purpose of the study, resilience was “the attainment of positive developmental outcomes in the face of adversity (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

## **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

### **The Study**

In part, the present study was inspired by the Cordeiro (1990) study; however, it used urban African American male students.

Once a list of students' names were generated, the students' permanent record were be reviewed and a profile identifying any "at risk" characteristics were compiled. To be included in the study, participants met the following criteria: a) African American ethnicity; b) male; c) senior in high school; d) working towards an honors diploma; e) coming from a family in which neither parent has completed high school; f) coming from a low SES family; and g) living in an urban environment. Other 'at risk' criteria were considered: single parent family, prior, coming from a large family, siblings and peers who have dropped out, and high mobility. A minimum of four students at each school was studied.

Students and parents were contacted. After explaining the purpose of the study, a parent signed an agreement allowing theirs son to participate in the study. All other respondents in the study (i.e. peers, teachers) were given a letter of informed consent. Thus three letters have been prepared (see appendix): a) parent consent letter; b) student consent letter; and c) respondent informed consent. Initial interviews were held with respondents to establish baseline data, including biographical and demographic information. All baseline data was coded and profiles were made for each respondent using constant comparison.

The study involved interactive methods. Ethnological method involved observations as a method of data collection (LeCompton & Priessle, 1993). Interviews were also used for the purpose of triangulation of data. Informal conversations with teachers were used to gain an emic perspective.

Initial interviews were followed by observation periods that explored patterns of behavior both inside and outside the school setting. Observations took place in the following setting: classrooms, the cafeteria, the home, the community, etc. Initially, observation categories were focused on academic studies, respondent interactions, school activities, and

school related activities. The focus of observations and interviews were on the process of excelling academically despite at risk characteristics. In addition, the researcher explored the ethnographic variables which were characteristic of academic success. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Systematic monitoring via interview and observation of respondents' progress as high school seniors continued throughout the study. Additionally, more focused interviews were used to monitor respondents' perspectives of any changes which took place. Monitoring occurred throughout the spring, and summer of 2002. At the conclusion of the study, exit interviews were held with all participants. Finally, contacts were maintained with respondents in order to conduct a follow-up of the study at a later date.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative interviews were used as a primary strategy for data collection in conjunction with observations, field notes, document analysis, or other techniques (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). Qualitative interviewing used open-ended questions allowed for individual variations. Interviews, which utilized a specific and yet open-ended protocol, based on research questions, were used to guide the interviews. These semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions, which were designed to explore general topics in order to gain information in the participant's "own words as well as to develop insights on how subjects interpret some pieces of the world" (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p.135). Interview guides provided the parameters, the tools, and the general guide of how to proceed. The qualitative research design will remain flexible. Therefore, plans are formulated as hunches. They are modified and remolded as they proceed.

Face-to face and telephone interviews were conducted over a eight week period, from September 15, 2002 to December 4, 2002. Those interviewed were:

- William Barnes
- Jacob Harris
- Joshua Davis
- Chris Adams
- Michael Reid

- James Wright
- Tyler Jackson
- John Anderson

Probing questions were conducted through telephone communications, from September 17, 2002 to December 12, 2002. Both personal and face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Telephone interviews were generally used to elicit responses as a follow-up of face-to-face interviews.

Field notes, which were descriptive in nature, were made during all interviews and observations. They included facts, quotes, and key words. No interpretations were included in the notes themselves. A personal log was used for the researcher's reactions to the observations or interviews. Logs also included reactions to what was seen and heard.

Appropriate documents were collected and used to supplement and verify data collected during observations and interviews. Documents were obtained from school records or requested from participants. This data included documents as such school records, letters, awards, certificates, photographs and news articles. When possible, all interviews were tape recorded (Patton, 1990). Besides basic demographic data, which was collected from school files as well as from respondents, the interview guide contained questions grouped according to categories. These included individual, school, family, peer, as well as work and community related questions. Separate interview guides were prepared for students, parents, school personnel, peers and community members.

Calls were made to selected schools to gather data between September 10, 2002 and October 4, 2002. Transcripts and other records were accessed.

Files were kept and formed the basis for the coding of data. These files included: a) mundane files for keeping track of people, places, documents, etc.; b) analytic files for emergent coding themes; and c) fieldwork files to keep a record of the process involved in doing the research itself. The fieldwork files that contained a record of experiences, ideas, mistakes, confusions and problems occurring during the fieldwork.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began from the beginning of the data collection process. The instrument was tweaked as the data collection proceeded. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) recommended that in qualitative research:

“We should never collect data without substantial analysis going on simultaneously.

Letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way...”( p.2).

Data analysis included reading and memoing, describing, clarifying, interpreting and writing the report. The researcher reread notes to get an overall view. The approach was also used to search for themes and patterns in the data. Next, the researcher focused on painting a verbal picture from the participant’s perspective. Classifying involved breaking down main ideas, classifying them, and later rebuilding theme into themes and patterns. Open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was used. This approach involved a paragraph by paragraph and line by line analysis, which generated categories and subcategories. Direct quotes were used to capture feelings, attitudes and beliefs of participants. Interpreting involved pulling together the important aspects of participant’s stories. Writing the report involved writing items that were found insightful and appropriate.

Discourse analysis was used in the study, which is the analysis beyond the sentence. involves the analysis of interaction consisting of a sequence of verbal moves, phrases and metaphors. This approach, which may be used in the exchange of meanings in face-to-face settings, involved the study of large chunks of language and the interpretation of text.

Each participant's interview was transcribed. Researcher read each transcript to assure understanding of the eight participants. Statements that directly pertained to the resilience were conceptually grouped. Coding for conceptual ideas assured freedom of analysis from the empirical bond of data, thus allowing the researcher to conceptually account for the process within the data in a theoretically sensitive manner. Codes gave the researcher an abstract view with a scope of the data that included disparate phenomenon (Glaser, 1978). Statements were assigned themes and organized into clusters of themes, which included

categorizing according to similar meaning (Kruger, 1979). Clustering provided the basis for the synthesized statement of each participant's experience. Each participant reviewed the synthesis to assure that his experience was been accurately described. Thematic clusters or descriptions of their experiences were based on the categories. Memos, written elaboration of ideas about the data and the coded categories (Charmanz, 1983), were classified and included to reveal any relationship between categories. Theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) occurred as data were analyzed and categories developed when additional data was needed to encompass categories. Since two high schools were used in the study, comparisons were made for their theoretical relevance. This approach provided a means of checking the breadth and depth of data that was categorized.

### **Building and Establishing Trustworthiness**

In the book Naturalistic Inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) embraced four terms, which were credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These terms were used as the naturalistic researcher's equivalents for terms used in positivistic models. Since this researcher concurred with the researchers that the terms internal and external validity, internal and external reliability were inappropriate when applied to a naturalistic study various measures were undertaken to establish trustworthiness of this study. These measures increased the probability that trustworthiness was achieved or provided data needed to reach a judgment.

Credibility depended less on the sample size than the richness of the data gathered and the analysis of the researcher (Patton 1990). In order to build credibility, the following techniques were used. First, prolonged engagement occurred. First, the researcher spent sufficient time at each study in order to understand the culture and so that his presence did not introduce any distortions. Prolonged engagement involved "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes; learning the culture; testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 301). Second, persistent observation allowed the researcher to identify elements, which were most relevant and the researcher focused on them. Third, triangulation was used

to improve the credibility of findings and interpretations. This includes multiple sources and methods. Fourth, data, categories, themes, interpretations and conclusions were tested with respondents. Respondents were given the opportunity to react to them. This occurred formally and informally. The final technique for enhancing the likelihood of credible findings was member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability was sought through the use of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). The researcher provided a sufficient basis of detail so that a person seeking possible application of the study to another situation sufficient information to make any possible comparisons.

Dependability included both factors of instability and design-induced change. Replicability is impossible to realize because the research design was flexible and the research finding were produced by constantly changing interactions between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability was of the foremost importance because the researcher was the chief instrument of this study. The term, referred to the degree to which the researcher demonstrated neutrality. This was done through maintaining an audit trail consisting of raw data; analysis notes; synthesis products, process notes, and preliminary developmental information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Maintaining Confidentiality**

Maintaining confidentiality was important at every phase of the qualitative study. Face-to-face interviews were explicitly based on building a relationship between the researcher and participants. Participants and locations were assigned pseudonyms from the beginning of the study. No reference was made in oral or written report which could link participants to the study. In addition, audio and videotapes were coded using pseudonyms. All tapes and notes were kept in a locked space. Tapes were erased six months after completion of the study. The researcher, however, was aware that he could not promise absolute confidentiality. For example, if legally required to testify in court, the researcher

would be obligated certain information. In addition, the law does not protect field notes, therefore the research was careful how these were stored.

The researcher also took steps to protect the emotional safety of participants. Since qualitative interviews often elicited intense discussions, some of which involved painful life events, the researcher was sensitive to research ethics. As a result, sensitive topics were not introduced needlessly. The researcher took steps to assure that the likelihood and the degree of discomfort anticipated in the research was not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### **Human Rights Approval**

This study was submitted to the North Carolina State University for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Research and Development Office of the Wake County Schools. All students and their parents were asked to sign an agreement to participate. Any other respondents in the study (i.e. community members, teachers, etc.) were given a letter of consent. At any point in the study, if a respondent desired to discontinue participation, the researcher immediately ceased including the respondent.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors, which played a part in the academic success of eight African American male students who possess several at risk characteristics. Research question number one dealt with basic demographic information and the biological characteristics of these students. This information was presented in the appendix and in the appropriate sections throughout this chapter. Research questions two through twelve referred to the myriad of factors (family life, individual, school, teachers, peers, community) which played a role in the overall lifestyle of these students, which contributed to their success. These questions were addressed throughout this chapter. In addition, two types of data were included. First, quotations from interviews were used extensively in order to show the discourse used to describe situations and events exemplifying the interpretive framework of participants. Secondly, observation data of observable behaviors were used to corroborate or point out inconsistencies of information from the interviews. In addition, observation data were used to explore further areas or categories for later discussions with participants. Finally, the last research question regarding possible instructional or environmental adaptations, which might increase the academic success of at risk students, was dealt with in the final chapter.

Chapter IV is presented in two parts. After a brief overview of the three schools and the participants, those factors which were involved in helping participants established an identity are presented. Included were those factors, which were potential barriers, or threats that identified how participants avoided those barriers. The first section dealt with the most general feature of their interpretive scheme, their ethnicity. A number of more specific factors, which participants framed through the fundamental features of their interpretive schemes, were included. Next, how academic success entered into their worlds and self-perceptions are presented.

The second section, referred to as “Getting My Bearings,” dealt with strategies used by the participants to succeed. In addition to the strategies, this section reported life routines

and early experiences of the most general features of the interpretive framework and how they relate to the challenge. Chapter IV provides the “thick description” of the data in this study. Thus, it has considerable detail, which readers will be able to draw conclusions that may differ from those of the researcher.

### **Setting of the Study**

Wake County is the state's second largest school district. Nearly 92,000 students attend the district's 108 schools, which include 13 high schools. For purpose of the study, students from two urban high schools, Cameron Senior and Central City Senior were selected. These schools had at least an African American student enrollment, which mirrored the African American population in North Carolina.

Wake County high schools made use of the “4-by-4 block” schedule, which was developed for academic acceleration, remediation, and enrichment. This term described a schedule in which a student completed four classes in the first half of the year (term) and four in the second term. Each class met for approximately 90 minutes every day. The name comes from the fact that there are two terms of four classes, and classes are taught in larger blocks of time. Some anticipated outcomes of block scheduling included more active and motivated students, a less hurried and stressful routine for students, improved student and teacher morale, increased opportunities to take elective courses, and more individualized instruction and personalized attention for students because of lower student-teacher ratios (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994).

### **The Settings of High Schools**

#### Cameron Senior High School

Cameron Senior High School is situated within the city limits in a residential setting. Homes in the immediate area are well kept. The school is located on 59.8 acres with 90 permanent classes and 12 portable classrooms. Cameron Senior has approximately 2044

students. The building is approximately five years old. Several buildings were added since it was built. Twelve portable classrooms were on the campus.

According to 2001-2002 High School Profiles, the school had 457 seniors. Records reveal that 294 were white, 146 were African American, 10 were Asian, 2 were Hispanic, and 5 were others. District records revealed that African American students comprised 43.1 percent of the total population. African American male students constituted 20.23 percent of the student population. During the 2000-2001 school year, 8 percent of students received free and reduced lunches. During the 2001-2002, 8 percent of students received free and reduced lunches. According to Profiles, 81.3 percent of graduating seniors successfully completed all courses in 2001 required for entry into the University of North Carolina system, while 88.8 percent completed requirements during the 2000 school year.

As revealed by test results from courses required for graduation, lower percentages of African American students scored at proficiency levels. During the 2001-2002 school year, 75 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on Algebra I, while 92 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test. In contrast, 50 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on Biology, while 91 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test. During the 2001-2002 school year, 67 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on English I, while 91 percent of White students were proficient on the End of Course Test. During the 2001-2002 school year, 40 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on English II, while 61 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test. During the 2001-2002 school year, 36 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on U.S. History, while 71 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test.

### Central City Senior High School

Central City Senior High School is situated in a residential setting within the city limits. It is located on 43.8 acres. The high school has 90 permanent classes and 13 portable

classrooms for approximately 2044 students. The main building is approximately 36 years old. Several sections have been added since it was built.

Central City Senior High School was located in a residential setting within the city limits. Although homes in the immediate area were at least twenty years old, they were well kept. However, several subsections in the surrounding blocks had lo-income housing.

According to 2001-2002 High School Profiles, the school had 432 seniors. Records revealed that 268 were white, 114 were African American, 26 were Asian, 18 were Hispanic, and 6 were others. District records also showed that African American students comprised 31.75 percent of the total population. African American male students constituted 16.44 percent of the student population. During the 2000-2001 school year, 15 percent of students received free and reduced lunches. The following year, 13 percent of students received free and reduced lunches. According to Profiles, 74.4 percent of graduating seniors successfully completed all courses in 2001 required for entry into the University of North Carolina system, while 75.8 percent completed requirements during the 2000 school year.

As revealed by test results from courses required for graduation, lower percentages of African American students scored at proficiency levels. During the 2001-2002 school year, 68percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on Algebra I, while 86 percent of White students were proficient on the End of Course Test. During the 2000-2001 school year, 54 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on Biology, while 88 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test. During the 2001-2002 school year, 59 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on English I, while 85 percent of White students were proficient on the End of Course Test. During the 2001-2002 school year, 47 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on English II, while 70 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test. During the 2001-2002 school year, 41 percent of African American students scored in Level III and IV on U.S. History, while 70 percent of White students were proficient on the End of course Test.

## **Participants in the Study**

The present study was conducted in two high schools within a highly diverse school district. These schools were located in a major metropolitan city in the southeast region of the United States. The school district was selected for the study because of its relatively high enrollment of African American students. About 26.3 percent of the students enrolled in the district were African American students during the 2001-2002 school year. Of the total student population, 13.21 percent were African American males.

Eight African American male seniors, who for some reason had defied the odds, participated in the study. All of the male participants lived in urban settings, were in the twelfth grade, and were considered as successful because they earned a 3.0 grade point average (on a 4.0 scale). (See Table 3). They also came from families considered low socioeconomic status. Although all of the parents admitted that they experienced financial difficulties, half of the participants received free and reduced lunch during their school experience. In spite of that, these economically disadvantaged seniors performed above average as indicated by their grade point averages.

A profile of participants revealed certain demographic factors. Six of the participants came from families with two or more children. Two families had only one other child. Half of the participants were first born. Households comprised of at least three persons. Five participants lived in a household with five persons. Each participant lived in a dwelling with four to eight rooms. Seven participants lived in a single family home. One participant lived in an apartment complex. All of the participants in the study came from low-income homes that had been affected by family changes, or multiple moves. Their peer associations were primarily centered around friendships at school and church, rather than from their neighborhoods. School district zones included numerous neighborhoods. In addition, most participants have moved on an average of four times since they started attending school, thus the likelihood of forming close friendships in the neighborhood decreases. (See Table 2). In spite of these difficulties, these students, who are profiled in the study survived and excelled in their school.

Five of eight participants experienced changes in their family structures since they enrolled in school. Five participants lived in a female-headed household during their school career. Their mothers separated when participants were in the early childhood. These five mothers remarried. One of the participants lived in a household with eight siblings and three adults.

Six of the students moved at least three times since enrolling in elementary school. One student moved at least fourteen times since birth. Their parents provided astounding revelations with regard to how and why mobility occurred. They shared honest stories of their experience and the lives of their children. In several instances, marital and economic factors played a part in their mobility. One family experienced multiple forced moves, which resulted from domestic substance abuse.

These academically successful African American male students held optimistic attitudes towards schooling. They adopted the American achievement ideology, which holds that success will result from hard work and effort regardless of individual's racial background. Apparently, their quest for academic excellence was impacted by this ideology. Much like other parents, the parents of these low-income children wanted their children to grow up and lead mainstream lives. For this reason, they guided them on paths toward academic achievement.

The eight interviews produced more than sixty-nine pages of transcript for analysis. Interviews transcripts were derived from interviews using personal, family, and school guides. (See Appendix). The method for managing this huge quantity of text data was to use a constant comparison approach with all 24 interviews. This method enabled the researcher to identify answers to the main interview questions and gather them together (i.e. code them). Major themes in these question categories could then be identified and further coded. Key ideas and words signaling the location of significant concepts occurring elsewhere in the transcripts were then tracked down through exhaustive searches. Finally, the coded data was interrogated using demographic information gathered about the participants. In this way, it

was possible to identify patterns and trends in the different categories of participants.

Descriptions of eight African American male participants were provided below, followed by a discussion of finding uncovered in the studies.

## **Participants**

Imagine a young eagle testing his wings against rather overpowering winds. Such winds could signify doom for most birds, let alone a young bird that knows little about the raging ethereal currents. Despite his young wings, the eagle set his face against those awesome winds. He was determined to get his bearings and to successfully navigate against the gales with all of its treacherous undercurrents. Thus, with confidence beating beneath his feathers and with adult eagles supportively watching from the distance, the young eagle became a master in the skies. Such a scenario characterizes the plight and the flight of eight African American male students who faced tremendous odds, yet they excelled academically. In an effort to determine attributes, which contributed to their success, the stories of eight urban African American male students are shared.

### **William**

The interview of William Barnes with Johnny Leak was conducted on September 15, 2002. William, the second of three children, struggled to find his place in life. As a child, he was “playful” and “curious.” His lightheartedness occasionally created problems in school and at home. The student indicated, “Sometimes, I got into trouble at home and at school.” Although he “had problems in school” a “very few times,” William said, “Sometimes, I would play around and break things in the house.” In response to his inappropriate behavior, his parents disciplined him. He explained, “I usually got a ‘whipping’ when I acted up or broke things.” As he became older, William’s temperaments changed. He was no longer and energetic, “playful” and “curious” person. As a high school senior, his mother described him as an “easy-going, caring child.”

His behavioral adjustments were partly attributed to his close relationship with his older brother. William clarified, “He taught me how to act better.” His brother functioned as his confidant and mentor. He modeled responsible behavior. William explained, “Although I am a unique person with my own qualities, I am most like my brother.” More often than not, William replicated qualities that he found in his brother. He noted, “We have the same personality. He is a sociable person, but he is cool and calm. He has been a guide for me. I learned a lot from him.”

The student took a proactive approach to problem solving. For example, William recognized his kinesthetic and tactile abilities and he used this knowledge at home and in school. He openly acknowledged his love for working with his hands. In which case, he “repaired computers, designed web sites, and performed trouble shooting“ on the computer. He also expressed his artistic talents by drawing in his spare time. Because he enjoyed problem solving and recognized his abilities, he felt that his plans to become an architectural engineer were appropriate.

Notwithstanding his love for problem solving, William’s family experienced considerable problems during his early school years. His parents were separated when he was about thirteen years old. Even before the family disruption, his mother struggled to support three children on her meager salary as a machine operator. Although his father was involved in his life at an earlier age, interactions decreased over the past two years. Instead, his father spent more time with the younger son.

Family moves caused problems for William. His family moved three times to different cities since he entered school. The student indicated his family lived in “small and out of order” “dilapidated” apartments, until they moved to an eight room house. While the family stayed in substandard housing, the student was “ashamed.” On the other hand, family moves broke social ties. He explained, “Every time we moved I left some good friends and I had to get used to a new situation.”

In spite of deprived conditions, both of his parents set high expectations for him.

William explained, “They expected me to make good grades and to prepare for a good job.” The student attributed his success to parental and personal expectations. High standards became “ingrained and second nature.” As a result, he became a “goal oriented” person, which he believed also contributed to his success. He indicated, “I set goals for myself. I set out to accomplish my goals. To accomplish them, I work hard and study.” He elaborated, “My parents expect me to make and to accomplish my goals, especially if they are practical.”

The student felt that his attitude towards school was primarily impacted by his mother’s perspective on life. His mother stated, “I believe sorely in education. It is the one thing that no one can take from you.” She reasoned, “If you have it, you always have something to fall back on.” She also acknowledged the importance of reinforcement, which was provided by his family. His mother explained, “All adults (in the family) are involved in raising the child.”

William corroborated the reinforcement from his extended family. He said, “My uncles are significant people. They give me instruction in life. They let me know that they are there for me. For instance, they have given me financial support and helped me prepare for college.”

Although William had a supportive family, his childhood was complicated by deprivation and social adjustments. His living conditions were substandard. He explained, “When I lived in the apartment, it was really small and out of order. It was dilapidated.” Yet, he was able to rise above his adversities. He insisted, “I had a regular childhood. I was a normal child.”

The deprived student felt good about his elementary school experience. He described his teachers as being “really friendly.” Because they were affable, William “felt especially close” to his teachers. He described them as being “caring and supportive.” He explained, “They took a lot of time with students. They cared about the students.” He added, “They were willing to help me when I needed help. They wanted to make sure that I did my work correctly and behaved appropriately.”

The student not only valued his elementary school experience, but he also had a positive perception of middle school. William enthusiastically recounted, “Middle school was pretty cool.” He felt that his social needs were met in middle school. He indicated, “I got to meet a lot of people from different places.” He added, “I learned a lot about people and how to get along with them.” Besides the social stimulation, the student felt that he was “academically challenged.” He enjoyed his advanced classes. William explained, “They (teachers in middle school) had a lot of activities to keep students motivated.”

Although he was motivated in elementary and middle school, William was not as enthusiastic about his high school experience. He felt that some of his classes were monotonous. The student also felt that classes lacked “personal challenge.” He explained, “Basically, it is the same thing each day. Even though I enjoy going to school, it is the same experience over and over. The subject may be different but the set up is the same each day.” In spite of his perception, the student was not adversely affected. He consistently performed well throughout high school. William reasoned, “ I am convinced that it (school) is a necessary process and it is filled with challenges, but I like change. I like having a different experience from time to time.” He resolved, “It is my job to make my own way. For this reason, I try to get the most out of school.”

## **Jacob**

The interview of Jacob Harris with Johnny Leak was conducted on September 19, 2002. Although he was born in the Republic of Congo, Jacob saw himself as an African American. More specifically, this youngest of children referred to himself as a “Congolese-American.” During his formative years, Jacob experienced considerable adversities. Although he overcame language barriers at an early age, he experienced significant cultural, social, and economic adjustments. His family arrived in the United States when he was about five years old. His parents devised strategies to help him to adjust. As a result, Jacob overcame adversities. For example, Jacob spoke French fluently prior to moving to America. He spoke no English. His mother reported, “He completely stopped speaking French and

began to speak English” when he was about five years old. Although he quickly learned to fluently speak and to understand English, it was difficult for him to learn how to read in English. His mother indicated that he was motivated by an “intense desire to fit in.” She explained, “He wanted to be a part of the new culture so intently that he was consumed by the quest.” He added, “We just reinforced his desire and he accomplished those goals.”

Although he made significant adjustments at an early age, Jacob struggled with the family problems. His parents separated when he was in the ninth grade. He became embittered. His anger was directed at virtually everyone. He felt alienated from church, family and friends. For a brief period, he became introverted. As a result, he avoided some social situations. It was difficult for him to concentrate and his grades plummeted. The student recounted, “One day, I saw the severity of my problems and how they affected me.” He devised a strategy to cope with family problems and to improve his academic performance. The student reported, “I reestablished my priorities and learned how to deal with this major change.” Although he continued to agonize about the marital split, he indicated that he was “better able to cope with it.”

In spite of his early adverse circumstances, Jacob felt good about his academic performance. He learned how to cope with domestic stressors and his self-confidence improved. As a result, Jacob described himself as being “pretty smart.” He added, “I am just a little smarter than a few of my peers.” A teacher, however, described him as being “unusually bright and often quite intuitive.” Another teacher indicated that he possessed “a keen ability to analyze situations.” His father upheld their claims.

The student developed considerable understanding of his learning preferences. Jacob felt that he learned “deductively.” The student, who sometimes seemed blunt, stated, “I often absorb a small amount of information, and make deductions until I get the right answer.” He learned this approach at an early age. He added, “This helps me to understand things and to get a handle on my school work.”

Although he developed a learning style preference, the student had mixed perceptions

of his total school experience. Even though he wanted to be challenged, sometimes he saw school as a series of process activities. He explained, “I like to learn things, not the worksheet and processed learning.” He also felt that his high school experience was “often repetitive.” He explained, “The same thing happens every day, over and over. There is too much emphasis on following the curriculum. No energy to it, we are just going through motions.” His description of middle school was slightly different. He stated, “It was not as divided, more repetitive.” His recollection of elementary school experience was not as clear. Although he enjoyed elementary school, he indicated “ I don’t remember it very much.”

## **Joshua**

The interview of Joshua Davis with Johnny Leak was conducted on September 24, 2002. A series of one level apartments lined up on both sides of an urban street. These apartments gave the appearance of uniformity and conformity. Each low-income apartment was neatly trimmed in a deep earthy tone and grass refused to grow in certain places. A sign, designating restrictive parking and a small group of young men who shared the contents of a brown bag, was enough to make a person wonder what to expect. Just then, two squad cars pulled into the parking lot across the street, while another slowly proceeded down the hill.

Upon entering the neat apartment, a tall, slender, medium dark complexioned teen sat in a chair. His dark pin striped suit gave the impression of seriousness, which was validated by his methodical movements. He used short phrases until he became comfortable. Initially, the interview was almost like pulling teeth initially. In a short time, he unclasped his hands and unfolded his heart. Then, he told the story of his pain, peril, and promise. There sat an African American male who by all calculations should have failed, but he was one of the top students in his class.

Joshua had a close-knitted family. He was the oldest of three siblings. He lived with both of his parents in an urban four-room apartment. His mother served as a major source of inspiration and support. His strong-willed father also carefully guided him. His father’s spiritual orientation influenced his interest in missionary work and his quest for academic

excellence.

Although family was intact, they experienced serious deprivation during the student's formative years. When his father was absent from the home, his mother struggled to provide for her children on a small income. They lived in cramped, substandard housing. Recalling a painful episode, Joshua explained, "When we stayed in Louisburg, we didn't have running water, and we stayed in like a half of a house." the student explained, "It was a tough time." In spite of severe deprivation, Joshua felt that his experience contributed to his "humility and ability to prevail."

The student not only lived in substandard housing, but he also experienced other effects of deprivation. His nutritional needs were often unmet and he lived in unsanitary conditions. Joshua explained:

"We had a pot to cook in, and I remember we used to go to Winn Dixie, we'd buy those Hormel cheeseburgers and stuff. My mother would stick them on the hot plate so they could get them warm. Thirteen years ago, it wasn't exactly the best situation to be in, but it taught me modesty. It taught me humility. It taught me to struggle and that's why I think now I can get by with necessities and necessities only. When I have things that I want, I feel like that's a privilege to have, because I know that there were some times when I knew what we were having every night for dinner. Now we have cube steak, rice, and mashed potatoes. Then, we were having hot dogs and French fries that were half cooked or those little Hormel cheeseburgers. Early childhood was a struggle. As far as the running water, I remember how the toilet would not always flush. It was a part of not having running water. Sometimes, we had to defecate in plastic bags. I know, for myself growing up I thought it was normal. I know I used to use the toilet at other people's houses. We found ways how to deal with the problems we dealt with, we had struggles, yes, but it taught me more in the long run. I'm proud of it."

He tried to conceal the pain of reflection by turning his head towards his mother. She had been a model of perseverance. She flashed a modest smile. Then, he closed his eyes for a second. When he regained his composure, he behaved as if he was unaffected by the

recollection.

Aside from depravation, Joshua also overcame health-related problems. His grandmother helped him to feel accepted and to cope with his ailments. The student explained:

“Before we moved here, when I was small, I had eczema. I’m allergic to citric acid. When we stayed in Youngsville, we stayed with my Grandma. She would sneak me things I wasn’t supposed to have. I remember one time my Mom went out with my Aunt. I don’t know how I remember this because I was three or four, but it was a Friday evening and my Grandma gave me a Pepsi. I had a little Kid’s Cuisine, microwave dinner, pizza, which I’m not supposed to eat. It was my treat! That was my relationship with my Grandma. I think that stuck because from that moment, we were close, but it instilled in me how important our relationship was; that she understood how important, even though I was small, at that time how important eating different food, experiencing different things was to me.”

