THE EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN
DETROIT: A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

by

FARRIS FATIR MUHAMMAD

(Under the Direction of April Peters-Hawkins)

ABSTRACT

African-American males in inner-cities often experience many challenges that present a barrier to their completion of high school. This study examines African-American males’ educational experience of resilience growing up in Detroit and graduating from a Detroit public high school. Detroit was selected for this study because there is a dearth of research on Black males’ educational experience in Detroit public schools. Although there is much research focused on the crime rate, economic status, and underperforming schools in Detroit, scarce research is available on how environmental influences impact the educational experience of African-American males.

The objective of this research study was to discover significant influences associated with or responsible for the resilience of the Black males in this study in the context of overcoming noteworthy or traumatic events that could have possibly culminated in their dropping out of high school. Moreover, this research study was designed to give voice to African-American males of low socioeconomic status in a city inundated with crime and very few resources, allowing them to unpack the types of
significant or traumatic events they experienced and how they navigated these experiences.

INDEX WORDS: Educational resilience, African-American males, Detroit public school Black male resilience, Detroit, narrative methodology
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA
2015
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August 2015
DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my nieces and nephews: Lajae, Malik, Laniya, Taniya, Trayvon, Heavenly, and Kaleb. I love each one of you dearly, and you have each kept me inspired throughout this journey. I thank you for your untiring love. I also dedicate this dissertation to my eight siblings: Kawanna, Sam, Rahman, Tanisha, Danielle, Raynisha, Shiniece, and Clarence. Each of you has inspired and motivated me in various ways to be steadfast throughout the dissertation process. Last but not least, I dedicate this dissertation to all of the Black males raised in poverty throughout Detroit that are questioning if they too can be resilient.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank my adviser, Dr. April Peters-Hawkins, for her “tough-love” throughout this entire process. From my first encounter as her student in her Educational Leadership course my first semester at the University of Georgia to my time as her advisee, she has consistently challenged me to do my best work. Although she was often very tough, she frequently provided rationales as to why she was being tough, thereby assuring me that she was coming from a place of love and desired to see me grow academically as a scholar. For this, I am forever grateful. Thank you for your hard work and dedication in seeing this project through to its completion.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jori Hall and Dr. Louis Castenell. I appreciate you, Dr. Hall, for serving as my methodologist and challenging me to think more critically about this study. I am grateful that you continuously made yourself available and provided me with valuable information that has allowed this study to manifest. I am also grateful to you Dr. Castenell for your tremendous support, guidance, and expertise. Thank you both!

In addition, I would like to acknowledge other faculty members from the University of Georgia. Special thanks to Dr. Sheneka Williams for her unyielding support throughout my doctoral journey. You have been a major asset and have helped me to acclimate to this doctoral process. Thank you Dr. Cheryl Fields-Smith for the support you have shown me and other doctoral students of color. I honestly appreciate your opening
your home on several occasions to students to discuss navigating the doctoral process. Those experiences were priceless to me.

I wish to acknowledge and show gratitude to my friends and members of the “BreathU” study group: Christopher Johnson, Ashley Baker, Dr. Tennille Lasker-Scott, Dr. Bantu Gross, Beverly Harper, and Dr. Tyra Gross. Each of you inspired me and held me accountable for accomplishing specific tasks to arrive at graduation. You have each been very resourceful, and I cannot imagine what this dissertation process would have been like without the presence of each of you during those long, late-night hours at Rivers Crossings. I wish to also thank other friends that I have met at the University of Georgia that have provided me with inspiration, advice, and resources to alleviate the anxiety that accompanies the earning of a doctoral degree. So, thank you Dr. Joseph Cooper, Jamon Holt, Dr. Ain Grooms, and the members of the Graduate and Professional Scholars (GAPS).

I thank my mentor, Dr. Delois Leapheart, for not only encouraging me to pursue a doctorate degree but also assisting me in the process, praying for me throughout the process, and celebrating each of my milestones to the end. Thank you for your belief in me and helping me to strive for greatness for now nearly ten years. I am grateful for your vision and belief in my academic potential when I did not see it myself.

Thanks to you Dr. Eric Mayes for your mentorship and support. You have been very supportive of my pursuit of a doctoral degree from the moment I first informed you of my intent. You have certainly been an inspiration to me, as I have expressed to you multiple times. You went from being my high school teacher to earning your Ph.D., and becoming the first Black male I knew personally to earn his Ph.D. I appreciate your
willingness to share with me your experiences with the intent of minimizing the resistance I would encounter throughout my doctoral journey.

Thanks to each and every one of the participants in this study and those who helped in my locating the participants by spreading the word about my study. I appreciate each participant’s courage and willingness to share the very intimate and troubling stories of his life and the life of his family.
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THE GENESIS

Growing up on the eastside of Detroit, I cannot recall even one conversation with my mother about homework, a school project, or anything related to school other than why I am being suspended from school. Teaching her children life lessons took precedence over formal education. My mother has nine children, five girls and four boys. I happen to be the middle child of the nine – the fifth child. The life lessons she instilled in her children, specifically her sons, were cleanliness, sharing, and not being a “punk” (afraid to physically defend ourselves). Due to the high level of violence in Detroit, and specifically on the eastside of the city, she wanted to be certain that her sons were able to fight and protect themselves to avoid being victims of violence. My mother was very unorthodox in her parenting practices and provided a great deal of autonomy to her children – specifically her boys.

My mother had a drug addiction throughout my entire childhood, and my father left home when I was five years of age – and never returned. As a result of my mother’s frequent drug use and drug peddling, our home was raided by the Wayne County Sheriff’s Department. My mother went to prison, and my siblings and I were split up and placed into various foster homes spread throughout the city. For the next two years, during my first and second years of schooling, one of my sisters and I lived together in a foster home. During this time, I performed reasonably well in school. The elderly foster parents that my sister and I lived with attended church five days a week. My foster mother during that period was also a Christian pastor who had her own church. The household had structure, and my foster parents placed a premium on education. Often after school, I would arrive home around 3:30pm and get started on any homework I had
to do. By 5:00 p.m., we were usually all eating dinner together in the kitchen. I would then have to change into my church clothes to attend church service at 7:00 p.m. We would get home around 9:30 pm, read a Bible verse, and then say our prayers before going to bed. During this time, I performed well in school and was consistently on the honor roll. However, I still often felt disturbed living with strangers and feeling as if I had to protect my sister, although she is older than me by a year.

Despite my excellent academic performance, I was often considered rebellious as a child and disruptive in school. After living with our foster parents for two years, my sister and I left that foster home and moved in with two different aunts who happened to reside one block apart from each other. During my second grade year in school, I lived with my aunt who had a son and a daughter. Both of my cousins were older than I was. However, I would still often react violently toward my older male cousin, who could not fight as well as I could, despite his size advantage. I would often become frustrated because of the frequent house hopping and felt like an unwanted child. When frustrated and angry, I gained a momentary sense of power by resorting to some form of violence. I often fought in school as a way to assert myself and compensate for a feeling of inadequacy that was the result of not living with my biological parents. I hated the feeling of inferiority and saw fighting as a way of proving my worth. One day I found a new method of proving myself—although my old method did not quite disappear.

While I was in second grade, my teacher, Mrs. Grey, was training the class for the school’s spelling bee. At each grade level, classes competed to determine which student would be the best speller. First, the members of each class had to compete with one another for the top five positions. The top five from each class advanced to the school’s
spelling bee to compete with other classes at the same grade level. There was three second-grade classes at that time. In my class, Mrs. Grey made it very clear whom she thought would win the spelling bee—it was certainly not me. She had placed her faith in Lisa, and if Lisa somehow became disqualified, then she believed that Gregory would be likely to win the spelling bee from our class. In the event that Lisa and Gregory both became disqualified, she thought I would be the next potential candidate to win the spelling bee. Feeling underappreciated because of her lack of recognition of my academic abilities in spelling, I felt very frustrated and needed to prove my worth. Compounded by my belief that Lisa had an “uppity” background, due to her demeanor and vernacular, I felt as if I were being viewed as an uneducated “crack-baby” and a foster child. Unable to fight a girl or a teacher, I was determined to seek revenge by outperforming Lisa in the school’s spelling bee.

On the day of the spelling bee, all of the second graders competing in the spelling contest convened on the stage in the auditorium. A few teachers, principals, and parents were in the audience as well to watch the students compete. When the spelling bee started, it was clear that many of the competitors were nervous because they were quickly eliminated with relatively easy words. Because I implemented the various strategies I had learned during spelling practices and because I was a fairly advanced speller for a second grader, I performed well. I often asked the moderators to repeat the word, define it, and use it in a sentence. After many students had been eliminated, Lisa and I were among the top five students from the entire school who were still in the competition. Finally, Lisa was called on to spell a word and she spelled it incorrectly, which resulted in her elimination. Her elimination from the spelling bee left only three others and me to
compete for the second-grade spelling championship. Since my goal was simply to outperform Lisa in the spelling bee, I began to celebrate silently upon her elimination. I was more concerned about being the best speller in my class than the best in the school. Once Lisa was disqualified, it became official—I was the best speller from my class. While I pondered my triumph over Lisa, the spelling bee continued. Next, a young man attempted to spell a word and was eliminated. Now it was down to the final three students out of the second grade competition. The last person standing would be the winner, and the second to last would be the runner up. I was called to the microphone on stage in the auditorium to spell my next word. I was still in celebratory mood from outpacing Lisa. The word given to me to spell was *ate*. No challenge there I thought. I confidently launched right into the spelling of the word without asking any additional questions for clarification: *e-i-g-h-t*. However, I heard a buzzer sound and was informed that I had spelled the word incorrectly. Despite my great disappointment, I still felt excited that I had outperformed Lisa and made Mrs. Grey reconsider ever counting me out again. It was the first time I realized that education could be used as a “weapon” and that I could get attention for being “smart.”

For fourth grade, I moved with my god-parents to a place where one of my brothers was living. This residence was one block away from the home that had been raided several years earlier. I was now back attending the same school for fourth grade that I had attended for kindergarten. My brother and I had to walk by our old home each morning on the way to school. This sight of our former home would remind us that we were not living with our mom and that she was still in prison. This neighborhood, in many ways, was very violent and saturated with drug dealing and drug users. Many
children in the neighborhood were similar to my brother and me—they had a mother who was a drug addict on welfare, no father at home, and a great deal of frustration and anger. While in fourth grade, I was allowed and encouraged by some of my uncles and other male adults to smoke marijuana and drink alcoholic beverages. It was very common to see guns, drugs, and large sums of money in rubber bands lying around inside the home. In school, I was considered smart and performed well academically. I was learning a lot of things regarding survival in the neighborhood during this time. Because I believed that many in my class were not experiencing the life I was living outside of school, I thought I might be smarter than the kids in the class—at least regarding street smarts. I also had a couple of fights during this fourth grade school year. Many times these fights were the result of name calling or talking about other students’ appearance (playing the dozens) in class. The name calling would escalate into physical fights due to someone feeling embarrassed and their feelings being hurt. I became popular and enjoyed being in school. Although I was only residing at this home for my fourth grade school year, all of these environmental factors—at home, at school, and in the community—contributed in some way to my development and the way I would analyze and process things.

A social worker determined that my brother and I would be better off at another foster home. So we moved into a foster home with an elderly lady and her daughter. Because of the frustration I experienced from the continuous moving and because of my belief that I was grown, I was rebellious to the foster parent. My disrespectful behavior caused the foster mother to request that we be removed from her care and placed with another foster family. My brother and I were there only for about two weeks. Since my brother was three years older than I, he was placed in a boy’s home instead of a foster
home next. It was hard to place boys older than thirteen who came from troubled backgrounds in foster homes. I moved in with another foster family for my fifth grade school year. It seemed that every school year I had to move to a new location, attend a new school and make new friends. My foster mother at this new foster home was very liberal in her parenting. She gave me freedom and treated me with kindness. She was the first person to purchase me a whole submarine sandwich from a Subway restaurant. Instantly, I liked her for it and thought she was generous. She purchased brand name cereals and allowed me to eat as much as I wanted as often as I wanted. I was grateful for her generosity. Therefore, I tried not to misbehave while living with her to show my gratitude for her kindness. I did not get into much trouble in fifth grade but did not perform well academically either. I was in this foster home for less than a year. My mother got released from prison and moved into a home right around the corner from the foster home that I had been placed in.

My mother was given custody of my siblings and me during the latter half of my fifth grade school year. It was not long after her release from prison that she started using drugs again. During sixth grade, I really started to misbehave in school. Because I could curse in front of adults and did not get “whoopings” (corporal punishment) from my mother—at least not for school related things such as misbehaving or poor grades—I thought I was grown. I was suspended several times in sixth grade, and my brother was suspended from school twice as much as I was. I was back to fighting, skipping class, and doing the minimum amount of work to pass the class. While I didn’t fail any courses, I barely passed them. This was not due to lack of intelligence or incompetence but simply to the belief that school was not a priority. I carried this same attitude over into my
seventh grade year. During seventh grade, however, my mother’s drug addiction became more serious; the social worker would come by the home and would be unable to find my mother. She was dodging the social worker. We were all at risk of being separated and placed in foster homes again. To avoid this, my oldest sister, who was legally considered an adult at the time, decided to take custody of all of the other siblings—with the exclusion of my oldest brother, who was imprisoned at the time.

My sister adopted us and became our legal guardian. However, because of the dynamic of this brother-sister relationship, I did not recognize her authority over me. It was hard for her to implement rules as a sister that even my mother could not or did not implement. Therefore, because of my resistance, my oldest sister could not be very involved in my education. She recognized me as someone who was old enough to earn his own money at about the age of eleven. From seventh grade until graduating from high school, I managed to stay in school with very little support or encouragement from anyone else. Drawing back on my thought process from second grade, I did not like the fact of people expecting me to drop out of high school and be “a statistic”. This motivated me to graduate high school, in addition to not finding high school to be academically challenging. During the latter half of seventh grade until graduating high school I lived on the Westside of Detroit. I did not care to meet many new friends due to growing up on the eastside of Detroit. In the city of Detroit, there has always been tension between those who reside on the east side of town and those on the west. The east side of Detroit was considered to be more dangerous, impoverished, and violent. The west side of town was better manicured and was more populated by residents that worked at the various plants and earned a higher income. Many people who resided on the east side of
the city viewed those on the west as uppity or cowardly, due to a perceived lower inclination to engage in violence.

As I was considered to be a “bad child,” I was not expected by many to graduate from high school until my brother graduated two years before me. My family situation was unstable as we were impoverished and received state assistance. My mother was on drugs and in and out of prison. Moreover, my oldest brother was sentenced to ten years in prison. My eight siblings and I had a difficult time being split up as we jumped from foster home to foster home. At this time, I terrorized some of the neighborhoods I resided in. My sister who is one year older than me graduated a year before me. Then, I graduated high school despite the many traumatic events I experienced throughout my childhood.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As I reminisce upon my upbringing in the city of Detroit and attending Detroit public schools (DPS), I often ponder upon the many horrifying and significant events my friends and I faced, directly and indirectly, that impacted our education. Many friends, family members, and extended family members have characterized my completion of high school as a miracle. As one family member put it, “You have now made it Brah.” Another family member explained to me, “You’ve made it to 18 years old, graduated high school, have a driver’s license, and don’t have a felony. YOU GOOD!” Those two declarations, in particular, have continued to resonate with me based on my understanding of these loaded statements in an urban context. Briefly unpacking the two statements, they are indicative of how many people perceive the plight of Black males’ achievement of success. Due to the harsh realities of incarceration, poverty, and violence with which scores of young Black males are inundated (Alexander, 2010), high school completion is often a highly significant accomplishment, worthy of praise in many urban Black families such as mine.

Many of my personal experiences piqued my interest about the current realities of young Black males in Detroit. More pressingly, I frequently wondered how Black males from Detroit displayed resilience by successfully hurdling over the road blocks in their paths to high school completion. How have they ascended in environments in which many who look like them do not? This is the overarching question motivating this
research. In addition, supplementary questions and concerns surrounding the impact of the home, community, and school on the completion of high school by Black males undergird this research. For example, how does the thundering sound of gun fire often heard at night negatively impact a young Black male’s educational experience? In contrast, how might a Black female single parent working multiple jobs to provide a better future for her children positively impact a Black male’s educational experience? This research seeks to better understand the educational resilience of Black males from Detroit who graduated from a DPS high school.