His grandmother nurtured and assured him. These qualities helped him feel important. They made him feel loved. He stated, “I felt like she was showing her love for me. She liberated me from feeling as if I was different.” She helped him to see beyond depravation by exposing him to a variety of experiences. He recalled, “I see a lot with my Grandma. I think that stuck because from that moment, we were close, but it instilled in me how important our relationship was.” He added, “She understood how important things were, even though I was small.” He explained, “She knew how important eating different food and experiencing different things was to me.” Joshua revealed, “I felt like it was her showing her love for me. She liberated me from feeling as if I was different.” His grandmother fostered a sense of normalcy that gave him confidence to deal with some of the issues that faced him.

His grandmother also played a vital role in his religious orientation. These experiences provided additional exposure and assurance. His Kingdom Hall experiences not only provided religious orientation and strong supportive relationships. Joshua explained, “A lot of my associations in Louisburg were with the people of the congregation at Kingdom Hall.” This exposure also gave him a strong sense of belonging. He added, “I see a lot of them

now.”

Although Joshua became a high-achieving student, he had fluctuating feelings of unworthiness and exhibited patterns of misbehaviors at an early age. Though he wanted to please his parents by exhibiting good behavior, he periodically misbehaved in middle school. His misbehavior disappointed his parents, especially his mother. He lamented, “I think I brought my mother shame a couple of times in my life.” The high performing student also felt that his mother was disappointed because he did not perform at his best level. He bemoaned, “I’m not that big an achiever. I think I get by sometimes, especially in middle school.” He explained, “Sometimes I got by with the bare minimum, but to others it was considered a success.” The student acknowledged, “Although I still get awards a lot of time, I know it wasn’t my best efforts.”

His middle school years were problematic. Inappropriate behavior caused academic and social problems at school. He explained, “Quite a number of times I feel like the influence that I had was negative when I was in middle school. So I felt like I got myself in a lot of trouble.”

His parents held him accountable for his behavior. He reasoned, “When you get yourself in trouble, you always dreaded coming home.” Joshua gave an example. He explained:

“One day, I was on pins and needles because I know my Dad got off about 4:30. I didn’t now how he was going to react. I tried to butter him up. I was out there at his car before he walked in the house.”

He was disciplined for his misbehavior. He stated, “Discipline is discipline. In our household discipline is not time-out. It’s not sit down. You got your butt beat, especially for things that were serious.” Although he periodically misbehaved, he made adjustments and became a more self-regulating person by the end of middle school.

Although Joshua faced a series of adverse circumstances over a long period, he was determined to rise above his circumstances. Joshua overcame brief episode of misbehavior,

severe economic depravation, health problems and low self-concept. Despite these conditions, Joshua rebounded and became a successful student.

## **Chris**

The interview of Christopher Adams with Johnny Leak was conducted on September 27, 2002. Upon entering a two-story house, figurines of angels flanked the entrance. They were situated in strategic places in an immaculate yet modest dwelling. The angelic theme gave the impression of protection and nurture, which characterized the home. These figurines also hinted of a strong religious orientation. Notwithstanding the religious orientation and the commitment to nurture, the family experienced considerable economic stress.

This slender-framed male came from a low-income, close-knitted family. He was the second oldest child. He had sixteen siblings. He assumed a leadership role with his siblings. His siblings admired him and followed his guidance. He explained, “ They listen to me.” Chris added, “It helps the family to function as it should. Everybody knows their role in the family.”

His mother was especially proud of the supervision and support that he provided to his siblings. His mother, who described him as “a quiet, sensitive and polite young man, beamed , “I can always count on him. He has a level head.” She added, He has never let me down. He has been very helpful and the other children respect his guidance.” His mother explained, “If I have a meeting, he is sometimes left with in charge of his brothers and sisters. He keeps things in order.”

Aside from offering supervision and support for his siblings, Chris used his skills to help the family in other ways. His mother relied on him to perform certain responsibilities in her day care business. She pointed out:

“He does not work outside of the home. He takes care of the day care records. He has developed and maintains the daily log, as well as all attendance and financial records. He logs in all payments on a weekly basis, prints receipts, and give client end of the

year transaction records.”

A teacher described him as a “multitalented young man.” She also characterized him as an “athletic and a capable student.” She bragged about his participation on the basketball and football teams. She indicated, “He has done well in the classroom and on the courts and fields.” She added, “Chris is proficient in the use of computers, particularly data entry, graphic design, and various programs.”

The student described himself as “an analytical person.” He felt that his analytical abilities were helpful in his studies, as well as in sports. He explained, “Everything has little parts. The main task often involves identifying the parts and understanding how to manipulate them.”

Despite an early childhood, which was marked with divorce, disruptions, and changes, Chris wanted to academically and athletically. His parents separated when he was about four years old. From age seven to ten years old, he lived within a single parent home. After the marital split, Chris had no contacts with his biological father. His mother married again when he was ten years old. She also became a foster parent for six other children. Both foster parents later adopted all of the children. Although they have been together a short period, Chris developed a strong bond with his disabled father. He asserted:

“My dad is great. We do a lot of guy stuff together. We do things like going to games, watching sports on television, and doing projects around the house.”

Chris felt that he was “loved and supported” by his father. He also indicated, “I can go to him with almost anything. He is very understanding.”

Family breakdown occurred before he entered school. He was about three years old when his parents separated. His mother mitigated the impact of the family transitions. His adjustments were minimized because his mother shielded him from some of the adversities. For example, his mother opted not to “belittle his biological father in any way.” In stead, she decided “to share positive aspects” to her son, “if he inquired.” Even so, Chris remembered very little about his biological father. Chris reasoned, “It was easier for me to adjust to my

new dad, because I had very little contacts with my biological father. I did not really know him. Besides, I was around my new dad for about three years before my mother remarried.”

Besides family breakdown, his family moved at least eight times prior to his high school experience. His early years were spent in Wilson, North Carolina. Then family moved to Raleigh when he was two years old. They remained there for at least a year. Afterwards, they moved to Rocky Mount where his parents separated. When he was five years old, they returned to Raleigh. Although the family moved three times while they were in Raleigh, Chris opted not to discuss the impact of these moves.

His mother modeled hard work. She operated a small in-home day care service. Although the business was successful, the small clientele did not allow her to reach middle-income status. Replicating her industry, Chris often assisted his mother by handling administrative matters for the in-home business. His mother’s diligence impacted his academic success. Chris explained, “My mother not only encouraged me to improve my skills, but she provided opportunities to apply them in the day care business.” In which case, Chris used his computer skills to compile and disseminate information for clients. He also stated, “What she has shown me and allowed me to do also helps me to perform better in school.”

This “responsible” student was not always that way. In discussing his childhood, Chris focused on “having fun.” He stated, “In elementary school, I had a lot of fun. I used to play by myself a lot.” He especially enjoyed spending time with a caring relative. He explained, “Most of the time, I was left with my aunt while my mother went to work.” Chris shed light on the reason he spent a great deal of time with his aunt. He stated, “During this time, my father was not living with us. My mother and father were divorced.” Although the absence of his father was a point of contention, he found some comfort in the fact that he “lived near the school.” He noted, “When I was a child, I lived next to my elementary school. I could easily walk to school. I like this. It made me feel more secure.” He added, “I liked going to school because I knew that I would have fun.”

The high-spirited student had behavioral problems in elementary school. Chris explained, "I got good grades" but he added, "I got in trouble a lot." He said, "I often finished work early, and then I would start talking."

Chris experienced considerable adjustment problems in middle school. The student commented, "It (middle school) was harder because I transferred from elementary school. I had to get used to it because I was not 'babied' like I was in elementary school." This talkative student also discovered that he "had more responsibilities in middle school." He indicated, "At the beginning of middle school, I did not make great grades. My grades were just average." However, his grades improved after he adjusted to middle school. Chris explained, "Towards the end, I made adjustments and my grades improved."

In spite of adjustments in the latter part of middle school, he experienced additional difficulties during the early phases of high school. He explained, "At first, it (high school) was stressful. I had a hard time." However, he made significant adjustments within the first year. He explained, "Then I got used to it." He learned how to set his priorities and to manage a more strenuous schedule. He added, "From the beginning, I had problems trying to manage my time. The first semester, I had football and I would get home real late. So I had to learn how to spread it out. As time went by, it became less of a challenge. I learned a lot about balancing and managing my time wisely." In high school, Chris participated in football. As a result, he felt that he became "a more focused student." For this reason, he "learned how to handle the demands of honors classes and the football team."

Though he experienced adjustment problems, Chris maintained a positive perception of school. He indicated, "School is alright." He pointed a connection between education and his future success. The student asserted, "I know that I have to do it if I want to get through life. I know that I can not experience some of the successes and have some of my dreams come true, unless I get a good education." He also reasoned, "I see it (education) as an avenue to get to the best colleges, and getting a good job. It is a means of doing what I want to do in the future." A vital part of his perception was based on social experiences. Chris added, "I like interacting with my friends at school and meeting new people. I have a couple

of close friends, but nothing comes before school.”

The observably poised student openly discussed his early discipline problems. He felt that his behavioral problems were not “chronic or serious.” He clarified, “I would simply mess with things that I should not bother and getting in trouble at school.” He gave an explanation, “In elementary school, I used to talk a lot in class. Sometimes, I talked back at the teacher. I was suspended once in elementary school.”

His parents used a variety of disciplinary strategies to modify his behaviors. He pointed out, “I was disciplined at different times. If I did something wrong, I got a whipping.” He stated, “As I got older, other punishments were given, such as taking things away from me.” He attributed his adjustments and success to being disciplined by his parents. He affirmed, “Apparently, their punishment worked. I feel that I have made the necessary adjustments.” He added, “I learned from this. If I did not want to get a whipping, I had to stop doing things that I should not do.”

## **Michael**

The interview of Michael Reid with Johnny Leak was conducted on November 1, 2002. During a Monday night choir practice in a nondenominational church, a tall lead tenor walked up the other five singers. They greeted each other and began to tune up their voices. The small band played their instruments as a prelude to a marvelous blend of musical instruments and brilliant voices. Michael was one of the singers. Band members and the other singers welcomed his presence. They tackled a new song. The sheet music was given to Michael. They started singing in preparation for the director. Michael caught on quickly. The song was “Beautiful Faces.” In just a few minutes, he knew not only the words, but he had become familiar with the tempo and the blend of voices. Michael assumed the leadership role. Some of the singers did not catch on right away. A female alto singer asked for his help. He stepped over and switched from tenor to alto. In seconds, they sang in skillful synchronization. The other singers chimed in after the female alto caught the rhythm. After they completed the song, the entire group broke out in laughter.

Unlike the choir practice, life for Michael was not always a beautiful song. This youngest of three children witnessed “a great deal of heartaches” which stemmed from the family breakdown. He was five years old when his family started experiencing problems. Because of his father’s substance abuse, the family experienced serious financial difficulties. Although his mother used, as she described, “financially creative tactics to manage things,” the family still moved constantly. His mother indicated that they lived in a “cramped and small rental” setting when Michael was in early elementary school. During this time, his mother kept him focused. She stated, “I wanted him to focus on his work in school and being a kid, not on problems within the household. That was my job.” Although he had no contact with his biological father, he learned to cope with family stressors, to view life positively, and to forge ahead.

The student projected a studious and solemn demeanor, which was diffused with a distinctive charm. During the interview, Michael was serious. He listened attentively. It seemed as though he focused on every word. The student responded after a brief pause.

His father felt that Michael was “serious.” He described him as “a goal-oriented person.” He also stated, “He pushes hard to achieve his goals.” He added, “He is a very tender hearted person who was challenged by his parents. He has stepped up and has grown considerably in confidence, integrity, and character.” His father explained, “He has become less concerned about what other people think. He has become a more self-confident person, with certain charm and wit.”

The goal-oriented student became a gifted musician. He was a lead trumpeter in the symphonic wind ensemble and the marching band. In addition, he was a lead tenor in a youth choir. His mother, who sings proficiently, inspired him. In turn, Michael became a critic and coach for his sister.

Despite the fact that he became an accomplished singer, Michael was physically active and adventurous as a child. He openly disclosed, “I was a very playful child. I used to

get into everything. I loved going outside, running in the woods, and playing in the mud. When I was outside, I felt unleashed. I would just run as much as I could. I enjoyed it.

The daring child sometimes got into trouble at home. His parents quickly responded to his misbehavior. He explained, “Every time I did something wrong, my parents stepped in. They taught me to how to distinguish right from wrong.” His parents used a variety of disciplinary methods to correct his behaviors. He stated, “They did not just ‘whip me’ when I did wrong, they also told me not to do it again. They gave me solid instructions.” Michael was grateful for their guidance. He asserted, “This is what keeps me in line today. It was great and I appreciate the directions.”

The adventurous child had an intense desire to learn even at an early age. Michael explained, “When I was a child, I played with my cousins. I wanted to explore. I was like Matthew Hinson. I just wanted to go somewhere, but I did not know where I wanted to go. If I saw something out of the ordinary, I wanted to check it out.” He stated, “During this period, I learned a lot, but I also made a lot of mistakes.” He said, “I just wanted to know about things; almost any thing.”

Michael enjoyed his school experience. He described school as “an adventure.” He explained, “I love going to school. It is exciting to me.” He saw education as a means for achieving future success. He reasoned, “By going to school, I am traveling on the pathway to success. By getting a good education, I am preparing for future success. This is the time that I am simply enjoying the journey.”

Although he recognized the importance of education, Michael pictured school as a place to have fun, particularly during the early phase of his school experience. He explained, “I started school (kindergarten) when I was five years old. I enjoyed school, especially recess.” His perception changed when a teacher stimulated his interest in learning. “One day, the teacher read the story about ‘Green Eggs and Ham.’ The teacher cooked green eggs and ham.” The student exclaimed, “The class became alive. We were living the experience. The lesson was real.” He also described another motivating experience. He explained, “In

kindergarten, I was the narrator in a play, because I could read. I enjoyed that experience.” In kindergarten, he was popular. He enjoyed the social aspects of school, especially being with his friends. He beamed, “I had a lot of friends. It was fun.” By preschool, he, however, was motivated as a student. He asserted, “I soon discovered that learning was fun.”

His middle school experience was marked with transitions. The student was home schooled when he was in the sixth grade. When he returned to public school in the seventh grade, he experienced some social problems. He was teased in the seventh and eighth grades. He bemoaned, “They called me a nerd. This was the first year that I wore glasses. In the seventh grade, I was also overweight.” Michael pointed out, “It was not an easy time for me, although I was not really trying to make many friends.” Even so, he felt socially isolation. He explained, “I just had a small group of friends in each grade.”

The student especially relished the social experiences of high school. He explained, “In high school, I like my teachers a lot.” He also found ways to interact with his friends, while enhancing the learning experience. He exclaimed, “I also have a small group of friends that I see in school. Most of my friends are in the band and are high achievers. So, our paths cross a lot.” He said, “We try to connect and share quick notes whenever we can.” He found his niche and a support group. Michael stated, “In the ninth grade, I became very popular when I got in the band. Band people accept each other, although I am still a very shy person.”

Although he relished the social aspects of high school, He appreciated the support from his parents. Michael attributed his social adjustment to having “a supportive family.” He explained:

“My parents were there for me. They helped me to see the real picture. I could talk to them when I had a problem. They would not always give me the answer, but they would listen and trust me to figure it out.”

His grandparents were also actively involved in his life. They mirrored the values of his parents. Michael explained, “It was like listening to a tape recording. My grandparents had the same script as my parents.” He explained, “The support from my parents and

grandparents helped me through some pretty tough times. It keeps me focused on where I am headed, not just what is happening at that time.”

## **James**

The interview of James Wright with Johnny Leak was conducted on November 7, 2002. A brisk breeze complicated the already chilled night air. The Central City Bears needed to win the inner-city classic football game. It was a matter of school pride. Late in the game, the starting running back was given the ball. The clock was almost out. The Central City Bears had barely penetrated the opposing team’s territory, but the awesome defense was determined not to allow them to move another foot. The quarterback faked giving the ball to the fullback, but he slipped it to the swift running back. With four players reaching for him and the crowd on their feet, chants filled the chilled night air, “Go, James. Go, James”. With sheer strength of mind and definitive skills, James eluded the opposition and pressed the ball thirteen yards. This impressive move set the stage for a Central City victory.

In spite of his athletic abilities, James viewed himself as one who is “learning the game of life.” He explained, Although I have learned a lot from sports, I am just trying to make the best of my life and to be a successful person.”

He developed interest in sports when they lived in the Midwest. Later, he became a star in track, football, and basketball. James admits, “I like the drama that happens everyday, particularly in athletic events.”

Aside from participating in sports, James was artistically and musically talented. He participated in the orchestral band, where he is a trumpeter. His musical talents were used in school activities and in his church. James explained, “I started playing the trumpet good when I was in the sixth grade. I got a trumpet from my uncle.” he also shared, “My interest in athletics began when I was in elementary school.” He elaborated, “In the fourth grade, I got on the track team.” He saw an association between athletic involvement and school performance. He recalled, “My grades were good and I became student of the month.” He

also acknowledged his artistic abilities at an early age. He stated, “I realized that I could draw when I was in kindergarten.”

James, the oldest of three children, was a sociable person. However, this extravert was equally comfortable with throngs chanting his name and quietly blending in with his peers in the classroom. Although his humor and charisma were salient traits, he appeared to be a focused young man. He had a clear picture of life, where he was going, and how he planned to get there.

This gregarious male came from a close knitted extended family. His grandparents were actively involved in his life. The family visited the maternal and fraternal grandparents regularly. They had been an important part of the children’s upbringing. James reported, “They are dependable. They helped me to stay balanced. I depend on my grandparents.” His father was one of seven children. All of whom supported and encouraged James to perform well in school. He had similar support from his mother’s eight siblings.

Besides strong family support, James had a strong religious orientation. Although his parents had different denominational affiliations, they wanted the church to be an important part of his life. His mother grew up in a Catholic Church and father was associated with the holiness church. His mother pointed out, “We wanted James to be a well balanced person with a spiritual center.” James was exposed to the church at an early age. The family attended religious services regularly.

James dotingly talked about his childhood. He flashed a huge smile when he shared, “I remember being comical as a little guy.” The he chanted, “ I remember being the oldest grandchild on my mother’s side of the family.” He received special treatment from his maternal grandparents. He explained, “They tried to spoil me.”

Although he received considerable attention from his grandparents, James recalled episodes of adversities. He acknowledged, “We had our struggles.” His smile quickly faded as he divulged, “We moved a lot.” The Maryland born participant lived in several places as a

child. Since he enrolled in school, he has attended five different schools. His mother explained:

“When we lived in Indiana, he was close to a group of friends. They had been close since they were about five years old. The group often played with the intendo, video games and they did other things together.”

James experienced considerable difficulties as a result of family moves. He felt lonely and isolated. His acknowledged, “He missed his friends.” She explained, “When our family moved, James was nine years old. He had a very hard time. He felt uprooted from his friends.” She was convinced that family moves affected his performance in school. She said, “In fact, he had more problems concerning the loss of his friends than he did about changing schools.” She explained, “His relationships with school friends actually helped him to perform well in school.” The move to Tulsa was more traumatic. He experienced anxieties, which were related to changes in school, when the family moved from Tulsa. His mother clarified:

“When we moved to Tulsa, he had another group of friends. He was only 13 years old. They played basketball and other games. He loved his school. He was excited about it. When our family moved, he was very upset. The school had very high standards. James learned a lot. In fact, it put him ahead of his peers when we moved to another place. He was especially attracted to the extracurricular activities in Tulsa. He played football from the sixth to the ninth grade. He liked the science enrichment program. Before we moved, he planned to take a special class about football strategies that was offered after school. The move was especially hard for him, because he was attached to the school.”

James was able to adjust, in spite of being uprooted from his friend and social structures within the school. James explained that these moves “created an entirely different school and community experience.”

Although he became a responsible young man, James indicated that had discipline problems when he was younger. He remarked, “I experienced discipline very early. When I was about four or five, I was very mischievous and curious.” He added:

“For instance, one night I sneaked out of the bedroom when I should have been sleeping. I hid under the kitchen table and my father came into the kitchen to get some water. When he noticed me, he gave me a spanking. At that point, I thought that discipline was a horrible thing, but I have come to appreciate it and to see the genuine care that it represents.”

He elaborated, “Over the years, I have had my fair share of discipline. I have had my share of days when I was out of line and I needed correction. The ultimate punishment would have been to receive no discipline. Then, I would have a false sense of direction. Therefore, I would be destined to failure.”

James viewed these behaviors as being part of the process of growing up. Nonetheless, he was grateful for the discipline that he received during his childhood. As a result, he felt that he was a “popular student who balances academic excellence with athletic and musical activities.”

His elementary school was marked with family moves and adjustments. He explained, “My elementary school experience was split into two parts. In the beginning, I was introduction to learning.” During this period, he “had a good time.” James felt that he had not adjusted and become a serious student. He explained, “It was a combination of playing and learning. I knew that it was a serious time, but I enjoyed myself.” He grimaced, “During the second part, our family moved. It was quite an adjustment.” He stated, “In beginning of the fifth grade, our family moved from South Bend, Indiana to Tulsa, Oklahoma.” With a look of consternation, he said, “I do not know whether it was good or bad experience. I had a good time, but I was still not a serious student.” He explained, “My grades were above average, but I knew it was not my best.”

Although he had mixed feelings about his elementary school experience, James enjoyed middle school. For him, it was a “pleasant experience.” He asserted, “It was a lot of fun for me.” He attended middle school on a large campus with several schools within the complex. During this period, he “became close to a lot of teachers, who provided support.” His teachers helped him to view life differently. He shared, “I learned a lot about socializing and about myself. I also learned that people in different states may deal with life a little

different.” James reasoned, “This period marked the beginning of sincerity as a student and real social understanding.”

He achieved a “sense of balance in high school.” As a result, his high school experience was enjoyable. He explained, “I have had a lot of fun.” He reasoned, “I had a chance to get close to people who could help me.” He seemed ecstatic about links with a small group of peers. He stated, “On a typical day, I go to school, socialize with a small group of friends, have a little fun, and work hard in class. There is a lot of drama in high school. That is what makes it a special experience.” Aside from the social interactions and the support, James felt that his high school afforded opportunities to grow. He shared, “I found high school to be a fair and well-balanced chance to grow and to improve my skills.”

The social aspects of school intrigued James. He explained, “I like the drama that happens every day, particularly in athletic events. It reminds me of anything you would expect to see on television.” He elaborated:

“Since school is a small sampling of different communities, you might see almost anything. In school a lot of crazy things happen. Some things make me laugh and keep my spirits high. Perhaps, that is why I like school.”

He also described school as “an exciting place to learn about life; not just from the books, but just by watching people, I am able to learn a great deal.”

## **Tyler**

The interview of Tyler Jackson with Johnny Leak was conducted on November 24, 2002. Tyler, the youngest child of two children, had a close knitted family. His father “closely monitored” his activities and served as a “role model” for him. His mother was his “encourager and confidant.” In addition, Tyler’s extended family “provided massive” emotional support and encouragement in his academic pursuits.

His father described him as a “kind hearted, respectful individual.” He called him “an independent thinker. He is not a follower.” His father explained, “Sometimes, he takes a

lead. He does not necessarily go with the norm.”

The 230-pound African American male was once a very playful and inquisitive child, who “used to get into everything.” Tyler felt that he had “an almost insatiable desire to experience new things.” His father was particularly instrumental in redirecting his curiosity by allowing him to explore and to be expressive. He stated, “I was given opportunities to take things apart, repair or improve them.” His curiosity and playfulness were misunderstood in school. His father reported, “In the earlier grades, teachers wanted to label him.” because his parents recognized “his creativity,” they “resisted attempts to mislabel him.” Since they helped him to harness his creativity, his parents felt that the student “developed as he should have.”

By high school, the well built, dark-complexioned male had garnered considerable respect for his athletic abilities. He was ranked as one of the top 100 in football for the state. His parents valued the plaques, certificates and awards that he received as a high performing student and an athlete.

As observed during a football game, the student demonstrated remarkable athletic ability. It happened on a mild mid-fall evening. A modest breeze stirred, while an impressive running back for the opposing team taunted Tyler’s team. He bragged and attempted to intimidate the opposing players. Although Tyler’s team was slightly ahead, the modest advantage could have easily eroded. Previously, the advantage seesawed until the final quarter. In an impressive tackle, Tyler hit the once taunting running back, sending his facemask sailing in the air. Although the running back was not seriously injured, he was removed from the game. The game was cemented and Tyler’s team was victorious. After the game, Tyler told his parents, “I did not intend to hurt him. I only wanted to minimize his effectiveness in that critical play.” The sensitive tackle hummed, “I’m glad he was not injured, but we take risks in the game of football.”

Tyler was not only a talented athlete, but he was also a gifted musician.” He played several instruments, including the piano, guitar, drums and saxophone. He also sang in a

gospel group and the church.

As observed, the six feet three inch male clutched his guitar as a prelude to ecstasy. The church contained at least 150 people during a Sunday evening event. Some people came especially to hear his fingers move across the cords of his electric lead guitar. Donned in a two piece black suit, he played a popular gospel song. The congregation clapped, cried, and shouted as he took the lead in the song. Some people in the audience stood on the feet, while others anxiously moved in their seats, especially when the lead guitar offered a song of its own. It was easy to discern that Tyler was also deeply moved by their reception. He seemed equally pleased that he had contributed to a night of worship and praise.

This accomplished musician and athlete made remarkable adjustments over the years. Although Tyler came up in an economically disadvantaged family, he was able to transcend his family's economic situation. His father modeled strength in the face of adversity, which helped the student to cope. His father commented, "We must not live beyond our means. We made the struggle transparent to him." His parents were not only resourceful, but they shielded him from their financial concerns. His father stated, "We found creative ways to supply school-related resources. He did not always get some of the other things, but school has always been our emphasis." They wanted Tyler to concentrate on his studies, instead of household financial difficulties. His father reasoned, "Around here, everybody has a job. My job is to try to make things work. His job is to go to school and to do well in school. We expect him to focus on his job, while we perform ours."

## **John**

The interview of John Anderson with Johnny Leak was conducted on December 4, 2002. John, the youngest of three children, was a highly motivated student. This mild mannered student maintained a minimum 3.6 grade point average. He was especially strong in mathematics and physics. As early as his freshman year, major universities attempted to recruit him.

His calming yet insightful nature positively impacted his family, especially during some tough times. All through his early middle school years, his family experienced hardships, which included sickness and serious financial problems. Although his parents were plagued with adversities, his father pointed out John “ended up being a source of strength for the entire family.” Though his parents tried to conceal the stress, John's faith was often provided solace for the family.

Even though he was reserved, John was quite articulate and convincing. His father described him as being “generally quiet, but when given an opportunity, he can talk intelligently about mostly anything.” His father also reported, “He, especially, loves to talk about what is happening in the world and his relationship with God.” When he was very young, John enjoyed watching the news and documentaries. He also liked watching “how people interact in different situation.” His mother felt that he was honing “analytical skills at an early age.” However, John stated, “I was simply learning about life and the issues that I would face at some time. That is why I feel comfortable talking about quite a few subjects.”

As observed, the tall slender young man was actively involved in his church. One Saturday, he went to his church. There was a meeting of youth missionary department in two adjoining rooms. Dressed in casual clothing, the young man quietly stepped up to a slightly off-balanced podium. He began the discussion about the pre-selected topic, “Youth: Making a Difference in Communities.” While the young people focused their eyes on him, he spoke enthusiastically on the topic. The lively discussion pursued after the discourse, which involved 14 adolescents. It continued for 45 minutes. Following the meeting, John hinted about being “nervous,” but it was not apparent to the observer. He appeared confident and well informed. He had also spoken with passion and conviction. Several adolescents showed their appreciation by expressing gratitude and commending him on his “courage to make the speech.”

In spite of his quiet, soft-spoken demeanor, he was a caring and compassionate person. His father disclosed, “He will give his last to people that he feels needs it more than he does.” As indicated by his father, “He really cares about people. He puts his faith in

action.” John was involved in community projects at school and youth missionary activities in his church. His mother reached the same opinion. She commented:

“He is a very compassionate person. When he believes in a thing or he takes on a mission, he focuses on it until he gets some results. He will try as many ways as he can to help in an activity or to help a person who needs help. His feelings run deeply.”

The introverted child hid himself in books. He learned to read very early. His mother reported, “He read almost incessantly. Soon after he knew his letters and their sounds, he was trying to connect them.” John corroborated, “I read everything that I could read after I learned how to read.” The student added, “At this point, my closet friends were on the printed page.” He pointed out, “I did not make a lot of friends. In fact, I shied away from most of my peers.” However, his teacher helped him to socialize with other children. John shared, “Two teachers helped me to improve my interactions with other students.” He explained, “They made me feel that I belonged and that I was special.”

The participant recalled some painful aspects in his childhood. John reported, “My childhood was filled with adjustments. They involved family health and financial problems and worries about my parents.” He explained, “When my brother and sister came along, they had a smoother time, but we had it rough for a while.” John explained, “Although our family lived from paycheck to pay check, well at least part of the way, by the time I got in late elementary school, the bottom fell out.” After a painfully reflective pause, he elaborated:

“Our family had a series of sicknesses. First, my mother got sick. She had a major medical problem. While we were still dealing with her sickness, my father got real sick for some times. He was out of work and we did not know how we were going to manage. So, both of them were sick during part of the same period. Yet, they kept me focused on school.”

His father convinced him “to focus on school work.” The student asserted, “My dad often said, Let us be concerned about the house. You be concerned about the problems in that book. If you do that, we can manage.” As a result, the student felt, “I was being taught how to be strong.”

As a child, John was infrequently disciplined. He gleefully shared, “It happened when my parents thought it was necessary.” John quipped as he discussed his behavioral tendencies. He shared, “I am no angel, but I have not been a bad child.” His father concurred, “We have only had the typical problems that one should expect from any child. Nothing serious. He has always been well behaved.” Even so, the student commented, “My parents generally talked to me when I misbehaved. If I did not get the message, they put me on restrictions. I have not gotten many spankings. The main method involved taking privileges away.”

## **GETTING MY BEARINGS**

This section deals with how the interpretive schemes were developed, particularly considering the problems, which could have prevented development at anytime. In spite of adversities, these students found ways to get their bearing and to become successful students. This section discusses a range of contextual influences that mitigated against negative life circumstances while facilitating development and educational resilience.

### **Role Models and Caregivers**

These urban African American male students had models and caregivers who helped them to “get their bearings.” These included parents, and relatives, as well as school personnel. Such support seems to have mitigated against the likelihood of school failure.

### **Parents**

Throughout the study, parents of these resilient African American male students possessed several characteristics. They: a) had positive parent-child relations which were characterized by support, respect, trust, and open communications b) modeled positive behaviors; c) provided religious orientation; d) were assertive in their involvement efforts; e) kept abreast of their children’s school progress; f) were optimistic and saw themselves as having effective coping strategies; g) set high and realistic expectations for their children; h)

held positive achievement orientation and supported the achievement ideology; and i) established clear role boundaries and discipline.

All of the participants indicated that their parents provided guidance and support, particularly in academic areas. John focused on the care that he received from his parents. He commented that his father showed him “how to keep my head up when I am struggling.” He stated, “My mom is the one who motivates me academically, while my dad gives me spiritual and social directions. Chris had two caring parents. He characterized his mother as a caring person “because she helps me with a lot of things. She pushes me to achieve. I can talk to her about most anything.” He also stressed that his father “pushes me, but not as much as my mom does.” His father took a different approach. Chris acknowledged, “He tells me the consequences of failure. He gives me guidance.” Likewise, William admitted that his parents “give me support, advice and guidance.” Joshua expressed appreciation for the care that he received from his mother. He appreciatively exclaimed, “She is just wonderful. I cannot repay her, for the things she’s done, and I know I never will be able to begin to.” Joshua pointed out, “I know she had to sacrifice a lot for me when I was small. So I just want to let her know how much I really do appreciate that.” He added, “She just helps me out whenever I need help. She does whatever she can to help me. Anything I need help with, troubles, I know I can talk to my Mom about it.” Although he did not feel as close to his father, Joshua commented, “but when I need man-to-man help, when I have man problems, can’t go to my Mom, I know that I have to go to my Dad.” Matthew also discussed his mother’s care. He stated, “She has always been supportive, caring, and understanding.”

Their parent exhibited trust and openly communicated with them. They not only discussed family circumstances, but they also allowed them to have input and to share their insights. In addition, their parents listened to their opinions and encouraged them to make responsible decisions.

Aside from their openness, the parents of two participants modeled other positive behaviors. Tyler’s parents modeled athletic prowess. As a result, he emulated them. He explained:

“When I was younger, I watched my parents. My mother was very athletic. She played softball. My father was also athletic. He played football and basketball. They taught me. I can do things that many of my peers can not do, because of the models that they showed me. They influenced me the most.”

On the other hand, John’s father modeled fortitude, while his mother motivated him academically.

All of the parents provided religious orientation. They encouraged involvement in religious activities. For example James indicated, “They wanted church to be an important part of our lives. So, we have always been in the church.” John also commented, “Going to church is a part of me.” In each instance, the entire family attended the same religious institution.

Their parents were actively involved in their academic enhancement. They kept abreast of their children’s academic performance and activities. To cite an instance John stated, “My parents are aware of my performance in school. They ask questions, review my work and attend school meetings.” William pointed out, “My parents are aware of everything. They know my schedule of school activities and they do not allow me to let up.” He also indicated, “My mother encourages me to do my homework and to study. She drives me to complete my assignments. My father does the same thing. They play an equal role in assuring that I give my best in school.” James clarified, “They always remind me to give that little extra effort and to complete my assignments for that day.” James explained, “My mother has always been involved. She knows every aspect of my performance.”

Their parents kept abreast of their children’s school progress. They kept extensive folders, certificates, files of their grades, school activities, and awards from earlier grades. Student, trophies and awards were often displayed in their homes. In addition, parents reported that they not only attended activities, such as games, concerts, and school-related ceremonies, but they also monitored their progress. In addition, they helped them to set priorities.

At least three parents demonstrated optimism and effective coping strategies. John pointed to his father. He shared:

“He has shown me how to keep my head up when I am struggling. From him, I learned to focus on the big picture. I watched my dad deal with family health and financial problems with a cool head. I know that some people would have folded but he taught me to visualize the result that I want to happen. In other words, I was taught to keep my eyes on the intended result.”

Joshua also recalled his mother’s ability to cope with severe deprivation. He explained, “We found ways to deal with the problems. We had struggles, yes, but it taught me more in the long run. I’m proud of it.” In addition, Michael pointed to the way his mother dealt with separation and serious financial difficulties. He admitted, “She was also struggling financially, but she was creative financially. In exchange for services, so she bartered with friends. For example, she allowed a student to live in our cramped and small rental house in exchange for baby sitting services.” Michael acknowledged, “Her actions taught me that I could make it. What I experienced in school was small compared to what she faced at home.”

All of the parents established clear role boundaries and discipline. Although behavioral expectations were clear, none of the parents set rigid or harsh behavioral standards. Parents used various approaches to correct misbehaviors. For instance, a participant indicated, “My parents generally talked to me when I misbehaved. If I did not get the message, they put me on restrictions.” Another student shared, “they gave me a spanking when I misbehaved.” Still another student explained, “In our household discipline is not time-out, it’s not sit down, you got your butt beat, especially for things that were serious.” A fourth student pointed out, “If I did something wrong, I got a whipping.” In contrast, one student shared, “When I did something wrong, my parents said they were going to punish me, but they never did.”

### **Other relatives**

Aside from their parents, participants benefited from a stable and supportive network of adult relatives. For their parents, childrearing was not an isolated endeavor. A supportive

network of relatives provided supplementary guidance and structure. Kinship networks included siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, who helped assure that they got a start in life. For example, Joshua indicated, “Whenever I had a problem, whenever I had any kind of issue, I could go to my Grandma because I knew that she was going to give me good, sound advice.” He acknowledged, “But it wasn’t always going to be what I wanted to hear. And that was good too! It was going to be what I needed at the time to help me.” Joshua exclaimed that his grandmother “liberated me from feeling as if I was different.” Michael’s grandmother replicated the tough love and support that he received at home. He revealed, “My grandmother gives a stronger dose of the same guidance that my mother gives.” He explained, “She is from the old school. She does not give any leeway.” The strength of Tyler’s grandmother made him feel safe. He reported, “At her house, I feel like nothing can touch me. “He added, “We could talk to her and she explained things to us.” Michael disclosed, “My grandmother is the same way as my parents. She does not allow room for me to mess up... She is a strong protector and a guide. She wants me to do exceedingly well.”

Two participants acknowledged special support from a sibling. Tyler indicated that his brother provided care and support. He stated, “My brother, even though he is not with us most of the time, is my confidant.” He pointed out, “I call him for advice. He is my closest friend. I ask him for advice on certain matters.” William also counted on his brother. He viewed him as a “mentor and role model.” He commented, “My brother is special because we have so much in common. We can talk about stuff that I can not talk as freely with anyone else.” He also shared, “He has been a sort of guide for me.”

Four students cited other supportive relatives (e.g., uncles and cousins). For example, James had supportive uncles and a cousin. He had become especially close to a cousin, who shared “some of the same interests and have shared some experiences.” His cousin also served as a mentor. He stated, “We can always talk. He listens and that makes a big difference.” In addition, James had two caring uncles. They often spent time with him, playing “basketball and sharing sports interests.” Besides these, James reported that they spent time “putting electronic and technical things together.” In addition, his uncles helped him to “tow the line” and “were always there when I needed them.” Likewise Tyler referred

to a cousin who functioned as a role model and provided guidance and emotional support. His cousin helped him to feel confident and capable, particularly in sports. Tyler stated:

“He has shown me a lot. When I was younger, he taught me about the game of football. He also taught me different strategies. For example, he taught me not to fear a bigger person who carries the football. From him, I learned how to still hit the bigger person and how to be effective in the contact. He took the fear out of me.”

Two students discussed multiple sources of family support. William pointed to a brother. He said, he “gives me guidance and advice.” He also received guidance and financial support from his uncles. William stated, “They give me instructions on life. They let me know that they are there for me. For instance, they have given me financial support and helped me prepare for college.” Joshua received support from his “large extended family.” He explained, “My grandmother, on my father’s side and my grandmother, on my mother’s side help me to keep focused. He added, “They tell me things about life. I spend a lot of time with them.” He also indicated, “On my father’s side, I have four uncles. On my mother’s side of the family, I have two aunts and one uncle. I can depend on them. They mean a lot to me. They are willing to help me if I need them.”

### **Other Role Models and Caregivers**

Besides supportive parents and relatives, role models and caregivers that were outside of their families supported these African American male students. They received support from neighbors, church members, and friends. For instance, John mentioned a caring neighbor who provided guidance and encouragement. John said, “He often has those moments when he will pass along tidbits of helpful information, especially about my responsibility to use my abilities to help people.” His neighbor encouraged him academically. John further explained, “He (my neighbor) knows that I want to study Physics. So, he often talks about how useful the knowledge would be in helping others. He tries to encourage me.” He added, “This neighbor keeps abreast of my school performance.” John also spoke of a “disabled neighbor” who was a “role model because he cares for people.” He said, “We talk about how he helped people while he could. He pushes me to use my gifts to

help other people.” The disabled neighbor also encouraged him to take charge of his circumstances and “to affect positive change for others.” Additionally, John indicated that his pastor and members of his church provided encouragement and guidance. He stated, “I am also close to some people in my church, especially my pastor. He makes sure that all of the young people are doing something productive in the church. He checks on our performance.” Others supported him from his church. Michael pointed to a “youth pastor and his wife.” He commented:

“My youth pastor has always been there for me. I can call on him at any time. In fact, they (youth pastor and his wife) encourage us to call them, even if we feel a need at 4:00 a.m. They gave us (the youth members of the church) their telephone numbers. They want us to make good grades and to be successful in every part of our lives.”

Other participants received support from neighbors. James mentioned the influence of a neighbor. He stated, “The neighbor, who lives behind us, gave me information about flying planes and about the air force.” He explained, “His son and I are close. His father, who works at NCSU is in charge of the ROTC. He has shown some interest in my future, especially as it relates to aeronautics. He knows that I am interested in aeronautics.” Joshua also mentioned a caring neighbor who often inquired about his school performance. His neighbor praised him for “doing so well in school.” Joshua indicated, “She always was there to tell me just to keep-it-up!”

Chris support network included his “mother’s friend,” who was “a pediatrician.” The student described him as his “mentor and friend.” He explained, “I feel close to him because he cares and has done a lot of things for me. He also points me in the right direction.” Chris indicated, “He is a very understanding person.” They shared activities since Chris was seven years old.

One student talked about a encouraging acquaintance. Jacob received support from a close friend. He felt that they could “talk to each other about a lot of things. Besides, she is a good listener and a very caring person.”

## **Supportive School Personnel**

In this study, African American male students indicated that supportive school personnel influenced them. Teachers played a major role in raising student learning, motivation, and attitude towards school, as well as helping them get through difficult life circumstances. Sustained close relationships between student and teacher help them to develop the values and attitudes needed to succeed in their schoolwork and to master new experiences.

Three students mentioned teacher support during critical periods. Tyler received support from a math teacher. He stated, “Ms. Bradley, a teacher, is a special person. She helped me out a lot.” He developed a special relationship with his teacher. He explained, “She was my in-school friend. I feel especially close to her. I can count on her. I’d stop by there everyday after football practice. Even though I was tired, I’d always stop by to talk to her.” Tyler added, “She helped me out. She cared about me. That was important. When I had problems, she listened to me. She encouraged and reassured me, especially when I faced personal problems. When I also had problems with schoolwork, she helped me.” Joshua lauded his kindergarten teacher. He said, She “instilled in me a lot as far as academics and helped me to understand how to focus even when I am having a hard time.” He also indicated, “She listened to me when I had problems at home and in school. Then I could make sense of my situation.” Michael stated, “My teacher provided notes from his past to give me hope and to let me know that I could overcome.”

## **Social and Academic Groups: Symbols of Category Membership**

These African American male participants surrounded themselves with small groups of peers and friends who offered help, support, and encouragement. Although participants were sociable, they opted to interact with small social and academic groups. These small networks consisted of individuals who were fellow and former students, college students, and members of prosocial organizations.

Even though participants had positive relationships with others, they maintained a small group of friends. For example, Chris indicated, "I have a couple of close real friends and a lot of associates. I might see them in school for a brief period, like when we are changing classes or in the cafeteria." He explained, "My friends are in different grade, but I do not have many friends." Jacob also said, "I have a few friends." Likewise, John asserted, "I do not have a lot of friends. I am friendly to every one, but I just associate with a few students." John reasoned, "To me a friend is some one that you are willing to share a lot of yourself with. Right now, I am sharing a lot of myself with school and with textbooks." Although he had a limited sphere of friends, John felt that he was not socially inconsiderate. He stated, "I don't turn people away. I have a hand full of friends in school." Michael stated, "There are about seven or eight people who make up my circle of friends."

Although they interacted with other students, participants primarily associated with an exclusive group of high performing students. William described his friends. He said, "They do well in school." He also pointed out, "I also have a few friends who do not do well in school. It is a mixture. Most of them, however, do well in school." Likewise, Chris stated, "Basically, they have been in advanced classes with me in the past." Tyler shared, "Most of my friends are in the same grade. We take the same classes." Jacob shared classes with his friends. He noted, "We have some of the same type of classes, but we are not always in the same classes." He clarified, "I have a few advance placement friends, who were seniors last year and have gone to college." One student felt that associating with other high performing students positively impacted achievement. Jacob reasoned, "If you really want to get anywhere that is what you need to do. It's a means to an end to associate with persons who have already achieved what you desire." In contrast, Jacob felt uncomfortable interacting with lower functioning students. He asserted, "I really have problems dealing with students who are not in advanced or honors classes. It does not feel right. That is why most of my friends are seniors." Michael was less discriminate. He stated, "My friends are in all grades in high school." James described his small group of friends. He pointed out, "Some of my friends at school live in the same community. Others are members of the football and track teams." James clarified:

"I suspect that I have the most in common with athletes who are in the fellowship and

who are doing well in school. We sort of push each other because we do not want to let the coach and the rest of the team down. The rest of my friends are just smart people who are in my classes. Some times, these are the same peoples. It is not a large group.”

In this study, African American male students not only had in-school associates, but they also had out-of-school friends. Frequently, their in-school and out-of-school friends consisted of the same individuals. For example, Chris disclosed, “They are the same as my friend in school.” William also shared, “My school friends are also my friends after school. Most of them are in the same grade.” Jacob clarified, “My friends at school are my friends outside of school too.” Likewise Tyler indicated, “They are the same people.” John indicated, “Most of my friends in school are also my friends out of school. It is the same handful of students.” John pointed out, “Basically, we are in the same grade. One is a junior.” Michael shared, “Some of my school friends are also my friends outside of school.” He also said, “I have church friends who do not attend my school. I also have a few church friends who attend my church.” Michael attempted to expand interactions with his small group of friends. He explained, “Sometimes, I invite my school friends to visit my church, but some of them are already committed to their church.” James echoed, “My friends are the same. I have the same friends both in school and after school.”

Five participants had friends who went to college. In some instances, their college friends were former band members or athletes. In another case, friends attended the same church. William indicated, “A few of my friends, who have gone to college, also went to my high school.” He explained, “We never took classes together. In some cases, we had the same interest. We actually had the same friends.” Jacob had “a few friends who have already graduated.” Tyler associated with “some people who have gone to college.” He pointed out, “Some of them belong to my church. Some of them have been on the football team.” John also had a “few friends who have gone to college.” He added, “Some of them were seniors last year. Some of them go to church with me.” Michael asserted, “I have a lot of friends have gone to college, who were in the band. I have a friend who attends my church who has also gone to college. He was also in the band.” All participants relied upon their college

friends for educational advice, especially related to college.

Participants maintained variable contacts with their friends. Although they primarily interacted in school, they found time to communicate after school hours. For example, Michael stated, “I spend time with them every day at school.” He had “at least one class” with his friends, but he ate “lunch with all of them at one time or another.” Jacob shared, “We usually talk on the telephone at night.” he added, “Sometimes, we talk time I get home.” Tyler interacted “with them everyday.” He elaborated, “We talk on the telephone. Some of them might spend time with me on the weekend.” William also maintained daily contacts with his associates. He pointed out, “I see my friends every day at school, perhaps three or four times at school. I also talk to them on the phone after school.”

### **Honors Groups**

In the present study, participants had high academic ambitions, which contributed to their success. These male students had enthusiasm, commitment, pride and self-discipline. Participants were intrinsically motivated and were willing to do what it took to excel academically. They received satisfaction and pleasure from learning and from accomplishing things.

All of the participants were enrolled in honors and advanced classes. When they entered high school, they were assigned to challenging classes. Participants were grateful for these challenging honors and advanced classes. For example, Chris appreciated the small class size. He said, “They are not too large.” Small class size allowed him to “get the attention” that he “needed in other classes.” Joshua focused on class offerings. He indicated, “My school offers an impressive number of meaningful electives. By this, I mean that the electives can help a student prepare for a career.” In contrast, five participants were disappointed when classes did not appropriately challenge them. For additional challenges, half of the African American male students participated in honors groups or clubs.

### **Fitting In: Academic Alienation or Inclusion**

All of the participants demonstrated social competence. They often elicited positive responses from others. Participants also had positive relations with peers and adults. In addition, they learned how to effectively navigate between social groups.

Although participants were representative of a small group of African American male students, they were well received by their peers. None of the participants had ever been belittled or alienated because of their academic performance. Chris commented, "I've never been teased about my performance." He added, "Students do not treat me any different." However, Chris revealed, "Most of the people I hang with also have good grades." He associated primarily with other high performing students. Likewise, William replied, "I've never been teased about my performance. Students treat me like they treat other students." He added, "Most of my peers are doing well in school." Tyler asserted, "In fact, quite a number of students seem to want to be around me. I suspect that is because most kids think I am smart and I am a member of the team. That is why I get a great deal of respect from them." Jacob declared, "I have never had that problem. I have never been teased." James was popular throughout his school experience. James indicated, "I have been well received by other students." James elaborated, "I believe that my popularity stems from being respected for my academic and athletic abilities."

Although they were never ribbed about their school performance, two students were teased about other issues. Tyler was teased about his size and clothing. He explained, "In elementary school, I was teased because I was bigger than most of my peers. I was also teased because of the clothes that I wore." On the contrary, Tyler asserted, "I was never teased about my grades." Although John was not teased about grades, he said, "I have been teased about how I dressed at different periods. I have been told that I dress like prep or something." Students taunted Michael about his behavior. He indicated, "At different points, I was teased. I was especially teased in elementary and middle school about the way I behaved. At that point, I was very curious and I was often misunderstood."

### **Neighborhood Interactions**

Five of the adolescents lived in neighborhoods with polite but standoffish neighbors. For example, James commented:

“People are not involved with each other, although they seem to care about each other. Community members are cordial, although it is not like the sense of community that existed a few years ago. People just speak and go about their business.”

James reasoned that they “were simply preoccupied.” He indicated, “I suspect everybody is just trying to etch out a living; just trying to survive.” Chris also felt that his neighbors were distant. He explained, “They generally speak. They seldom visit and mostly stay to themselves. They are friendly, but they are distant.” William commented, “I know only a few of my neighbors. The adult neighbors seldom visit. He deduced, “There is nothing to do in the neighborhood; no activities to draw us together.” Jacob stated, “I live in a quiet place where virtually nothing happens... People do their own thing and they stay to themselves. There is nothing special about it (the neighborhood).” Michael indicated that young people interacted but “most people stay to themselves.” He had, however, developed supportive relationships with two neighbors.

Although several participants lived in standoffish neighborhoods, they had some support from neighbors. Two participants spoke of neighborhoods with caring and supportive people. While describing his neighborhood, John pointed out, “It’s not as fancy as some communities, but people are friendly.” He added, “They care about each other. If anything happens, they will come and see you. At least they give you the impression that they are concerned.” Joshua had become close to several neighbors and had developed mutual support. He asserted, “I really believe that I can count on them.”

### **Ethnic/Racial Subgroups**

Although their closest friends were primarily African Americans, all participants had friends who were of a different racial or ethnic groups. Participants had no significant difficulties interacting within their interracial and multicultural subgroups. Their social

groups were small, ranging from four to eight people.

Participants identified with being an African American in various ways. Tyler acknowledged that many African American males were not reaching their potential. He asserted, “I am one (African American) who is trying to rise to the top.” William indicated, “I am proud that I am Black because I know that a successful Black person is somewhat rare now-a-days. I know that I am a smart Black man.” Jacob said, “I am an African American from the Democratic Republic of Congo.” He pointed out:

“Although I was born in Congo, I do not refer to myself purely as an African-American. Perhaps, the truest designation would be a Congolese American. I can identify with my heritage. My identity is more specific than most African Americans are because I can pinpoint a specific place in Africa. I am sort of like Tiger Woods. My identity is specific.”

Joshua commented, “Being African American means a lot. It means, automatically, when I go to school, I’m expected, whether it’s by teachers, students, sometimes by administrators, to not perform as well.” John also explained, “I am a strong but caring young Black male.”

They developed distinct ways of coping with social pressures that were associated with being an African Americans. James explained:

“As an African American, I have studied history, which describes our trials and hardships. Although I recognize these hardships, I try to put it off and not make such an issue, as other people in this country would do. I do not focus on our hardships, I try to ignore them.”

Chris had a different coping strategy. He maintained, “I have not had any difficulties as an African American because I try to work hard.” Although he recognized some of the barriers, which were associated with his ethnicity, he opted to confront them as they arise. Chris indicated:

“There are definite obstacles that African American males face just because you are a minority. Basically, I deal with situations when they develop. Until such things occur, I put them in the back of my mind. When things happen, I try to find a way to solve the problem to the best of my ability.”

Tyler acknowledged the difficulties that he faced as an African American. He asserted, “I know that it is difficult to make it as an African American, especially as a male. I know that a lot of us have not made it, but I want to be a role model.” Likewise, Michael admitted susceptibility to mistreatment. He explained:

“I have not really had a hard experience as an African American male, but I know that it happens. Sometimes, when I am not chosen for something, I might think about prejudice and unfairness. But I chase those thoughts away. It does not happen often. I have many White friends. Sometimes, I tell them that Black people are like everyone else. We have to take people as they are and not stereotype them. I have been stereotyped before. Some people in certain cliques at school will not talk to Black people. I try to get them to look at me and not at my race. I deserve the same ground as any other person. It does not matter what color you are, but what you are on the inside.”

Two students opted to challenge unfair situations. Joshua asserted, “Generally, I express my opinion about mistreatment, although I approach it from a softer, more reasonable way.” John insisted:

“If it happens, it merits some discussion. Since each situation is different, each situation deserves an appropriate response. Some responses should be soft, while others deserve at least a correction of some sort.”

John also said, “I know that there aren’t many African American leaders, see myself rising to the top and showing others that they can do it also.”

Two participants resisted succumbing to stereotypes. For instance, Chris disclosed, “I try to disprove some of the stereotypes that some people have about African Americans. Some people feel that all we can do is sports and we are not as smart as other races. So, I try to prove them wrong by showing them that I am smart and capable of doing what I put my mind to.” Tyler also commented, “I know that there aren’t many African American leaders, see myself rising to the top and showing others that they can do it also.”

## **Clothing**

These adolescent male students wore conventional clothing. They shied away from clothing styles of the popular youth culture. No participant wore ethnic garb or clothing which would be considered outside of the mainstream. They were observed wearing casual to business suit attire. All participants were well dressed.

### **Playing the Game of Being a Good Student**

All of the students developed a series of characteristics, which supported high achievement. These qualities included personally recognizing their learning styles, seeking help from peers and teachers, adopting achievement ideologies, and becoming involved in extracurricular activities.

Six students acknowledged their learning style preferences. They developed various understandings about how they learned best. For example, Jacob felt that he quickly comprehended what he read. He explained, "I realize that it takes me less time to read and to comprehend than do some of my peers." Although he sometimes procrastinated, he felt that he performed "better under pressure." Jacob added, "Mostly, I am focused and determined to accomplish my goals. That is how I get things done." Joshua saw himself as a concrete person who attempts "to make an impression and make the mark count." William acknowledged being an auditory learner. He explained, "I like listening. I learn better by listening. If I heard it, I am able to understand it much better." Jacob disclosed, "I like to figure things out." Tyler was basically a tactile learner. He explained, "Although I can do it, I really do not like Math. It is not interesting to me by itself. Math on a sheet of paper does not grab my attention. I am an analytical person. Although I like to solve problems and tear things apart, math problems on a page do not appeal to me." He added, "My teachers told me that I need to explore creative approaches.": he elaborated, "I like the practical application." Joshua asserted, "I got turned onto history and I started seeing possibilities of leadership or involvement in shaping things." He also said, "I see myself as an analytical person. So, if a class offered a chance for discussion, I like it. Frankly, it is great to hear the debate. I like to analyze different issues." Likewise John commented, "I like to analyze things; to improve

things. This class allows me to learn new concepts and to test them.” Michael shared, “Most of the time, I like to experience the learning situation. That is how I learn best.” He said, “I want a hands-on experience.” James also indicated, “I am a visual learner, who is anxious to learn. I am not satisfied unless I learn more things that I can see versus things that I have to imagine. If I can see it, then I can understand it. That is why I am especially drawn to math and science, because I can see the concepts. For example, if you look at the stars, I can see the patterns and I can learn other important information about them.” These African American male adolescents used their awareness of learning preferences to enhance their learning experiences.

These African American male students created their own cooperative learning situations to enhance academic and social outcomes. They networked with other high-achieving students. Because they found few high-achieving African American males, they networked with academically successful students from other ethnic groups. To bring this about, they spent time with each other during week and weekends.

Each participant demonstrated self-determination and agency. They learned to set and to act on their goals. To accomplish their aims, they set appropriate priorities and worked on the projects that were important. These adolescents also developed effective study habits. For example Chris stated, “I think I have good study habits. I am a much more serious student than I was in the earlier grades. I know the benefits of getting the most from my studies.” All of the participants had a well-defined purpose. They knew exactly what they wanted. Consequently, the thoughts and opinions of others did not easily influence them.

Participants often assessed progress towards their own goals. They derived great satisfaction from accomplishing their goals. Michael indicated:

“I am always striving to do better. This is my ongoing goal. Whenever I reach the current goal, then I will set a goal with higher standards. Sometimes, like everyone else, I will miss my goal. But when I fall down, I just get up and try again. This time, I will try harder. If I find a fault in myself, I will try to fix it.”

When asked to describe himself, Michael stated, “I am preparing to support a family and

myself in the future.” Chris asserted, “I know that I can not experience some of the successes and have some of my dreams come true, unless I get a good education. I see it as an avenue to get to the best colleges, and getting a good job. It is a means of doing what I want in the future. I like interacting with my friends at school and meeting new people.” Chris also clarified, “I want to perform well, so I can have some of the privileges that I want in life.”

They offered various reasons for their high achievement. Michael stated, “First, I believe that I have done well in school because I had some encouragement at home. Even when I was not as serious in school, I was still encouraged at home.” These students felt that they had a sense of control over their academic outcomes.