Statement of the Problem

Many Black males are continuously defying the odds in education, yet the educational literature is selective in acknowledging and magnifying this reality. A great deal of literature often depicts Black males in a troubling light without providing adequate context as a rationale for their academic performance. Black males are currently in a state of crisis according to a recent study conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010), and it considers this “a national catastrophe.” Findings from the report indicate Black males are academically underperforming compared to their schoolmates and dropping out of school at double the rate of white males (Herbert, 1999; Lewis 2010). According to the Schott Foundation (2008), only 47 percent of African-American males are graduating from U.S. high schools as opposed to 75 percent of White males. In larger inner cities such as Detroit, the graduation rates are even worse, ranging between 20 to 30 percent for Black males (Schott Foundation, 2010). Given the soaring concerns of reducing the Black male dropout rate or push out rate (Mazama, 2015; Mazama & Lundy, 2012), attention needs
to be shifted to those who persevere in the face of the challenges that permeate inner-city schools, low-income communities and impoverished households. Young Black males are disproportionately reared in impoverished neighborhoods, where crime, unemployment, and violence are commonplace (Garibaldi, 1992; Harrison, et al., 1990; Task Force, 2008). Much research has confirmed that children raised in these sorts of environments are more likely to experience academic difficulties; complete fewer years of schooling; be less oriented toward school; earn lower grades; and drop out of school more frequently than children from comparable families living in wealthier neighborhoods (Castenell, 1983; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997).

Research focused on highlighting the academic underperformance of inner-city Black males is ethically responsible for illuminating the daunting challenges faced by the students to avoid disingenuity. There is much research, discourse, and concern about the dropout rate of Black males (Herbert, 1999; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010): poor academic performance of African-American students (Ford, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006); disciplinary issues of African Americans (Kunjufu, 1995; Milner, 2007; Task Force; 2008); and, the Black-White achievement gap (Ferguson, 2003; Ladson-Billing, 2006). This discourse is in large part due to the alarming dropout rate of African-American students, especially in inner-city public school systems resembling that of Detroit. However, there is little research that focuses on eliciting the voices of those students and their direct lived experiences of overcoming significant obstacles in the poorest performing schools in impoverished cities (Corwin, 2000; Seidman, 2006; Wiggan, 2007) like Detroit. To this end, Randle (2012) argues that “previous student achievement studies have primarily focused on the researcher’s analyses and
interpretations of quantitative data such as test scores rather than on students’ perspectives” (p. 32). The narratives of lived experiences from students who have displayed educational resilience by graduating from DPS help seal a void in educational research.

The DPS System has been considered a failing school system and conceivably the worst school system in the nation (NAEP, 2009; The Nations Report Card, 2009). DPS student enrollment is over 90 percent African-American (Holzman, 2004; Michigan Department of Education, 2006) due to being in a city which is nearly 83 percent African-American (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Many have expressed their disappointment with the DPS. Michael Winerip (The New York Times, 2011) stated, “[i]n 2009, Detroit public schools had the lowest scores ever recorded in the 21-year history of the national math proficiency test” (p. 13). Secretary of Education Arne Duncan weighed in on the unsatisfactory performance of the DPS. Duncan made undesirable references to DPS as “Ground Zero” and reportedly referred to it publicly as New Orleans without the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina (Huff Post Education, 2013; The Washington Times, 2009). More recently, Duncan referred to the DPS dropout rates as “devastating” and the school system as a whole as “arguably the worst urban school district in the country now” (The Wall Street Journal, 2013). Bearing in mind the myriad challenges faced by the Black males in Detroit, such as the city facing a depression, inferior city services and unsafe living conditions, which Duncan failed to acknowledge in his comments, the dropout rate becomes more comprehensible when given this context. There have been remarkable accounts of Black males displaying
educational resilience in Detroit that are understudied and not acknowledged by educational leaders such as Duncan.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to add to the scarce but emerging body of literature on the educational resilience of Black males (Bryan, 2013; Randle, 2012; William & Bryan, 2013). Particularly, this study focuses on eliciting narratives from Black males who are DPS graduates to understand the factors that contributed to their resilience. Since there is no shortage of literature stressing the Black male dropout rate and their unsatisfactory academic performance, this dissertation seeks to reveal the factors and characteristics responsible for facilitating their academic resilience as evidenced by their successful high school completion. In accordance with the ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013), particular attention will be given to role of the home, community, and school. Using an ecological approach allows for consideration of a wide range of factors that shape a student’s social environment and contribute to a student’s outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) by looking at both contextual and individual characteristics. As William and Bryan (2013) have discussed, in the previous two decades, there have been limited studies focused on the resiliency of African-American children and adolescents (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991; Clark, 1983; Cook, 2000; Ford, 1993, 1994; William & Bryan, 2013). This study helps to illuminate Black males’ voices of successes in persevering over significant impediment.

Randle (2012) acknowledges the dearth of research eliciting the voices of Black students’ direct lived experiences of overcoming obstacles that hinder their education in
the poorest performing schools (Seidman, 2006). Often, schools in inner-cities that are
deeded as high poverty schools lack many resources, putting poor children at an
educational disadvantage. Yet, many Black males manage to graduate annually. Often the
notion of completing high school is trivialized by mainstream America as a common
benchmark. Having attended many high poverty high school graduations, the response
from the ecstatic family members and parents’ theatrics clearly suggest otherwise when a
Black male graduates. As a result, I would argue that Black males’ resilience is not
recognized by the completion of high school despite the overcoming of traumatic events,
which puts their education in jeopardy often on a daily basis. This research intends to
shift the paradigm to recognize and appreciate the resilience of Black males from Detroit.

Many researchers have provided various definitions for the term *resilience*.
Among the various definitions that researchers have provided, overcoming a traumatic or
significant challenge is a commonality embedded in each of them (Bryan, 2005; Fraser,
2004; Masten, 2001; William & Bryan, 2013; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In addition,
another common understanding of resilience is, it simply cannot exist without some form
of adversity, danger or perceived risk involved (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar,
Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Spencer et al., 2006). The Task Force on
Resilience (2008) explicates “resilience is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that
incorporates the bidirectional interaction between individuals and their environment
within contexts (family, peer, school and community, society)” (p. 21). Accordingly, to
understand the resilience of Black males, it is critical to comprehend the resistance they
often face and the environment in which they are experiencing it. To this end, the Task
Force on Resilience (2008) recognizes the necessity of a historical view by stating “we
contend that understanding resilience among African-American youth requires acknowledging their experience in the United States and appreciating the continuing legacy of oppression and discrimination that affects their daily lives” (p. 24). For the purpose of this study, the researcher frames *educational resilience* as the graduation from a DPS high school by overcoming significant obstacles or traumatic events (e.g., homelessness, violence, juvenile detention/prison, death in family) in which the adverse impact would ordinarily jeopardize the ability of a Black male to graduate.

**Methodology Overview and Research Questions**

The methodology chosen for this study on the *educational resilience of African-American males* is narrative inquiry. When defining narrative inquiry, Schwandt (2007) asserts, “this is a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (e.g., life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research” (pp. 203-204). The objectives of methodologies, as explained by Schwandt (2007) are to:

explicate and define (a) the kinds of problems that are worth investigating, (b) what comprises a researchable problem, testable hypothesis, and so on, (c) how to frame a problem in such a way that it can be investigated using particular designs and procedures, (d) how to understand what constitutes a legitimate and warranted explanation, (e) how to judge matters of generalizability, (f) how to select or develop appropriate means of generating data, and (g) how to develop the logic linking problem–data generation–analysis–argument. (p. 193)
The researcher believes the phenomenon of Black males displaying educational resilience is worthy of investigation. Using an ecological theory of human development, which takes into account the impact of environmental factors (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2012), helps situate the challenges and resilience of the Black males in this study. As such, the researcher seeks to gain understanding of the lived experiences of Black males who have displayed resilience by providing them with a voice to expound upon their experiences through narrative interviews (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In doing so, I asked semi-structured interview questions to elicit background information of each of the participants, including the traumatic events they faced and how they overcame the events. Kvale (2007) articulates how semi-structured interviews are designed to “understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects’ own perspectives” (p. 10). It is very similar to an everyday conversation, but has a purpose and technique to gain an understanding of a phenomenon.

Research Questions

Through an ecological theory of human development lens, the research questions were developed and used to construct the research design. The ecological perspective considers many environmental factors impacting a student’s educational outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Bronfenbrenner’s theory of human development “provides a model of interrelated social structures (e.g., self, family, peers, home, and school) and processes that influence individual behavior” (Stewart, 2007, p. 17). As such, through an ecological lens, the researcher considers factors beyond regularly cited-causes of resilience (e.g., intrinsic motivation, personality traits) and studies environmental factors (e.g., inner-city school, impoverished community, home) that may have impacted a
child’s resilience (Fraser, 2004). Therefore, the ecological lens allows for a broader scope to view and analyze resilience in other complex ways (William & Brian, 2013). Below are the research questions guiding this study:

1. How do African-American male high school graduates raised in poverty describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit?

2. When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) have the largest impact on Black males’ education from the perspective of Black males?

3. What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the Black males exhibiting resilience?

**Why Detroit Public Schools**

The DPS system is attractive for researching and analyzing Black males’ educational resilience, due to the obstacles many Black males overcome in Detroit during their journey to high school completion. Detroit public high schools suffer in large part from the social ills that plague the city of Detroit (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994; Simmons, 2014). Due to high levels of crime and violence in Detroit, DPS officials have expressed great concerns for safety in their schools. DPS is working closely with the Detroit Police Department, the Michigan State Police Department, and other community organizations to reduce crime and violence in schools and on school grounds. News journalist Maddox (2011) reported that “the [DPS school] district has invested 534 thousand dollars in a new system that comes with new cameras and high tech metal detectors similar to what you’d expect to see at an airport.” The action, time and financial
allocation that public officials and school administrators deem necessary to reduce crime near DPS high schools indicates the severity of crime and violence to which children are being subjected. The appointed emergency financial manager for DPS, Roy Roberts, stated during a press conference that “the biggest challenge facing the Detroit Public Schools is safety” (ABC News, 2011). Safety is important at the school level, but it is also important for the students as they travel through their communities to arrive at school safely. A safe environment is needed in the community.

Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development, environmental factors in Detroit and their impact on students must also be considered to provide context to students’ resilience. When discussing school safety in DPS, the routes traveled to school need to be discussed as they pertain to safety. The community must also enter the discussion of school safety, as it also impacts students. Lastly, issues at home impacting students’ learning at school need to be analyzed as well. When taking into account the ecology of human development, learning is not only done at the school; environmental influences significantly impact a child’s capacity to learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2012). When holistically observing and analyzing the dangers many Black males have to experience in Detroit, it becomes clearer how a family member might say “You have now made it Brah,” when a Black male graduates from the DPS system.

A study conducted by Neighborhood Scout (2013) revealed the top 25 most dangerous neighborhoods in America by analyzing 2011 crime statistics from the FBI and U.S. Census data, tracking the violent crimes of homicide, armed robbery, aggravated assaults, and forcible rape. Neighborhood Scout (2013) found, out of the top
25 most dangerous neighborhoods in America, the top three are in Detroit. The three Detroit neighborhoods, labeled as the most dangerous in the world, each have schools in their areas. A basketball coach at Martin Luther King high school recently shot two teenagers, killing one, after they attempted to rob him while escorting two students to their vehicle at the school (MyFoxDetroit, 2013). According to other local news reports (Huffpost Detroit, 2013; WXYZ Detroit, 2013), the two teenagers attended the high school, but one was expelled from the school. Analyzing this tragedy, of a school’s basketball coach killing a former student and shooting the other, through an ecological lens assists in understanding the negative impact it has on the students regarding their safety and academic achievement. This conceptual lens has been argued to help in understanding how peers, family, and community shape a person’s identity (Johnson, 2014). The negative things a person witnesses during his or her upbringing and development, especially near a school campus, can cause a fear of attending school or cause a disdain toward school. To this end, Noguera (2003) argues,

It is not surprising that there is a connection between the educational performance of African American males and the hardships they endure within the larger society (Coleman et al., 1966). In fact, it would be more surprising if Black males were doing well academically in spite of the broad array of difficulties that confront them. Scholars and researchers commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance. (pp. 432-433)

In Detroit, where multiple communities have been recognized as the most dangerous areas in America inside a city ranked as the most dangerous in America, the educational
resilience of Black males must be viewed as significant given the challenging environmental context of Detroit.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this research, the following terms apply:

**Poverty**: “A standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of an adequate diet, health, and shelter” (Eitzen & Eitzen Smith, 2009, p. 219).

**Poverty threshold**: “The poverty line established by the government based on the minimal amount of money required for a subsistence level of life. The threshold varies with the size of the family” (Eitzen & Eitzen Smith, 2009, p. 219).

**Resilience**: The successful display of strength after overcoming a significant tragic experience. A universal capacity of having “an awareness of the self-righting tendencies that move children toward normal adult development under all but the most adverse circumstances” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 202).

**Educational Resilience**: Is the successful academic achievement of students, despite being hindered by challenges, especially environmental, outside of their control. For the purpose of this study, educational resilience is the completion of high school by an African-American male who have encountered a significant obstacles at home, school or community related to poverty which made the idea of completing high school doubtful.

**Push out Rate**: The push out rate is centered on the theory that many children are “pushed-out” of school, discouraged in school, or treated in an inferior way which persuade them to leave school because they find little to no value in continuing enrollment.
African-American: The term African American is used to describe a person of color who is a descendent of Africa but born in America. The term African-American is used interchangeably with term Black when referencing a persons’ race.

Traumatic Event: A disturbing event painfully impacting a person physically, emotionally, or psychological causing that person to become stressed or fearful of reliving that event. An event causing a person to think and respond in a desperate manner for the purpose of survival.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The objective of this narrative inquiry is to explore the educational resilience of African-American males, from impoverished backgrounds, who graduated from a Detroit public high school. The overarching questions guiding this research are as follows:

1. How do African-American males who were raised in poverty and graduated from high school describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit?

2. When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) have the largest impact on Black males’ education from the perspective of Black males?

3. What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the African-American males exhibiting resilience?

There exists a significant body of empirical and theoretical scholarship on Black males in high school, Black males in poverty, and the educational achievements of Black males. However, there has been minimal qualitative research conducted on the lived experiences of Black males who face life threatening challenges daily, while attending school, who graduate despite these obstacles (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991; Clark, 1983; Cook, 2000; Ford, 1993, 1994; William & Bryan, 2013). Even more so, research on the lived experience of Black males’ educational resilience in the city of Detroit is essentially nonexistent. More research is being conducted on Black males’
educational achievements; but, research needs to be conducted on Black males facing troubling encounters in dangerous communities, but still displaying educational resilience as well.

This literature review looks across studies focused on Black males to discern historically what aspects of resilience have been researched. Most importantly, what were the implications of research for the future of Black males in troubling communities who are relegated to high poverty schools based on socioeconomic status? Existing literature was analyzed to discover how environmental factors contribute to the challenges in front of Black males and how those challenges are impacting their resilience.

In undertaking this research, I have discovered there are multiple definitions for the term educational resilience (Fraser 2004; O’Connor, 1997; William & Bryan, 2013). But no research provides a cultural context of the term as it relates to the challenges often facing young Black males in inner-cities or impoverished communities. General definitions are often given such as the one provided by Yeager & Dweck (2012). They assert the term resilient is:

any behavioral, attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social challenge that is positive and beneficial for development (such as seeking new strategies, putting forth greater effort, or solving conflicts peacefully), and we refer to any response to a challenge that is negative or not beneficial for development (such as helplessness, giving up, cheating, or aggressive retaliation) as not resilient. (p. 303)

While Yeager’s and Dweck’s definition of resilient might suffice in general terms, literature is deficient at capturing Black males’ resilience in impoverished inner-cities
like Detroit. Yeager and Dweck (2012) provide their definition through a psychological lens. They argue that it is not only one’s challenges that dictate the outcome, but also their interpretation of the challenges that will ultimately dictate their resilience. Their research dealing with the *mindsets that promote resilience* is another perspective that is often lost in the educational literature on resilience of Black males. Most educational literature focuses strictly on the difficulties presented and overcoming them. Since environmental factors help to shape how one thinks and views problems (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2012), it is important to understand the environment in which they were raised to understand the magnitude of their resilience. Likewise, it is essential to understand how they viewed the environment they were raised in to understand the depths of their resilience. It is only after arriving at this understanding that one can help to foster environments that promote resilience.

In this chapter, five areas of literature relevant to this study are reviewed to provide a background, including: literature on educational resilience as it pertains to Black males; an overview of the literature on Black students’ achievement in public schools; an analysis on the significance of race and gender; literature on the city of Detroit and; finally, an analysis of the Detroit public school system. An overall summary of these literatures concludes the chapter.

**Black Males and Education**

Throughout history, Black males have had many challenges to overcome in public schools in America. The challenges faced and overcome depicts a picture of a long history of educational resilience of Blacks, and more specific to this research, Black males. The historical 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling caused a
major shift in public education and a challenging merger into public schools for African-Americans. In short, the decision of the Supreme Court ruled that the idea of “separate but equal” is indeed not equal and discriminatory in nature toward Blacks. Therefore, the legal course of actions taken by the Supreme Court, after Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund filed suit in court, allowed for Blacks to be present in classrooms with their white counterparts. One way of increasing the probability of Black students receiving educational equality was to allow them to integrate into the same classroom to receive the same lessons being taught to Caucasian students.