### **Perception of School Achievement**

These students felt that their academic performance was superior. Although his grades were excellent, Chris felt that he had not always performed as well. He indicated:

“In elementary, I did well although I had some behavior problem. In middle school, I dropped down a little at the beginning and improved at the end. In high school, I have done well. I learned how to manage my time and to maximize my learning experience. I think that I have good study habits. I am a much more serious student than I was in earlier grades. I know the benefits of getting the most from my studies.” William felt that he made “good grades.” He indicated, “They are primarily A’s & B’s.” Likewise, Jacob asserted, “My performance has always been pretty good. My grades are average to above average.” John echoed, “My grades have been good all through school. I have been on the honor roll or the dean's list several times.” Michael commented, “I think that I have performed well.” He added, “There is, however, always room for improvement. I think of myself as an above average student.” James stated, “I have performed slightly above average throughout my school experience.” Tyler wanted to improve his academic performance, although he had a high grade point average. He explained, “I am doing great in school. I know that I could do better, but football takes a big chunk of my time. I have been recognized for doing well academically, while remaining on the team. Of course, football is a part of my education and I am also performing well in it also.”

These African American male participants not only had superior grades, but they also maintained positive attitudes towards school. For instance, Chris stated, “School is alright. I know that I have to do it if I want to get through life.” William indicated, “I feel good about school. I like going to school.” He felt that learning was his job. He explained, “My job right now is to learn and to have fun. It is to get a good education.” William reasoned, “School is a place where formal learning takes place; where teachers help shape our learning skills. I like the constant challenge that comes with learning new things. I like interacting with my friends briefly between classes. Above all, I like seeing myself grow. One student focused on the social aspects of schooling. Tyler depicted school as a social unit. He explained:

“School is a smaller world within a larger world. It is everything that you see in the community or the real world. There are some exceptions. The same thing that happens in school happens in the community. It is just a smaller place. In school, we have friends and enemies. We have people who conduct business. In school, we have everything.”

Another student was attracted to the social interactions. Joshua indicated, “School is interesting. It is where I interact with different types of people. It is a place where I have an opportunity to watch how people operate. That is a learning experience within itself. There are some academic aspects of school that I enjoy. I love history and love talking about it.”

Although he basically maintained positive attitudes towards school, James had some mixed feelings. He saw school as a positive place with several disadvantages. The participant acknowledged the academic and social benefits of school, but a few of his “classes did not academically challenge” him. James explained, “Well, I’ll say school is a drag, but I know it’s a reality, and something that has to be accomplished. Some times, I am not really challenged in school and it becomes a drag, but there are some courses that are pretty exciting and it keeps me motivated.”

Four students, who took academically challenging classes, maintained positive perceptions of their experiences. For example, Chris explained, “I try to take honors classes, because I like the challenge.” It was a part of his strategy for better outcomes. He reasoned, “

I try to spread my classes so that I am not overwhelmed. This is one of the ways that I have managed my time and worked smart.” Despite the fact that William had “mixed feelings” about some of his classes, he acknowledged, “Some of them I do not like, but I do my best, because I know that I need the skills.” He explained, “For example, AP Statistics is not one of my favorite subjects, but I can see the need for the course. I have done well in that course because I know that I will need it in the future. I apply myself because of its usefulness to me.” Tyler also felt good about his advanced classes, although he felt that “come at a bad time.” He explained”

“During football season, my schedule is hectic. We have four classes with the block schedule. I have four major honors courses. And during football season, it is just not a good time to have heavy courses like that. Although these courses are heavy, I have struggled to maintain a GPA of 3.29.”

Although Joshua enjoyed his classes, he preferred being obscure. He stated, “When I go class, I try to be quiet.” His peers, however, often pulled him into class discussions. He explained, “ It seems like I’m automatically picked for a discussion or a response. It always seems like they want me to become a leader and I relish it.” In spite of his reluctance, these discussions stimulated him. Joshua felt that his performance in school was a reflection on his family. He argued, “I like the attention, but it’s not all about attention. It’s about reflection on my family and me. I prize and value that.” James also enjoyed his classes. He explained, “Mostly, all my classes are fun. I enjoy them all to some degree. I would not pick them and not enjoy them.” Although he preferred some more than others, James had less appreciation for uninteresting classes. He explained, “Some classes get a little boring from time to time. It seems like we are repeating the same concepts. We are going over the same thing from time to time. That is when things become uninteresting.”

All of the participants recognized the importance of performing well in school. Some of them wanted to please themselves and significant others, while the others recognized the social and economic benefits of performing well in school. Chris reasoned, “I want to perform well, so I can have some of the privileges that I want in life. I want to go to a good college, to earn a good salary, and to live the good life. More importantly, I want to please

my mother.” William asserted, “Getting a good education is important to me. It will help me to do well in life. Therefore, I give my best while I am in school.” For one student, performing well in school was a personal matter. Jacob indicated, “It is important to do well because I do not want to let myself down. If I do not do well, I let myself down, because I know that I am capable of doing well. Part of it is also my ego.” Tyler reasoned, “If I do not give my best in school, I will have cheated myself. I will have stolen from myself. I would pay for it in the future. By doing well in school today, I am building a foundation for the future. Because I am curious by nature, I could not settle for mediocrity.” Joshua had personal and familial reasons for performing well in school. He indicated, “I have set high standard for myself. If I do well, then I will not disappoint myself. Since I know my capabilities, I do not intend to perform beneath my capabilities. I do not want to disappoint my mother. I want to show her that her sacrifices were not in vain. She has raised a capable son and I will not let her down.” John saw it as an opportunity to build a foundation for the future. He argued, “School is an introduction to the rest of my life. If I want a good rest of my life, then I must get a good start. For this reason, it is important for me to perform well in school.” Michael stressed, “It is important to do well in school, because it is my job to go to school. If I did not want to do my job well, then going to school would be in vain. Frankly, I have every intention to do my job well.” James cited several reasons why he should “do well in school.” He stated:

“For one reason, my dad is my primary motivator. I know what will happen if I do not perform well in school. There could be long or short-term repercussions. For instance, the long-term consequences, I would have no job, no money, and I would be incapable of helping myself, if I did not complete my educational goals. Short-term, my parents would become upset. I would let down the football team. The coach would become upset because I must maintain good grades to remain on the team. There is a lot of pressure on me to perform well in school.”

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Participants were actively involved in extracurricular activities, which included sports, clubs, organizations, and groups. Tyler was inducted in the National Achievers

Society. He also played football. For two years, Chris participated in the Pre-College and National Achiever's Society clubs. William belonged to the Afro-centric Club, which fostered discussions about events in the Black community. They also sponsored community projects. Also, William participated in the Key Club, which conducted fundraising and community projects. In addition, he was a member of Health Occupations Students of America. This group conducted fundraisers, blood drives and community projects. Jacob participated in the Key, Art, and Biology clubs. Joshua was a member of the national Achiever's Society.

Although they were involved in extracurricular activities, participants juggled academically rigorous schedules. James was a member of the football team. Jacob managed his rigid schedule by opting "not to have an official role" in club affiliations. Joshua served as vice president of the National Achievers Society. John participated only in the Afro-centric Club. Similarly, Michael was a staff writer for the Bridges Newsletter, which was designed to bridge the gap between America and Viet Nam. Although he was also a member of the Marching Band, he drew the line. He explained, "I do not have time for any other organizations." Tyler did not participate in clubs and organizations during the football season. He explained:

"During football season, I am not active in any club. I try to keep my activities and involvement at a minimum during football season. My focus is on my schoolwork and football season has its demands. I have been a member for a year now. I was inducted last year. I am just a member. I am not an officer. I have not been involved in any other groups outside of being on the football team."

Extracurricular activities provided opportunities for mastery experiences. Through his participation on the football team, fellow players viewed James as a "leader." However, James indicated, "I am just fulfilling my responsibilities. I am just doing my job." Aside from developing leadership skills, the student also gained valuable religious and social competencies from "the Fellow Christian Athletic Association." This group of Christian athletes convened every week, listened to speakers and discussed socially relevant topics. In addition, James indicated, "We will share God's Word and get some guidance for life." He

explained, “ These sessions help me to deal with life experiences.” Joshua, Chris, and Tyler also gained leadership skills from his experiences with academic clubs. Michael gained literary skills from his experience as a writer for the school letter. John gained cultural competencies from his participation in the Afro-centric Club.

### **Positive Attitude Towards Homework**

These participants also maintained positive attitudes towards homework activity. James viewed homework as “a priority.” He explained, “When friends ask me to play, I tell them I have a project to do. Mostly, they understand.” Michael was intrinsically motivated to do homework. He stated, “I do it, but I do not always have fun doing it. The reason that I do my homework is that I want to get a good grade.” On student focused on the academic benefits of homework. Tyler pointed out, “For a person who has to experience it, homework is helpful.” He added, “During the football season that is a struggle, but I know that it must be done. Homework is part of the learning activity.” William observed, “I can see the importance of homework. I get to understand the opinions of other people.” Chris acknowledged the practical application of homework assignments. He indicated:

“To me homework is an opportunity to get closer to the subject and to build on what you learned in class. It helps me. Most of the time, homework prepares me for the test.”

### **Doing Homework and Other Assignments with Others**

Three participants often did homework and other assignments with others. James often did homework “just smart people” in his classes, along with “members of the track and football teams.” He indicated, “Sometimes, a few of us get together and study. “William indicated, “A small group of us do homework together from time to time.” Likewise Tyler shared, “If there is something that I am not clear on (homework), I might contact a class friend, especially if I can not get to a teacher.”

One student not only received help from others, he offered tutorial assistance to at least one peer. William explained, “Sometime ago, I became a friend of another student who

was not doing well in school. The fellow student's parents found me and asked me to help the student. His grades picked up." William added, "My third grade teacher recognized my willingness to help others. So, she paired me with the student who was having difficulties in school."

### **Teacher Behaviors**

These African American male students felt that some teachers impacted their lives. They teachers were at various points in their school experience. Their teachers provided advice and support. Because of their close relationships, they also functioned as confidants and provided guidance in academic and social areas. Throughout their interviews, participants spoke of certain teachers, who communicated empathy and concern. They saw these traits as important factors the student-teacher relationship. In some instances, the student-teacher bond seemed to have affected the student for the rest of his school experience. In contrast, some teachers were characterized as being biased or disorganized.

Participants were encouraged and motivated by certain teachers. For example, Tyler recalled a helpful math teacher. He asserted, "Ms. Bradley ...helped me out a lot. She was my in-school friend. I could count on her. I'd stop by there everyday after football practice." he added, "Even though I was tired, I'd always stop by to talk to her. She helped me out. She cared about me. That was important. When I had problems, she listened to me. She encouraged and reassured me. When I had problems with schoolwork, she helped me."

Joshua had several teachers who motivated and assisted him. He explained, "My kindergarten/first grade teacher, Ms. Shields instilled in me a lot as far as academics. In the second through fifth grades, I was privileged to have the same teacher." One of his teachers developed a close relationship with members of his family. He explained, "Ms. Perry was very close to our family. She knew my mother and grandmother very well. Another affable teacher positively affected him. He said, "In high school, the teacher who has the most impact on me has been my history teacher. He is a nice person and I learned a lot from him." In contrast, Joshua was also upset about a teacher's comments regarding the loss of

“snow days” in school and the “bussing of students.” He inferred, “The implication is that if we did not have these Black kids bussed in here, we would not miss school and we could make better scores on the test.”

William acknowledged two teachers who helped him. “A couple of my teachers gave extra support.” He named one of them, “Mr. Prim, who teachers honors Physics, makes the class interesting and the subject becomes easy to learn.”

John mentioned two elementary school teachers who helped him adjust socially. He explained:

“When I was a child, I was very quiet and reserved. I hid myself in books. I learned to read early and I read everything that I could read. I did not make a lot of friends. In fact, I shied away from most of my peers. Two of my teachers were made me their special project. They thought that I was a good student, but they felt that I should interact with my peers. They made me feel that I belonged and that I was special.”

Jacob gleefully acknowledged support from his teachers. He like most of them. Jacob asserted, “Most of my teachers are interesting. Some of them just teach bad subjects. He quipped, “Most of my teachers have been funny people. They know their subjects. They are likeable people. That helped me a lot.”

Another student felt that his teachers genuinely cared. Chris explained, “Most of my teachers are willing to help. They do not want students to fail. They are good teachers. They offer extra help both before and after school.” He felt the same way about administrators. He said, “We have good administrators. They keep everyone in class. If someone is messing it up for everybody, they take care of it.”

Another student recalled the competence and commitment of several teachers. Tyler indicated, “I am fortunate to have some good teachers, with the exception of my English class.” Tyler said”

“I have three teachers (in the block schedule), who are pretty cool. One of my

teachers might as well be one of us. Although he has a lot of knowledge, he has learned how to work with students and to maintain a relationship with students. One of my teachers is just about fresh out of college, but he is a good teacher. He might as well be a professor because he is brilliant. My honors history teacher tells it like it is. I am on the same page that he is on. I watch the history channel and I have learned a lot from watching it. My history teacher just makes the subject come alive. That is why we are on the same page.”

The student also had a teacher, who had “some organizational problems.” He maintained, “She is a good lady, but she is not an effective teacher.” He further commented, “In English, I am not getting as much out of it. My teacher does not seem organized. She is still going to school also. And she is widowed with children. It seems like she does not have enough time to organize her classroom presentations. It is hard to keep up with her because she does a lot of last minute stuff. Her lack of structure makes it difficult for me to manage the demands upon my time.”

### **Time Management**

Participants developed time management skills. They juggled extracurricular activities, supervised siblings, performed well in school, did homework, maintained part-time jobs, and had recreational activities. They skillfully allotted their time for these and other activities.

One aspect of time management was evidenced in the amount of time spent doing homework. Participants dedicated a considerable amount of time for homework. The amount of time spent varied in elementary, middle, and high school. Chris indicated, “I spend about two to three hours a day doing homework. On the weekends, I spend about an hour doing homework. In elementary and middle school, I would spend about 30 minutes to an hour doing homework. In earlier grades, I did not care as much. Now, I take my time to get it right.” William indicated, “I spend about an hour and a half each night doing homework. I spend another hour studying.” He added, “I spend about the same amount of time doing

homework in high school that I did when I was in middle school. I did not spend a lot of time doing homework in elementary school; perhaps, about thirty minutes to an hour on some nights.” Jacob shared, “Most of the time, we read out of book in elementary and middle school, we did not have much written homework. I didn’t like classes that you have to get back with teacher. I do not mind doing homework. Most of the time, I spend about two hours doing homework every night.” Tyler indicated, “I spend about one and a half to three hour doing homework each night and about the same on the weekend. He also said, “I spend more time doing homework in high school than I did when I was in elementary and middle school. In elementary school, I spent about a half-hour to an hour. In middle school it was about a half-hour to an hour and a half.” John “spent about an hour each night doing homework. He chuckled, “I guess it was hard for my parents to tell because I was always reading something. I am still that way. In middle school, I worked on homework about one to two hours a day. In high school, I might do homework about three hours a day. It varies, depending on what we are doing in class.” Michael stated, “The amount of homework that I do fluctuates from one to four hours a day. It depends upon the class and the assignment. I put more time into my AP classes. I realize that I am already doing well in my other classes. So, I focus on my Advance Placement classes. He reasoned, “Homework is a necessary toll for learning, although I do not always like that tool.” James disclosed, “The amount of homework depends upon what is happening in my classes. Basically, I adjust according to the load. Basically, I will average probably 1 hour a day doing homework. Sometimes, I will work about two or more hours a day.”

### **Fun Activities**

In spite of their rigorous schedules, these African American male students found time to become meaningfully engaged in pleasurable activities. Aside from typical recreational activities, six participants still found time to study on the weekend. Tyler indicated, “On the weekend, I like to watch college football games. Sometimes, I go to the movies, pick up my friends and ride around. I love to ride around. Sometimes, I drive to the airport or a lake, just to see something different. I might rides all day, go to the movies, eat, and go home.” Chris revealed, “I play sports, go to the movies or to the mall on the weekends. Sometimes, I hang

out with my girlfriend.” William noted, “On the weekends, I generally play video games, basketball or go to the mall. I will study a little and I work. Sometimes, I will spend a little time with friends.” Jacob shared, “On the weekend, I also spend a lot of time reading and studying.” Joshua’s weekend primarily involved part-time employment. Since he got off work late at night, he would generally, come home and I get ready for bed. When I wake up the next morning, I do my daily activities.” John balanced his time with reading and entertainment. He shared, “On the weekend, I like to catch up on my readings. Some of it might be school related, but most of my readings are for my pleasure or my growth. It’s that time when I generally do some of the things that I wanted to do during the week. Sometimes, I will watch sports or animals on television. We have choir practice on Saturdays. Sometimes, I will go riding with my dad.” Michael revealed, “Usually, I stay home and I do homework. On Friday nights, I generally stay home and I watch a movie and eat something easy, like hotdogs or hamburgers. It is sort of like a family night. Sometimes on Saturday, we might go to the movies or do something that we just want to do. On Sundays, we go to church. If we are not working in the ministries, we will go to the first service. Afterwards, we usually stay at the church for an hour to four hours, since we are involved in the church.” James disclosed, “Sometimes I will go out and play games, but there are times when I seriously buckle down and do my work. If there’s a big project on the line, I go and do it first. I have learned to set my priorities. At this time, schoolwork is a major priority, since it is my job. I spend a lot of time studying and completing projects on the weekend. If there is a big project, I will dedicate all my time to that project. Sometimes, I will spend a whole day working on it. By using this approach, I do not have a lot of stress because I am able to manage my time and get more accomplished.”

Past-time activities were often structured during the weekend. Each participant had a routine. Tyler indicated:

“On the weekend, I spend a lot of time doing homework and studying. Sometimes, I will spend time with friends and families. I might go to the movies. At night, I watch television, do homework, and go to sleep. I try to keep my room clean. I try to keep the lawn mowed. Sometimes my Dad will mow the yard when I have a football game. I wash clothes. In the afternoons, we have football practice, but after that, I come

home and get the work done and go to sleep. Since mom and dad take care of the inside of the house, I try to take care of the outside, such as mowing the grass. I do not have a specific time, but I know that I should get in around eleven.”

Other students had a similar practice. Chris stated, “On weeknights, I will watch television or get on the computer after I complete my homework. I like to watch basketball games and sitcoms. I do not have a special time to get in on the weekend. As long as my mom knows where I am and that I am all right. I will get in at about ten or eleven o’clock. On the weeknights, I do not go out.” William disclosed:

“Basically, my dad guides me on weeknights. He keeps me focused. Most of the time during the weeknights, I will spend working, studying or doing homework. Sometimes, I will watch a little television. I judge things by my work schedule. Although studying is a priority, I have learned to write down my schedule and manage my time.”

Jacob was self-regulated. He stated, “I do not go out on weeknights, as a rule. Sometime, I might go out and eat once a month or go to a movie. My parents give me flexibility about the time that I get in at night. On the weekend, I try not to over do it. I don not want to break my regiment.” Joshua detailed his general schedule. He said:

“After school on Monday and Wednesday evenings, I have a lot to do in planning for DECA. I’m at school until 5:30 p.m. When I get home, I do homework and I eat. Sometimes, I watch Monday night football. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I get home, plan for DECA, do homework, eat, and watch a little TV. I am very good at managing my time. I have to be in at night at 9 p.m., if I go out. On the weekend, I unwind, watch a little television, spend a little time with friends, study, and do chores.”

John spent much of his spare time honing other skills. He stated, “When I am not reading about current events in my spare time, I am usually near the computer. I like to get on the Internet. I can spend all day on the computer, looking up stuff and playing video games.” He added, “On weeknights, I watch about an hour or a little more watching television. I like to watch sitcoms. Most of the time, I do not go out during weeknights. On the weekend, I get in at least by 11:30.” Michael gave a general outline of his schedule. He revealed, “Usually, I come home and do homework. I might spend about one to four hours a night. Sometimes, I

might stop and cook dinner. Then, I will finish my homework. If I have time, I might watch a little television. On Monday nights, I have band practice at the church at 7:30. On Wednesdays, we have services at the church. Friday is basically a family night. I do not usually go out on weeknights. It is not really wise to go out at night.” James noted, “I like to watch and to play football, basketball, and hockey. I watch movies, play video games, and spend a lot of time on the Internet. During weeknights, I do homework. I have six classes in school. Each day, I have four classes with the block schedule. As a result, I have to stay focused and to be sure that I have mastered the information and materials during the semester. Then, we move to the other subjects. Although, we only have four classes, we can get a lot done, but when I have four tests, it can be a real strain and it takes much more concentration. During weeknights, I am at home. I do school work and a few chores when I get in. During school nights, I get in about 10:30. On the weekend, the time that I get in varies. Sometimes, I spend the night with a friend.”

During leisure periods, all participants engaged in educationally enhancing activities. They read magazines, books, and other materials. Tyler reported, “I like to read military stories, like Star Drill, and novels.” Chris indicated, “I like to read magazines; usually Rap magazines. I enjoy Rap a lot. I also enjoy reading basketball magazines.” William revealed, “I enjoy reading entertainment, sports and science magazines.” Jacob indicated, “I enjoy reading nonfiction books.” Joshua announced, “I have read more in the past few months than in three years. I’ve read about 500 pages in the Bible. I also read other books that supplement the Bible, especially those that are published by Jehovah’s Witness.” John shared, “I read a lot. If it gets too quiet, I will probably pick up a book. I read a variety of things. They include magazines like Newsweek and the stock market.” Michael stated:

“If I am not reading a textbook, I will read a mystery. I like the Left Behind theory. Sometimes I read inspirational books, like Celebrating Teens Who Are Saying Yes to God. When I watch television, I like the news and sitcoms. I like Frazier, Everybody Loves Ramon, and Friends. I have very limited television consumption.” James commented, “I know that there is a difference from what you want to read, what you don’t have time to read, and what the school system makes you read. Often, students are assigned readings, but we don’t particularly like to read them. For the most part,

some students perform poorly in English, because they're just not interested in that book. I try to get beyond my personal preferences when I face situations where the book is not interesting. Sometimes, this is a considerable challenge, although it is my job to master the information. I love anything that's action oriented, like Tom Clancy and Great Expectations."

For at least five African American male students, television watching involved entertainment and educational enhancement. Tyler revealed, "I like watching cartoons and the history channel. I like to see what went on before I came about." Chris stated, "I like to watch comedy and sports on television." William indicated, "I watch sports, science and sitcoms. I also like music videos. Sometimes, I will watch ESPN." Jacob disclosed, "I also enjoy watching the Discovery Channel and BET." Joshua, declared, "I don't watch much television. For me, television is often a break from the real world."

## **Dating**

Half of the students did not actively date. James never dated. He admitted, "I am not dating at this point in my life." Although William dated previously, he pointed out, "I am not dating at this time." Joshua felt that dating was "not a priority." He asserted, "I don't date." This student argued, "I feel like dating should be restricted to when you want to get married. I like someone now, she's special to me, but at the same time, we enjoy each others company, but it's not dating." Likewise John disclosed, "I am not dating any one. I have gone to the movie with a female, but it was not a date." For him, "It was just an activity." He explained, "I do not want to date right now, because I do not want to lose focus. Dating is time consuming and distracting. I do not want to date until I finish high school." Michael went also out socially with a friend. He admitted "I do not date frequently, but I went to a dance with a church friend."

The remaining four participants occasionally dated. For example, Chris "dated the same girl for a year." He had "not dated anyone else." Chris described her as being "smart and athletic." He said, "We go to the movies, mall, or just hangout at each other's house. I

think we might get married after college. Tyler felt that dating prepares both parties for later life. He reasoned:

“I do something like dating. I believe all young ladies are treated badly. Most of them, later in life will give birth to a child, so we should start early treating them well, and then they’ll treat their children well. At this stage, they should know that someone loves them, so they can transfer that love to their children when they are born.”

Tyler was not serious about dating. He said, “I might take a lady out, to the movie that’s it. I haven’t had a girlfriend in a few years.” He explained:

“Girlfriends are like an introduction to marriage, like being bound. Dating is like hanging out ‘buddy-buddy.’ If you have a girlfriend, it is as if you are bound because you are preparing for a more serious relationship. It is an early taste of what marriage is like. For example, a young man feels if this happens now and we do not have rings on, you can imagine what it is like when she wears your rings and you go through the ceremony.”

## **The Future**

All of the African American male participants held positive optimistic outlooks on the future. They had specific plans for the future. Tyler narrowed his plans, “I want to be a NFL star. He added, “In the future, I also want to do something like being an architect and building a bridge and make a difference. Tyler explained, “I ran my own landscaping business during the summer. I learned about plants in middle school and I enjoy working with plants. Although I want to be a NFL player, I am still interested in studying horticulture.” He briefly vacillated, “I might change to engineering, because I like working outside.” Chris revealed, “After college, I plan to get married. I want to study athletic training or sports medicine in college.” William indicated, “I want to be rich. I plan to go to college and study architectural engineering. Afterwards, I plan to get a good job. I want to take care of my parents when they become old.” Similarly, Jacob disclosed, “Basically, I want to be rich. My goal is to become successful at a very young age. I want to be secure and to retire at the age of thirty years old. Then, I want my money to work for me while I

explore the world.” Jacob planned to “start a business.” He does not, however, “want to be sucked into the turmoil of working everyday.” Joshua indicated, “I want to travel. I have always wanted to be a missionary. He added;

“I want to go to college. I don’t think the definition of full-time student would apply to me. I wouldn’t be living on campus. Hopefully I’ll be able to go somewhere in the area where I’ll be able to drive and still live at home. I’d like to do some missionary work where I go out for about 70 hours a month and talk to people about the ministry, while I’m in college.”

John also had plans. He indicated, “I want to be a physicist or a biochemist.” He planned “to go to a major university” and complete “graduate school.” He said, “After I graduate, I want to get a summer job and save a few dollars for college. Then I plan to go to college. I want to observe some people who are successful in my area of study.” Michael stated, “I plan to go to college and major in biology or pre-med.” He continued, “Afterwards, I would like to go to Duke University medical school. I want to start my own family practice, along with a few of my friends. I plan to get married and start a family. After the business grows, I plan to allow some junior partners to run it, and I will live off the proceeds.” He asserted, “The only thing that would change my decision is if God told me to do otherwise. And He gave me a list of things that He wanted me to do. I believe that God wants me to fulfill my dreams and accomplish my goals.” James wanted to recapture his father’s dreams. “My dreams are similar to my dad's dreams. My dad wanted to fly, but he couldn’t because his vision was not too good. They were offered him a chance to become a helicopter pilot. I will become a pilot. I do love to become one; it has always been my childhood dream. He added, “I will study aviation after I finish high school.”

### **Parental Pushing**

Whether they were from single parent families or two parent homes, all participants were pushed by their parents to excel in school. For example, John indicated, “My mom is the one who motivates me academically, while my dad gives me spiritual and social directions.” Chris commented, “But I am closest to my mother because she helps me with a lot of things. She pushes me to achieve.” Michael stated, “Both parents push me to excel

academically. They encourage me to reach my potential. They use positive reinforcement to keep me motivated.” He also stated, “My parents are special because they push me to do many things. They encourage me to do my very best.” Matthew pointed to his mother. He said, “She was an excellent student and she has high expectations for me as a student and as a person. Basically, she influences me to strive for high standards in behavior, cooking, and learning.” He also indicated, “My dad is the same way. He is an encourager in different ways.” John commented about both parents, “They have given me the foundation that I need to help me to survive. My parents are not only a role model for me, but they are also a model for other people.” James shared, “Both my parents are special to me, especially my dad, because he pushes me everyday. He keeps me on target. Mom asks me if I have completed my homework and if I am satisfied with the product. Both of my parents remind me to keep my head up and to stay focused. My Mother encourages me to improve.” Only one student indicated that their mothers pushed them to excel. Chris comments that his mother “keeps me (him) straight.”

### **Personal Compass**

These students possessed a personal compass or a strong religious orientation. Each participant had an early orientation to church. From early childhood, seven of eight participants consistently participated in religious activities. Participants attended religious services regularly with their parents. Tyler indicated, “I am active in my church. I attend every Sunday.” Chris stated, “I belong to a Pentecostal Church. I attend almost every Sunday.” Joshua stated, “The Kingdom Hall is important to me. My spirituality is very important. I do what ever I can to spread the word and help people to grow in their knowledge of Jehovah.” John said, “My parents gave me good exposure to the church. I have been active in the church for as long as I can remember... I have done it all my life.”

All but one participant was involved in religious activities on a regular basis. Jacob shared,

“When I was younger, I attended church regularly, but I do not attend church regularly now. My attendance changed about three years ago. Prior to this, I attended

church regularly. I felt weird because people kept referring to me as Harvey's little brother. I did not like being labeled. I cannot have my own identity when I am "Harvey's little brother!" Also, another brother, Jimmy, was close to going to the seminary. In church, I felt like I stood in their shadow."

Although his attendance was not as consistent as it was three years earlier, Jacob attended church at least twice a month.

Participants valued their religious involvement. John indicated, "Going to church is a part of me. He insisted, "It is where I get my focus on life and what God expects me to do with myself, and for other people." William stressed, "It gives me faith and hope." For Joshua, he had become a religious leader, who was responsible for "spiritual talks." Michael expressed, "The church has changed my life. I am enthusiastic about my church. The only way for me to learn is to have a relationship with God." He saw a connection between education and his spiritual orientation. "Schooling is the job that I have right now. Learning is what God has called me to do right now." Tyler expressed, "Church is not only my religious sanctuary, but it is also a place a place that frees me of my burdens." For him, it was also a place of affirmation. "When I am in church, I know everyone is loved and everyone loves." He further clarified, "I learn in that atmosphere." He added, "I have learned things about God and my responsibilities in life." Tyler acknowledged, "I can not do without church as a part of my life. Church keeps me grounded." Chris testified, "I like going to church because I know that I can use the lessons throughout life." William stated, "My faith is what keeps me pointed in the right direction. It helps me see my role in life and my responsibility to use my talents and abilities to the fullest degree." John proclaimed, "Working for God and learning about his plan for my life is important. My religious foundation helps me to be a person of values and purpose." Joshua stressed, "The church has greatly influenced my life. It has helped me through some really tough times. I must rely on my faith to help me deal with the difficulties that I experience."

Five students maintained vital roles in their religious institutions. Chris helped direct the youth choir and participated in other youth activities. Joshua not only attended services throughout the week, but he also helped conduct field services and spoke on various religious

topics. In addition, Joshua and John were active in missionary efforts. Joshua pointed out, “When I was a child, I had part in a church play. When I was in middle school, I participated in the church oratory contest. I sing in the choir, usher, and I am a member of the missionary department.” Michael served as a youth leader, a singer, and a teacher. He was also involved in the youth ministry, youth band and choir and taught a class. Tyler played the drums. John participated in oratory contests, sang in the choir and participated in youth missionary. These African American males participated in various activities in the church.

Their religious involvement provided a moral compass and an outlook on life. For example John asserted, “Working for God and learning about his plan for my life is important. My religious foundation helps me to be a person with values and purpose.” Chris pointed out, “My pastor gives life’s lessons. I like hearing him to get advice. I like going to church because I know that I can use the lessons throughout life.” William explained, “Religion is important to me. It is my way of returning praise to God.” He added, “Through worship, I am able to show my thanks and to get stronger in my faith.” William reasoned, “My faith is what keeps me pointed in the right direction. It helps me to see my role in life and my responsibility to use my talents and abilities to the fullest degree.” Tyler testified, “I cannot do without church as a part of my life. Church keeps me grounded.”

### **Individual Attributes**

In the present study, participants demonstrated several common individual attributes. These characteristics included a sense of autonomy, sensitivity towards others, motivation, positive outlook, problem-solving skills, and realistic aspirations. Examples of these attributes were consistently noted in this study.

Participants in the study had different temperaments. Although all participants were personable, some of them were easygoing and reserved, while others were outgoing. For example, James noted, “I am learning the game of life. I want to know what’s going on.” He added, “I am my own person. Each year, I learn a little more about the person that I am and I am content with just being myself.” Tyler described himself as “a curious person.” He stated,

“I want to know what’s going on. I enjoy knowing what makes things operate.” Tyler also indicated, “Sometimes I break things down and reassemble them. This is the way that I learn concepts and get new ideas.” Chris reported, “I am a nice, intelligent person who is easy to get along with others. I am easy to talk to and an overall good friend”. On the other hand, some participants thought of themselves as replicas of other people.” Joshua stated, “I am like little pieces of a few people. I am a little piece of my mom and dad. My mother does not tolerate a lot. I am like that. He added, “I am structured, strong-willed and a disciplinarian, like my mother. I am also kind, honest, spiritual, and well-centered, much like my dad.”

As evidenced in discussions about their adversities, these students demonstrated a sense of autonomy. They did not see themselves as victims of circumstances, nor did they accept personal weaknesses as being unchangeable. They took responsibility for their actions and were willing to learn from their experiences. For example James stated, “I am learning the game of life. That is what being a student is all about. I am simply learning what others have learned and combining it with my own ideas.” They were able to detach from their environment to maintain outside pursuits. Chris also commented, “I try disproving some of the stereotypes that some people have about African Americans.” He added, “I try to prove them wrong by showing them that I am smart and capable of doing what I put my mind to.”

Participants in the study clearly possessed keen problem solving skills and were able to deal effectively with many of life’s stressors. They sought various solutions to their problems. Most of them came from homes, which had been affected at various points with poverty. Family stressors included family instability, which were associated with separation, divorce, family mobility, drugs, or other problems. Yet, these African American male adolescents developed a number of coping behaviors, which enabled them to deal with adverse circumstances and other challenges. Moreover, these behaviors reflect how they sought to resolve conflicts peacefully.

As a problem solving mechanism, nearly all participants used their skills to navigate their cultural identities. James stated, “As an African American, I have studied history, which

describes our trials and hardships. I try to put it off and not make such an issue as other people in this country would. I do not focus on hardships. I try to ignore them.” In fact, these students learned how to separate themselves emotionally from adverse circumstances and people to accomplish goals and to overcome difficulties. Michael stated, “I try to get them to look at me and not my race.” He said, “It does not matter what color you are, but what you are on the inside.

These African American male youth assumed bicultural identities. Although they identified with their own ethnic group, they adopted some of the cultural affects of the dominant culture. By assuming bicultural identities, they were able to function within the social spheres of both the dominant and non-dominant cultures. However, their friends and social networks often included high performing European American students and other ethnic groups. They also used other coping strategies to deal with discrimination and prejudice.

In the present study, African American males exhibited problem solving skills, which were characterized by their ability to think abstractly and reflectively. In numerous instances, they negotiated the demands of their adverse environments or circumstances. For example Michael stated, “When I fall down, I just get up and try again. This time, I try harder. If I find a fault in myself, I try to fix it.” James also indicated that since “most people just expect me to perform well academically,” “I am motivated to better perform.”

They learned how to make positive decisions. These adolescent males thought about issues confronting them, gave considerable deliberations, and made constructive decisions. In some instances, these urban youngsters avoided crime in their neighborhoods, the lure of alcohol and drugs, and other negative conditions. Instead, they went on to become scholars, star athletes, and class leaders. Prestigious universities and selective colleges sought some of them. These students had the courage to face glaring obstacles and to appreciate opportunities, which were thrust before them. For example, Joshua’s problems alone might have seemed overwhelming to some. Yet, he persisted and became a budding scholar.

These academically successful students juggled complex and demanding schedules, which often included part-time jobs. They kept work hours at a minimum to reduce and avoid interfering with their studies. In spite of part-time jobs and strenuous study demands, they managed to spend time with their friends. Their self-efficacy grew when they engaged in part-time work.

As evidenced in the present study, these African American males possessed a sense of self-reflection, which involves the ability to appraise the environment, plan, and juggle a range of possibilities. They possessed and demonstrated higher order thinking skills. Tyler indicated, “During football season, I am not active in any club. I try to keep my activities/involvement at a minimum during football season. My focus is on my schoolwork and football season has its demands.” These students found various problem solving strategies. As for school, James states, “Generally, I readjust my mind to transform a few classes into a more attractive and pleasant learning experience.”

Some students used self-reflection to navigate stressful situations, which were related to their ethnicity. William explained, “There are definite obstacles that African American males face, just because you are a minority. Basically, I deal with situations when they develop.” He said, “Until such things occur, I put them in the back of my mind. When things happen, I try to find a way to solve the problem to the best of my ability.” Joshua reported, “I don’t feel that I am any different from any 16-year old male who faces problems, issues, and conflicts in his life. At this stage, a lot of issues come up. Like any serious young person, I try to solve the problem before it gets bigger and more troublesome.” Michael said, “Sometimes, when I am not chosen for something, I might think about prejudice and unfairness. But I chase those thoughts away.”

These African American male adolescents had enthusiastic visions of the future and what it held in store for them. They expressed a positive future orientation, with definite plans for their future. For instance, James reported, “My dreams are similar to my dad’s dreams. My dad wanted to fly, but he couldn’t... I will become a pilot.” Tyler commented, “I want to do something big like being an architect and building a bridge and different

structures.” Chris said, “I want to study athletic training or sports medicine”. William indicated, “I want to study architectural engineering.” He also planned to take care of his “parents when they become old.” Jacob disclosed, “My goal is to become successful at a very young age.” He planned “to be secure and retire at the age of thirty.” Joshua said, “I have always wanted to be a missionary.” Michael, “I plan to go to college and major in biology or pre-med.”

It was clear from the interviews that these participants had strong belief in self. They all saw themselves as capable individuals. For example, James stated, “I feel very good about myself. I am convinced that I am capable as a student and as an athlete.” Tyler saw himself as being “dependable.” He said, “I consider myself like someone who if you need I’ll be there for you, regardless of the circumstances”. Likewise, Chris indicated, “I am a kind person who would try to give good advice and not steer anyone in the wrong way.” He envisioned himself as being “a caring and dependable person.” William felt that he was a “good person and a cool guy,” aside from being “smart and dependable.” Joshua stated, “I try to make an impression and make my mark count.” In addition, they all expressed a desire to graduate from high school, to go to college, and to pursue a professional career. Each participant had dreams and goals towards which they were striving.

They used their skills, talents, energies and knowledge to the fullest extent. In this study, participants openly discussed their personal achievements. They mentioned athletic, musical and other skills, which were largely developed outside the school. All of the participants were involved in various clubs, organizations or groups. Students also participated in the Christian Athletic Association, Achievers Society, projects, and other clubs. As a result, they developed athletic, musical and interpersonal skills, which were enhanced by their participants in school-related activities. The self-concept theory suggests how important a sense of self worth is in the development of wholesome individuals and how a healthy self-concept can only be built on real achievements. For example Seligman (1995) suggests that ‘feeling good’ about ourselves can only be predicated on ‘doing well’; thus, if we give students the opportunity to achieve, develop competencies and master skills in a wide range of areas, then self-esteem will automatically follow.

These young people have a sense of direction or purpose in life. With the exception of one, participants were actively involved in religious activities, which contributed to their sense of mission. James stated, “The church has greatly influenced my life. It has helped me through some really tough times. I rely upon my faith to help me to deal with the difficulties that I experience.” Tyler said, “I can not do without church as a part of my life. Church keeps me pointed in the right direction.” Chris indicated that he received “lessons throughout life” from his church orientation. William clarified, “Through worship, I am able to show my thanks and to get stronger. My faith is what keeps me pointed in the right direction. It helps me to see my role in life and my responsibility to use my talents and abilities to the fullest.” Unlike the others, Jacob attended church regularly until three years ago, when his family experienced changes. He also felt that he “stood in the shadows” of his brothers who were significant figures in their church. Joshua reported, “My spirituality is very important. I do whatever I can to spread the word and to help people to grow in their knowledge of Jehovah.” John is also involved in the choir and in community missionary activities.

The religious involvement of some of the participants provided opportunities to use their talents. Tyler plays the drums. Michael sings in Youth Band and Youth Choir. He is also involved in the Youth Ministry. Joshua is preparing to be a missionary. He uses his interpersonal and oratory skills in his religious activities.

In the present study, participants consistently used time constructively. These high school students spend one to three hours a day doing homework. When they were in middle school, they spent one to two hours doing homework. Some of them participated in extra-curricular activities, which involved periodic commitments after school. Several of the participants spent time in practice of music, computers, and other arts. In addition, participants were judicious in the amount of time spent “hanging out.” They structured their lives and priorities.

All of the participants associated with a small group of like-minded peers. Their peer associates were primarily students who shared classes or other activities with participants.

For instance, Chris stated, “I have a couple of close friends and a lot of associates. Basically, they have been in classes with me in the past.” Jacob disclosed, “I have a few friends. We have some of the same classes.” Tyler echoed, “Most of my friends are in the same grade. We take some of the same classes.” Joshua clarified, “I do not have many friends in school... Now, I am focusing more on my schoolwork.” John stated, “I have a hand full of friends in school.” Michael disclosed, “There are about seven or eight people who make up my circle of friends...I have at least one class with my friends.”

These African American males had friends who were basically high achievers. William indicated, “They do well in school. I also have a few friends who do not do well in school.” Jacob disclosed, “In my classes, everyone is at a higher level. It makes things go a lot easier. There are no disruptions and no one acts up, because they really want to be there.” In this regard, Jacob indicated, “I would have a hard time dealing with students who are not on my level.” He stated, “It really does not feel right.” Joshua revealed, “Basically, they are people who are in my honors and advanced classes.” Although James’ friends were primarily members of the football team, he reported, “The rest of my friends are just smart people who are in my classes. Sometimes, these are the same people.”

### **Family Factors**

Several networks existed to support the achievement of these African American male students. Their support system consisted of family members, who wanted them to succeed academically. Family members invested the capitol of time and resources to help them achieve their goals. Moreover, these networks served to strengthen and to enable these male students to excel.

As revealed in the study, participants had relationship with at least one caring parent. Parents gave them much needed attention, particularly during their formative years. Throughout their schooling, parents also provided considerable support. For example, Chris indicated, “I am closest to my mother because she helps me with a lot of things. She pushes me to achieve.” He also stated, “I can talk to her about most anything.” He added, “I feel sort

of close to my dad. We can relate to each other. He pushes me, but not as much as my mom does. He tells me the consequences of failure. He gives me guidance.” William mentioned closeness to a sibling. He said, “I am closest to my brother because we are about the same age. He is eighteen years old. He is like a friend and a peer. He gives me guidance and advice. Next are my parents. They also give me support, advice and guidance.”

Their caring environment included stable supportive family members. John disclosed, “I come from a small family, but we are close. I have three uncles, who are around almost all the time. One of my uncles has expressed interest in my schoolwork. He used to give me little rewards for doing well in school. When I was not as on top of it, he would give me advice.” Much like John, Joshua had caring relationship with his uncles. “On my father’s side, I have four uncles. On my mother’s side of the family, I have two aunts and one uncle. I can depend on them. They mean a lot to me. They are willing to help me if I need them.” Not unlike other participants, William had several relationships with caring family members. He said, “My uncles are significant people. They give me instructions on life. They let me know that they are there for me.” As a result, parents were not isolated and overwhelmed by adverse circumstances. The supportive network also seemed to have helped these students to cope.

Aside from their family system, their caring environment included neighbors and significant others. John recalled, “I am close to my disabled neighbor. He is a role model because he cares for people.” These students often developed closeness as a result of shared interests. James felt close to a cousins, who was about the same age and they spent a lot of “time together.” He was also close to uncles because they “shared some experiences” “sports,” “technical” and “artistic” interests.

Family support and encouragement helped these African American male students, who bounced back in spite of adversities. Their parents held high educational expectations for their children. Parental expectations wielded pressure to remain engaged in school and toward high achievement. For example, James revealed that his mother “makes sure that we are on task.” He further clarified, "My dad pushes me every day." He keeps me on target. My

mother encourages me to improve.” They “always remind me to give that little extra effort and to complete my assignments.” Similarly, Darren confirmed, “My parents keep me in line.”

Although these students were aware that their parents faced adversities, their parents modeled resiliency. For example, John’s father modeled dealing with adversities. John explained, “From him, I learned to focus on the big picture. I watched my dad deal with family health and financial problems with a cool head. I know that some people would have folded but he taught me to visualize the result that I want to happen. In other words, I was taught to keep my eyes on the intended result.” James parents modeled religious dedication, “My mother grew up in a Catholic Church and dad grew up in holiness church. They wanted the church to be an important part of our lives. So, I have always been in the church. I enjoy going to church.” James concluded, “Over the years, I have had my fair share of discipline. I have had my share of days when I was out of line and I needed correction. The ultimate punishment would have been to receive no discipline. Then, I would have a false sense of direction. Therefore, I would be destined to failure.”

All participants reported being disciplined at some point. Various disciplinary approaches were used. The primary method of discipline appears to be “spankings” for serious breaches. Joshua indicated, “It’s not sit down, you got your butt beat, especially for things that were serious.” Chris also clarified, “If I did something wrong, I got a “whipping.” I learned from this. If I did not want to get a whipping, I had to stop doing things that should not do.” John indicated, “My parents generally talked to me when I misbehaved. If I did not get the message, they put me on restrictions. I have not gotten many spankings. The main method involved taking privileges away. Both grandmothers offered support for Joshua, “...whenever I had a problem, whenever I had any kind of issue, I could go to my grandma because I knew that she was going to give me good, sound advice.

Their extended support networks included family, friends, and neighbors. John pointed to an uncle, “He used to give me little rewards for doing well in school.” Chris affirmed, “My great aunt and my mother’s cousins”...“help by encouraging me and giving

advice.” Jacob’s support network included a friend that he met in school. “Sometimes, we study together. We do homework together. We might even go to the movies and hang out.” Joshua also had a neighbor who supported his academic pursuits. “Ms. Williams would ask me about how I was doing in school, how it was good to see me doing so well in school. She always was there to tell me just to “keep-it-up!”

### **School Factors**

These African American students held a positive attitude toward school. Basically, they enjoyed attending school. Michael asserts, “It excites me.” Although he had mixed feelings about some of his classes, William states, “I like going to school. My job right now is to learn and to have fun.” Jacob cites, “It works a lot better when teachers care. I like school, but sometimes teachers make it a process instead of an exploration.” He added, “Some (classes) are a complete waste of time. But, I do well because it is what is expected of me.” Tyler saw the school as a social unit. “School is a smaller world with a larger world. It is everything you see in the community or the real world.” Although he enjoyed the academic trappings of school, Joshua was also drawn to the social aspects of school. He saw it as a place to “interact with different types of people”. “It is where I have an opportunity to watch how people operate. That is a learning experience within itself.” Michael stated, “It is exciting to me. By going to school, I am traveling on the pathway to success. Michael saw it “as an avenue to get to the best colleges, and getting a good job.” One student had a mixed view of school. James asserted, “...I’ll say school is a drag but I know that it is a reality, and something that has to be accomplished.”

Although these students loved school, they had different perceptions of their classes. For at least two participants, the level of support and care from teachers made a difference. James indicated, “Sometimes, I am not really challenged in school, but there are some classes that are pretty exciting.” Tyler reported, “Some of my classes are pretty good, but they come at a bad time.” Tyler is a member of the football team and the block schedule requires intense efforts over a short period.”

It became evident in the study that teacher behaviors impacted these students. These

caring teachers motivated them to learn. Their teachers developed positive and supportive relationships with participants. Chris stated:

“My relationship with teachers grew when they got to know me and I got to know them. When we developed better relationships, I felt more comfortable asking questions. I am impressed that they give up so much of their time to help students. They put their hearts into their work. I have a good relationship with my teachers. Some of them are closer to me than others.”

Michael disclosed, “Some of my teachers have really stood out. Ms. Hawk, my freshman Algebra teacher, and I have a good relationship. I had a little fall in the beginning of my freshman year. She helped me and encouraged me. I still go back to her, sometimes just to talk.” John also indicated, “Some (teachers) have offered assistance, even when I did not ask for it. They have helped prepare me for things that I had not thought about.” Tyler developed an enduring relationship with a caring teacher, “Ms. Bradley, a teacher, is a special person. She helped me out a lot. She was my in-school friend. I could count on her. I’d stop by there everyday after football practice. Even though I was tired, I’d always stop by to talk to her. She helped me out. She cared about me. That was important. When I had problems, she listened to me. She encouraged and reassured me. When I had problems with schoolwork, she helped me.”

Two students sustained relationships with teachers who cared about them. Tyler returned to his teacher “everyday after football practice.” James explained, “...my favorite teachers are those who have shown an interest in me as a person.”

Aside from having caring and supportive teachers, these African American male students had opportunities for meaningful involvement in class. Joshua said, “I try to be quiet in class, but it seems like I’m automatically picked for a discussion or a response. It seems like they (teachers and students) want me to become a leader.” Michael indicates, “Usually, I participate in class and ask questions. My teachers encourage everyone to participate and to be involved in the class.”

Participants wanted teachers who took personal interest in them, as well as in their

academic success. It appears that both interpersonal relationships and personal competence were important to these African American male students. In referring to his teachers, William states, some of his teachers “pushed me forward.” Jacob said, “Most of my teachers expect us to come to class and to put forth the best effort. Since they see me as a capable student, they will not allow me to ease up.” Tyler reported, “My teacher told me that I need to explore creative approaches to math, because I like math on a different level. Joshua noted, “She keeps me focused, especially about my assignments. She helps me focus on my priorities.” On the other hand, one student indicated that he could not achieve as well under a “disorganized” teacher. Michael discloses, “I believe that students learn better when class is stimulating and teachers set high goals for students.” James commented, “My favorite teachers are those who have shown an interest in me as a person. They take time to guide me and to show me the ways of life.” On the other hand, he indicated that one teacher “patronized” him, and he was “convinced that my (his) performance is not great.”

Students felt that their relationships with teachers contributed to their performance. Michael put it best, “My relationship grew when they got to know me and I got to know them. When we developed better relationships, I felt more comfortable asking questions.” Student felt that these relationships nurtured the emotional and cognitive lives of students, reinforced motivation and learning, and touched both the hearts and minds of students. Tyler said, “I worked harder for those teachers that I felt cared about me. Some of them found ways to show they cared about me. That made me feel that they respected me as a person and they wanted me to succeed in life, not just in their classroom.”

These African American male students involved themselves in activities beyond the classroom. All of the participants were involved in at least one extracurricular activity. Such activities increased their feelings of involvement, belonging, and self-esteem. In addition, these activities provided a network of people who have shared experiences.

Parental involvement and pushing enabled them to excel. Since school was an important aspect of their lives, a positive and meaningful school experience mitigated home and social problems. For these students, school was often the place where they were prided

meaningful experiences, had opportunities for mastery, had positive and supportive relationships, which helped them to cope with their adversities. Therefore, all of these factors must be addressed in understanding why some at-risk African American male students succeed, while others do not. A clear message emerged from the study of African American male students is that these students need teachers who are respectful, caring, listen well, and have a positive attitude to help mitigate risks.

In conclusion, these resilient African American males possessed certain individual, family, and school factors, which enabled them to succeed. These students also seemed to have personal strength and temperament that enabled them to become self-reliant.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Summary**

While it is important to understand why students excel, it is equally important to understand what contributes to the resilience of urban African American male students. In this study, male adolescents exhibited certain factors, which contributed to their resilience. These factors yield valuable insights regarding the reasons why these young people excelled academically in spite of their adverse circumstances.

In the present study, the resilient African American males were self-regulated, believed in themselves, and had feelings of empowerment. These adolescents also demonstrated a sense of autonomy and personal agency when they talked about their lives. They had definite plans and positive views about their futures. They assumed bicultural identities and often denied or minimized racial disparity. They students developed social skills, which enabled them to access social systems. These social systems also impacted their achievement and their self-esteem. Their social competence often served as an adaptive mechanism to an environment or social context, which seems to have been the foundation for the development of a sense of self and self-esteem.

All of the participants had the presence of at least one caring person in their lives. They had someone who conveyed compassion, and who understood the child's behavior. These persons provided supported their academic and social development. Caring relationships included those of parents, grandparents, relatives and friends. In some instances, teachers also conveyed compassion for these African American males. Their caring relationships also gave them the motivation to succeed in school. These African American males were more comfortable and they worked harder for teachers who exhibited caring attitudes.

Although participants came from low-income families, they possessed cultural capital, which included the cultural background, knowledge base, skills and attitudes that

parents transmitted to their children. It also included taste in art, music, manner of talking, and manners (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Parents stressed the importance of education, which helped these African American males to negotiate the schooling process and have high expectations.

In addition to cultural capital, participants possessed social capital, which refers to “social relationships from which a person is potentially able to derive institutional support, particularly support that includes the delivery of knowledge-based resources” (Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch, 1995, p.119). Participants received considerable attention from familiar adults, which assured that they acquire valuable knowledge. These adults also provided support and encouragement. Then again, participants learned social skills, which enabled them to elicit positive responses from others.

In this study, significant adults communicated high expectations to participants. They had at least one parent and a teacher who expected them to perform well. It appears that these expectations served to inspire high rates of academic success. As a result of which were communicated to them, students learned to believe in themselves and their future. Thus, they developed traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and autonomy. On the other hand, teachers who expected less communicated a sense of inadequacy or “patronage,” which did not contribute to their success.

These low-income students established ties with at least one teacher who provided them with useful information about opportunities and instructional assistance. Generally, social networks give children of wealthy and well-educated parents an additional advantage, especially in school (Useem, 1991). However, these students created ties or social networks, which are usually not accessed by those of lower classes.

Participants valued teachers who held high expectations. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) found that when teachers expected students to perform well academically, the students reached the level of expectation. Conversely, when teachers failed to communicate appropriate expectations, student academic performance and growth declined. They often

returned to them years for assistance and guidance after their assignment ceased. Teacher expectations are particularly influential in the development of positive self-images in Black students. These teachers did not use race and poverty as an excuse for low performance. Positive racial attitudes by teachers are associated with greater minority achievement (Forehand, Regosta and Rock, 1976). In contrast, low teacher expectations have been shown to reduce the motivation of students to learn. Perhaps the most damaging consequence of low teacher expectations is the erosion of academic self-image in students.

African American youth are more influenced by teacher perceptions than by their own perceptions (Garrett-Holiday, 1985). Therefore, African American students are victimized by low teacher expectations, which are too often based on a teacher's preconceived notions about the potential and ability of students of a particular race, rather than on the actual performance of individual students (Williams and Muehle, 1978). These low expectations are capable of destroying egos and contributing to the loss of positive cultural and racial identity in students.

As indicated by participants, a critical element to their resilience involved the development a close and nurturing relationship with at least one caring teacher. Students indicated that they needed to know that there was a teacher whom they knew, to whom they could turn, and who would act as an advocate for them. These teachers made them feel safe, secure, and accepted.

African American male students, in the study, participated in extracurricular activities. As revealed in the study, providing African American male students with opportunities for meaningful participation and involvement fostered academic enhancement. Resilient African American males expressed a sense of belonging and connectedness to their schools, peer groups, sports teams, clubs, groups, and even to other high-achieving students. Participation was viewed as a basic need for these students, which boosted their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

In addition to extracurricular activities, students participated in activities outside of

the school. They were involved in community-based and religious activities. These experiences fostered higher educational aspirations and enhance their self-concept. They kept employment hours at a minimum to reduce interference with their studies. Researchers found that working over 20 hours per week was associated with decreased academic performance (Steinberg & Cauffman, 1995).

In the present study, participants basically liked both school and their teachers. Students who disliked school or the teacher eventually develop hostility or fear and withdraw from school. Fine (1986) concluded that teachers are the biggest school-related factor for dropouts and they often erode student confidence. Consequently, these students attempt to avoid teachers who put them in uncomfortable and humiliating positions. Participants in the present study were drawn to their teachers and they developed respect for their support and commitment.

Aside from benefits derived from schools and teachers who communicate high expectations, participants cited benefits from instruction that appealed to their interests, critical inquiry, problem solving, and dialogue. Several students recognized the way that they learned best, which supported the use of strategies of multiple intelligences.

### **The Problem of the Study**

A considerable amount was known about the environmental characteristics that promote academic achievement for middle-class European American students. However, many of these experiences identified as contributing to academic success are not within the reach of children from low income and minority families. For this reason, the present study focused on those influences, which might stimulate academic achievement in African American male students with limited social and economic resources.

This qualitative study involved the academic achievement of eight African American high school students who possessed many of the background variables and characteristics associated with students who are at risk of failing in school. Yet, these students graduated

from high school in May 2003 with honors diplomas. A university accepted all students for the fall of 2003.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Rather than focusing on adolescents who were casualties of negative factors, the present study focused on African American male students who had not succumbed. The important question then is “Why do some African American children excel in spite of their adverse circumstances, while others do not?” Instead of focusing on individual deficit, the present study focused on individual, family, and school factors that facilitated successful adaptation despite challenging circumstances. Consistent with a scant body of literature, the present study identified characteristics of resilient African American adolescents such as competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future. A network of high achieving friends was characteristic of these African American male students. In addition, these successful students supported the concept of grouping in honors and advanced classes, had supportive adults in their lives, and participated in multiple extracurricular activities.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the multiple social systems that students encountered had an “ecological” relationship to each other. Thus, high academic achievement is most likely when schools, home, and communities contribute to student’s ability, willingness, and opportunity to invest in education. Therefore, resources in one social system may mediate risk factors in another system. For example, a strong bond with a supportive and caring parent might compensate for influence of negative peers. Moreover, resilience was not an inherent characteristic of the individual personality, it involves a relationship between the person and the environment, individuals influence life situations as well as being influenced by them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since resilience is not static, at various points, the individual may respond differently to the similar stressors.

Findings are presented in connection with Bronfenbrenner’s microsystems, which involves the settings in the African American male’s immediate environment. These include the home, school and community. In addition, a common thread of individual characteristics

enabled these at risk African American male students to thrive and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances.