While the legal ruling of Brown appeared as a victory the fight was far from over. There was plenty of resistance in the 1950’s regarding a Black child being able to sit in the same classroom with a white child and receive the same education. As Chemerinsky (2005) articulates, at the time of Brown V. Board of Education in 1954, only 0.001 percent of Black students in the south were attending majority white schools (p. 29). Ten years later, there was still not a satisfactory amount of equal education and desegregation in the southern public schools. In 1964, in Griffin V. County School Board, The Supreme Court was frustrated with the delay, suggesting that there had been slow progress and ordered that all vestiges of prior segregation be eliminated as quickly and effective as possible. Chemerinsky (2005) explains “in South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi, not one African-American child attended a public school with a white child in the 1962-63 school year” (p. 32). So, throughout the South, there was strong resistance to the Brown decision. Plenty of cases had been brought before the courts dealing with the same issue, or similar, to that of Brown.
Not only did Blacks face many forms of educational discrimination in the South, but in the North as well. Specifically in Detroit, there was major segregation that permeated the school system decades after the 1954 *Brown* decision. In 1974, The United States Supreme Court heard the arguments in the *Milliken v Bradley* case, which addressed a plan to desegregate schools in Detroit Michigan by allowing busing in and out of Detroit and Detroit suburbs. During this time, Detroit public schools became predominately populated by African-American students who were arguably not receiving an equal education. Many Blacks believed their children in Detroit could receive an equal education like their Caucasian counterparts in the suburbs if a busing plan could allow for integrating of schools. Since many Blacks in Detroit could not move to the suburbs, busing seemed to be a viable remedy to solving the problem of Blacks receiving an unequal education (Baugh, 2012; Grove, 2012; Meinke, 2011). With the rapid migration of Caucasians to the suburbs, DPS became a predominately Black school district. The school district lacked resources, providing Blacks with an inferior education compared to Detroit suburban schools (Baugh, 2012).

More recently, Black males are still experiencing racism, injustice, and inequality in public schools in America. Despite the long history of Blacks in education, Blacks are still not often seeing themselves reflected positively in school’s curricula (Kunjufu, 2004; Porter, 1997). For this reason, some scholars have converted the narrative of a Black male “drop-out” rate to referring to it as a Black male “push-out” rate. Many scholars have argued how Black males are being pushed out of school due to reasons such as: school-related racism and Eurocentric school curricula (Mazama, 2015; Mazama & Lundy, 2012) and frequent suspensions and disciplinary issues resulting in being placed
in the school-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003). Research conducted in the field of education has indicated that children learn best when their culture and language are reflected in the school’s curriculum (Franklin, et al., 2002; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Tatum, 2003). In addition, Kunjufu (2004) has argued, “within the school curriculums in schools, African-American children are not taught a thorough history of themselves and therefore usually don’t see a lot of good or heroes in their history as a people” (p. 17). It can be detrimental to students to hear miraculous and heroic stories of other races, but very minimum to none about their own. In sum, the journey of Blacks males, have been one of many challenges and triumphs that highlights resilience.

The Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender

The race, class and gender of low income Black males each makes a significant contribution to their educational dilemmas and educational resilience. Low-income Black males frequently perform worse than other children in academic achievement from elementary school to high school; they are three times more likely to be placed in special education classes (for the intellectually, developmentally, and learning disabled and not gifted), and are twice as likely to drop out of school as their more advantaged European-American peers (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Task Force, 2008). Research has shown there is a cultural disconnect in the public school system in America as it pertains to Black students, more specifically Black males, and White teachers (Castenell, 1983). As it pertains to low income Black males in school, Castenell (1983) explains how “A cross-cultural study of low-income Black and White students found that Blacks were less likely than their White counterparts to perceive school tasks (e.g., testing, studying) as the most important consideration for success in
life” (p. 205). Throughout the nation there are three consistent demographic variables that are consistently significant in public schools. These include gender, race, and class (Cooper & Kwame, 2003; Kea & Utley, 1998). Research has shown, of those three variables, the students likely to receive inequality are Black, male, and poor (Harry, Klinger, & Moore, 2000). More specifically, low-income Black males are more likely to receive unfair treatment (Holzman, 2006; Noguera, 2005).

Race and gender also becomes important for Black males in Detroit as it relates to finding positive male role models. Black males in Detroit having or seeking positive role models in leadership position such as a school teacher, school administrator, or school coach can potentially positively impact them, contributing to them being resilient (Stewart, 2007; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). Contrary, difficulty finding a positive Black male role model for a young Black male can contribute to risk factors exacerbating the challenges of being a young Black male currently facing many challenges.

Significance of Race

Race has proven to be significant in the educating of Blacks (O’Connor, 1997; Ogbu, 1974, 1987; Tatum, 2003). As Tatum (2003) puts it, “We all must be able to embrace who we are in terms of our racial and cultural heritage, not in terms of assumed superiority or inferiority, but as an integral part of our daily experience in which we can take pride” (p. 107). Children are attending schools everyday and are expected to master the content of school’s curriculum. Black students are subjected to learn a Eurocentric school curriculum (Gilbert & Gay 1985; Moses, 2002; Porter, 1997; Tatum, 1997, 2007; Yosso, 2002). The consideration of a Black student’s zeal to learn and obtain a mastery
level of another race as opposed to theirs needs to be considered when analyzing Black students academic accomplishments. A 2007 study conducted by Teachers College, Princeton University, and City University of New York revealed that Black high school dropouts had a 69% unemployment rate in 2008 (The New York Times, 2009). Furthermore, 82% of prisoners in America are high school dropouts (National Dropout Prevention Center/ Network, 2010). In addition, 80 percent of Black males from impoverished inner-cities like Detroit have experienced some involvement with the criminal justice system, due to their race amplifying them as a target (Alexander, 2010). The relationship between race, education, employment, and poverty or class appears to be linear. Much research has shown the majority of citizens residing in poverty lack education. Considering the dropout rate of Black students, specifically males, from inner-city public schools the significance of race as a factor becomes more imperative for consideration.

Significance of Gender

Black Males often face various types of challenges that differ from Black females. Schools systems are often dominated with female teachers (usually white), which Kunjufu (2004) argues often has a negative impact on Black males due to a multifaceted (race, class, and gender) cultural disconnect. Explicitly, a disconnect is often present between lower-class Black male students and middle-class White female teachers. Peters (2003) explains how many school systems are still dominated by Caucasian males in leadership positions. The Black males who are often in leadership position face many barriers (Peters, 2008) which might complicate their ability and time to mentor young Black males in DPS. The dynamics of gender and race as it relates to Black males finding
positive mentors who look like them becomes highly relevant. Black males often face higher rates of disciplinary actions. While in 2008, research showed Black males comprised only 8 percent of all children in K-12 schools, they represented 60 percent of juveniles in jail (Task Force, 2008). Black males are more prone to become involved with the prison system. Black males are also more likely to join gangs and become victims of violence when compared to Black women (Esbensen, Deschenes, Winfree, 1999; Peterson, Miler, Esbensen, 2001). In America, it is during the childhood of Black males that the system of racism and white supremacy starts negatively impacting Black males (Kunjufu, 2004). In addition, gender is of great significance when considering the 53 percent drop-out rate of Black males compared to 40 percent of Black females (National Women’s Law Center, 2007; Schott Foundation, 2008). Isolating gender in this proposed study, unlike many other studies, allows for drilling down past the surface level of problems facing Black males.

Significance of Class and Poverty

Many terms have been used as parameters for identifying citizens who reside in poverty. Terms such as lower-class, under-class, low socioeconomic status, and working poor are common terms for identify citizens who lack resources and earn low wages that can barely provide the necessary essentials to live (Wilson, 1980). Citizens who are considered members of the poor class represent a heterogeneous grouping—people at the very bottom of the economic ladder. Members of the poor class include: those who are lower-class workers and income falls below the poverty level, long-term unemployed, and those who are welfare recipients. Members, who are of the underclass or living in impoverished conditions, often receive some form of governmental assistance (Tatum,
Students living in poverty who are identified as receiving governmental assistance often receive free or reduced lunch in public schools. Socioeconomic status does play a major factor when considering the trajectory of one’s life goals and educational attainment. In his book, \textit{The Declining Significance of Race}, Julius Wilson (1980) explains how one’s economic class has a major impact on one’s life chances and personal lived experiences.

In its relationship to Black males, over the last few decades, data have made visible that Black children are three times more likely to live in poverty than their European American peers (Task Force, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Living in poverty often presents a set of challenging circumstances that complicates life within itself. For Black males living in these impoverished conditions in inner-cities such as Detroit where unemployment, crime, and violence frequently occurs, it can negatively influences their education and life outcomes. With living in poverty often come inadequate resources in the community and local public school (Harrison, et al., 1990).

City of Detroit

According to Forbes (2013) there should be no surprise that the City of Detroit has topped the Forbes list of “most dangerous cities” for the fifth year in a row. According to the FBI crime database (2013), Detroit had 386 murders in 2012, an increase from 344 murders in 2011. The crime rates in the City of Detroit have essentially been consistent since 2000, despite Detroit having nearly 200,000 less residents. Detroit’s murder rate is the highest in America compared to large cities. Stockton California, who ranked fifth on the Forbes list of “most dangerous cities”, had less than half of the murders of Detroit. These statistics provide some insight into the danger that
permeates throughout Detroit. Children are no exception to being a victim of violence. In fact, children might be more attractive for predators to prey on due to their vulnerability. With the city of Detroit public services steadily becoming more degenerate, the resources to protect children are bleak (Bloomberg, 2012). There exists a culture of violence in Detroit. Factors such the city being bankrupt, collapse of the auto industry, and job loss only compounds the depression in the city resulting in an increase in crime. While under these conditions, many children are walking to school or catching the city bus. Herrada (2012) asserts “60% of Detroiters don’t own cars, and no buses will come to get the poorest children to school” (p. 175).

Many children are waiting at the bus stops in the dark at six o’clock in the morning without street lights, because half of the street lights in Detroit are not working and the city cannot afford to fix them (Bloomberg, 2012). Due to poor public transportation, children have to leave the home very early in an attempt to arrive at school on time utilizing an unreliable source of public transportation. Many scholarly outlets do not delve into the impact of environmental factors when discussing or perpetuating the negative narratives surrounding young Black males’ underperformance or stereotypes of disdain towards education. How much do Black males have to tolerate to receive an education? Who are possibly inspiring Black males in a city like Detroit to seriously and aggressively pursue an education? Have they seen anyone, who looks like them, graduate from a Detroit public school and leverage their education effectively? Children, especially Blacks in Detroit, often need to see models and blueprints to know something works to pursue it as well.
Detroit’s former mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick, was elected in 2001 at the age of thirty-one, to be the youngest mayor the city of Detroit has ever had. Being a Black man and having what many considered to be an urban demeanor made him relatable to many young Black males throughout the city of Detroit and the nation. He was, temporarily, a beacon of hope for young Blacks, specifically males, to aspire to. Kwame graduated from Cass Technical School, Detroit’s highest performing academic public school, earned his bachelor’s degree from an HBCU, and then graduated from what is known today as Michigan State Law School. Leveraging his education and charismatic personality to relate to the citizens of Detroit during his campaign, the citizens elected him to become Detroit’s mayor. Kwame Kilpatrick was a display of urban intelligence. He appeared both cool and intelligent to many Black youth.

Kilpatrick was elected a second term in the midst of many allegation hurled his way for corruption and many scandals. During his second term as mayor, he was investigated and charged on several felony counts including perjury and obstruction of justice while mayor (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013). He was arrested and jailed as mayor. He was strongly encouraged to step down from public office and he did. He eventually was arrested and jailed several times before finally being jailed on federal felony counts resulting in him receiving a 28 year prison sentence. The history of the Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick is highly relevant due to a subtle message it might send to young Black boys. Based on the relevance of race, as explored earlier, some young Black males might understand Kwame’s incarceration as it being pointless trying to succeed in America due to the level of racism designed to prevent the success of Black males.
Kwame Kilpatrick is not the only powerful political figure within the last several years to hold a political position that resulted in an unfavorable outcome. Detroit has had a high turnover rate of police chiefs including a couple of Black males. In 2008 Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings resigned from her post. Warren Evans, a Black man, took office in 2008. In 2010, he was asked by Mayor Dave Bing for his letter of resignation. Ralph Godbee became the successor to Warren Evan, becoming the Detroit Chief of Police. However, in 2012, Police Chief Ralph Godbee resigned from his post due to sex scandals. Chester Logan was then assigned as the interim police chief. In 2013, James Craig was hired as the new Detroit Police Chief. In five years, for multiple reasons, Detroit has had five people lead the Detroit police department with the title of Detroit police chief. This high turnover rate of a city’s police chief speaks volumes regarding that city and its safety as well. Detroit’s city council’s president, Charles Pugh, was also removed from his post with his pay suspended as president in 2013 for inappropriate allegations by the city of Detroit’s emergency manager, Kevyn Orr. Charles Pugh officially resigned two months later. The political position held by Blacks, more specifically Black males, in the city of Detroit have been typically short lived in the last several years. There has been a blatant culture of political corruption in the city of Detroit by city leaders. These things directly impact the city of Detroit and indirectly impact the Detroit public school system.

Detroit Public School System

The Detroit Public School System, over the last decade, has been considered a poor performing school system that is perhaps the worst in the Nation ([The Nations Report Card, 2009](#)). The DPS student enrollment is predominately African-American
due to being in a city that is predominately African-American (United States Census Bureau, 2011). Based on the academic performance of DPS, many parents, educators, and news reporters expressed their disappointment. Michael Winerip (The New York Times, 2011) stated how the DPS math test scores in 2009 were the worst ever recorded since the inception of national math proficiency exams. Arne Duncan expressed his discontent with DPS achievements when he made it analogous to Ground Zero and Hurricane Katrina minus the natural disaster (The Washington Times, 2009). There were more unflattering comments made in Arne Duncan’s tirade on DPS and it failing of students (The Wall Street Journal, 2013). The City of Detroit had yet to file for bankruptcy when some of the deleterious comments were publicly made. The City of Detroit has since then filed for bankruptcy, so more limited resources can be expected for DPS. It is also important to take into consideration the DPS was previous taken over by Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bob in 2009, due to its poor performance (DPS, 2013). The City of Detroit is 82.7 percent Black (United States Census Bureau, 2011) so the DPS enrollment is predominately African-American students. The DPS is faced with many challenges that cause the future of DPS students to look bleak. Among these challenges that African-American students face are: lack of resources, lack of quality teachers, lack of teachers educated and trained in the content area they are teaching in, school’s curriculum, crime, violence, poverty, and poor transportation systems to name a few.

**Educational Resilience**

This section reviews literature surrounding the concept of educational resilience, its definitions, and its application to Black males. Scarce research exists on eliciting the
voices of Black male students’ direct lived experiences centered on overcoming adversities which hinder their education in the most impoverished cities (Randle, 2012; Seidman, 2006). The literature which elicits the voices of Blacks males (O’Connor, 1997; Randle, 2012; William & Bryan, 2013) explicates students’ motivation to succeed culminates from home-factors, school-factors, racial identity-factors, and community-factors. These areas have been cited as most the common ecological factors instrumental in the resilience of Blacks males in poverty. Researchers have provided various definitions for the term resilience (Fraser 2004; Masten, 2001; William & Bryan, 2013; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Bryan (2005) states “Resilience is the capacity of an individual to overcome difficult and challenging life circumstances and risk factors” (p. 220). More specifically, Bryan (2005) defines educational resilience as “the ability of children to succeed academically despite risk factors that make it difficult for them to succeed.” He goes on to say “[r]esilient children experience one or more difficult life circumstances or traumatic events but somehow find power to overcome their adverse impact” (p. 220).

Traumatic events that impact the lives of Black families are occurring often in inner-cities. Black males are often victims of violent crimes in Detroit, but are also often the perpetrator of the violent crimes taking place in the predominately Black city. The violent crimes which are rampant often results in some Black men being killed and some going to prison. Black males from inner-cities are dominating the prison system (Alexander, 2010). “And in major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80 percent of young African-American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives” (Alexander, 2010, p. 7). In 2010, the incarceration rate of Black males was six times more than that of whites according to a
study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2013). Many African-American males are growing up without a father presence in the home or involved in their lives outside of the home environment (William & Bryan, 2013).

Many research questions concerned with the educational resilience of Black males in K-12 are focused strongly on the impact of school environments. For example, In James Randle’s dissertation (2012), his third research questions asks “What role does each distinct school environment play in the students’ academic experiences and college preparedness?” (p. v). Despite his dissertation focusing on the resilience of African-American males from three different urban high schools in California who are of low socioeconomic status, students’ environments and the impact of environments, were not thoroughly explored. Notwithstanding the dissertation focusing on urban poor, no discussion of governmental assistance (welfare), crime as it relates to shootings or murders, or victims of severe violence occurred illustrating traumatic events occurring. The terms shooting(s), murder(s), and welfare recipient(s) were never mentioned. While terms like violence, gang, and fighting were mentioned, they were not mentioned in direct relationship to the students experiences and schooling impact. Children do not learn in a vacuum. Much of learning takes place outside of school, as students are only in school for upwards of eight hours out of twenty four hours a day. In a week, students are in attendance for under twenty-five percent of their time, if they are attending with perfect attendance. While out of school, what are children seeing, experiencing, and learning that impacts their academic learning? This question, as it pertains to Black males in highly violent inner-cities, is the question in need of exploring. While, James Randle has a stellar dissertation, it is complicated to reveal the resilience of Black males
in education without properly contextualizing the ecology which significantly impacts their education.

The researcher intends to have the research participants articulate their lived experiences of significant circumstances or traumatic events and how they overcame the adverse impact of those events and successfully graduated. William and Bryan (2013) posit that the home, school, and community context substantially contributes to the educational resilience of African-American students in urban context. Many prominent scholars in the field agree with their findings (Bryan, 2005; O’Conner, 1997; Randle, 2012; Task Force, 2008). Carla O’Connor (1997) conducted a case study using six African-American high school students in a Chicago area. She discovered race to be a major factor and constant emerging theme for the students. However, Williams and Bryan (2013) highlight 10 emerging themes that contributes to the students educational resilience of Black males: (1) school-related parenting practices, (2) positive mother-child relationships, (3) personal stories of hardship, (4) extended family networks, (5) supportive school-based relationships, (6) school-oriented peer culture, (7) good teaching, (8) extracurricular school activities, (9) social support networks, and (10) out-of-school time activities. William and Bryan (2013) never mention race as an emerging theme in their multicase research study. Interestingly enough, both studies (O’Connor, 1997; William & Bryan, 2013) focused on the educational resilience of African-American high schools graduates and both studies were in the Chicago area. Both studies were qualitative and used interviewing as a method of data collection. Nevertheless, in both studies, students did share commonalities regarding family, community, and hardships growing up in poverty.
Aside from the standard academic challenges most students face, many African-American males in impoverished communities are compounded with challenges of escaping dire circumstances such as violence (shootings, robberies, fights), poverty, and food instability (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Regarding food instability, research has shown the adverse impact on learning when children are not receiving the proper nutrition (Murphy, 2007; USDA, 2011). Many parents in inner-cities who are recipients of governmental assistance often sell their governmental benefits (food stamp) at a reduced price in exchange for currency to pay other bills or purchase other necessities (Detroit Free Press, 2013; Mlive, 2014; Swan, et al, 2008). Black families in impoverished communities have to prioritize in many cases between food, heat, and water. In the event food is sacrificed in exchange for heat, and a child has to go to school with his stomach growling until lunch time to receive a free or reduced meal, his learning ability is then jeopardized for the first half of the school day. How does this impact his learning? Can these issues be a factor in the achievement gap of some Black and white students? While the struggle of underprivileged Black families is not a new phenomenon, the impacts these struggles have on Black males are often surface-level in the educational literature. William and Bryan however collected rich data and added a significant contribution to the emerging body of literature on the educational resilience of African Americans in major inner-cities raised in poverty. They acknowledged how seven out of the eight participants resided with their grandmother while attending school. One of the participants resided with their mother. None of the eight participants resided with their father. The impact of growing up fatherless was not illuminated in their study. Certainly, only having one parent compounds the struggle for a child to survive in a dangerous
neighborhood and impacts the schooling of the child. Nevertheless, as it pertains to eliciting the lived experience of these African-American students in poverty, the research is arguably surface level.

Many of the empirical studies on African-American males’ educational resilience thus far have been with eight or fewer students. The studies have not been gender specific. Herbert (1999) conducted a study on the resilience of 18 high achieving students in an inner-city school where the students were subjected to poverty, family crises, and bad environments. This study is not gender specific either, but does have a larger sample size of students. Multiple factors were found which contributed to these students’ ability to be resilient such as supportive adults in the home, school, and community; extracurricular after school programs; supportive achieving peer groups; and self-esteem (Bryan, 2005).

Research over the past decade (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997) has documented that inner-city African-American children are generally less oriented toward school, earn lower grades, drop out more often, and attain less education than their nonminority peers. This can be attributed to, in large part, the risk factors Black youth face such as underresourced schools, family disruption, or negative peer influences (Task Force, 2008). As it specifically pertains to Black males, The Task Force on Resilience (2008) explains, “[a]lthough some cognitive resilience research has directly measured African Americans’ exposure to risk factors, most often this relation has been inferred from living conditions family structure, or discrimination –experiences salient for children of color growing up in the United States” (p. 63). Based upon young Black males being subjected to more discrimination than their European-American peers,
having the capacity to sort out and resolve multiple difficulties is the crux of what it means for African-Americans to be resilient (Task Force, 2008).

Impact of Home

Black parents of a higher socioeconomic class are typically better informed concerning the education process and their parental rights regarding school activities. This knowledge often leads them to believe they are entitled to be involved and to participate in school functions (Task Force, 2008). Contrary to Blacks of higher socioeconomic status, lower income Black parents often experience barriers to participating in schools due to lack of resources, poor experiences with schooling themselves, and work schedules that are incompatible with school events (Porter, 1997; Reynolds, 1991; Sampson, 2002). Many Black parents in Detroit are low-income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) and have to prioritize between maintaining employment — multiple jobs in some cases — and increasing their participation in school activities. Having financial constraints are often barriers to school participation for Black parents residing in poverty. Research conducted by Diamond and Gomez (2004) examined the importance of social class and Black parents’ view of education and their findings suggest that social class has a significant effect on parental involvement (Lareau, 1987; Ogbu, 1974; Yan & Lin, 2002). Research indicates the relationships between parents’ views of school, their educational orientation (their belief in the role they play in their child’s education), and socioeconomic status are interdependent (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Ogbu, 1974). The cultural perspective of the parents that derives from their social class, educational experience, orientation and involvement is embedded in the children, allowing for their embracement of the ideologies, whether
positive or detrimental (Aronson, 2008; Coffman, 2011; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Gosa & Alexander, 2007).

A study conducted by Barnett (2004) provides further support for Diamond and Gomez’s (2004) argument that parents’ socioeconomic status has a major impact on the educational accomplishments of the student. For instance, his research focused on Black students in Ivy League universities, yet, the merits of the study are applicable to Black students in general. The study by Barnett (2004) discovered that out of the 50 Black students interviewed, 70 percent of the males and 80 percent of the females suggested it was their parents’ involvement that had the most significant impact on their persistence in education. The majority of the parents in the study had obtained some level of college, just fewer than 40 percent had both parents attending college, and just fewer than 15 percent had at least a parent with a graduate level degree. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 2008-2012 only 12.3 percent of residents in Detroit had a bachelors degree or higher. Some studies have indicated that nearly 50 percent of Detroit residents are functionally illiterate and that 50 percent of those who are illiterate do not have a high school diploma or GED (National Institute for Literacy, 1998; The Detroit Regional Workforce Fund, 2011). The lack of education obtained by the parents complicates the educational attainment of the child and potentially diminishes the value of education to the child (Barnett, 2004; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; The Task Force, 2008). The educational level of Black males’ parents contributes largely to how they are likely to progress through education. The higher the education of the parents, the more likely the child will make further educational gains. High achieving Black students often have more family educational capital, while many Black males in Detroit lack educational
capital. Using the ecological theory of human development (Fraser, 2004) to analyze Black males’ lack of capital helps to highlight their educational resilience (Yeager & Dweck, 2012) and appreciate (Stowell, 2012) their journey of overcoming struggles. The appreciative model (Stowell, 2012) demands placing value on the students’ narratives of resilience elicited and not their traumatic experiences or lack of resources.

Impact of Community

The community one resides has a major impact on the future educational outcomes of the person, in terms of safety and the education they might receive. This impact can be negative, positive or a combination of the both. William and Bryan’s (2013) study revealed 50 percent of the participants identified the community as contributing positively to their academic success. The microsystem of the ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Ungar, 2012) supports William and Bryan’s findings of community impacting a child’s academic outcomes. There are many thriving communities in the city of Detroit where youth can seek inspiration as well. The city of Detroit has community centers, recreation centers, parks and playgrounds for outdoor activities where mentors and role models are often present. Bryan (2005) explains this is important because “resilience in children can be fostered and promoted by establishing protective factors in the environments” such as activities to engage into in their schools and communities (p.220). The development of youth in the city of Detroit is directly impacted by the community they live in (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter, 2013). Historically in Black communities, there existed a positive relationship between the schools, churches, and community (Siddle-Walker, 1996; Morris, 2004). During those times, more teachers resided within the community in
which they taught. Now, 83 percent (Kunjufu, 2004) of school teachers are White females. It is certainly not common for White female teacher to reside in the city of Detroit where crime is considered rampant (Garmon, 2004). In many cases, a middle class White female teacher will not want to live in a poor, violent, Black community for safety reasons (Garmon, 2004). According to FBI, national news reports, and local news reports, Detroit has a high rate of murder, robbery, sexual assault, and overall violent track record which makes it an unattractive place regarding safety.

Growing up in an impoverished city such as Detroit can have serious consequences to not only one’s safety, but also one’s educational accomplishments. Children who are subjected to poor, violent, and crime-ridden areas are more probable to experience academic difficulties, complete fewer years of schooling and drop out of school than children from similar families living in more affluent neighborhoods according to research (Connell, Spencer, & Abert, 1994, Task Force, 2008). There is a direct relationship between environmental factors and school outcomes for children. Living in a city that has a high crime rate and more prone to violence can be more stressful and a partial academic distraction to students.

Impact of School

School faculty consists of many employees from janitors, sport coaches, teachers, counselors, cafeteria employees, crossing guards, school security officers, and the school principals. Any one of a school employees can make a positive impact on a student (Bryan, 2005) and impart knowledge to change the outcome of his or her life. On the contrary, any of those same people, especially a teacher or school counselor, can negatively impact a student’s life by discouraging them, not inspiring them, or having
low expectations for them (Harper, 2009; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). The microsystem of the ecological model of human development explicates how those who students come in contact with at the school level also influence their growth and development. Hughes and Bonner (2006), in their article “Leaving Black Males Behind: Debunking the Myths of Meritocracy Education,” lamented how schools have played a large role in the perpetuating a negative narrative of Black males’ educational achievements without taking responsibility. They stated, “current research would have many of us believe that Black males are pathological and failing miserably in our nation’s schools, when in actuality our nation’s schools seems to be the purveyors of pathology and are miserably failing Black males” (p. 77). A school’s culture and its environment impact a child and the way in which the child learns. To this end, scholars (Bryan, 2005; Yeager & Dweck, 2012) argue how environments can help to foster resilience through the interactions of people, school, and community – also can be described as the mesosystem of the ecological model (Frazer, 2004).

The safety surrounding the school and throughout the community is important to development of a student. Many Black males are the victims of violence and sometimes the perpetuators of violence and crime when not engaged in receiving an education. For Black males in Detroit to avoid engaging in a life of crime and being a victim of violent crimes, has proven to be challenging. Kersey (2009) explains how:

In June, seven students were wounded in a shooting near Cody Ninth Grade Academy just two weeks after 16-year-old Tenecia Walter was shot in the chest shortly after leaving class at Denby High School. Earlier this year a gunfight broke out in Detroit’s Central High School and last year a student was shot and
killed walking home from Henry Ford High School. All of this has forced school officials to step up security measures, including increasing the number of police patrols. (p. 1)

Consider the fact that while school violence is a major problem, this is usually just one area of challenges that are often hindering children from learning and graduating high school. There are concerns of safety for Black males traveling from school to home. There are concerns of the safety of Black males playing in the community while out of school. In addition, events which take place in the home also impact the way a student performs in school according to the mesosystem of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Fraser, 2004; Ungar, Ghazinour, Richter, 2013). The mesosystem illustrates how multiple experiences of people and places (family, church, neighborhood, friends, community center) impacts the behaviors of a child while in a different environment or around different people. Therefore, a hostile environment at home can cause lack of engagement in school or improved performance in school. When examining the trials many Black males experience in Detroit, the term “resilience” best describes their high school completion. Many Black males display this level of educational resilience throughout the Nation annually. Nevertheless, there is limited research and literature available on the lived experiences of these African-American males. The voices of Black males are nearly silent pertaining to the resilience displayed attending inner-city schools such as DPS.

Ecology

The term ecology is often defined as a branch of science which essentially focuses on the relationships between groups of living things –such as humans –and their
environments. The term ecology was originally introduced in 1954 by Barker and Wright into the field of human development for researchers (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). Pertaining to the ecology of human development, Bronfenbrenner (1977) provides the definition “as the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his [sic] relation to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties” (p. 9). Earlier that same year when discussing ecology and its relationship to human development, Bronfenbrenner (1977) stated,

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (P. 14)

To this end, the ecological theory of human development suggests there are environmental factors which impacts the development of human beings. The ecological theory of human development presents a model to visually represent the various levels and the interconnections of societal structures such as school, peers, community, family and other factors that impact ones development and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Randle, 2012; Stewart, 2007).

The Ecological Model of Human Development

Using an ecological model allows the researcher to consider a wide range of factors which shapes a students’ social environment and contributes to a student’s outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) by examining both contextual factors and individual
characteristics. The application of the ecological model allows the researcher to take a holistic view of factors by looking into environmental factors and their dynamics such as school, church, community centers, and communities, which contributes to the educational resilience of students and not simply individual personal traits (Fraser, 2004; William & Bryan, 2013). The ecological model of human development focuses on five systems (see Figure 1). These five systems consist of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The five systems will be explored at greater detail below.

Ecological Model of Human Development (Figure 1)

Ecological Systems Theory

The five systems making up the ecological model of human development are not isolated systems but are interrelated (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2012). While visually, the model (see fig. 1) might appear to have each layer isolated by systems, the
layers can and do overlap. In his earlier work, Bronfenbrenner (1975) stated in relation to defining the term ecology,

In attempting to define the "ecology" of human development, the term's history and connotations are discussed. The ecological approach requires that the person, the environment, and the relations between them be conceptualized in terms of systems, and subsystems within systems. The experimental situation is not limited to being unidirectional and dyadic, allowing only first-order effects. Two or more environmental settings can and should be included, and these environments should be studied and described along with the subject. (p.1)

When using the ecological approach, as described above, one must consider the various systems individually and in tandem with others systems in the human development model—as it relates to people and their environments. Below, each layer will be explained in terms of its contextual influences. A clearer understanding of the ecological model of human development will be manageable by arriving at an understanding of the context and variables at each layer in the model. For starters, the model starts in the center with the child and works its way out to the various layers. By moving outward to the various layers, one can see how a child is impacted, if at all, at the various levels in the ecological system.

Microsystem

The microsystem level examines people and objects in the child’s immediate environment which may have an impact on the child. These things include, but are not limited to: family, school, church group, peers, and neighborhood play areas. It is likely that a child will come into contact with people and places often which have some impact,
directly or indirectly, on the child’s life. This is based on the notion that one does not develop in a vacuum or in an isolated location alienated from the rest of the world. To this end, the household one grows up in, the people they are around, the conversations they hear or engage in, the music played around them, all contributes to the human development of that person (Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter, 2013). As it relates to Black males in Detroit, the microsystem will be used to analyze the impact of the home, school, and community on the child. Based up on the culture of Detroit and DPS, this research will explore the impacts of seeing and experiencing what the participant considers positive or negative factors and how they might have fostered resilience. This exploration at the microsystem level will be instrumental in gaining an ecological understanding of resilience (Ungar, 2012; Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter, 2013).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem includes the various people and places mentioned in the microsystem, but focuses more on the relationship between them. It can be said to be the influences of microsystems on each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, the mesosystem looks at how the home environment impacts a child’s experience at school. If a Black male child has a negative home experience in the morning before arriving at a DPS, like receiving corporal punishment for not doing a chore the night before, then his learning experience upon arriving at school will likely be impacted. However, the mesosystem does not only look at how the relationships of the microsystems causes negative experiences but also the positive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ungar, 2012). Referring back to the previous example, if the same child was rewarded financially for doing a fabulous job with his chores, it might have a positive impact on that child’s
academic performance or learning for that day. Overall, the mesosystem concerns itself with the working relationships and various dynamics of people and objects found in the microsystem (Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter, 2013).