Specific personal attributes of the children that arose from a general description, identified not only with internal assets of the individual but also with external strengths occurring in which the individual grows and develops. Internal assets, found in participants, included a strong commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and strong belief in self. External assets included supportive adults, a network of high achieving peers, extracurricular activities, boundaries, expectations, and constructive use of time.

### **Individual**

In the present study, the lives of African American male students displaying resilient behaviors, responses to critical life events served to ameliorate individual's exposure to risks to their development. According to Garmezy (cited in Benard, 1991), the resilient child is an individual who "works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well"(p.3). In essence, participants possessed four basic attributes. These include social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose or mission. They also had other factors, either in the family school, or community that helped them bounce back from adversity. In the present study, African American males, who defied the odds, displayed these characteristics.

The resilient African American adolescent males in the study possessed dispositional characteristics that elicited positive responses from people who were around them. In the present study, participants were affectionate, sensitive, easy-going, resourceful, responsible, and outgoing. These traits began in early childhood and included a child who had easygoing temperament or disposition, affectionate, and amiable (Werner, 1990; McMillan and Reed, 1993). They had skills to elicit positive attention from others. They also responded in socially acceptable ways and were sensitive to the emotions and conditions of others. Their positive attitudes were often rewarded by helpful reactions by people who were around them. These African American males often sought new experiences, lacked fear and were self-reliant.

They had strong reasoning abilities. These males were intelligent and they often approached problems proactively. Proactive problem solving helped to equip these individuals with the required interpersonal skills for focusing, perspective goal setting and decision-making. They set goals, established priorities, and planned for significant events in their lives. For example, Chris said, “(I) attempt to disprove stereotypes that some people have about African Americans.” As a problem-solving approach, he tried “to prove them wrong and try to show them that I am also smart and capable of doing what I put my mind to.” Strong reasoning abilities made Chris feel invulnerable “to attacks from people who want to bring me (him) down.” In addition, his reasoning ability gave him a sense of empowerment and boosted his belief in self. Chris shared another example of problem solving. He said:

“I know what will happen if I do not perform well in school. There would be long or short-term repercussions. For example, the long-term consequence, I would have no job, no money, and I would be incapable of helping myself, if I did not complete my educational goals. Short term, my parents would be upset.”

Students possessed problem-solving strategies, which enabled them to effect positive change in their environments and to maintain a strong sense of self.

In the present study, African American male participants were autonomous. They took personal responsibility for their success. Joshua provided an example of personal responsibility. He said, “Working has kept me out of trouble.” Joshua also stated, “Because I have somewhere to focus many of my energies, where a lot of the stuff was going through before I had a lot of idle time.” The student felt that: “Taking responsibility for my actions gives control over my life and what ultimately happens to me.” Much like Joshua, these African American male students accomplished tasks on their own and wanted their wishes, beliefs, and opinions considered. Ultimately, these students viewed success as a matter of personal responsibility. Because they constructively used their time, television viewing and employment were minimized. They worked no more than twenty hours a week. In addition, they spent more than eight hour a week doing homework and studying. Furthermore, their leisure readings were often intellectually stimulating and enhancing. Steinberg (1996) found that school achievement was dependent on the way students structure their time, and set

priorities.

These students were self-regulated. This was evidenced in Jacob's response:

“My success is due to the fact that I do not view being in an average class as being normal, or getting average grades as being normal. It is not ok to get average grades... I do not want and get average grades because it is not ok. I think that part of my success is attributed to being focused. When I need to do something, I focus on it and I get the job done.”

William indicated, “Next (to help from my parents), my success is due to the fact that I set goals for myself. I set out to accomplish my goals. I keep my priorities in order.” All of the participants, believed that they could impact their own destinies. Participants set lofty goals and they were determined to reach them.

They also used a variety of mechanisms, such as peer networking and socializing primarily with high achieving students to enhance the likelihood of success. In addition, these African American males often viewed themselves as being successful because they chose to be successful. Researchers found that students who were intrinsically motivated persisted longer, solved more problems and demonstrated more accomplishments in their academic pursuits than those who were extrinsically motivated (Ames, 1992; Pintrich & De Root; 1990). Despite adverse circumstances in their lives, they were confident that they could achieve their goals.

Participants displayed academically purposeful learning behaviors. These young males had high intrinsic motivation, which enabled them to achieve academic success. In which case, they possessed the ability to meet both the social and academic challenges of school. They believed in the relevance and importance of education. As a result, they were motivated to perform well in school. They believed that working hard in school would bring economic and social benefits. They were motivated by a strong desire to succeed and to be personally responsible for their achievement (Peng et. al., 1992; McMillan & Reed, 1993).

The findings indicate that African American male students who have defied the odds

have developed personal strategies to mitigate against the effects of environmental adversities. These adolescent males have developed a strong self-image that provided drive, energy, and tools they needed to face adversities. This strong belief in self is a driving force that allows them to succeed in school and in life.

They did not undertake tasks that they felt were beyond their abilities (e.g., band, sports, drama, and chorus). Instead, they were convinced that they were able to deal effectively with various situations. They sized up opportunities, thus increasing the probability of their success and belief in self. A belief that one is able to master specific tasks leads to perceiving task difficulties as challenging rather than insurmountable obstacles. Therefore, the greater one believes in one's self-efficacy, the greater one will experience affective commitment and satisfaction with the context (Capra et al., 2003).

Several traits interacted to bring about this strong self-image within these students. They include heightened sensitivity, which allowed them to appreciate individual differences in people around them, and internal determination, which provided the strong drive to reach for their goals in life. Self-image was reinforced in these several ways. These young people created a network of high achieving peers who encouraged each other to achieve academically and in extracurricular activities. They were also supported by a variety of adults who provided emotional support, teachers who encouraged and assisted them, and neighbors who cared about them. In addition, they participated in activities, in which they were highly successful, which in turn caused them to believe more strongly in their ability to achieve. Self-concept theory emphasizes the importance of a sense of self worth is in the development of functional individuals and how self-esteem can be built on real achievements (Seligman, 1995).

Male students held definite aspirations and they believed they could achieve their goals. The development of strong belief in self was apparent in all participants. They were confident that their internal and external worlds were predictable, controllable, and hopeful. The participants exhibited this strong belief in self in different ways. In addition, these students developed adaptive distancing, such as the ability to think and act independently

from anxiety-ridden caretakers (Beardslee, 1989).

These adolescents participated in a variety of experiences that allowed them to develop their talents, thereby exposing them to another world out side of their environment. Such experiences included involvement in extracurricular activities, religious involvement, clubs, and organizations. The combination of family and peer support from significant adults, and experiences, in which they saw themselves as valued individuals, enabled their self-esteem to become stronger. Increased self-esteem lead to an increase in motivation, persistence, and self-regulation. These protective factors were noted in the resiliency literature. Nonetheless, they achieved despite the problems they faced, such as poverty and problems growing up in urban settings.

Not only did they use their talents in and out of school, but these resilient young people also used their free time constructively. James felt that being able to manage his time well was the reason that he did “not have a lot of stress.” He added, “Other stressful situations are more tolerable because I do not have the pressure.” Similarly, Tyler kept extra involvement at a minimum during football season in order to focus on school.” All of the students were meaningfully involved in school and community activities. They studied long hours, but they some found time to have fun. Being actively involved in extracurricular activities and athletics at school and in the community evidently provided a refuge for these resilient African American males and helped to promote the growth of self-esteem. Being recognized for special talents was important and being involved in activities that were considered special appeared to increase both self-esteem in young people and the belief in their ability to be successful (McMillan & Reed, 1994).

In this study, successful African American male students identified with the beliefs and values of the dominant culture. All participants associated with a small group of interracial peers. For example, three participants attended multiracial churches and lived in diverse communities. Such supportive relationships helped students to maintain adaptive functioning and self-esteem by socializing the student to adopt bicultural orientations in which the individual learned how to function successfully in diverse cultural contexts

(Nelson-Le gall and Jones, 1991). Taylor (1991) found that multi-racial peer acceptance and mutual friendships were associated with more positive self-perception on the part of African American children. Higher self-perceptions of academic and social competence were associated with being socially accepted.

In spite of their identification with the beliefs and values of the dominant culture, participants developed complex yet strong ethnic identities. These African American males felt as comfortable with their gifted interracial peers as they did with other African American peers who were often not identified as being high performing. Clark (1991) suggests that students who maintained multiracial friendships developed better academic and social outcomes in high school. Clark reasoned that such resilient outcomes were a product of the African American student's mainstream socialization, which was often required to succeed in the middle class culture of schools. Research on the development in African American students suggested that ethnic identity plays a protective role in their lives (Miller, 1999). In the present study, students who identified strongly with their ethnic group were better able to negotiate negative environments, to deal with discrimination and prejudice and to have high self-esteem. Townsend and Patton (1995) indicated that two social dynamics often pull gifted African American students. One pulls in the direction of social acceptance of same ethnic group peers, while another pulls towards mainstream cultural values and norms. Nonetheless, bicultural identities allow high achieving African American students to maintain an African American identity while engaging in achievement oriented behaviors (Banks, 1979).

Their assessment of social, economic and political conditions compelled them to develop alternative responses to situations that prevented them from attaining academic success. As a result, they individuals ascribed to the American achievement ideology, which holds that success will result from hard work and effort irrespective of individual's racial heritage. These students managed to effectively juggle both dominant and non-dominant cultural affects, especially when they interacted with peers and teachers. For example, while interacting within the non-dominant culture, they embodied a set of tastes, schemes of appreciation and understandings, according to their African America groups. While in other settings, they employed dominant cultural affects to gain academic and social mobility. In

effect, they were able to negotiate strategically between their community, peers, and teachers.

Consistent with resiliency literature on African American youth, the present study showed that resilient urban African American male students were self-regulated. According to Brody and Flor (1998), students who are self-regulating in spite of adverse circumstances have been found to achieve better academically and to experience fewer externalizing and internalizing problems. Clark (1983) found that students who were autonomous, independent, highly structured, and hold a positive view of themselves, were more likely to develop their capabilities. In addition, students who possessed a sense of power in intellectual matters generally developed higher levels of motivation and achievement.

All of the participants were actively involved in religious activities. Their churches and other religious institutions taught them how to have positive images of themselves. This was done, primarily through providing meaningful activities, which also boosted their self-esteem. Church activities also provided opportunities to network and to interact with like-minded peers. Most of the participants not only regularly attended religious services, but also they had religious friends. Participants felt that their religious beliefs provided stability and meaningfulness. Michael said, "I can not live without my relationship with God." He asserted, "My religious orientation has helped me to keep focused on the right things instead of distractions... That makes me feel that I can make it, no matter what happens." Researchers suggest that religious people are likely to have an internal locus of control (Jackson & Coursey, 1988). Sanders (1998) found that church involvement had a positive effect on the academic self-concept of African American youth. The researcher also found that church support influenced student attitudes and conduct. Freeman (1986) found that regularly attending church seemed to influence the way African American adolescent males allocated their time, which lead to more time at school or work and less time in socially deviant activity. In addition, involvement in religious activities strengthened resiliency in a number of young people (Ford, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1982). Religious beliefs provided stability and meaningfulness for some individuals, especially during times of adversity.

Besides church involvement, these African American male students were actively involved in extracurricular activities, such as hobbies, sports, or creative interests. Students also participated in clubs, bands, and orchestras. James indicated, “I enjoy being able to compete against others. Athletically, that brings out the best in my performance.” Through success in these activities, their self-esteem grew. In addition, being recognized and honored for these talents were important, and the involvement seemed to have increased belief in self and their ability to succeed (Geary, 1988; Cogburn, 1989).

These African American male adolescents volunteered in community efforts, such as working in the church and community, tutoring, or taking care of siblings at home. These activities appeared to lend a purpose to the difficulties of life as well as enhanced their feelings about other people. Self-efficacy also grew when the students engaged in part-time work, volunteer, or even cared for a younger siblings. In addition, students gained in the areas of personal growth, such as self-esteem, self-awareness, independence, assertiveness, developing a conscious set of personal values and beliefs, openness to new experiences, roles and identities. Besides these, the African American male adolescents grew intellectually (increased thinking skills, ability to learn from experience, adapted and learn new skills, improved attitude toward education). Additionally, students grew socially (increased concern for others in a broadened circle, increased understanding and skills in caring, knowledge of a few service related careers possibilities, realistic ideas about the work world, contacts for future work).

## **Family**

The resiliency literature supported the notion that the family was essential to the development of resiliency (Garmezy, 1985, Rutter, 1987). Researchers pointed out that families passed on the values, norms, and beliefs that children need in order to cope in an adverse environment. In the present study, resilient African American males shared some similar factors. All of the students received plenty of attention from at least one caregiver. All of the participants had supportive family environment that nurtured them. Some of the participants had very supportive two-parent families while other participant’s had primary

support from one parent. All participants perceived that their parents regarded school and learning as important as a means of improving their situation in life. These successful African American male students had an opportunity to establish a close bond with at least one caregiver that gave them considerable attention, particularly in their formative years. This attention enabled them to establish a strong sense of trust. This trust became important in their later interactions with teachers and peers. It was important in their development.

Parental support impacted their ability to bounce back. Family support involved encouragement and assistance given to facilitate student's academic development. Researchers found family support to be an attribute of successful resilient young people (Peng, et. al., 1992). Walker, et. al. (2002) maintained that support could buffer the effects of stress, reduce feelings of alienation, and facilitate positive adjustment. Correspondingly, Joshua believed that support from his parents attributed to his success. He indicated, "I am privileged in a sense. Not so much materially, but I am privileged, in a sense, to know that I have people who care about me and love me." Joshua felt that the care that he received helped him "to feel secure and to know that I can face difficult situations." In the present study, parental support involved encouragement and assistance given to facilitate student's academic development. Research has documented that parenting that was most supportive of adolescent adjustment was characterized by the consistent enforcement of standard of behavior, encouragement and valuing of adolescent's opinions, expectations for self-reliant and mature behavior, and concern for emotional and physical (Baumrind, 1991).

As evidenced in the present study, the social interactions and relationships with parents were linked to school adjustment, including academic success (Dishion, 1990), motivation and interest (Wentzel & Feldman, 1993), and social behavior in school (Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Consistent with these studies, African American male students in the present study experienced parenting that was most supportive of adolescent adjustment. Parenting was also characterized by the enforcement of fair and consistent standards of behavior, encouragement and valuing of adolescent opinions, expectations of self-reliant and mature behavior, and concern for their emotional and physical welfare. Parents demonstrated that they cared about them by setting

reasonable rules and communicating positive expectations. At the same time, parents were receptive when they wanted to talk about their problems.

Participants experienced positive relationships and support within the family. All participants seemed to have a good relationship with their parents with support to do well academically. Parental relationships likely had motivational significance. When relationships with parents are nurturing and supportive, children are more likely to adopt and internalize the expectations and goals that are valued by their parents, rather than if their parents are harsh and critical (Grusec and Goodnow, 1994). Cornell and Grossberg (1987) found that children who excelled academically had closer and more supportive families than students from the general population. Therefore parents, as well as caregivers, hold the potential to create optimal contexts within which learning of goals and values can take place.

These African American male students were socialized to adopt and to internalize adult goals and values. Michael indicated, “My parents expect the best from me. They will not settle for anything less than the best that I can do.” Darling and Steinberg (1993) suggested that the specific goals that parents communicates to their children (e.g., do well in school), combined with meaningful opportunities for achieving these goals (e.g., providing support and learning resources) might explain why some young people who experience effective parenting styles are successful in school, whereas other children are not. According to Grusec and Goodnow (1994), such socialization influenced socially acceptable patterns of behavior.

Effective parenting styles influenced behavioral and performance outcomes by way of goals and values. Parents of these African American male students actively taught these adolescents what they needed to do to become accepted and competent members of society. Tyler indicated, “I learned so much during my childhood. I learned from being disciplined and from watching others.” He felt that parental modeling and “discipline provided structure and security.” In which case, Tyler, like the other adolescents, not only adopted sets of values, standards of behavior, and goals that adults would like for them to achieve, but they also took on qualities that allowed them to deal with stressors.

Parents were assertively involved in their academic enhancement. In the present study, parents pushed these African American males to excel academically. They spent a considerable amount of time with students, took interest in their activities and were proud of their accomplishments. Goldberg (1989) suggested that assertive parent involvement significantly influenced student achievement. The researcher also suggested that children who improve their reading skills received instructional support from their parents.

High parental expectations of academic achievement were evidenced. For example, William indicated:

“I can attribute my success to my parents first. They always wanted me to go to school. They wanted me to do well in school. They expect me to make good grades and to prepare for a good job.”

Parental expectations exerted pressures to remain focused and to work towards high achievement (Peng et. al., 1992). Although parents pushed their children to succeed, minimal parental guidance was evidenced. They inspired a respect for learning as well as the development of positive attitudes toward school and homework habits.

In the present study, extra familiar sources of support from relatives and adult role models were evidenced. Their network of support included older siblings, aunts, uncles, or grandparents who provided them with consistent support. They felt that they could talk to these people about almost anything without being judged. Joshua received support from his grandmother. He said, “Whenever I had a problem, whenever I had any kind of issue, I could go to my Grandma because I knew that she was going to give me good, sound advice.” Michael asserted, “My grandparents are special because they pushed me to do many things. They encouraged me to do my very best. They hold a special place in my life.” Connectedness with adults whose unconditional positive regard is an important factor in the development of resilient behavior.

Family composition seemed to have no impact on the student’s success. Students living with both parents did not affect student’s success or failure. Instead, good parent-child

relationships and supportive attachments appeared to protect the student from the environment.

Parental education seemed to be related to the student's ability to bounce back. It appeared that parent with higher educational backgrounds may have contributed achievement in their children. Their parents held achievement ideologies, which were passed to their children.

For purpose of the study, a frequent move was defined as 3-4 moves during the student's school years. Students moved into new schools within or outside of their present school system. These moves often disrupted their support networks, which consisted of friends and significant teachers. Often children experience lasting effects of moving (Buerkle & Christenson, 1999). Some general effects of relocation included an increased risk of failing a grade in school (Wood et. al, 1993), losing their social support systems and acting out in response to stress and their feelings of loss. Since moving broke ties between parents, children, and members of the community, Coleman (1988) argued that children who moved loss important social connections. These children often experienced a loss of social capital, which referred to those relationships between persons or within communities that were used to foster skills and capabilities of children. The losses in social capital in due course undermined children's educational achievement. Five of eight participants moved frequently during their school years. In spite of these moves and the loss of support systems, these students were able to adjust and to excel in their new environments.

High levels of involvement, support, communication and monitoring characterized parenting. Parents also had trusting relationships with their children. Clark (1983) suggested that African American children performed best when they had frequent dialogues with their parents, parental encouragement of academic pursuits, clear and consistent behavioral limits, and consistent monitoring of how they spent their time.

### **Community Factors**

Aside from individual and familial factors, community factors impacted their ability to bounce back. These African American male students received emotional support within the community. They had at least one supportive friend or neighbor who provided support and encouragement. They also received support from church officials and members. Individuals in their support network provided assurance when they faced a crisis. These people were willing to listen and to intervene when problems arose at home or in school, and provided needed support to overcome these problems.

These students interacted with other high performing peers in various extracurricular activities, such as clubs, athletic teams and the Honor Society. They also worked with peer groups on volunteer efforts, community issues, and honors classes. Although their peers socially accepted participants, each had a small group of friends. Their peer support system consisted primarily of high-performing students and persons who also participated in extracurricular activities. James gained support and assurance from members of the football team. He indicated, “We sort of push each other because we do not want to let the coach and the rest of the team down.” The student also commented, “Support from my peers, especially those who are on the team, makes me feel that I have additional protection beyond their football field. As a result I feel that I can tackle other problems.” In addition, these socially accepted African American male youth enjoyed extensive interactions with peers and teachers. In general, they also identified with the norms of the dominant group.

## **School**

In the present study, students had positive perceptions of the role and purpose of school. They viewed school as a prerequisite for future success. Honora (2003) found that high achieving African American males described the role of school as preparing them for future life opportunities and academic success.

Students involved in the study participated in appropriately challenging learning experiences in school, such as honors and advanced placement classes. Although they did not find all of their classes interesting or enjoyable, they produced high quality work. They

produced higher quality work in their honors and advanced placement classes.

For these resilient African American males, extracurricular activities and special programs at school not only increased involvement, belonging and self-esteem, but also provided a network of peers who created a mutual bond and worked cooperatively with each other to achieve a goal. Schools provide varied opportunities for success by offering a variety of curriculum options and extracurricular activities. These activities at school, especially athletics, seemed to mitigate the pressure not to achieve academically.

Resilient African American male students found support outside of the home environment, which included a network within the school to help them succeed academically. These support systems consisted of students who wanted to succeed academically and were willing to work together to accomplish these goals. The network of high achieving peers worked together on projects, community activities, in clubs, and in challenging classes. These African American males tend to be liked by peers and have at least one person in whom they can confide. They had an informal network of people in their lives to whom they turned in difficult times. Peer groups were often chosen to motivate each other and to help in academic and social aspects.

Participants in the present study embraced teachers and administrators who had high expectations and supported their goals. Michael indicated, “Next (to my parents), I attribute my success to my teachers. They have been very encouraging and very helpful. They offer help if I need it. I know that I can go back to them and get help.” Michael added, “My teachers want me to succeed. This gives me a feeling that I am capable of doing well in and out of class.” James discussed support that he received from administrators. He stated:

“In middle and high school, my administrators were involved. They provided encouragement. They seemed to know how I was doing in school as well as how I was getting along personally. From time to time, they stopped me and gave me a pat on the back. I did not expect them to even know my name, especially since there were so many students in the school.”

James explained, “Concern from certain teachers and administrators was simply

academically motivating, it made me feel like I was walking on air. That I was accomplishing something and somebody noticed.” Researchers showed that teacher expectation affected student learning. Students who are expected to learn are more likely to rise to the challenge and achieve in school. On the other hand, teachers generally have lower expectations for minority students and children from low-income families (Gaines and Davis, 199).

These African American male students differed regarding their performance during earlier grades. Some of the students were not as serious in elementary and middle school. Teachers could have easily mislabeled others, since they were physically active in earlier grades. They, however, had teachers who believed in their innate resilience. Delpit, (1996) pointed out, “They held visions of us that we could not image for us... They were determined that, despite all odds, we would achieve” (p.199).

For the most part, the participants had positive relationships with their teachers. Although others were cited, William provided an example of a positive relationship with a teacher. He said, “I get along well with teachers. They interact with me and push me forward. A couple of teachers have given me extra support.” William indicated, “Being able to relate to my teachers helps me to feel comfortable enough to discuss problems, both academic and social problems. Then, I feel like they care about me as a person, not just a student who is passing through the schoolhouse doors.” Consistent with research, a positive relationship must exist between the student and the teacher if significant academic achievement to be attained (Graybill, 1997). That is, the student must identify favorably with their teachers or they will perform poorly in school, which will lead to failure in society.

In addition to liking their teachers, these African American males liked school. All of them participated in class discussions and activities. School was more than an academic environment for these students. Most were involved in at least one extracurricular activity, which became a source of informal support. For them, extracurricular activities increased belonging and self-esteem. Involvement in extracurricular activities, especially sports, seemed to have mitigated the pressure that students who excel were outcasts. Such

opportunities for meaningful participation were shown, in other research, to be an important correlate to student attachment to school, academic motivation and engagement (Battisch, Solomon, Kim, Watson and Schaps, 1995). Bryk and Driscoll (1988) suggested that when schools or classrooms were structured in ways that help students feel that they belong, are valued, and have sufficient influence, they were able to assume meaningful levels of responsibility and autonomy.

Teachers played an important role in their academic success. Both interpersonal relations and professional competence were important to these African American male students. It was important to have the care, respect, and support of teachers, understand them, and to be available to them. Participants described teachers who, through instructional delivery, personal interaction and body language, exuded high expectations. These high expectations were supported by academic rigor, genuine caring, empowering students to manage responsibility, and teacher confidence. In addition, teachers communicate a belief that young people can achieve their goals and offer support to help them do so. Such teacher characteristics conveyed to students that the teacher valued improved academic performance and the students. In turn, their teachers saw these African American male students as being capable. Consistent to the study, a positive relationship existed between student and teacher if significant academic achievement is to be gained (Graybill, 1997). Thus, the student must identify favorably with their teachers or they will more likely perform poorly in school, which leads to their failure in society.

Participants in the present study revealed that their teachers often provided extra support and encouragement. Teachers encouraged African American male students to participate in the classroom and the school. They also showed an interest in students beyond academic performance, encouraging social, sporting and other achievements. Consistent with research, teacher involvement, support and encouragement were associated with high self-esteem (Ryan and Grolnick (1986). Support buffered the negative effects of stress, reduced feelings of alienation and facilitated positive adjustment.

In this study, participants identified with the beliefs and values of a small community

of high performers in their school. In the setting of the study, the dominant culture was European-American, but participants found few high achieving African American male students. So, they aligned themselves with a community of achievers from diverse backgrounds. This community of achievement also consisted of students and teachers who supported them. Students were able to work within this culture of high achievement to succeed. In addition, these students acknowledged the importance of being grouped together in advanced and honors classes. They received encouragement and support from each other, as well as from supportive adults and teachers.

Among the most potent factors promoting resiliency mentioned in the literature were parents, teachers, and mentors who provided emotional support and fostered self-esteem. These resilient individuals had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally. Most of them established familial bonds in their early years, either with a parent or another family member. Adolescence was a critical time for these students during which relationships with peers and adults other than family members, such as mentors, coaches, club advisors, and work supervisors, became particularly important. Therefore, the role of teachers as protective buffers, especially in the early years, had a lasting effect in the lives of these adolescent males.

Falling within the domains of individual personality attributes or dispositions, family characteristics, and environmental influences (i.e., peers, school, and community), urban African American male students possessed certain resilient traits. Individual traits included a sense of responsibility, high aspirations, realistic planning, hope and optimism. They also had personal agency, self-reliance, a strong sense of self, good coping skills and strong family values. Family characteristics included caring and support from at least one parent, high expectations from parents, and high levels of family involvement. Peer related influences included good relationships with peers, high expectations from like-minded peers, and sources of support and stimulation. School influences included at least one teacher who provided time, attention, and nurturance, particularly during elementary and middle grades. Students were also influenced by their participation in extra-curricular activities, and opportunities for participation. In addition, caring, support and high expectations impacted

them. Community influences included caring and support, and high expectations from neighbors and other community members.

The present study not only revealed that these resilient African American males had many characteristics in common with other resilient individuals, but they also possessed characteristics, which were different from other resilient youth. They possessed individual characteristics, which included a strong future orientation, religious orientation, positive racial identity, and a bicultural identity. Family characteristics included opportunities for participation, responsibility and belonging, support from the extended family, and strong parental pushing. Peer networks involving other high performing peers, and networks for learning and participation impacted these students. In addition, Community influences included opportunities for participation and belonging, religious activities, and adults who served as role models and supporters.

These African American male students had some recognition of their learning style preference. They used their awareness to concentrate on, process, internalize, and retain new and complex academic information. As a result, they were able to enhance their learning experience. Since each person learns different from every other person, the same instructional environment, methods and resources are effective for some students and not for others (Dunn, 1993). In a recent study, all students in Freeport School District's learning styles classes performed better on standardized tests when they used their learning styles (Dunn & Bello, 1999). Learning style traits of African American in the study were similar to Willis's four distinct characteristics:

1. Social/affective: people-oriented, emphasis on emphasis on affective domain, social interaction is crucial, social learning is common.
2. Harmonious interdependence and harmonious/communal aspects of people and environment are respected and encouraged; knowledge is sought for practical, utilitarian, and relevant purposes; holistic approaches to experiences; synthesis is sought.
3. Expressive creativity: creative, adaptive, variable, stylistic, intuitive, simultaneous stimulation is preferred; oral expression.

4. Nonverbal: nonverbal communication is important, movement and rhythm components are vital (Willis, 1989, p.54).

By recognizing their learning style, these students felt empowered to become academically successful.

The results of this study are pertinent to the research on resilient African American male students. Resilience research has consistently shown that some children experience many stressors, but do not succumb to their effects. These African American male students were found to have internal and external assets that helped them to excel academically.

Young people who are at risk are not able to succeed are at considerable risk of being unable to lead productive lives and to contribute to society. Since it involves improving student outcomes, the study has social, economic and political value.

### **Implications**

*Once upon a time there was a town that happened to have a playground located at the edge of a cliff. Every so often a child would fall off this cliff and be seriously injured. At last the town council decided to take action but was immediately deadlocked on what to do. Should they put a fence at the top of the cliff or an ambulance at the bottom? (Slavin, Karweit & Wasik, 1994, p.9)*

As the passage above points out, educators are often fixated on placing the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. The present study, however, focused on building protective devices of “fences” for the academic betterment of disadvantaged children, particularly for African American male students.

This research contributes to the knowledge about education for the development and improvement of educational practices. Rather than generalizing findings, as suggested by Donmoyer (1990), the best value that qualitative research of this nature can offer is vivid experience. Thus, this research does not offer an absolute generalization from which a

prescriptive model for human behavior can be drawn. Instead, the researcher believes it is possible for the inquirer to identify common themes among participants that can function as points of theoretical speculation. Therefore, the researcher for purpose of discussion gathered what he determined to be key common experiences among participants into a framework of categories. The researcher drew from specific examples of experiences, which were common to that category.

Research into academic resilience is critical for several reasons. By examining the life stories of African American male students who experienced adversities, the researcher hoped to identify strategies that would enable urban African American male students to realize their potential. One of the more convincing reasons is that it claims to:

“... promote hope rather than despair, empowerment rather than alienation, survival rather than victimization and pro-action rather than reaction (Dryden, Johnson, and Howard, 1998).

The educational status of African Americans, particularly males, is alarmingly low. Compared to their majority peers, African American males lag far behind on a variety of indicators of academic success. Contemporary research in this area has focuses primarily on socioeconomic and cultural factors contributing to academic underachievement. The results of the study provide support for the research on specific factors which the academic success of African American males, who bounce back in spite of adverse conditions. Important implications for educators and parents are readily apparent from the study of high achieving African American male students, in particular. These individuals have educational needs that should be addressed if they are to reach their full potential and to enjoy a productive life. This research provides a framework by which parents and educators might respond to the imperatives of academic success, particularly for the most endangered species, African American males.

Because of the dynamic nature of resilience, a holistic ecological approach is recommended to foster resilience in African American male students. From an ecological approach, individuals, family, and community change is useful. An ecological approach

suggests that protective factors can be introduced into a student's life through any part of the system (e.g., personal attributes, family attributes, school, community and peers). As a result, these positive influences can reverberate throughout the student's ecosystem, thereby enhancing the likelihood of favorable outcomes. Hence, efforts to combine interventions in a manner that targets factors (e.g., personal attributes, family attributes, school, community and peers) concurrently should have stronger effects than efforts focused on only one factor.

The findings of this study have clear implications for urban educators, particularly those who educate at-risk African American male students. First, schools are in a unique position to foster resilient characteristics because their development is important to the learning process. Second, this information should allow educators to focus resources on interventions that are most helpful to these students. Third, educators must realize that significant academic achievement for African American students, particularly for males, can not become possible unless educators realize that they should "place learning in the context of the values and experiences of the children they serve" (Viadero, 1996, p.44). In addition, schools should work with families and communities to encourage a variety of instructional experiences to discover the student's abilities, enable them to participate in meaningful activities and value their contributions, and to create meaningful opportunities for students to contribute to their communities and to serve others.

Researchers reveal that teachers potentially have impact on student self-esteem. Results indicate that teacher involvement, support, and encouragement of student autonomy are associated with higher self-image (Ryan and Grolnick, 1986). Conversely, aggressive misbehavior and withdrawal were viewed as symptoms of teacher reinforce low self-esteem. Bronfenbrenner (1989) insisted that young people need adults, particularly teachers, who are "crazy" about them. However, in many schools teachers are not as committed. Consequently, some students feel that no one at school knows or cares about them.

Without a doubt schools can become more nurturing and supportive places, particularly for students who are likely to feel alienated in the school environment. Schools may be perceived as a source of help and opportunity, rather than an inhospitable place that students

want to escape and avoid.

School can provide opportunities for social networking among students. Clark (1991) found that academically resilient students developed strong support networks that provided assistance for success in and out of school by developing friendships and getting support from school personnel and family. As a result, what schools do to counteract the negative peer culture among African Americans and to foster more positive attitudes in spite of the some cultural influences is very important. Although developing friendships, especially in schools with diverse populations, is complex (Clark, 1991). But it is necessary to resolve the negative perception that academic success is associated with ethnic defection, which is documented by Fordham (1994). For this reason, it is recommended that school personnel inculcate proactive strategies for maintaining a sense of self, explore how African American adolescents can adjust to life in two worlds.

Many aspects of school and classrooms that are associated with African American high achievement are modifiable. For example, the findings suggest the following conditions hold promise to affirm the self-worth and to convey the promise of greater potential for success among African American male students. African American children are more influenced by teacher perceptions and acceptance than by their own perceptions (Garret-Holiday, 1985). Thus, these African American males can be victimized by low teacher expectations, which may be based on a teacher's misconception about their potential and ability, rather than their actual performance. Consequently, low teacher expectations are capable of destroying the self-image and contributing to the loss of positive identity. Low teacher expectations have been shown to reduce the motivation of students to learn. Strategies for teacher expectation may include:

- Eliminate harmful stereotypes that staff members may hold about the community and students served by their school;
- Make the curriculum and instruction more relevant to the African American experience by focusing classroom activities on current issues, political decision-making, and making responsible decisions;
- Place greater emphasis on student-centered and advanced skills curriculum and

instruction;

- Encourage teachers to acknowledge areas of teaching of student social and psychological development in which they need assistance;
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss concerns with teachers, counselors, and administrators;
- Encourage greater interaction with peers who share the achievement ideology; and
- Develop strategies, which address issues of motivation, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

The classroom environment must promote student engagement, which is structured to include activities that are drawn from various interests, beliefs and values of all students. The relationship between student and teacher and subject matter must allow for different ideas and perspectives. According to McLeod (1996), it is important for teachers to show respect, support, and encouragement, particularly for at-risk students. Byrd et al. (1996) found that students respond best to teachers who relate in a caring and respectful manner and also communicate an understanding of cultural diversity. Thus, some classroom environment suggestions may include:

- Accommodate learning styles
- Focus on student interest as a means of engaging the student in the learning activity
- Vary teaching styles to accommodate learning styles
- Use cooperative learning and group activities, in which students are organized into small mixed-ability groups to learn instructional material.
- Provide opportunities for African American students to display their non-academic talents in ways that enhance their academic learning experience
- Decrease competition and norm-referenced environments
- Create student-centered classrooms
- Involve family members in substantive ways.

Teachers must help student see their possibilities and promise. They must not use past behaviors or present risks to predict future outcomes. They must also believe in the student's innate ability to bounce back. In addition, they must also encourage self-righting capacities.

Teachers may stimulate student interest and build upon the “cultural capital” that students possess. Barrera (1992) suggested that classroom texts must reflect the culture of the students. Teachers must also recognize African American student achievement in all areas, not only in Black History Month or stereotypical areas.

Other strategies are offered to help African American male students develop internal motivation and to increase academic engagement. These are:

- Provide consistent and constructive feedback
- Provide experiential learning activities
- Adopt an educational posture that is multicultural and meaningful
- Have a nurturing, affirming classroom.

Participants in the study consistently acknowledged the importance of advanced placement and honors classes in which they found relevant and intellectually stimulation. Without such classes, student believed that they would not have learned at the same level. These experiences should remind high school administrators of the importance of advanced placement opportunities and honors classes for high achieving African American students. In addition, an insight of this study was the importance of extracurricular activities for resilient students. Schools should extend the scope of after school activities beyond the realm of sports to include academic clubs, drama, and study groups. This study offers evidence that peer socialization often occurs among resilient African American male students during extracurricular activities.

In addition to the implications for schools, the study also offers intimations for fostering resiliency within the family. Families may assist by promoting care and support of the student, encouraging involvement in school activities, and communicating high academic and social expectations. Students were especially responsive to strong parental pushing and their high expectations held by parents.

Besides these, the present study offers implications for parent involvement and the home. An academically stimulating home environment was evidenced in each interview and

observation of the participants. Since students spend a great deal of time at home, altering the home environment as well as relations between the home and school, especially for low-income African American male students, should affect their achievement. The student's home environment can help build the student's ability to adapt and serve as a protective factor. Consistent with Epstein (1990), parents may be involved in their children's education in several ways. Parents can participate in activities at school, such as parent-teacher conferences and attendance at school activities and events. They may also expose their children to intellectually stimulating materials and activities. In addition, parents must remain knowledgeable about and interested in their children's school experience. Therefore, the following suggestions are offered:

- Teach parents how to assist students in organizing for study at home and where to find needed resources for homework assistance;
- Hold regular meetings with parents to communicate homework, curricular, and behavioral expectations, especially when no behavioral problem has occurred;
- Foster feelings of partnership between the school and home;
- Create a climate of trust and open communication between the school and home.

Schools and families may promote many of the individual characteristics that tended to characterize the most successful African American male students in the present study. Educators should design engaging school activities and expect all students to achieve at their highest academic level. Both parents and schools should foster the development of children's affective attributes, such as a Self-reliant, a more positive self-concept, and a more positive attitude towards school.

Schools that are positive and achievement-oriented help African American adolescents develop a sense of purpose and autonomy. They also teach valuable skills, such as problem solving, which may be useful in life. In these ways, schools facilitate resilience by promoting academic competence, boosting self-concept and attending to the social and emotional needs of students.

Schools in collaboration with community groups and churches can conduct

workshops to promote family understanding of adolescence, the family influence on student attitudes toward schooling and future orientation.

In the present study, resilient African American male adolescents were religiously oriented and were involved in church. Fellow parishioners were part of their support network and friends. The findings suggest that churches encourage and facilitate relationships to build upon existing support networks. Churches may also become aware of the schools that young people in their congregation attend, encouraged the congregation to participate in school activities, and make provisions for tutorial and homework assistance. Rubin, Billingsley, and Caldwell (1994) castigated African American churches, particularly those in urban settings, for failing to meet the needs of adolescent members in urban areas.

Much further research is needed in area of resilience in African American males, since currently so little research on this population exists. Existing national research is quite limited in that few resilient African American male students are represented in them. Research is also needed to help school districts, educators and parents understand how they support the improvement of teaching and learning. Future studies should explore these issues and others that relate to advancing African American male achievement. Future studies should also explore the specific impact of the variables of peer influences, culture, divorce, and other variables. The most beneficial research may be those that focus on school-based programs and parental involvement that promote academic excellence for African American males, particularly those who experience adverse circumstances.

Educators and parents must realize that significant improvement in the attitudes, academic achievement, and outcomes of African American male students can only become possible if protective factors are enhanced. Benard and Marshall (1997) suggest:

“What we do to tap the young person’s resilience makes all the difference. For instance, it is not enough to simply institute best-practice strategies such as mentoring, peer helping, cooperative learning, service learning, authentic assessment, multiple intelligences, community service, full service schools, or parent involvement.... Fostering resilience requires adults to create the conditions for

empowerment child by child”(p.4).

Further study is recommended. Additional study might investigate whether family composition and stability impacts resilience of African American male students.

## **SUMMARY**

As revealed in census data from the 2000s, the nation still leads the industrialized world in terms of children living in poverty. National attention remains drawn to the plight of children and families in a variety of risk circumstances, particularly high-risk circumstances in this nation's inner cities. Even in the twenty-first century, African American children continue to rank high among children in deprived conditions.

Many poor African American male students experience adverse circumstance, which could have inhibited them from reaching their maximum potential. Even as changes at any level of Bronfenbrenner's model of nested systems could have effected the development of these African American male students, changes at the level of the microsystem were most immediately able to be undertaken (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since the school is an important microsystem setting, it is one that affords many possibilities and resources for assisting African American male students to develop resilience-promoting skills and attributes. However, meeting the needs of the increasingly diverse, economically and educationally disadvantaged urban children, particularly African American males, requires specific interventions and restructuring of how some schools provide services. These interventions cannot be implemented if schools are unable to examine the unique need of these students.

Despite adversities, African American males involved in the study possessed certain characteristics, which contributed to their academic resilience. Characteristics included positive belief in self, parental pushing, support systems, participation in extracurricular activities, challenging classes, and realistic aspirations. In general, these youth were self-assured, autonomous, and goal-oriented. They also were self-regulated, possessed good coping skills, had strong family values, and were actively involved in religious activities. In

addition, the exhibited social competence, and self-sufficiency. Besides these, they elicited positive responses from others, possessed problem-solving skills, a sense of direction or purpose. These characteristics hold important implications for improving academic outcomes for other disadvantaged African American male students.

Although these resilient African American male adolescents shared many of the characteristics of resilient youth in general, some of their traits were different. These African American male students possessed characteristics, which were culturally specific. They often assumed a bi-cultural identity and used adaptive distancing. They maintained a small network of high performing peers, which were primarily from other ethnic groups, while not alienating peers from their own ethnic group. They had positive, supportive relationships from caregivers from their extended family and from the community. The emotional and physical support from their parents, relatives, teachers, and peers contributed to their ability to bounce back in spite of tremendous odds. These youth often to coped more effectively with adversities when they had someone with whom they shared their daily struggles. They sought and received help from informal sources, such as parents, relatives, teachers, ministers and neighbors.

Their familiar support system included at least one parent and other close caring relatives. Parental figures had high expectations and set clear consistent boundaries. These young people benefited from authoritative parenting styles and monitoring. In addition, parents valued their children's accomplishments. Kinship networks, which included relatives and close friends shared in a collective responsibility for caring for these males. In addition, they taught values and skills. Besides these, they supported academic and social learning. Family support allowed them to gain strength from the collective group, which in turn enhanced their self-esteem.

These African American male students maintained relationships with supportive teachers who listened to them and assisted them academically and socially. They had at least one important teacher in their lives who pushed them and monitored their performance. They believed in the ability of these students to achieve. These teachers not only spent extra time

assisting them, but they often availed themselves long after the student was no longer in their classes. In addition, these teachers created welcoming conditions and encouraged these male students to speak freely and to incorporate their out-of-school and extracurricular activities into the classroom.

They created a community of achievement within the school setting. More importantly, these students surrounded themselves with a network of support, which included an exclusive group of high achieving or like-minded peers and supportive teachers. Their peer network primarily consisted of a small group of interracial high performing peers. In addition, they possessed help seeking skills that they readily used when they did not understand concepts or when they faced critical situations.

Although these resilient African American males had many characteristics in common with individuals who are generally considered to be resilient, these young people possessed characteristics that were different from other resilient youth. The present study revealed that in addition to other traits, they possessed individual characteristics, which included a strong future orientation, religious orientation, positive racial identity, and a bicultural identity. Family characteristics included opportunities for participation, responsibility and belonging, support from the extended family, and strong parental pushing. Peer networks involving other high performing peers, and networks for learning and participation impacted these students. In addition, Community influences included opportunities for participation and belonging, religious activities, and adults who served as role models and supporters.

When considered together, the findings of the present investigation hold substantive implications for researchers studying these phenomena, and are also relevant to educators who are interested in helping at-risk students to excel despite adverse circumstances, particularly for African American males. Although these findings are limited by the data, particularly the universe and size, they provide solid evidence as to what makes a difference for Africa American male students.

## References

- Akers, R. L. (1994). Criminological theories: Introduction and evaluation. Los Angeles: Roxbury.
- Alexander, J.M., & Mohanty, C.P. (1997). Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures. Boston: Routledge Kegan Paul.
- Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures, and student motivation. Journal of Educational Psychology, 84, (3), 261-271.
- Antonovski, A. (1979). Health, stress and coping: New perspectives on mental and physical well being. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Banks, J. A. (1979). Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Barbarin, O. (1993). Emotional and Social Development of African American Children. Journal of Black Psychology, 19, (4), 381-391.
- Barrera, R. (1992). The cultural gap in literacy instruction. Education and Urban Society, 24, (2), 227-243.
- Battisch, V., Solomon, D., Kim, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1995). Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and student attitudes, motives, and performance. American Educational Research Journal, 32, (2), 627-658.
- Baumrind, D. (1991). Effective parenting during the early adolescent transition. In P. A. Cowan & M. Hetherington (Eds.), Family Transitions (pp. 111-164). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Beardslee, W.R. (1989). The role of self-understanding in resilient individuals: The development of a perspective. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 59, (2), 266-278.
- Benard, B. (1995). Fostering Resilience in Children. ERIC/EECE Digest, EDO-PS-95-9.
- Benard, B. (1991). Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school, and community. Portland, OR: Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.
- Benard, B. (1993). Fostering resiliency in kids. Educational Leadership 51, (3), 44-48.
- Benard, B., & Marshall, K. (1997). A Framework for Practice: Tapping Innate Resilience. In Research Practice, 5, 1, University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development.

Berndt, T.J., & Keefe, K. (1992). Friends' influence on adolescent adjustment to school. Child Development, 66, (5), 1312-1329.

Berndt, T.J., Laychak, A.E., & Park, K. (1990). Friends' influence on adolescents' academic achievement motivation: An experimental study. Journal of Educational Psychology, 82, (4), 664-670.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karebl & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), Power and ideology in education. (pp.487-511). New York: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P.E., & Wacquant, L.D. (1992). Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Boyd, W. L. (1991). What makes ghetto schools succeed or fail? Teachers College Record, 92, (3), 331-362.

Brody, G. H., & Flor, D.L. (1998). Maternal resources, parenting practices, and child competence in rural, single parent African American families. Child Development, 69, (3), 803-816.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. Developmental Psychology, 22, (6), 723-742.

Bryk, A.S., & Driscoll, M.E. (1988). The school as community: Theoretical foundations, contextual influences, and consequences for students and teachers. Madison National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin.

Byrd, J., Lundeberg, M., Hoffland, S., Couillard, E., & Lee, M. (1996). Caring, cognition and cultural pluralism. Urban Education, 31, 432-453.

Charmanz, K. (1999). Context and method in qualitative research. Edited by G. Miller & R. Dingwall. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997, Contemporary Sociology, 28, (2), 247.

Clark, M.L. (1991). Social identity, peer relations, and academic of African American adolescents. Education and Urban Society, 24, (1), 41-52.

Clark, R. (1983). Family life and school achievement: Why poor Black children succeed or fail? Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Coburn, J., & Nelson, S. (1989). Teachers Do Make A Difference: What Indian graduates say about their school experience. Washington, D.C., Office of Educational Research and Improvement) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 306 071).

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies. Thousand Oakes, CA: sage.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. American Journal of Sociology, 94, (Suppl.95), S95-120.

Coll, G.C., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H.P., Crnic, K., Wasik, B.H., & Garcia, H.V. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. Child Development, 67, (5), 1891-1914.

Comprehensive Teaming to Assure Resiliency in Students (1996). Moving beyond risk to resiliency: The school's role in supporting resiliency in children. Minneapolis, Minneapolis Public Schools (CTARS Project).

Connell, J.P., Spencer, M.B., & Abner, J.L. (1994). Educational risk and resilience in African American youth: Context, self, action, and outcomes in schools. Child Development, 65, (2), 493-506.

Cordeiro, P. A. (1991). An ethnography of high achieving at risk Hispanic youth at two urban high schools: Implications for administrators (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 330 088).

Cordeiro, P. A. (1990). Growing away from the barrio: An ethnography of high achieving at risk Hispanic youths at two urban high schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Houston.

Cornell, D.G., & Grossberg, W. (1997). Family environment and personality adjustment in gifted program children. Gifted Child Quarterly, 31, (2), 59-64.

Dalaker, J., & Naifeh, M. (1998). Poverty in the United States: 1997. Current Population Reports (Series P60-201). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. Psychological Bulletin, 113, 487-496.

Delpit, L. (1996). The politics of teaching literate discourse. In City Kids, City Teachers: Reports from the Front Row. New York: New Press.

Denzin, N. (1989). Interpretive Biography. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative

research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 1-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Diaz-Rico, L.T. (1993). From monocultural to multicultural teaching in an inner-city middle school. In A.E. Wolfolk (Ed.) Readings and cases in educational psychology (pp.272-279). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Dishion, T. (1990). The family ecology of boy's peer relations in middle childhood. Child Development, 61, 874-892.

Dishion, T. J., Patterson, G. R., Stoolmiller, M., & Skinner, M. L. (1991). Family, school, and behavioral antecedents to early adolescent involvement with antisocial peers. Developmental Psychology, 27, (1), 172-180.

Donmoyer, R. (1990). Generalizability and the single case study. Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate. Teachers College (175-200).

Dornbusch, S.M., & Ritter, P.L. (1991). Family decision-making and authoritative parenting: Oral presentation. Society for Research on Child Development, Seattle, Washington.

Douglas, J. D. (1976). Investigative social research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Dryden, J., Johnson, B., & Howard, S. (1998). Resiliency: A Comparison of Construct Definitions Arising from Conversations with 9 - 12 year old Children and their Teachers. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, 13 - 17 April.

Dryfoos, J.G. (1991). Adolescents at risk: Prevalence and prevention. New York, Oxford University Press.

Duncan, G. J., & Aber, J. L. (1997). Neighborhood models and measures. In G. J. Duncan, J. Brooks-Gunn, & P. K. Klebanov (Eds.), Neighborhood poverty: Vol. 1. Context and consequences for children (pp. 62-78). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Duncan, G. J., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Klebanov, P. K. (1994). Economic deprivation and early childhood development. Child Development, 65, (2), 296-318.

Dunn, R.(1993). Teaching secondary students through their individual learning styles: Practical approach for grades 7-12. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Dunn, R., & Bello, T. C.(1999). Improved test scores, attitudes, and behaviors in America's schools: Supervisor's success stories. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Eccles, J., Wigfield, A., Midgley, C., Reuman, D., MacIver, D., & Feldlaufer, H. (1993). Negative effects of traditional middle school on students' motivation. Elementary School Journal, 93, (5), 553-574.

Eccles, J.S., Lord, S., & Midley, C. (1991). What are we doing to early adolescents? The impact of educational contexts on early adolescents. American Journal of Education, 89, (4), 521-542.

Epstein, J.E. (1990). School and family connection: Theory, research and implications for integrating sociologies of education and family. In D. Unger & M. Sussman (Eds.), Families in community settings: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 99-126). New York: Haworth Press.

Farrell, E.W. (1990). Hanging in and dropping out: Voices of at-risk high school students. New York Teachers College Press.

Farrell, E.W. (1994). Self and school success: Voices and lore of inner-city students. Albany, NY: State University Press.

Feldman, S.S. & Wenzel, K. R. (1990). Relations among family interaction patterns, classroom self-restraint, and academic preadolescent boys. Journal of Educational Psychology, 82, 813-819.

Fine, M. (1986). Why Urban Adolescents Drop Into and Out of Public Schools. Teachers College Board, 87, (3), 396-409.

Fine, M., Weis, L., Powell, L.C., & Wong, L.M. (1997). Off White: Readings on race, power, and society. New York. NY: Routledge.

Finn, J. D., & Rock, D. A. (1997). Academic success among students at risk for school failure. Journal of Applied Psychology, 82, (2), 221-234.

Ford, D. Y. (1992). Determinants of underachievement as perceived by gifted, above average and average Black students. Roeper Review, 14, (3), 130-137.

Ford, D. Y. (1993). An investigation into the paradox of underachievement among gifted Black students. Roeper Review, 16, (2), 78-84.

Ford, D. Y. (1994). Nurturing resilience in gifted Black youth. Roeper Review, 17, (2), 80-85.

Ford, D. Y., & Harris, J. J. (1990). On discovering the hidden treasures of gifted and talented Black children. Roeper Review, 13, (11), 27-32.

Fordham, S. (1988). Racelessness as a factor in Black students school success: Pragmatic strategy pyrrhic victory? Harvard Educational Review, 58, (1), 54-84.

Fordham, S. (1998). Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of acting white." Urban Review, 18, (3), 176-206.

Forehand, G.A., Regosta, M., & Rock, D.A. (1976). Conditions and Processes of Effective School Desegregation: Final Report. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service.

Gaines, M.L., & Davis, M. (1990). Accuracy of teacher perception of elementary student achievement. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (Boston, MA, April 1990). ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 320942.

Garbarino, J., Dubrow, N., Kostolny, K., & Pardo, C. (1992). Children in danger: Coping with the consequences of community violence. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Garbarino, J., & Abramowitz, R.H. (1992). The ecology of human development. In J. Garbarino (Ed.). Children and families in the social environment (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) New York, Aldine.

Garnezy, N. (1985). Stress-resistant children: The search for protective factors. In J. E. Stevenson (Ed.), Recent research in developmental psychopathology (pp. 213-233). Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Garnezy, N. (1991). Resiliency and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty. American Behavioral Scientist, 345, (4), 416-430.

Garrett-Holiday, B. (1985). Differential Effects of Children's Self-Perceptions and Teachers Perceptions on Black Children's Academic Achievement." Journal of Negro Education, 54, (1), 1985.

Garrett, P., Nganda, N., & Ferron, J. (1994). Poverty experiences of young children and the quality of their home environments. Child Development, 65, (2), 331-345.

Geary, P.A. (1988) 'Defying the Odds?' academic success among at-risk minority teenagers in an urban high school. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 296 055).

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Gibbs, J.T. (1988). Young, black, and male in America: An endangered species. Dover, MA: Auburn House.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. Chicago: Aldine.

Glaser, B.G. (1978). Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in methodology of grounded theory.

Mill Valley: CA. Sociology Press.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act, Pub. L. 103-227, 108 sta. 125(1994).

Gonzales, R., & Padilla, A.M. (1997). The academic resilience of Mexican American high school students. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 19, (3), 301-318.

Good, L.T. (1981). Teacher expectation and student perceptions: A decade of research. Educational Leadership, 38, (5), 415-421.

Graybill, S. (1997). Questions of race and culture: How they relate to the classroom for African American students. The Clearing House, 70, (6), 311-318.

Grizenko, N., & Pawluik, N. (1994). Risk and protective factors for disruptive behaviors in children. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 64, (4), 534-544.

Grusec, J.E., & Goodnow, J.J. (1994). Impact of parental discipline methods on the child's internalization of values: A reconceptualization of current points of view: Developmental Psychology, 30, (1), 4-19.

Halpern, E.S. (1983). Auditing naturalistic inquiries: The developmental application model. Dissertation: Indiana University.

Hare, B. (1988). African American youth at risk. Urban League Review, 12, (1), 25-38.

Hodgkinson, H. (1991). Reform versus reality. Phi Delta Kappan, 73, (1), 8-16.

Honora, D. (2003). Urban African American adolescents and school identification, Urban Education, 38, (1), 58-76.

Howard, S., & Dryden, J. (1999). Childhood resilience. Review and critique of literature Oxford Review of Education. 25, (3), 307-324.

Huang, S.L., & Waxman, H.C. (1996). Learning environment differences between high and low achieving minority students in urban middle schools. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 398 314).

Jackson, L.E., & Coursey, R.D. (1998). The relationship between God, control and internal locus of control to intrinsic religious motivation, coping, and purpose in life, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 27, 399-410.

Jaynes, G., & Williams, R. (1989). A common destiny: Blacks and American society. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Johnson, G.M. (1996). Psycho-educational approaches to youth crime: An historical and

paradigm analysis. Exceptionality Education Canada, 6, 3968.

Johnson, G.M. (1997). Resilient at risk students in the inner-city. McGill Journal of Education, 32, (1), 35-49.

Johnson, G.M. (1998). Effectiveness of interventions for at risk students: Inner-city school administrators. Canadian Journal of Education, 21, (4), 445-450.

Johnson, B., Howard, S., Dryden, J., & Johnson, K. (1997). Teachers' thinking about childhood resiliency: preliminary impressions from a qualitative study. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Brisbane, 30, November-4 December.

Johnson, G.M. (1994). An ecological framework for conceptualizing risk: Urban Education, 29, (1), 34-49.

Johnston, R.C., & Viadero, D. (2000). Unmet promise: Raising minority achievement. Education Week, 19, (27), 1-5.

Jones, D.J., & Watson, B.C. (1990). High risk student and higher education: Future trends. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, George Washington University. Washington, DC. (ED 325033).

Juvenonen, J., & Murdock, T. B. (1993). How to promote social approval: The effect of outcome and audience on publicly communicated attributions. Journal of Educational Psychology, 85, (2), 365-376.

Kaplan, C. P., Turner, S., Norman, E., & Stillson, K. (1996). Promoting resilience strategies: A modified consultation model. Social Work in Education, 18, (3), 158-168.

Kennedy, E. (1995). Correlates of perceived popularity among peers: A study of race and gender differences among middle school students. Journal of Negro Education, 64, (2), 186-195.

Keogh, B. K., & Weisner, T. (1993) An ecocultural perspective on risk and protective factors in children's development. Implications for learning disabilities. Learning Disabilities Research & Practice. 8, (1), 3-10.

Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools. New York: Harper Perrenial.

Kumpfer, K.L.(1993).Resiliency and AOD use prevention in high risk youth. Unpublished manuscript.

Kunjufu, J. (1988). To be popular or smart: The Black peer group. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

LeCompte, M.D., & Preissle, J. (1993). Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) San Deigo, CA: Academic Press.

Leak, J. (1994). Sermon: Making the best of what you have. Unpublished manuscript.

Lee, C.C. (1984). An investigation of psychosocial variables related to academic success for rural Black adolescents. Journal of Negro Education, 53, (4), 424-434.

Lee, V. E. (1991). Academic behaviors among high achieving African American students. Education and Urban Society, 24, (1), 65-86.