Exosystem

The exosystems focus on those various extended influences which impact the child’s development. Some of these external environmental influences consist of: friends of family, mass media, social welfare services, school boards, and neighbors. The exosystem shapes the value of the mesosystem and the microsystem relations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). For example, the impact of mass media (radio, social websites, television, and paper print) on young Black males depicting them as inferior has indirect consequences. Watching popular television programs of Black families engaging in violence or living in poverty contributes to normalizing that lifestyle while diminishing aspirations of a more positive lifestyle and accomplishments. Television programs and popular movies rarely depict young Black males or Black families in positive, productive images. These indirect influences have the potential to influence a child’s development and their families.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem level in the ecological model of human development focuses on the attitudes and ideologies of the culture and its dominant beliefs. It narrows in on the norms and practices of a culture and how that culture contributes to the shaping or development of the child. For example, why are there many commonalities in how Black males are raised in Detroit? I seek to answer the question to why Black males in Detroit might perform very common to each other in DPS. In Detroit, young Black males are
often taught to act masculine. What is considered masculine and how to exhibit masculinity might appear differently on the Eastside of Detroit as opposed to the Westside of Detroit, due to the culture of that area. Throughout the nation, many inner-cities have a culture of violence. To this end, many young Black males are taught to protect themselves and to not let anyone bully them. Subsequently, the training of urban combat for young Black males is associated with the cultures of many inner-cities. The norms of protecting yourself and not capitulating to the taunting and antagonizing of a bully are attitudes which permeate throughout many inner-cities where a majority of males are Black.

**Chronosystem**

The fifth and final system in the ecological model of human development is the chronosystem. The chronosystem focal point is on the influence of time, both in the individual’s life experiences and in an historical context. It considers all of the life experiences a person has had to shape them, including historical events, traumatic events and major life transitions. The chronosystem impacts the development of a child in different ways. For example, the divorcing of a child’s parents might have a different impact on a child’s education in elementary school than in high school. As it relates to the historical context, many major historical events help to shift the culture of some generations. For example, in 1995 there was the Million Man March where nearly two million Black men convened in Washington, DC in the interest of improving individually and for bettering their communities by reducing violence and treating women with more respect. A child born and being raised during this time of positivity might have a different
social and academic growth compared to one born and raised after the 2001 September 11th attack, which created a more negative culture of fear and concern.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the relevant literature pertaining to this study on the educational resilience of Black males who have graduated from a Detroit Public High School, faced and overcame traumatic events in their life displaying resilience. In doing so, I provided an overview of the significance of race, class and gender. In addition, I provided context to the significance of the city of Detroit and its history, and the ecological theory of human development. Collectively, the research has shown while growing up in poverty can be a severe challenge for Black males to complete high school, it is not impossible. The research has verified that children from the most challenging circumstances can display resilience despite improbable circumstances (Wyner et al., 2007). Resources at the home, school, or in the community can be used as protective factors to mitigate dropping out of high school. Despite the fact that many Black males from impoverished communities have multiple precipitating factors and stressors that increase the probability of dropping out, many display educational resilience.

Analyzing the empirical and theoretical studies conducted on the educational resilience of African Americans (Bryan, 2005; Fraser, 2004; Masten, 2001; O’Connor, 1997; Task Force, 2008; William & Bryan, 2013; Yeager & Dweck, 2012), much of the research overlaps and builds upon the emerging literature. Much of the research has focused on Black students during their high school years. However, only one study has conducted a reflective analysis of those students, allowing them to voice their lived
experience post high school graduation (William & Bryan, 2013). In addition, many of the empirical studies that focused on the educational resilience of African Americans, with the exception of Randle (2012), were not gender specific. More importantly to my research, many of the empirical studies did not focus strictly on Black males. While Randle (2012) focused only on Black males, he did not concentrate solely on Black males from impoverished neighborhoods who graduated, but he focused more so on those he deemed to be “high achieving.” None of the studies on Black male’s educational resilience situated their study in the city of Detroit.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the educational resilience of Black males who have graduated from a Detroit public school by using an ecological model. Black male graduates from DPS is a group that has been under examined, especially from an appreciate standpoint (Stowell, 2012) to gain a more in-depth understanding of their educational resilience. The study of Black males’ educational resilience requires an understanding that their resilience is shaped by and through their environment (home, community, school). I interviewed 10 participants to discover the answers to the following three research questions:

1. How do African-American males who were raised in poverty and graduated from high school describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit?

2. When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) had the largest impact on Black males’ education from the perspective of Black males?

3. What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the African-American males exhibiting resilience?

In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the research design, sampling, data collection, analysis, validity and reliability, followed by a subjectivity statement.
Research Design

For the purpose of this study, I used a qualitative research design (Cresswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). This qualitative study aimed to “achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome of product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 98). In doing so, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews designed to develop an understanding from the Black male graduates of DPS that have encountered traumatic events impacting their education. In depth-interviews are typically for retrieving data in qualitative research by using an interview protocol (APPENDIX B) to guide the interview and following up with probing questions to elicit a more detailed description of what has been said (Roulston, 2010). Using narrative inquiry, the use of open-ended questions was best fitted for the interviewees to voice their experiences as they recall in the first person. This method helped to remove the constraints of feeling limited from the participants while they were sharing and explaining their experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

Cole and Knowles (2001) explain that “the focus of narrative research is on the individual and the fact that life might be understood through a recounting and reconstruction of the life story” (p. 19). Researchers use narrative inquiry to solve problems impacting human conditions and to retrieve a more holistic understanding of human lived experiences. Narrative inquiry can be particularly useful when studying the lives of marginalized groups who are often under researched in specific phenomena. Bold (2012) posits that “narrative is central to human experiences and existence,
providing opportunity to share the nature and order of events at particular times in history. It helps to define self and personal identity” (pp. 17-18). In many cases, the researcher(s) participate by co-constructing the narrative or retelling the story. Narrative inquiry can be described as the collaborative effort between a researcher and participant to comprehend the experiences of the individual and the world in which he lives (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Mishler, 1991; Riessman, 2008). To this end, Butler-Kisber (2010) explains how “narrative inquirers who live the story with their participants are interested in improving the individual and social conditions” but not at the harm or risk of the individual or their community (p. 66). Often peoples’ lived experiences and the stories they share are very personal, especially within marginalized groups, and can culminate in very emotional responses. It is critical for the researcher to protect the stories told by the participants to ensure there is minimum risk for the participant.

Narrative design, as explained by Johnson-Bailey (2004), is often noticed for its “implicit collaborative and interactive nature,” which can often contribute to leveling the inequalities of power which permeate throughout when conducting research studies (p. 124). Johnson-Bailey (2004) elaborates upon how narratives are useful for revealing life stories and providing the environmental and societal context which accompanies the experiences. Narratives are instrumental and valuable for providing a voice to a community, nation and culture. As demonstrated in Johnson-Bailey and Cervero’s (2008) article, the way in which an individual provides a narrative can be extremely informative to a community or highlight cultural awareness. Narratives can often be lengthy and as well as invasive. When engaging in narratives, respondents often confess, reflect and
give details of their actions in the past. In this study, I invited the participants to share their stories, not just retelling the events but also exposing how they as individuals came to understand or make meaning (Riessman, 1993).

Throughout the literature on narrative inquiry, it is clear there is not one all-encompassing definition of narrative inquiry and its procedures (Clandin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 2002; Schwandt, 2007; Weiland, 1995). There are, however, many commonalities among the various definitions from various scholars. For instance, to provide a few, Schwandt (2007), regarding narrative inquiry, asserts:

This is a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study on the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (e.g., life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research. Narrative inquiry or research also includes examination of the methodology and aim of research in the form of personal narrative and autoethnography. (pp. 203-204)

Contrasting Schwandt’s (2007) broad definition, Polkinghorne (1995) offers a more narrow definition and defines narrative as “the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed process” (p. 5). I have a great appreciation of Weiland’s (1995) definition:

Narrative is the representation of process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life. (p. 33)
Due to the process of attempting to make meaning from interviewing and collecting individuals’ stories, Weiland’s definition resonates well given the explanation of recapturing of the world and the perceptions of the past over time. Lastly, the definition that I find most appropriate for this study is by Clandinin (2013), who states “narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 15). Approaching narrative inquiry from this perspective allows for richer and deeper understanding of the educational resilience of the African-American males that have faced significant challenges growing up and attending high poverty schools.

Epistemological Stance

The term *epistemology* has been expressly defined as “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2007, p.87). It is essentially the way in which we articulate the knowledge we possess and how we come to make meaning of it. Various theories exist to explain epistemology as it varies among different disciplines. Epistemologies are instrumental in providing the rational for specific methodologies (Bowman, 1991; Schwandt, 2007). As it relates to narrative inquiry and its epistemological stance, Bell (2002) asserts,

Narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures. That is, we select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us. (p. 207)
This research specifically was designed to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Black males, from the ways in which they are making meaning of their experiences. Due to the many factors involved in the obstacles confronting young Black males, ranging from their race, gender, and class, the ways they articulated their experiences in this study varied due to their epistemological stance.

Ontological Stance

Ontology, sometimes referred to as metaphysics, is essentially concerned with the study of nature, reality, and those things which give meaning to the world – an understanding of things which compose the world (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). As it pertains specifically to narrative ontology, also referred to as narrative realism, Schwandt (2007) states “this is a doctrine concerned with the storied nature of being or how narrative is the very ‘lived’ character of human existence” (pp. 204-205). People make meaning from their lived experiences and telling their stories in a narrative helps to arrive at an understanding for their experiences of the world and how they make meaning of the world. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain that “the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.” They continue on to say that “the study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2).

Axiological Stance

As articulated above, narrative inquiry is designed to display value for individuals’ lived experiences and provide a voice for individuals who are normally underrepresented throughout research literature to share their experiences and make
meaning of their experiences. Axiology, which focuses on the study of value, is critical for understanding as it relates to the objective of narrative methodology (Rodriguez, 2002). The axiological stance of narrative methodology declares there is value in human experiences and that they should be honored and appreciated. While axiology is concerned with understanding value or the theory of value, narrative methodology asserts there is value in individuals’ human experiences and desires to elicit their stories and provide a voice. To this end, this research elicited the narratives of Black males with an appreciative model approach (Doggett & Lewis, 2013) to value their experiences.

Sample Selection

For this research study, purposeful sampling was used in an effort to discover, understand and gain insight into the lived experiences of Black males in Detroit that graduated from DPS (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling has been regarded as sampling that leads to research cases that are “research rich” and allows for the researcher to learn a “great deal about issues of central importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The essential criteria for participation in this study are that the participants self-identify as being a Black or African-American male, have graduated from a Detroit public high school during or after 2007, resided in Detroit throughout the duration of high school, and experienced a traumatic event associated with living in poverty or as a victim of what San Francisco State University Professor, Duncan-Andrade (2014) refers to as the “hood disease.” Duncan-Andrade (2014) argues how things learned in school by students facing severe life threatening issues will essentially become unimportant or forgotten due to their survival being focused on as a higher priority. He supports this argument of academic disdain by asserting that “frankly it does not matter in our biology if we don’t survive the
walk home [from school]” (CBS news interview, 2014). Each of the 10 Black males in this study expressed concerns of safety traveling to and from school in their community and how this negatively impacted their education. I chose DPS graduates between the years 2007-2014 for this study due to much of the negative media attention DPS received nationally surrounding students’ academic performance and drop-out rates. National reporting (Education Week, 2007; EPE Research Center, 2008) of the graduation rate for DPS in 2007 were under 25 percent, the worst out of the nation’s 50 largest cities. Interviewing Black males that attended and graduated from Detroit public high schools during these years allows them to voice their experiences of the challenges they encountered, threats to their high school completion, and the ecological factors contributing to them completed high school.

The ability to gain access to participants is a vital component in qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009). One must be able to navigate their way into the field and get pass the gatekeepers to collect data (Patton, 2002). Successfully gaining access to my participants was a frustrating but rewarding process that required much fieldwork. By using a snowball sampling method, I had to go through third parties to often contact my participants and then wait for ten very busy people to respond back to me with a date that they are available to interview. This was not a straightforward process. While each participant was eager about the topic of the study, they each displayed some apprehension to the idea of research being conducted on them due to research often exploiting Black males publicly in a negative way (Katz et al, 2006). To this point, Hatchett, Holmes, Duran, and Davis (2000) argue “the Tuskegee study, the Moynihan report, and the Bell Curve have negatively affected the participation rates of African-Americans in research”
(p. 666). I clearly explained to each participant the purpose of the study, my interest in conducting the study, and that he can withdraw from the study at any given time to help them become more comfortable with participating in the study. Moreover, I informed each Black male that he will receive a copy of the transcript from the interview and a period of time to read it and provide feedback as a method of member checking to ensure things are not taken out of context (Creswell, 1994).

For this study, my sample consisted of ten African-American males that was born and raised in Detroit, graduated from DPS, and faced a variety of traumatic events that made an impact on their education. The African-American males ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-five. Patton (2002) asserts there is no rule for sample size; the size is contingent upon “what you want to find out, why you want to find it out, how the findings will be used, and what resources you have for the study” (p. 244). Narrativists have agreed with Patton as it pertains to recruiting participants when conducting narrative research (Bold, 2012; Butler-Kisber, 2010; Johnson-Bailey, 2004). However, too small of a sample size could reflect poorly regarding the credibility of the study. If the objective of the study is to maximize information, according to Patton (2002), then sampling should be terminated when noticing no new information is forthcoming and all possibilities have been exhausted.

To recruit participants for this study, I used the methods of networking and snowballing. Glense (1999) explains that snowballing is a method of recruiting participants for a research study based upon “knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (p.29). I used my connections and association with community and student alumni organizations, DPS teachers, and
community leaders in Detroit to identify prospective interviewees that I confirmed fit all of the criteria established to participate in this study. First, I developed a letter of invitation to ask those fitting the criteria to participate in this study (APPENDIX A). Next, I sent out emails to those Black males fitting the criteria to participate in the study. In addition to this, I also relied upon others to forward my email to those who they believed fit the criteria to start a “snowball” effect. After I sent out the emails and contacted individuals by phone, I waited to hear back from them. Many people I did not hear back from. Some people said things such as “the study sounds great but I will not be available” or “I don’t think I am successful or resilient enough to participate, but will inform others of your study.” Nevertheless, after nearly three months, a total of thirteen people did respond agreeing to participate in this study with one withdrawal. Two participants I used in my pilot study and the other ten as the primary participants for this study. Corbin and Strauss (2015) argues how “a good way to refine a problem area is to do a few pilot interviews or observations and ask persons working in an organization about their greatest concerns or problems” (p. 34).

Data Collection

When collecting data in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting data (Maxwell, 2013). I used narrative interviewing as the primary strategy of data collection (Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000). Over the previous two decades, narratives have been used extensively by people of color and marginalized groups (Johnson-Bailey, 2010). Furthermore, “narratives are also a way of understanding the world around us, our communities, and our families. We remember our childhood, our foremothers and forefathers in the stories that are passed down through the
generations” (Johnson-Bailey, 2010, p. 77). Due to collecting data from African-American males pertaining to the world around them, their communities, families, and educational experiences, narrative interviewing was used.

I conducted semi-structured interviews designed to elicit narratives. Relevant to the semi-structured interviews, Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mathis (2007) explain "the semi-structured interview is designed to cover a common set of themes but allows for changes in the sequencing of questions and the forms of questions, enabling the interviewer to follow up on the interviewees answers" (p. 311). To this end, many of my questions had variation depending on the demeanor and language used by my participant. For an example, I started off each interview requesting the participants to “Please tell me how large was your family while you were growing up and what the relationships were like between you and your family members.” I would then ask follow-up questions to probe further based on a combination of their category of interest and the response they provided (Bold, 2012). Conducting the narrative interviews in this manner allowed for the participants to tell their stories while I gained an understanding of the context of their stories.

Each face-to-face interview with the Black men ranged in length from one hour to one hour and forty minutes. Each interview took place at a local restaurant in Detroit, except for one that took place in my vehicle after eating at a restaurant that was too crowded and noisy. The Black men all appeared comfortable with the interviews and I was comfortable conducting each interview inside the different restaurants. I was comfortable conducting the car interview but felt as if I might be jeopardizing rich data by not focusing in on the body language of the interviewee while keeping my eyes on the
road. Due to this concern, I made frequent stops on different streets and parked for 10 to 15 minutes while allowing myself time to analyze the interviewee’s body language and jot notes accordingly. The random stops did not seem to disrupt the interview at all. Each participant was provided with two consent forms to sign before beginning the interviews (APPENDIX A). The consent form provided the participants with details of the study, the participant’s rights, and the purpose of the study. I requested that each of the Black males sign the copies. I then kept one for my records and they kept the other one for their records. I explained to each man that I would be recording the interview with two electronic devices and will be also jotting down notes as they are sharing their experiences. Scholars have argued the importance of jotting and taking fieldnotes when interviewing to aid capturing meaning (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995; Wolfinger, 2002). Writing memos helps to collect visual data that an audio recorder cannot collect such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and important objects. After each interview, I wrote a brief memo about the interview capturing my thoughts. Later on that night or the next morning, I wrote a more extensive reflection on the interview after more details settled in my head. The collection and organizing of my written memos, reflections, and overall thoughts after the interviews assisted me in my analysis and findings.