Lee, V.E., Winfield, L. F., & Wilson, T. C., (1991). Academic behaviors among high-achieving African American students. Education and Urban Society, 24, (1), 65-86.

Lerner, R.M. (1995). America's youth in crisis: Challenges and choices for programs and policies. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Lerner, R.M., & Spanier, G. B. (1980). Adolescent development: A life-span perspective. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G., (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hill, CA: Sage.

Linquanti, R. (1992) Using community-wide collaboration to foster resiliency in kids: A conceptual framework (San Francisco, Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development).

Lippman, L., Bums, S., & McArthur, E. (1996). Urban schools: The challenge of location and poverty. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Luthar, S. S., & Zigler, E. (1991). Vulnerability and competence: A review of research on resilience in childhood. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 61, (1), 6-21.

Manning, M. L., & Baruth, L. G. (1995). Students at risk. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1989). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Masten, A. S., Best, K M., & Garmezy, N.(1990). Resiliency and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. Development and Psychopathology, 2, 425-444.

Masten, A. S., Best, K., & Garmezy, N.(1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcame adversity. Development and Psychopathology, 2, 425-444.

Masten, A. S., & Coatsworth, J. D. (1998). The development of competence in students:

Favorable and unfavorable environments. American Psychologist, 53, (2), 205-220.

McCann, R.A., & Austin, S. (1988). At risk youth: definitions, dimensions, and relationships. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). Growing up with a single-parent: What hurts, What helps? Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McLeod, B. (1996). Educating students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Santa Cruz: The Bilingual Research Center.

McMillan, J.H., & Reed, D.F (1993). A qualitative study of resilient at-risk students. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Mensch, B.S., & Kandel, D.B. (1988). Dropping out of school and drug involvement. Sociology of Education, 61, (2), 95-113.

Merchant, N., & Dupuy, P. (1996). Multicultural counseling and qualitative research: Shared worldview and skills. Journal of Counseling and Development, 74, (6), 537-541.

Miller, D. B. (1999). Racial socialization and racial identity: Can they promote resiliency for African American adolescents? Adolescence, 34, (135), 493-501.

Mincy, R. B. (1994). Mentoring young Black males. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Moore, K.A., & Glei, D. (1995). Taking the plunge: An examination of positive youth development. Journal of Adolescent Research, 10, (1), 15-40.

Mortenson, T. G. (1993). Postsecondary education opportunity: The Mortenson report on public policy analysis of opportunity for postsecondary education, 1992-93, Iowa City: Postsecondary Education Opportunity.

Mortenson, T.G., & Wu, A. (1990). High school graduation and college participation of young adults by family income backgrounds, 1970 to 1989. Iowa City: American College Testing Program.

N.C. State School Board of Education, 2000).

National Center for Educational Statistics (1994). National education longitudinal study of 1988. Washington, DC: Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

National Commission on Time and Learning. (1994). Prisoners of time. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Educational Longitudinal Study (1988). Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics.

Nelson-Le Gall, S., & Jones, E. (1991). Classroom help-seeking behavior of African American children. Education and Urban Society, 24, (1), 27-40.

Nettles, S. M., & Pleck, J. H. (1994). Risk, resilience, and development: The multiple ecologies of Black adolescents in the United States. In R. J Haggerty, N. Garmezy, M. Rutter, & L. Sherrod (Eds.), Stress, risk, and resilience in children and adolescents of second-generation discrimination. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

O'Connell-Higgins, R. (1983) Psychological resilience and the capacity for intimacy. Qualifying paper. Harvard Graduate School.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pelto, P. (1978). Anthropological research: The structure of inquiry. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Harper and Row.

Peng, S. S., & Lee, R.M. (1992). Activities and academic achievement: A study of 1988 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1992. Pergamon.

Peng, S.S., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (1992). Demographic disparities of inner-city eighth graders. Urban Education, 26, (4), 441-459.

Phelan, P., Davidson, A.L., & Cao, H.T. (1991). Students' multiple worlds: Negotiating the boundaries of family, peer, and school cultures. Journal of Educational Psychology, 82, (9), 33-40.

Pintrich, P.R., & De Root, E.V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. Journal of Educational Psychology, 82, (1), 33-40.

Preseisen, B.Z. (1988). At risk students: Defining a population. In K.M. Kershner and J.A. Conner (Eds.) At risk students and school restructuring. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools.

Reed, D. F., McMillan, J. H., & McBee, R. H. (1995). Defying the odds: Middle schoolers in high risk circumstances who succeed. Middle School Journal, 27, (1), 3-10.

Riessman, C.K. (1993). Narrative Analysis. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage.

Reyes, O., Gillock, K., & Kobus, K. (1994). A longitudinal study of school adjustment in urban, minority adolescents: Effects of a high school transition program. American Journal

of Community Psychology, 22, (3), 341-369.

Richardson, V., Casanova, U., Placier, P., & Gailfoye, K. (1989). School children at-risk. New York: Falmer.

Romo, H. D., & Falbo, T. (1996). Latino high school graduation: Defying the odds. Austin University of Texas Press.

Rosen, H. D. (1959). Race, ethnicity, and achievement syndrome. American Sociological Review, 26, 47-60.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1992). Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupil's intellectual development. New York: Irvington.

Rubin, L. (1996). The transcendent child. New York: Basic Books.

Rubin, R., Billensley, A., & Caldwell, C.H. (1994). The role of the Black church in working with Black adolescents. Adolescents, 29, (114), 251-266.

Ruff, T.P. (1993). Middle school students at-risk: What do we do with the most vulnerable children in American education? Middle School Journal, 24, (5), 10-12.

Rush, S., & Vitale, P.A. (1994). Analysis for determining factors that place elementary students at risk. Journal of Educational Research, 87, (6), 325-334.

Rutter, M. (1979). Protective factors in children's responses to stress and disadvantage. In M.W. Kent & J.E. Rolf (Eds.), Primary prevention of psychopathology: Vol 3. Social competence in children (pp. 49-72). Hanover: VT: University Press of New England.

Rutter, M. (1980) Changing Youth in a Changing Society. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Rutter, M. (1984) Resilient children: Why some disadvantaged children overcome their environments, and how we can help? Psychology Today, March, 57-65.

Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity: protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder, British Journal of Psychiatry, 147, 598-611.

Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 57, (3), 316-331.

Rutter, M. (1990). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms, In: J. Rolf, A. Masten, D. Cicchetti, K. Neuchterlein & S. Weintraub (Eds.) Risk and Protective Factors in the Development of Psychopathology. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Rutter, M. (1994.) Stress research: accomplishments and tasks ahead. In R. Haggerty et al.

(Eds.) Stress, risk and resilience in children and adolescents: Processes, mechanisms and interventions (New York, Cambridge University Press).

Ryan, R.M., & Grolnick, W.W. (1986). Origins and pawns in the classroom: Self report and projective assessments of individual differences in children's perceptions. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50, 550-558.

Safyer, A.W. (1994). The impact of inner-city life on adolescent development: Implications for social work. Smith College Studies in Social Work, 64, (2), 153-167.

Salcedo, D.(1996). Successful Latino students at high school level: A case study of ten students, Harvard University.

Sanders, M.G. (1998). The effects of school, family, and community support on the academic achievement of African American adolescents, Urban Education, 33, (3), 385-409.

Seligman, M. (1995). The Optimistic Child. Sydney, Random House.

Simmon, R.G., Black, A., & Zhou, Y. (1991). African American versus White children transition to junior high school. American Journal of Education, 99, (4), 481-520.

Simons, R.L., Johnson, C., Beamon, J., Conger, R.D., & Whitbeck, L.B. (1996). Parents and peer groups as mediators of the effect of community structure on adolescent problem behavior. American Journal of Community Psychology, 24, 145-171.

Siteram, K.S., & Prosser, M.H. (1998). Civic discourse: Multicultural diversity and global communication. Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

Slaughter, D.T., & Epps, E.G. (1987). The home environment and academic achievement of Black American children and youth: An overview. Journal of Negro Education, 86, (1), 3-20.

Slavin, R. E., & Madden, N. A., (1989). What works for students at-risk: A research synthesis. Educational Leadership, 46, (5), 4-13.

Slavin, R. E., Karweit, N. L., & Madden, N. A. (1989). Effective programs for students at risk. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Sleeter, C., & Grant, C., (1993). Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Smith, T. M., & Choy, S. P. (1995). The educational progress of Black students. Findings from: The condition of education, 1994. National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC: Department of Education.

Speck, M., & Krovetz, M.L.(1995). Student resiliency: Building caring learning communities. Multicultures 1,113-23.

Spencer, M. B., Cole, S. P., DuPree, D., Glymph, A., & Pierre, P. (1993). Self-efficacy among urban African American early adolescents: Exploring issues of risk, vulnerability, and resilience. Development and Psychopathology, 5, 719-739.

Stanton-Salazar, R.D., & Dornbusch, S.M. (1995 April). Social capital and the reproduction of equality: Information networks among Mexican-origin in high school students. Sociology of Education, 68, (2), 116-135.

Steele, C. M. (1998). A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance. American Psychologist, 52, (6), 613-29.

Steele, C. M. (1992). Race and the schooling of Black Americans. The Atlantic Monthly, 269, (4), 68-78.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69, 797-811.

Steinberg, L. (1996). Beyond the classroom: Why school reform has failed and what parents need to do. New York: Simon & Schuster. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 398 346.

Steinberg, L., & Cauffman, S.D. (1995). The impact of employment on adolescent development. Child Development, 11, 131-166.

Steinberg, L., Dornbush, S.M., & Brown, B.B. (1992). Ethnic differences in adolescent achievement: An ecological perspective. American Psychologist, 47, (6), 723-729.

Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S.D., Dornbusch, S.M., & Darling, N. (1992) Impact of parenting practices on adolescent achievement: Authoritative parenting, school involvement, and encouragement to succeed. Child Development, 61, 508-523.

Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sum, A.M., & Fogg, W.N. (1991). The adolescent poor and the transition to early adulthood. In P. Edelman and J. Laddher (Eds.), Adolescents and poverty: Challenges for the 1990s. Washington, DC: Center for National Policy Press.

Swaden, B.B., & Lubeck, S. (1995). Children and families at promise: Deconstructing the discourse of risk. Albany: State University of New York.

Taylor, R. (1995). African American youth: Their social and economic status in the United States. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Taylor, A.R. (1991). Social competence and early school transition: Risk and protective

factors for African American children. Education in Urban Society, 24, (1), 15-26.

Theissen, S., (1997). Effects of single parenting on adolescent's academic achievement: Establishing a risk and protective factor framework, 1-17 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 412 479).

Townsend, B.L., & Patton, J.M. (1995). Three “warring souls” of African American high school students. International Association of Special Education Monograph, 1-8.

Tyler, J.H., Murdane, R.J., & Willette, J.B., (2000). Cognitive Skills Matter in the Labor Market, Even for School Dropouts, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, p. 1-31. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 440 303).

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1994). Statistical abstract of the United States: 1994 (114<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1997). Statistical abstract of the United States: 1997 (117<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current population survey, McMillen, M., and Kaufman, P. (1996). Dropout rates in the United States: 1994, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

U.S. Department of Education (1992). Fourteenth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education. (1997). Nineteenth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. To assure the free appropriate public education of all children with disabilities (Publication No. 1997-616-188/90444). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Useem, E.L. (1991). Student selection into course sequence in mathematics: The impact of parental involvement and school policies. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 3, 231-250.

Viadero, D. (1996). Culture Clash. Education Week. 15, (29), 42-45.

Walker, K., & Satterwhite, T. (2002). Academic performance among African American and Caucasian college students: Is family still important? College Student Journal, 36, 1, 113-129.

Wang, M. (1997) Next steps in inner-city education. Focusing on resilience development and learning success, Education and Urban Society, 29, (3), 255-276.

Wang, M.C. (1995). Fostering resilience and learning success in schools: The Learning City Program, spotlight on student success #102 (Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success, Philadelphia).

- Wang, M.C., (1997). Next Steps in inner-city education: Focusing on resilience development and learning success. Education and Urban Society, 29, (3), 255-276.
- Wang, M.C., Carter, G., Trice, C., & Schweizer, A. (1995). Case studies of inner city schools [Interim Report] (Philadelphia, PA, National Center on Education in the Inner Cities).
- Wang, M.C., & Gordon, E.W. (1994). Educational resilience in inner-city America: Challenges and prospects. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wang, M. C., & Reynolds, M. C. (1995). Making a difference for students at risk. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Wang, M., Haertel, G., & Walberg, H. (1995). The effectiveness of collaborative school-linked services, In L.C. Rigsby, M.C. Reynolds & M.C. Wang (Eds.) School-community connections: Exploring issues for research and practice (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass).
- Wang, M.C., Haertel, G.D., & Walberg, H.J. (1993). Synthesis of research: what helps students learn? Educational Leadership, 51, (4), 74-79.
- Wang, M.C., Haertel, G.D., & Walberg, H.J. (1994). Educational resilience in inner cities, In M.C. Wang & E.W. Gordon (Eds.) Educational resilience in inner cities: Challenges and prospects (Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).
- Weber, J. M. (1986). An evaluation of selected procedures for identifying potential high school dropouts. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, National Center for Research in Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 311 348).
- Wehlage, G.G. (1989). Dropping out: Can schools be expected to prevent it? In L. Weis, E. Parrar & H. G. Petrie (Eds.), Dropouts from school: Issues, dilemmas, and solutions (pp. 181-204). State University of New York Press: Albany, New York.
- Wehlage, G. G., & Rutter, R. A. (1986). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? Teachers College Record, 87, (3), 374-392.
- Wells, S. E. (1990). At-risk youth: Identification, programs and recommendations. Englewood, CO: Teachers Ideas Press.
- Werner, E. E. (1990) Protective factors and individual resilience. In S. J. Meisels & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds.). Handbook of early childhood intervention (pp.97-116). Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press.
- Wentzel, K. R., & Asher, S. R. (1995). Academic lives of neglected, rejected, popular, and controversial children. Child Development, 66, (3), 754-763.
- Wentzel, K. R., & Feldman, S. S. (1993). Parental predictors of boys' self-restraint and motivation to achieve at school: A longitudinal study. Journal of Early Adolescence, 13, 183-

203.

Werner, E. E. (1984) Resilient children, Young Children, 40, (1), 68-72.

Werner, E. E. (1989) High-risk children in young adulthood: A longitudinal study from birth to 32 years, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 59, (1), 72-81.

Werner, E. E. (1990). Protective factors and individual resilience. In S. Meisels & J. Shonkoff (Eds) Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention (New York, Cambridge University Press).

Werner, E. E., & Smith, G. (1990). Overcoming the Odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood (New York, Cornell University Press).

Werner, E. E., & Smith, R.S. (1988) Vulnerable but Invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth (New York, Adams, Bannister and Cox).

Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1989). Vulnerable but invincible: A longitudinal study, of resilient children and youth New York: Adams-Bannister-Cox.

Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1992). Overcoming the odds: High-risk children from birth to adulthood. Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1982). Vulnerable but invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.

West, D.J., & Farrington, D.P. (1973). Who becomes delinquent? Second report of the Cambridge study in delinquent development. London, Heinemann.

Wheelock, A., & Dorman, G. (1988). Before it's too late: Dropout prevention in the middle grades. Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence and Boston: Massachusetts Advocacy Center.

White, J. L., & Parham, T. A. (1990). The psychology of Blacks: An African American perspective. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

White, S. E. (1992). Factors that contribute to learning differences among African American and Caucasian students (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 374 177).

Willis, M.G. (1989). Learning styles of African American children: A review of literature and interventions. The Journal of Black Psychology, 16, 1, 47-65.

Williams, J. H., & Muehle, S. (1978). Relations Among Student and Teacher Perceptions of Behavior. Journal of Negro Education, Fall.

Wilson, K. R., & Allen, W.R. (1987). Explaining the educational attainment of young Black adults: Critical familial and extra-familial influences. Journal of Negro Education, 56, (1),

64-76.

Wilson-Sadberry, K.R., Winfield, L.F., & Royster, D. A. (1991). Resilience and persistence of African American males in post-secondary enrollment. Education and Urban Society, 24, (1), 87-102.

Winfield, L. F. (1991). Resilience, schooling, and development in African American: A conceptual framework. Education and Urban Society, 24, (1), 5-14.

Winfield, L. (1994). Developing Resilience in Urban Youth (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory Urban Monograph Series).

Wirth, L. (1972). The problem of minority groups. In P.I. Rose (Ed.) Nation of nations: The ethnic experience and the racial crisis (pp. 136-158). New York: Random House.

Wood, D., Halfon, N., Newacheck, P., & Scarlata, D. (1993). Impact of Family Relocation on Children's Growth, Development, School Function and Behavior. Journal of the American Medical Association, 270, (11), 1334-1338.

Wolcott, H.F. (1973). The man in the principal's office: An ethnography. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, And Winston.

Wolin, S. J., & Wolin, S. (1993). The resilient self: How survivors of troubled families rise from adversity. New York: Villard.

Zeldin, S., Pittman, K., Price, L., & Irby, M. (1994). Principles and practices for promoting youth development. Report for the Youth Outcomes and Best Practices Project. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Zimiles, H. & Lee, V.E., (1991). Adolescent family structure and education process. Developmental Psychology, 27, (2), 314-320.

Zimmerman, M.A., & Arunkumen, R. (1994). Resiliency research: Implications for schools and policy. Social policy report, Society for Research and Development, 8, (4), 4-18.

## **INTERVIEWS**

Interview of William Barnes with Johnny Leak (September 15, 2002).

Interview of Jacob Harris with Johnny Leak (September 19, 2002).

Interview of Joshua Davis with Johnny Leak was (September 24, 2002).

Interview of Christopher Adams with Johnny Leak (September 27, 2002).

Interview of Michael Reid with Johnny Leak (November 1, 2002).

Interview of James Wright with Johnny Leak (November 7, 2002).

Interview of Tyler Jackson with Johnny Leak (November 24, 2002).

Interview of John Anderson with Johnny Leak (December 4, 2002).

Telephone conversation with Paula Cordeiro (August 17, 2001)

Telephone conversation with Paula Cordeiro (August 21, 2001)

Telephone conversation with Paula Cordeiro (June 25, 2002)

## **APPENDICES**

Table 1: Profile of Protective Factors

| INDIVIDUAL  | FAMILY  | SCHOOL   | COMMUNITY   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Personal traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active easy, outgoing temperament</li> <li>• Academic ability</li> <li>• Emotional strength</li> <li>• Sense of autonomy</li> <li>• Social competence</li> <li>• Problem-solving skills</li> </ul> <p>Coping behaviors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Active engagement</li> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Reflectiveness</li> </ul> <p>Strong belief in self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-confidence</li> <li>• Positive self-efficacy</li> <li>• Sense of purpose</li> <li>• Optimism and hope</li> <li>• Self Confidence</li> </ul> | <p>Love and Attachment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Siblings</li> <li>• Extended family</li> </ul> <p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material (Resources, financial, access to knowledge)</li> <li>• Emotional</li> </ul> <p>Parental practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency</li> <li>• Discipline, authoritative</li> <li>• High but realistic expectations</li> </ul> <p>Modeling resiliency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Siblings</li> <li>• Extended family</li> </ul> <p>Positive relations with school (Involved in school)</p> | <p>Good teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive relationships</li> <li>• Knowledge of children</li> </ul> <p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Agencies</li> </ul> <p>School climate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student focused</li> <li>• Caring</li> <li>• Safe and secure</li> <li>• Empowering</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant</li> </ul> <p>Enriched</p> | <p>Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Protective</li> <li>• Culturally proud</li> </ul> <p>Prosocial Peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Common interest</li> <li>• Common experiences</li> <li>• Helpful</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities for participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-identity</li> <li>• Belongingness</li> <li>• Connectedness</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities for success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Contribution</li> </ul> <p>Stable residence</p> <p>Safe neighborhood</p> |

Table 2: Profile of Participants

| Name                            | William       | Jacob         | Joshua           | Chris                 | Michael               | James           | Tyler          | John                  |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Number of siblings              | 2             | 3             | 3                | 13                    | 2                     | 2               | 1              | 4                     |
| Birth ranking                   | 2             | 3             | 1                | 2                     | 1                     | 1               | 2              | 1                     |
| Number living at home           | 5             | 5             | 5                | 11                    | 5                     | 5               | 3              | 4                     |
| Number of rooms                 | 8             | 7             | 4                | 8                     | 7                     | 8               | 7              | 7                     |
| Parent marital status           | Separated     | Separated     | Married          | Separated<br>Divorced | Divorced<br>Remarried | Married         | Married        | Divorced<br>Remarried |
| Currently living with           | Mother        | Mother        | Both Parents     | Mother                | Both Parents          | Both Parents    | Both Parents   | Both Parents          |
| Type of dwelling                | Single Family | Single Family | Apartment        | Single Family         | Single Family         | Single Family   | Single Family  | Single Family         |
| Mother's educational attainment | College       | High School   | Associate Degree | High School           | College               | 2 Years College | 1 Year College | College               |
| Father's educational attainment | College       | College       | High School      | Unknown               | College               | College         | College        | College               |

Table 3: Profile of Ethnicity, Gender and Grade Level

| Name    | Ethnicity        | Gender | Grade Level | Grade Point Average (GPA) |
|---------|------------------|--------|-------------|---------------------------|
| William | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.13                      |
| Jacob   | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.34                      |
| Joshua  | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.89                      |
| Chris   | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.01                      |
| Michael | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.14                      |
| James   | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.09                      |
| Tyler   | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.8                       |
| John    | African American | Male   | 12          | 3.63                      |

Table 4: Protective Factors

| INDIVIDUAL  | FAMILY   | SCHOOL   | COMMUNITY   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Personal traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy temperament</li> <li>• Academic ability</li> <li>• Emotional strength</li> <li>• Sense of autonomy</li> <li>• Social competence</li> </ul> <p>Coping behaviors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Active engagement</li> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Reflectiveness</li> </ul> <p>Strong belief in self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High self-esteem</li> <li>• Positive self-efficacy</li> <li>• Sense of purpose</li> <li>• Optimism and hope</li> <li>• Self Confidence</li> </ul> | <p>Love and Attachment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Siblings</li> <li>• Extended family</li> </ul> <p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material (Resources, financial)</li> <li>• Emotional</li> </ul> <p>Parental practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• High expectations</li> </ul> <p>Modeling resiliency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Siblings</li> <li>• Extended family</li> </ul> <p>Positive relations with school</p> | <p>Good teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive relationships</li> <li>• Knowledge of children</li> </ul> <p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Agencies</li> </ul> <p>School climate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student focused</li> <li>• Caring</li> <li>• Safe and secure</li> <li>• Empowering</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant</li> </ul> <p>Enriched</p> | <p>Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Protective</li> <li>• Culturally proud</li> </ul> <p>Prosocial Peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Common interest</li> <li>• Common experiences</li> <li>• Helpful</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities for participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-identity</li> <li>• Belongingness</li> <li>• Connectedness</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities for success</p> |

**Johnny Leak**  
1702 Forest Road  
Durham, North Carolina 27705

September 4, 2002

Dear parents:

I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University. I will be conducting a study to investigate the factors, which lead to the academic success of African American male high school students. Rather than focusing on school dropouts, my purpose is to study the African American male students who excel in spite of considerable difficulties. School personnel identified your child as one of those students who excel. I am asking permission for your child to participate in this study.

The study consists of interviews and observations. I will observe your child at school, in the company of his friends, at home and/or in other relevant settings. I will conduct several interviews lasting approximately one hour. Please note that your child may stop participating at any time. It will not hurt your child's grades or jeopardize your child's program in any way if he is not in the study. However, I do hope you will allow and encourage participation.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you or your child specifically gives permission in writing to do otherwise.

Please feel free to call my faculty advisor, Paul Bitting, or me if you have any questions about the study. Our phone number is (919) 515-1768. At the end of the study, a summary of the results will be made available to all interested parents, teachers, and students. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Johnny Leak  
Doctoral Student  
North Carolina State University

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this project, by checking a statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher as quickly as possible.

I do grant permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

I do not grant permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian's Signature

A REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS STUDY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY (PHONE (919) 515-451).

**Johnny Leak**  
1702 Forest Road  
Durham, North Carolina 27705

September 5, 2002

Dr. Karen Banks  
Assistant Superintendent  
Wake County Schools  
3600 Wake Forest Road  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27609-7329

Dear Dr. Banks:

I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University. As a part of the program, I will be conducting a study to investigate the factors, which lead to the academic success of African American male high school students. Thus, I propose to study African American male students who excel in spite of tremendous odds. Therefore, school personnel will need to identify students who meet at risk criteria yet they excel. I am asking permission for two schools within your district to participate in this study.

The study consists of interviews and observations. I will observe students at school, in the company of his friends, at home and/or in other relevant settings. I will conduct several interviews lasting approximately one hour. Students may stop participating at any time. It will not hurt the student's grades or jeopardize your child's program in any way if he is not in the study.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless parents or the student specifically gives permission in writing to do otherwise.

Please feel free to call my faculty advisor, Paul Bitting, or me if you have any questions about the study. Our phone number is (919) 515-1768. At the end of the study, a summary of the results will be made available to all interested parents, teachers, and students. I can also be reached at (919) 807-3944.

Please grant permission to conduct this study. Findings may benefit schools in their effect to help other at risk students to excel academically. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Johnny Leak  
Doctoral Student  
North Carolina State University

A REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS STUDY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY (PHONE (919) 515-4514.

## **Personal Interview Guide**

1. Past time activities, weekend
2. Special people in student's life
3. Employment status
  - a. Where
  - b. Number of hours per week
  - c. How long?
  - d. Interference with school
  - e. Previous jobs held
4. Involvement in clubs, organizations, and groups
  - a. How long?
  - b. Role
  - c. Previous involvement
5. Self-description/perception
6. Self identity
7. Driving information
8. Religious involvement
9. Dating status
  - a. How long?
  - b. Things done together
  - c. Future plans
10. Past time activities
  - a. On weekend
  - b. Week nights
  - c. Time in at night
11. Type of music listening
12. Reading, watching television
13. Who are you most like?

14. Dreams for future
15. Plans for high school

## **Family Interview Guide**

1. Household information
  - a. Number of siblings
  - b. Siblings living in household
  - c. Birth order of siblings
  - d. Gender of siblings
  - e. Age of siblings
2. Work status of siblings
3. Parents' educational attainment
4. Description of extended family
  - a. Size
  - b. Roles they play
5. Church participation
  - a. By student
  - b. Frequency of attendance
  - c. Is everyone in the family in same church?
6. Residence
  - a. How long residing in current place
  - b. Where family lived before current place
7. Neighborhood information
  - a. General description
  - b. Persons in community who influenced student
8. Relationship/closeness to family members
9. Relationship/closeness to significant others
10. Childhood
  - a. What was life like?
  - b. Important memories

- c. Discipline from parents
11. Contact with police

## **School Interview Guide**

1. Perception of school
  - a. Life in high school
  - b. Life in middle school
  - c. Life in elementary school.
2. Awards
3. Early school experience
4. Perception of aspects of school experience
  - a. Classes
  - b. Teachers
  - c. Administrators
  - d. Fellow students
5. Description of typical day in school
6. Plans after high school
7. Friends who have gone to college
8. Friends in school
9. Friends outside of school
10. What do you attribute your success?
11. Ever skipped a grade/repeated?
12. Academic performance (past/present)
13. Teased (High, middle, elementary)
14. SAT scores
15. School attendance
  - a. Personal
  - b. Friends
  - c. When younger

16. Description of elementary school experience
17. Homework
  - a. Amount of time spent (High, middle, elementary)
  - b. Perception of homework activity
18. Favorite subjects
  - a. Subjects felt done especially well
  - b. Reasons for achievement
19. Least favorite subjects
20. Perceptions of academic achievement
21. School assignment history (Where attended)
22. Relationship with teachers
23. Extracurricular activities
24. Interest in school
25. Describe your school
26. Importance of performing well in school



**EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION:**

16. School performance this year is: \_\_\_ Better than average \_\_\_ Average \_\_\_ Below Average

17. Educational Placement: \_\_\_ Honors \_\_\_ AP \_\_\_ Other, Specify \_\_\_\_\_

18. Latest Standardized Tests:

| Name of Test | Date of Test | Test Score ranking/Percentile |
|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| _____        | _____        | _____                         |
| _____        | _____        | _____                         |
| _____        | _____        | _____                         |
| _____        | _____        | _____                         |
| _____        | _____        | _____                         |

19. Special talents, abilities:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20. Special honors, recognitions, and awards:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

21. Extracurricular activities:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**HOME AND COMMUNITY SITUATION:**

22. Lives in: \_\_\_ Single Family House \_\_\_ Duplex \_\_\_ Apartment \_\_\_ Trailer \_\_\_ Other,  
Specify \_\_\_\_\_

23. \_\_\_\_\_ Number of persons living in household \_\_\_\_\_ Number of rooms

Description of living environment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_