Data Analysis

According to Bold (2012), the objective of analysis is to gain a deeper understanding of different events from different people’s views of the world. To this end, it is important to note that analysis often takes place during the interview when asking follow-up question to probe for a deeper understanding of a phenomena. Data analysis occurs throughout the entire data collection process (Merriam, 1998). There is not one
way to conduct narrative analysis. Narrative analysis can begin “at any point within an iterative process: analyzing, collecting data, synthesizing, reanalyzing, and so on” or “retrospectively after all the data collection is complete” (Bold, 2012, p. 121). While analysis can start at any point within the iterative process, some take a retrospective approach to analysis; then, they start to analyze for themes and areas of relevance. In most cases, analysis consists of a combination of both approaches. The combination of both was used in analyzing the data for this dissertation.

The researcher, as Riessman (2008) argues, has a major role in constituting the narrative data that we scrutinize, and through our presence, forms of questioning and listening in meticulous ways, we significantly shape the stories our research participants choose to tell. Narratives provide the interviewee the ability to relive past experiences through a different lens, by reflecting, than that which they used while experiencing it. The narrated lived experiences of the participants in this study was analyzed to help gain a better understanding of the lives of the Black males in their social context and viewed as texts that highlight their identity construction (Alasuutari, 1997). In doing so, I read through the transcriptions “with [my] our research concerns in mind” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 37) as well as with the theoretical framework to “situate [my] your study in broader context” (Wolcott, 2001, p 76). Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development, I read through the data multiple times with the relevance of the ecological model and research questions in mind. In addition, memos, jottings, and field notes were sorted and categorized to help in the development of themes (Hall & Ryan, 2011). The interviews were each transcribed, printed, and placed in a three-ring binder. After viewing the transcribed interviews, I provided an opportunity for each
Black male to review the interview before I started to engage in an in-depth analysis. I sent each participant a copy of the transcription for member checking (Creswell, 1994, Hall, 2010). Member checking is an important component to increasing the reliability and validity in qualitative research. To this end, Hall (2010) explains “In terms of the qualitative data, strategies of persistent observation, member checking, and an audit trail were employed to maximize the credibility and confirmability” (p. 13). It is also critical to note, as Riessman (1993) explains, analysis cannot always be distinguished from transcription. Pertaining specifically to narrative analysis Bold (2012) states that it “aims to understand how people think through events over time and in context” (p. 132). Several participants provided me with additional feedback regarding their transcripts. After receiving initial feedback from the member checking, I used the constant comparison method for analyzing the data (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

**Constant Comparison**

Constant comparison is a strategy used to tease out the similarities across various interviews used in a study. It is a process of coding to discover commonalities and differences in the data collected (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Large pieces of data, that are conceptually similar, is then broken down into more manageable pieces and grouped together by headings or themes. In this process, I constantly interrogated and compared elements of the data (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004). This method of data analysis aids in producing common elements of phenomena which might be instrumental and persuasive in making recommendations resulting from the research (Butler-Kisber, 2010). There are five categories for judging the method of constant comparison: trustworthiness, originality, resonance, usefulness, and the nature of the writing (Charmaz, 2005). Using
constant comparative method, I coded the data for similarities – such as life experiences, educational experiences, challenges faced, motivation, family background, and community environment – using the transcribed narratives, memos, written reflections, and field notes to compare the experiences or incidents of the participants. The participants’ commonalities of experiences were then categorized into themes and then theorized to make meaning (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Mattingnly & Lawlor, 2000). Constant comparative method is one approach in establishing the trustworthiness of a study (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Patton, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

I used an ecological theoretical framework based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development (1979). Using an ecological model assisted the researcher in considering a wide range of factors which shapes students’ social environments and contributes to a student’s outcome by looking at both contextual factors and individual characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Using the ecological model allowed for taking a holistic view at the environmental factors such as: family, school, and community, which contributed to the educational resilience of students and not simply individual personal traits (Fraser, 2004; William & Bryan, 2013).

Theory

A theory is based upon some experimental data or evidence. Based upon having some measure of evidence, people develop a perspective. By having a viewpoint or perspective framed by a theory, you have developed a lens to look through – or a theoretical perspective. Crotty (1998) defines a theoretical perspective as the “stance lying behind the methodology … different ways of viewing the world shape different
ways of researching the world” (p. 66). Your approach to conducting research will be influenced by your preexisting views on the subject matter – this is crucial to understand for qualitative research. A theoretical perspective is essential to understand in qualitative research as it helps to frame the way in which the research is conducted. As Crotty (1998) puts it,

At every point in our research – in our observing, our interpreting, our reporting, and everything else we do as researchers – we inject a host of assumptions. These are assumptions about human knowledge and assumptions about realities encountered in our human world. Such assumptions shape for us the meaning or research questions, the purposiveness of research methodologies, and the interpretability of research findings. (p. 17)

Because qualitative research focuses greatly on understanding human behaviors, it is important for the reader to have some understanding of the researcher’s assumptions in developing his research questions and how he conducted the research. How did the researcher view the world before engaging in the research, developing research questions, and collecting data on the subject, is what many readers would want to know. Essentially, the reader needs to understand the theoretical perspective of the researcher to help contextualize the research. This explanation is critical for understanding as groundwork before launching into the ecological theory / model of human development and its relevance to the resilience of African-American males.

Application of Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective and its application to the study directly impact the research design. A research design is essentially a blueprint for conducting the study. The
theoretical perspective directly impacts the way one decides to engineer their study. According to Crotty (1998), the theoretical perspective is the rationale behind pursing a specific methodology, and then the reader should be privy to that knowledge to better read and analyze the research being conducted in proper context. For example, if research is being conducted on the educational discrimination of African-American female students in inner-cities, there are many theories to apply. The results of the data will look differently if one uses critical race theory as opposed to Black feminist theory. Because the two theories are different, they will call for the developing of different interviewing questions and different approaches as it relates to the design of the study.

As for this study, the perspective of the ecological theory of human development suggests external factors are instrumental in the development of a child. Using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005) assisted in the development of interview questions, data analysis, and the development of themes. Looking beyond often cited reasons of resilience such as personality traits (Fraser, 2004), the interview questions (APPENDIX B) in this study focused on providing a “big picture” perspective on the factors contributing to the Black males’ resilience (Williams & Bryan, 2013). As a result, interviews questions were designed around the Black males’ family experiences, community experiences, educational experiences, and how each might have resulted in their high school completion. Using constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) as the method to analyze the narratives, I constantly looked across and interrogated the data to find and compare common experiences and the ways these experience culminated in the resilience of the Black
males. In doing so, I kept in mind the various systems within the ecological model and which system(s) were functioning in influencing the Black males’ resilience.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

The terms *trustworthiness* and *validity* are often used interchangeably throughout qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). However, (Butler-Kisber, 2010) argues that it is more preferable to use the term *trustworthiness*, especially in narrative and arts-informed research, because the term *validity* “still carries with it the realist/positivist understanding that misconstrue how it is defined for these types of inquiry” (p. 14). Reliability and trustworthiness are often associated with minimizing bias in a research study (Patton, 2002). To this end, the researcher needs to document as many of the steps taken during the research process as possible to show the consistency in the approach taken. This process of documenting the approaches taken helps to increase reliability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). The trustworthiness or validity is determined by the accuracy of the findings from the view of the reader, participant or researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this study, I explained the interviewing process, data collection process, and the data analysis methods used.

Reliability in qualitative research hinges largely on the consistency of the researcher’s methods throughout the research project as opposed to the replicability (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). Merriam and Simpson (2000) argue that when doing qualitative research, reliability is “the extent to which one’s findings will be found again” (p. 102). Because qualitative research focuses on the unique experiences of humans and relational encounters, there is no guarantee that another researcher conducting this same study will arrive at the same data and findings. Maxwell (2013) articulates how
“qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences of these” (p. 124). As a result, the establishment of reliability should focus more on “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” as opposed to focusing more on achieving identical results if the study were replicated by another researcher (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 102).

Methods of Establishing Reliability and Trustworthiness

For this study on the resilience of Black males, I used several methods to increase reliability and trustworthiness as detailed by Creswell (2009). I used member checking, which provided the Black males in this study opportunities to review the data as well as discuss the themes that emerged in this study. Each participant received an electronic copy of the interview and was informed to read it and provide feedback as it pertains to the accuracy of the interview to their recollection. Majority of the participants responded with minimal feedback related to typos and how they enjoyed the interview. One participant spoke to how he did not recall telling one story about his family but did not object to it being part of the study. Out of the 10 Black males in this study, not one requested to have his interview significantly edited outside of typos or any portion redacted.

I revealed “rich” and “thick descriptions” in the findings to add to the validity of this qualitative study (p. 191). The practice of “peer debriefing” occurred in this qualitative study with a close and trusted colleague, who reviewed the data and asked probing questions regarding accuracy. One of the strongest potential threats visible to the
trustworthiness of the intended study is researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). As a way to “clarify the bias” that might exist in this study, I took multiple steps by being transparent and making clear my subjectivities, theoretical framework, and any assumptions I incorporated during the research process (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). To ensure transparency, I detailed each step in this research process in order for the reader to understand how I arrived at my findings and interpretations (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003). Finally, I kept a researcher journal as a way of documenting important details and reflections throughout the data collections process.

Boundaries of the Study

Qualitative research aims to provide understanding, and my objective as a researcher is to discover and share elaborately detailed narratives that highlights and respects the unique experiences of the 10 participants. Therefore, in lieu of identifying “limitations” I advocate that the findings of this study be examined in consideration of its boundaries (Davis, 2013). First, qualitative researchers are not concerned with large numbers of participants but mainly use a purposive sample. Since my research study involved 10 participants, this could be considered a boundary. However, qualitative research is not intended for generalizing to a larger population, but to be very descriptive in describing the findings of the research. Readers should not make the assumptions that ecological model that provides perspective and explains the research participants educational resilience will be the same for all African-American males.

The focus of this study was on the educational resilience of African-American males from Detroit that overcame a traumatic experience and managed to graduate from a Detroit public high school between the years 2007 and 2014. Thus, the experiences of
Black males who graduated during divergent school years, displayed resilience in other ways, or deemed autonomous and do not contribute their resilience to the influences of the home, school, and community, are not represented in this study.

**Researcher Subjectivities**

Analyzing and revealing the researcher’s subjectivities is a key component of qualitative research and heightens the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). Researchers bring forth a host of assumptions and taken for granted knowledge when entering fields to collect data. Cheater (1987) acknowledges this and responds by stating “[w]e cannot rid ourselves of this subjectivity, nor should we wish to; but we ought, perhaps, to pay it very much more attention . . . .” (p. 172). In this section, I will present my own subjectivities related to my upbringing and experiences attending Detroit Public Schools because engaging in this research has made me more aware of my own educational resilience.

I was born in the city of Detroit and lived there for my entire childhood and most of my adulthood. I attended many Detroit public schools in nearly each part of the city and graduated from a Detroit public high school. During my childhood, there were many people who were influential in my life that I can recall, and there were many things that shaped my identity. The culmination of the many experiences I had growing up shaped my life’s narrative. I will highlight several of the most salient experiences of my life that I have deemed relevant to this research study.

The environments in which I was cultivated culminated into my becoming a precocious child. At the age of five, I lived on a very lively street on the eastside of Detroit that had high levels of traffic. There were often children playing outside, adults
playing loud music, and criminal activities such as drug deals taking place. On this street, my home undoubtedly had the most traffic due to its serving as a hub for illegal activities. My mother rarely ever attempted to shield her children, especially her sons, from any of the dangerous activities occurring on our street and throughout our neighborhood. My two older brothers, Rahman and Sam, and I attempted to mimic, as best as possible, the drug dealers, who were seen and embraced by many people in the community as “cool” and were highly respected. Simply being seen and associated with some of these local iconic figures increased our recognition and respect in the community. In addition to gaining recognition from our association with these figures, my brother Rahman, who was eight at this time, and I, five at the time, had our ears pierced and wore earrings. We also wore a popular hairstyle known as “finger waves,” which required having a “perm” done and having “relaxer” applied to our hair. No other child in the neighborhood would have been seen with this type of hairstyle. For the most part, only musicians and drug dealers were known for wearing this type of hair style. Because my mother styled the hair of many of the drug dealers in the neighborhood, she had the products to style my brother’s and my hair as well. These events that occurred in this early period of my life were highly important because they instilled in me the desire to be a “somebody” who was deemed important among people who looked like me. However, at that early age, my home was raided by the police for the illegal drug activities that took place there, which resulted in my mother going to prison and my siblings and I being split up and placed in various foster homes. I was in the house at the time our home was raided. To this day, I remember how the whole event occurred and how it made me feel. I understood then that engaging in illegal activities has
consequences, the most immediate of which for me was being placed in several different foster homes that exposed me to different environments. These environments and the people in them contributed to how I saw myself and world at an early age.

Just before I started middle school, my mother was released from prison and regained custody of her children. These were happy times, being able to live in the same house as my mother and siblings. My oldest brother Sam did not live in the home with us due to him being incarcerated. However, he would often call home from prison collect to speak with the family. This added an extra pressure on my brother and me to be the manly figures in the home for our five sisters. We were responsible for not only attending school, but also for earning income and finding ways to financially contribute to the family. During this time in school, my brother Rahman and I academic performance was poor due to often being suspended from school. My mother started obviously using drugs again and this caused my siblings and me much public embarrassment. This had an adverse impact on our academic performance.

When I started high school in the ninth grade, I was accustomed to being independent regarding earning my own income to purchase things such as clothes, shoes, jewelry, and various things of the similar. Aside from my ninth grade year, I did not take high school seriously academically. During my ninth grade school year, I wanted to prove to myself that I could achieve academically and earn a 4.00 GPA. The first report card marking, I received all “A’s” and one “B” grade. I received the “B” in algebra, which I performed well in. I inquired about my grade with the teacher, Mr. Cheslerean, after class regarding why I received the grade. He told me that he “don’t think anyone is perfect and do not give out As.” This impact on me was academically toxic. From this
point, my GPA continued to plummet throughout the rest of my high school years. Nevertheless, I was never gravely concerned about not completing high school. I was determined to graduate from high school, but never had plans on attending college.

The multiple systems embedded in the ecological model (see Fig. 1) directly and indirectly influenced my desire to graduate from high school. At the microsystem level of the ecological model, family members, friends, and community members shaped my decision to complete school in different ways. At the mesosystem level, I recognize how the dynamics of different individuals and groups shaped my development and education. Just before attending high school, an elder in the community explained to me how “everyone you see is an example. They are either an example of what to be or what not to be.” That quote always resonated with me and changed the ways that I once viewed people. Before receiving this knowledge, I only focused on being inspired by those I deemed to be successful in life. After receiving this knowledge from the elder, I then took a more holistic approach to viewing life and receiving motivation from those who I believed to be unsuccessful as motivation of what not to be. I quickly recognized most adults that did not live independently, own a vehicle, or generate sufficient income to sustain a lifestyle outside of poverty did not complete high school. Therefore it became more and more evident to me each day when seeing certain individuals in my community that, at minimum, I must graduate high school.

Family, friends, and the community had impacted me in ways that allowed for me to complete high school. My older brother Rahman had completed high school two years before I did and he was the first to accomplish this out of my eight siblings. He and I
were always very close as siblings and together we took on the responsibility of helping to provide for our younger siblings and being a role model for them. Whatever he successfully accomplished, I wanted to accomplish because I thought it was either the responsible thing to do or the manly thing to do. In addition, he would antagonize me for thing I did not accomplish. To some degree, there was an element of competition between him and me. We both believed in the old adage that *steel sharpens steel and men sharpen men*. To this point, we both tried to keep each other sharp.

Researcher Reflexivity

Every researcher has a research identity and that identity often changes with time and experience—similar to the way our everyday identities do (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Understanding who we are as a researcher helps to identify what biases we bring to our research and allows for it to be interrogated to analyze its impact on our research. Butler-Kisber (2010) articulates “in qualitative inquiry, no apologies are needed for identity, assumptions, and biases, just a rigorous accounting of them” (p. 19). Revealing your positionality to potential readers and participants is imperative in qualitative research, because the researcher is instrumental in the collection of data and the analysis (Patton, 2002). “The term reflexivity is also used in a methodological sense to refer to the process of critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2007, p.260). Reflexivity is established as very important when considering the relationship of the researcher to the participants. To establish this, Valandra (2012) urges the researcher to “come clean” by being transparent in their research. For this reason, before interviewing each participant, I revealed to them my
experiences growing up in Detroit, attending DPS, and how various systems in the ecological model influenced my educational resilience.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have detailed the methodological process and methods that I incorporated in this qualitative study on the educational resilience of African-American males who have graduated from DPS. These methods include narrative inquiry, sample selection, site location, data collection, data analysis, and the theoretical framework. Concerns related to validity, trustworthiness, and reliability, which are all imperative aspects of qualitative research, were also discussed. Lastly, I ended this chapter with exploring the various components of my own subjectivity and reflexivity.
CHAPTER 4
PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

The objective of this narrative inquiry is to explore the educational resilience of African-American males from impoverished backgrounds who graduated from a Detroit public high school. The overarching questions guiding this research are as follows:

1. How do African-American males who were raised in poverty and graduated from high school describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit?

2. When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) have the largest impact on Black males’ education from the perspective of Black males?

3. What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the African-American males exhibiting resilience?

The ten participants of this study were selected purposefully. The ages of the participants range from 18 to 25. Each participant attended Detroit public schools their entire academic career with the exception of two students, Christopher and Malcolm. Due to behavioral problems, Christopher was once kicked out of all Detroit public schools. His parents were able to later negotiate with the DPS system to allow for him to re-enroll and graduate from a Detroit public high school. On the other hand, Malcolm spent a few of his elementary school years at a private school in the city of Detroit within walking distance
from his home. Due to financial constraints, his family found it best for him to attend DPS later on during his middle school years.

The year each participant graduated from high school differs due to their age and whether or not they were retained a grade. However, 70 percent of the participants were never retained for a grade and thereby graduated on time. Each participant in this study expressed and detailed a major challenge they faced growing up in the city of Detroit. Nevertheless, each Black male interviewed defied the odds by completing high school, as indicated in Table 1. Table 1, presents the participant’s name (pseudonym) and year he graduated from high school. The DPS 4 year graduation rate, male graduation rate, African-American graduation rate and percentage of economically disadvantaged students (who receive free lunch or pay a reduced fee for lunch) for each participant’s graduation year is also presented in Table 1 (Michigan Department of Education, 2015).

<Table 1> Participant Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
<th>DPS 4-year Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Males Graduation Rate</th>
<th>African-American Graduations Rate</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dumisile</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>58.42%</td>
<td>48.46%</td>
<td>58.65%</td>
<td>57.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>62.70%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>62.73%</td>
<td>61.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>59.74%</td>
<td>50.28%</td>
<td>60.26%</td>
<td>61.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>64.74%</td>
<td>56.17%</td>
<td>65.52%</td>
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There are many commonalities amongst Black males’ upbringing in Detroit despite most people’s living arrangements and varying household cultures. In Table 2 below is a brief summary of each participant in this study followed by a more detailed narrative of their life, educational experiences, and resilience. Each Black male described the unique relationship he had with his parents or guardians, siblings, and peers. Out of the 10 Black males, 30 percent described having a father in the home their entire life. One participate, King, described that his father was in and out of his life and had a “moderate” relationship with him. Similarly, Malcolm had a moderate relationship with his mother to where he lived with his grandparents and his mother would “temporarily” reside in the home with him and his grandparents. The many dynamics of each system within the ecological model and the factors embedded in each system are responsible for shaping each participant’s life in a distinctive way to where no two narratives out of the ten are the same.

<Table 2> Summary of Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
<th>Parent(s)</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Relatives in Household</th>
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<td>Malik</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Younger sister</td>
<td>Mother, Step-dad, Step-brother, and younger sister</td>
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</table>
Each narrative of the 10 Black males in this study will be structured in an identical format. First, the narrative will detail how I came in contact with the participant for the study, my impression of them on the day we met for the interview, and what transpired, on the day of before conducting the interview. Next, I will provide the narrative of the Black male as it relates to his experiences in his home, school, and community that shaped his development and resilience. Finally, I will reveal what each participant is currently accomplishing in their life post high school completion.
Malik

Introduction

I was introduced to Malik through a college female friend of mine who is very involved in Detroit as a community activist. She hosts a radio station and has a social media blog dedicated to educating and uniting Black people in Detroit. She was aware of my research and informed Malik of it. I contacted Malik to briefly inform him of my research. He was ecstatic to be involved with it as he has seen the necessity for Black males to share their stories of challenges and triumphs in Detroit. I informed him that I would like to schedule a face-to-face meeting with him during my next visit to Detroit. We scheduled a date for the interview and I contacted him to confirm the meeting when I arrived in Detroit. We arranged the logistics for our meeting which consisted of me picking him up at his home and going to a local restaurant to eat.

I drove over into Malik’s neighborhood around 2:30 pm for our 3:00 pm meeting. There were many dilapidated homes, abandoned buildings, and vacant lots. I stopped at the gas station to get some batteries for the tape recorder in case the ones I had died. The gas station I stopped at was not the most pleasant-looking one, but I sat there in the car just observing the neighborhood for a while because I arrived in the area early. Just by sitting there observing the neighborhood for less than 15 minutes, I found it to be depressing. I could not help but wonder how the children in this community understand this to be the norm and not aspire to much more than the environment in which they live. As I pulled away from the gas station, I called Malik to let him know that I was on his street and pulling up to his home shortly. As I pulled up, there he was coming out of his front door wearing a bulky coat, tan Timberland boots, and a skull cap on his head. It was December in Detroit.
I stepped out of the car to greet him as he approached the vehicle. I had on a Detroit fitted cap, a black leather jacket, blue jeans, and some Nike tennis shoes. I likely appeared more like a local resident than I did a doctoral student looking to conduct professional research. Nevertheless, we embraced by greeting each other with a “soul brother handshake” (the extending of an aggressive handshake that emerges into a hug after the contact of the hands) as if we had known each other for years. During the drive to a local restaurant, we had causal conversations about the neighborhood, the weather, and the holiday season. Once we got to the restaurant and were seated, I explained to him more details of the research study. Moreover, I told him of my upbringing, family history, and how it provoked me to focus my research on this topic. This helped him become even more relaxed as I had mentioned things first that he could relate to, and this lessened the discomfort of telling a stranger some very intimate details of his life. However, the restaurant we attended was more crowded than expected. Therefore, due to the noise and privacy issues, I asked if we could just eat here and do the interview inside the vehicle. He obliged. The interview seemed very natural.

The Narrative

Growing up in Detroit, Malik lived in a home with his mother, younger sister, step-father, and step-brother. He was a very inquisitive child that enjoyed reading books at home that his mother would buy him. Due to being sheltered by his mother for safety reasons, he spent much of his childhood inside of the home. She preferred for him to spend limited amounts of time outside the house to mitigate the probability of being a victim of crime. Nevertheless, it seemed inevitable that he would one day be faced with the harsh realities of crime and violence that too often permeates Detroit. This will be explored later. While
home as a child, if he was not playing a video game or watching cartoons, he would be reading a book. He enjoyed playing video games which involved shooting and violence. Despite finding violent video games intriguing, he expressed how the title most fitting for him growing up would be a “Black nerd” due to reading often. This is very interesting due to his academic challenges faced later on in high school, which includes graduating with a 1.400 grade point average. Poverty certainly impacted his educational accomplishments.

Before Malik’s early teen years, his family could be classified as lower-middle class in Detroit. Nevertheless, around the age of 12, his step-father divorced his mother and they then struggled financially and lived in poverty. This shift to “being broke” caused a few challenges for Malik as his step-father and step-brother left their home. He explains how “being broke” includes barely being able to afford uniform clothes, having the water cut off in the home, having the heat being cut for months at a time, and going some nights without dinner. After a while, this lifestyle became the norm and “…it was what it was” for Malik and his family.

During high school, more problems began to surface in the home and community which in turn exacerbated his academic challenges. Being the man of the house at that time and despite being in high school, Malik felt obligated to be the protector of the home. Therefore, when his home got broken into during his early years in high school, he became very worried. His first thoughts were, “I need to get a gun,” so that he could protect his mother, younger sister, and himself. As one can imagine, it must have become hard to sleep at night in a dangerous neighborhood after having your home broken into. Moreover, Malik had been robbed at gunpoint on more than one occasion as a child. He explains one robbery and what transpired:
Yeah, I was 16. I don’t know. I was walking up to the barbershop. Walked past Big Daddy’s Liquor store. Next, a man is getting me in a chokehold and gets me on my knees and then puts a gun in the back of my head. He wants my money. So I’m like, “Shit.” I gave him my last $29 and it was what it was. I didn’t die. That’s exactly what it would have been to the back of the head. So I just marked it up as a loss. I mean growing up in Detroit you know you are going to take an L[oss], so all you can do is take the L[oss]. If you don’t want to take the L[oss] and you feel as though you want retaliation then you are going to get yourself killed.

The following year when he turned 17 years of age, he encountered a very similar experience. However, this time he was attacked by upwards of 15 people while heading to work after school. This violent attack led to his head being fractured requiring staples to close it shut. His money was also taken from him. He explained:

So yeah, it always was what it was. I took an L[oss]. I got paid the next day and then I replaced everything. But yeah it was what it was. Just taking the L[oss].

Some people take more L[osses] than others.

In his attitude of resilience, he summed up these violent experiences to “That is just growing up Black” in Detroit. In comparison to some of the other things he witnessed such as a murder and other robberies, he considers himself to be lucky.

The home and community Malik grew up in started having a very intricate impact on his education. During high school, he did not like the idea of going home directly after school. Aside from living in destitute conditions, he felt going home every day and locking himself in the house was analogous to being in prison. Simultaneously, he felt hanging out in the streets would only increase the probability of him being a victim of violence at best
and killed at worse. This logic sparked in him a desire to become involved in extra-curricular activities after school. He even became more interested in afterschool programs than in the school curriculum. All throughout high school, Malik was involved in some type of extra-curricular activity. He felt this was necessary in order to stay more productive and positive than negative. Despite being retained during his ninth-grade year due to fighting and misbehaving, he did exceptional things in after school activities. He became very involved in JROTC after school and credits it to helping him build character. In addition, he was involved in student council, debate, and the robotics team. These activities started to give him a purpose and fostered a competitive spirit in him which contributed to his resilience. Yet, his biggest inspiration for graduating from high school was to get a cool, high-paying job that would provide him and his family with a better life out of poverty.

I was introduced to Malik through a college female friend of mine who is very involved in Detroit as a community activist. She hosts a radio station and has a social media blog dedicated to educating and uniting Black people in Detroit. She was aware of my research and informed Malik of it. I contacted Malik to briefly inform him of my research. He was ecstatic to be involved with it as he has seen the necessity for Black males to share their stories of challenges and triumphs in Detroit. I informed him that I would like to schedule a face-to-face meeting with him during my next visit to Detroit. We scheduled a date for the interview and I contacted him to confirm the meeting when I arrived in Detroit. We arranged the logistics for our meeting which consisted of me picking him up at his home and going to a local restaurant to eat.

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Life after High School

Malik was born in 1991, and he is 24 years old. He is preparing to graduate from a nearby research university and then attend law school within the next two years. Malik focuses heavily on politics and is very involved in the city of Detroit as a community activist and social justice warrior. His community activism and political acumen have earned him the attention of many local and state politicians. In large part, his desire to pursue politics stems from his impoverished upbringing and wanting to make a difference in the lives of Black and underprivileged people in Detroit and beyond. Malik has spent his entire life living in the city of Detroit and most of his adult life trying to make positive change in Detroit.

Malcolm

Introduction

I met Malcolm through a program director of a community outreach organization in Detroit. The director knew of my research through a mutual friend. When I contacted her about my research, she put me in contact with Malcolm and a few other individuals. When Malcolm heard of my research, he was delighted to participate and share his story. He believes that more Black males should be shown in a positive light despite the challenges we often face. Malcolm believes that he is proof that our circumstances do not define who we are or what we can accomplish.
The Narrative

During Malcolm’s upbringing in the city of Detroit, he had many issues at home regarding the stability of his family and their relationships. Malcolm’s father was not involved in his life. In fact, he never met him or even knew him until he was around the age of 13 or 14. Malcolm and his mother lived with his grandmother and grandfather along with his younger siblings. Seldom was his mother gainfully employed. He only recalls his mother having one job before he was a teenager and that was as an exotic dancer at a gentleman’s club. He details it as follows:

Last time she had a job was when I was like 12 and she left that job because she got jumped because she was a stripper and she like was stripping. And it was weird because I always knew something was kind of funny because whenever I asked her for money she would give me a lot of ones and stuff. I didn’t understand it at the time. It wasn’t something that I wanted to hear.

His mother could not afford to rent her own home, so they all stayed with his grandmother and grandfather. Conversely, both Malcolm’s grandmother and grandfather worked full-time jobs. Despite them often being at work and away from home, there was always tension in the household. Malcolm’s mother did not get along with her parents well and Malcolm often felt as if he was stuck in the middle between his mother and grandparents.

They worked hard to ensure their grandson Malcolm could take better advantage of opportunities than his mother did and that their grandson did not follow in her footsteps. He attended a private Baptist elementary school down the street from his home. He was performing at the top of his class academically and he believed he was the smartest person at the school. Malcolm was on the honor roll, president’s list, and even graduated as a
valedictorian. While he was attempting to focus very hard on his academics, when school let out, he was in “the hood” with his friends who would tease him for wearing a school uniform. He was being taunted and called “pee pee boy” and “doo doo boy” by students in the neighborhood who attended public schools because his school uniform was brown and yellow. He explained how some factors in his family and in the community that were outside of his and his grandparents’ control to be “weird”. Things became even more complex when the private school he was attending closed down, causing him to have to attend public school during the sixth grade. Also, around this time, Malcolm was informed by his grandmother about his mother and the traumatic event she experienced coming home from work as an exotic dancer one night:

I was around 10 or 11. I need you to come home, your mom doesn’t feel well and she wants to see you. And I’m like what? Anytime I get bad news I don’t understand how to take it, so I don’t get upset immediately ‘cause I don’t know how bad it is, or I just go and be like it’s okay, I don’t know what to expect. So I went down to the house, and I’m used to my mom not coming home all night, you know? I’m just used to her being out probably a day, so I really didn’t – nobody had tell me about her being in the hospital or anything, they just said she’s not here, she’ll be here tomorrow. I’m like okay, ‘cause you know. So I went home and she had like a black eye, a black eye, bruises on her face, and I’m like, you know, what happened? And she literally started telling me like, she was a stripper, and she was at the light after work, like 5 in the morning, she was at the red light, and somebody asked her did she want her window wiped, like walked up to her car like you want your windows wiped, and she said no. And for some reason, she left her doors unlocked, and
somebody grabbed her, opened her door and pulled her out. Uh, I think they raped her too, I’m not sure, I believe they raped her and they beat her. And she started telling me about it and at that moment I was just like, defeated . . . Yeah, yeah it was guys, it was guys that did it. I was defeated and I was mad at everybody. And actually, that type of stuff played a part in me not wanting to go to school at all, period.

Understandably, this had a profound impact on Malcolm who was not even a teenager at this time. At a young age, this caused him to not want to attend school as he was trying to make sense out of family issues. School became less important to him when juxtaposed to the family and community challenges he was facing.

Going from attending a private Baptist school to attending a Detroit public school was a drastic change for Malcolm. He had no idea what to expect of the public school environment. He wondered about the type of friends he would meet, what the culture would be like, and how might this environment impact him. He quickly found out.

So I’m like public school? I didn’t know what was about to happen. I started learning about sex stuff. I’m young. I’m in the sixth grade. Girls talking about sex and stuff. I’m like what is you talking about? I’m one of those guys – I was in fairytale land and when I got out of there it was like dude, this is out in the world – because I was like closed in. School was right down the street from my house so I didn’t really see anything in the world except when I ride my bike across the railroad tracks. I didn’t really see nothing. So when I start going to public school – girls touching me, girls saying they like me, girls saying this [and that]. The teachers didn’t care if the class was loud. The students cuss. I was scared to cuss in front of
an adult. The students cuss and stuff. They started teaching me words I didn’t know. So I started being exposed to a lot of things in life that was – that would bring me down. It’s like I didn’t have a choice to say no that’s not the right thing because I didn’t have a choice. It was the only thing that was around me so it was the only right thing.

A major shift took place in Malcolm’s life regarding his behaviors. By the seventh grade, he started getting into plenty of fights at school, skipping classes, and taking serious romantic interest in girls. He was trying to have sex with girls. When outside of school, he would hang out with his friends, and they would often beat people up and take other peoples’ bikes in the neighborhood. He was also pressured to smoke marijuana when he was 12 years old, or “hit the blunt” as he put it. Shortly after establishing a strong friendship with guys in the community and at the middle school, his mother decided to move into a house with her boyfriend and took her children with her. This frustrated Malcolm a great deal, because he was separated from his friends. Therefore, he decided that whatever school he attended, he would fight often and show the students there what “hood” he comes from. This frustrated his mother and caused her to make statements such as “You just like your daddy,” which Malcolm found insulting. As can be seen, he was facing many challenging events around this time in his life.

The following year did not become any easier for Malcolm. During the second semester of eighth grade, he started becoming sexually active with a young girl his age in the neighborhood. His mother was becoming more and more absent in his life—he felt as if he had no mother-son relationship with her. While his grandparents were still very supportive of him, they worked so much that he barely saw them. This provided Malcolm
with a great deal of freedom and lack of structure, thus facilitating him to become more involved in trouble. His academic performance in school was plummeting. He was more concerned about skipping school to go and have sex with his female friend than going to school and attempting to learn. During the end of the second semester of the eighth grade, he was curious as to what high school he would attend the following year. Then, Malcolm received startling news:

Come and find out we get a letter in the mail and it’s like he has to be retained. I’m like retained? I ‘pose to go to high school. I was supposed to take my high school test. I wasn’t thinking about high school at the time. I’m like I’m done with it. It changed my whole vibe. You’ve got everything set in a certain way you want it to be but it was uncontrolled. It changed my whole thought process. So at this point, I’m like forget it. Whatever. You got to be retained and they say you can’t go to summer school because of all those days you missed so I’m pissed.

To make matters worse, between the end of his eighth-grade year and the summer, he got his female friend pregnant. He and his family were not sure what to do about this. Eventually, the young lady’s family decided it would be best for her to have an abortion. However, Malcolm was looking forward to having the child. The shock of getting a girl pregnant followed by him considering being a father and then having the child aborted was traumatic for him.

The second time Malcolm was enrolled in the eighth grade, he graduated. He had moved back in with his grandparents. It was not easy for him, because some people knew that he was retained and this was socially damaging for him—he was antagonized some for it. Malcolm’s mother became very sick while he was in the eighth grade for the second
time due to her having a drug addiction. Hence, he had to stay home many days at a time
to care for his mother, because his grandparents had to go to work. He suspected his mother
was doing drugs, but could not confirm it at that time. Nevertheless, while he did graduate
from middle school, he graduated with the bare minimum. In large part, this was out of his
control due to having to stay home often and care for his mother who became very ill at
this time. Nevertheless, before he moved on to high school, his grandparents had a serious
conversation with him about their expectations of him being great. This conversation had
a profound impact on him. He did not like the idea of disappointing his grandparents,
because he understood how hard they worked and how they tried to provide for him; having
people who believed in him gave him a sense of purpose. However, his transition from
reducing the troubles he would normally get into did not come easy.

Malcolm ultimately had to attend three different high schools. He originally took
an admission exam to get accepted into one of the top Detroit public schools, and he was
accepted. He felt as if he did not put forth a strong effort in preparing for the exam to get
accepted, yet because he did get accepted, he thought he must therefore really be smart.
He had an epiphany: “Something clicked,” as he explained it. He recognized that he could
perform academically when necessary, and that if he really applied himself, he could soar
academically like he did in elementary school. This boosted his confidence. Moreover,
there was something else that he found encouraging. He explains:

Before I went to high school – the summer before I went to high school – I worked
at this. . . what was it called? At a summer camp as a counselor. So it was like kids
from five to 12 would come to the camp and they got counselors and they got
different classes and the counselors would kinda teach the class as far as different
activities and threw in a little mathematics here and there and we would go on trips every week. I was a counselor and I had a nice job and the money was coming in for me. One hundred, two-fifty, three hundred dollars. That was money right there. It was actually at the school – at the private school that closed down at the corner of my block. So I had on nice stuff and my girl had on nice stuff and I still had fun with my boys and its like – it was like I was living by myself though. I had my own money, my own job and my own house. I just didn’t pay no bills. I couldn’t afford the house but it was like I lived by myself. And I started saving my little money. I was spending some but saving a little bit too. I was thinking if I save five dollars here and ten dollars there, when I got to high school I am going to be the freshest kid in the high school.

Being dressed “fresh” was certainly a big deal to Malcolm. The ability to be nicely dressed removed one additional burden of fitting in socially with his peers. Some students were popular in high school for different reasons: dressing “fresh,” being smart, being an athlete, being able to fight, or a combination of things. However, when he arrived and enrolled in the advanced high school, he quickly noticed a few things. First, he noticed how other students were dressed and it made him feel as if he was the “ freshest”-dressed student at the school. Next, the school was not what he expected it to be in regards to the seriousness of academic rigor. It was not the prestigious high school he expected, and “it was just regular.” The school environment did not have a positive impact on him. Because of this, he went back to his regular ways.

It was like come here you wanna clown. Go ahead and clown. We had four fights my first week I came and it was so fun to me. I was like what? I’m not taking this
serious. I’m gonna fool. So I didn’t take it serious at all and that’s when I really started skipping [classes]. [I received a] flat F. If I could have had lower, I would have had lower. So I’m doing that and I end up getting my first report card and it was a like 1.3[GPA]. So just like, I’m like dang man. So I had to start thinking about stuff because I didn’t want to show my Grandma. I was thinking to myself like, you got to get your studying together. They [my grandparents] gave me the talk like “you living here now be great again.” Man, I was thinking all about that at once as soon as I got that report card ‘cause they gave it to us that time at sixth hour and I’m looking at it like oh my goodness. They gon’ kill me! So at that moment I was like, man I just failed my Grandma. I just failed her. So, I took it home and they were so mad. They were disappointed and I’m like what if I just go to school closer? I’m like I can’t possibly continue going to this high school. I’m like it’s too fun.

Malcolm started to recognize how not only his friends in that school environment impacted him, but also how disappointing his grandparents influenced him. As such, he proposed to attend a different school, and his grandparents agreed that it would be best.

Changing schools for Malcolm did not bring about an instant change. He happened to have a friend or two at the new school that he now transferred to. During his first week attending this new high school, he became involved in a violent fight. Due to him changing schools during the second semester of 9th grade, he had to find a way to become popular or assert himself, because most students had already formed cliques. However, the few friends Malcolm did have at the school tried to be a positive role model for him. They tried to share with him a blueprint to help him navigate through high school and avoid the pitfalls.
So then they start telling me ‘cause they older so they telling me, “We do that [fighting] sometimes but you can’t be doing that. You gotta focus up fam. Like we about to graduate. You need to make alliances so you can be good here. You need to focus so you can graduate too.” I’m like alright good. I started focusing up. It got to a point where – my Granddad, he not older but I felt bad at times that he had to wake up in the morning to take me to school. So I was like, I’ll take the bus but they didn’t have money like that. They would just have enough to provide for the family. So it would be times where, and it wasn’t just me it was me and my friends, we would collect bottles and take the bottles to the store [for a 10 cent deposit] and get our bus fare. That’s all we had to do. Take the bottles to the store and get the bus fare.

He adhered to their advice and started putting forth a serious and concentrated effort to improving his behavior and focusing on his academics. He never believed for a second that he was intellectually or academically inferior. Yet, situations would often occur that caused his academics to become secondary. For example, he explains:

It was tough. I’ll never forget it. I was doing good. I was one of the smartest in all my classes. People are competing with me like the Mexicans, the Puerto Ricans, the White people, the Black people. Everybody competing with me ‘cause I’m the smartest in all my classes. I just hear like a lot of commotion. I’m just doing work. I hear a lot of commotion and I hear gangs getting said. My hood is my hood and I’m hearing it and I’m like what’s going on? I’m not about to get up ‘cause I’m gonna be in it. My boy run in the classroom and say “Let’s go now! Let’s go now! We gotta go handle this.” I’m like ahh. Like in my mind I’m like do you stay and
do your work or do you go and help out? So I threw the paper on the ground and went out to help out [fight] and got suspended for like two weeks. Two weeks! The fight was a big thing. Like security guards fighting people. It was crazy. It was big. Yeah, it was big. So I got suspended and my Grandma was like: “So what’s up? You into that stuff again?” I’m like no, no, no. I’m going to do good ‘cause I really wanted to stay at this high school because I was doing good. My report card came around and I got a 2.5 [GPA.] It was better than a 1.3 [GPA]. I’m like alright I’m getting better but it was like man . . . I feel stupid though because I’m not living up to my potential. It’s so bad when you understand your potential and you don’t live up to what you understand you can be.

Malcolm had all the intentions on changing so that he could graduate from this high school, because he recognized his potential to improve. However, later that same year, the school announced that it would be closing down. This added to the frustration of having to change schools again—now, he was off to a third high school.

Now in the 10th grade, Malcolm was at a new school and was striving to become a better and more focused student. This new school was home to a plethora of gangs (i.e., Folks, Crips, and Bloods) and was an unfamiliar part of the town for Malcolm. Nevertheless, he was striving hard to focus on school work and become great so that he would not disappoint his grandparents. Because his behavior had not completely changed yet, he was involved in what he considered to be a few relatively small altercations. Around this time, he had friends and people his age that had been killed and incarcerated. He did not want this to be his fate. Losing friends to violence and the criminal justice system started concerning him. Something clicked again in his mind: He believed he should
become more involved in productive things to minimize the time he has to be involved in fruitless activities. Malcolm started playing sports, and he became one of the team captains. He became involved in some extra-curricular activities as well. During this time, his grade point average went up to a 3.300 toward the end of his 10th grade year.

Around 11th grade, he started getting involved in extracurricular activities and outreach programs. He enjoyed being involved in one organization that provided opportunities to mentor younger children so much so that he decided to run for leadership positions within the organization. He then became the president of the organization. His grade point average on his report cards started to increase and he was making the honor roll. Being involved in one of the extracurricular activities helped to expose him to other Black males who were highly intelligent and still seemed “cool.” This was inspiring to him. While he always believed he was smart, he felt as if his intelligence did not compare with that of his peers from some of the elite Detroit public schools. He would network with the highly intelligent Black males and they would help him develop his speaking and leadership skills. While Malcolm was experiencing many positive things and his behavior began improving along with his outlook on life, he still had family troubles that were distressing him.

Malcom’s mother came back into his life after being absent for nearly 8 months. When she returned, Malcolm viewed his mother as a bad influence. The first day she saw him, she encouraged him to smoke marijuana with her because she was stressed out. She had some news she wanted to tell Malcolm:

She dropped a bomb: “I’m pregnant!” She dropped a bomb like you about to have another brother. I’m like what? Like it was just so bad for me. You don’t even care
about us. You left. It was like, so then while she was pregnant she left [from living with my grandparents and me]. This is around New Year’s she went back home and some people broke in the house and beat her bad and they pistol whipped her and they ran in with guns and stuff. She was living on the Eastside. So then that happened. It’s just killing me and like all this stuff happened. You know what I’m saying? So she ended up moving back and stuff and when she moved back she only was back because she couldn’t stay there. She didn’t care about us. She cared about her new baby and she was about to have with the guy she was messing with. She was worried about him. She didn’t care about us.

Unfortunately, family problems, along with problems within the community, did not disappear for Malcolm. During his senior year in high school, he was robbed while at a bus stop heading to school.

I’m at a bus stop one time and this guy pulled up on me. He didn’t pull the gun out on me but he had the gun on him. He was like “just give me all your stuff.” So, I just gave him everything I had.

This was the first time he was robbed. He would often hear gun shots in the neighborhood. These gun shots and other criminal activity he witnessed caused him to never feel safe. He believed a person getting shot was a normal thing due to its frequency.

Between Malcolm’s grandparents displaying a great deal of work ethic and him wanting to live a better life outside of Detroit, he became determined to graduate from high school and attend college—he did both despite all the barriers placed before him. Also, he always believed that he had a strike against him just because he was Black. As a Black male, he believed the world saw him as inferior, and he wanted to prove a point that he
Life after High School

Malcolm was born in 1992, and he is 22 years of age. He is currently a student at a private college in the Detroit metropolitan area. He is very active on campus and involved in residence life and student organizations. He has won various college scholarships due to his academic performance in high school and during college. One of Malcolm’s largest motivations for attending college is due to his mother having him at the age of 14 and recognizing how she struggled to provide for him. He did not want to repeat that cycle. To this end, despite him impregnating his girlfriend while he was in the eighth grade, he currently has no children. However, he has recently become engaged to his fiancée and plans to start a family after he graduates from college.

King

Introduction

When I was scheduled to meet with King, I was eagerly looking forward to it based on his excitement over the phone to participate in the study. He continuously complimented me for pursing this line of research and lectured me on how it is highly relevant. I was put in contact with King by a community organizer in the city of Detroit who focuses much of her work on improving the outcome of youth in Detroit. King and I scheduled a date and time to meet and arranged for me to pick him up. On the day of the meeting, I contacted him to let him know that I would be heading in his direction to make sure there had been no new developments that would delay our meeting. He confirmed that he would be awaiting my arrival. I contacted King when I was outside of his home. His home was
relatively small but there were not many vacant homes on his block. He came outside pretty quickly and was still putting on his coat. I stepped out of the vehicle wearing my Eastern Michigan University hoodie, blue jeans, and casual Rockport shoes. We greeted each other in a Detroit cultural fashion by stating “What up doe” as we extended our hands for a handshake and hug. He wanted to have the interview at a nearby restaurant. During the commute to the restaurant, I shared with him my upbringing in Detroit and how it motivated my research. Once we got inside, we sat down and ordered something to eat from the menus. By the time the food arrived, I was done sharing my story. I turned on the tape recorders for King to then voice his story.

The Narrative

Growing up, King learned early on the importance of having discipline due to his mother’s concern for his safety. He is the middle child of three and the only son. His mother provided him with agency to make decisions growing up, but she would also discipline him when he made the wrong ones. King briefly explains this dynamic as follows:

Not that we would like get the hell beat out of us. I wouldn’t say she verbally abuses us, but its Detroit and we a Black family so it’s just kinda normal. That helps you build character. The harder she is on you the stronger you are out there [in the city streets of Detroit]. Cause being younger I was real gullible. I was so gullible. I fight that today, you know? Yeah, growing up in poverty like, my mom wasn’t completely by herself. I knew who my father was. He was there to speak verbally and discipline, it just wasn’t that effective. But, yeah I was real humble and real gullible to stuff and that’s how I came up. He [my father] wasn’t there but he was there. So I learned to be more masculine from my uncle and being around him. He
told me, “You are too nice.” He called me “Mr. Softee” like an ice cream truck. He be like, “You too nice. Every time you see somebody you wave. You smiling.” When I got older, [I recognized] ain’t nothing wrong with that. But when I was younger, there was something wrong with that. Because you gotta keep a guard up which I really needed to understand especially being out here [in the city of Detroit] and being independent.

Issues of safety were of high priority for King’s family growing up in Detroit. Due to King being a male, his mother and uncle wanted to ensure he developed a masculine identity because of the violent culture in his community and around the city of Detroit. However, issues of safety were not the primary problems for King and his family.

Our challenge is poverty, which is very common in Detroit. That’s a big frustration of mine. As I got older the biggest frustration of poverty came from how I have friends that have lived in the same house their whole life. I’ve never had that. We always move from house to house like every three years. I don’t know how many houses but the moment it really struck me and really made me mad was my ninth-grade year—no—it was middle school. Middle school, it was a real frustrating time for me ‘cause, it was like, don’t nobody like me. Everybody just knew I could dance. I was real quiet. They would just tease me and stuff. Oh, at home the lights and gas and stuff were cut off. No heat, no lights. Just living in a house and it’s always in the wintertime.

Finding ways to improve their destitute living conditions was a constant battle for King and his family. Oftentimes, once they hurdled over a challenge, their improvisation would
then cause them another setback. King tells of one of his experiences from living with no heat in the home:

My older sister, she was in high school and her boyfriend came over and he just tried to kinda like wanted to help out, and he lit up a little small charcoal grill in the house. It wasn’t a big grill it was a small grill to heat up, so like we could put our hands near it to stay warm in the home. I went to school the next day and probably for about a week, you know I smelled like charcoal. They [other students] were saying I stink and shit like that. That shit affected me emotionally, ‘cause around that time I had bad grades and I don’t know. It was just a real bad time for me and then when I came out of that frustration, though I was still aware, that was in the ninth grade when it happened again. When it happened I told myself when I have kids, there should never be a moment in the wintertime when we don’t have lights and hot water [in the home], where they should have to wash they ass with cold water at six o’clock in the morning. And I had to catch the bus and I got robbed that summer. Gunpoint. It’s crazy. Took everything I had and I was nervous. I just know that the messed up part about it is, that it shouldn’t be normal and it is. That was really my main frustration, but my motivation for graduating was to bring my family out of poverty.

Clearly, being poor and living in a dangerous environment had a strong educational impact on King. The bus ride to school from his location took nearly two hours—he would arrive at the bus stop as early as 5:45 am. It was usually dark outside at this time. He would have to pass by many vacant homes, homeless people on the streets, and vagrant dogs, which he found threatening to his safety. King was robbed at the bus stop he would wait at daily to
go to school in the morning. At another stop, he was robbed and viciously attacked while returning home from school. King did not feel safe when traveling back and forth to school using the city’s transportation.

You really consistently looking back and over your shoulder you know. There really isn’t any safety. When the person I saw get jumped by thirty niggas, the cops didn’t show up until like fifteen minutes later and it was already over by then. He was bleeding. Whole face red. But then cops pulled up in like the SWAT team [formation]. Wasn’t nobody there though. [Expletive]. There’s a fire station like right there, you know, and like the police station is right down the street from the school. Crazy. It’s crazy seeing one person get jumped by that many people for no reason at all. I don’t know. When I got jumped it was about like six to eight niggas. They just beat me up and kicked me. My first year in high school, my ninth grade year I had this big ass book bag. I mean at the bus stop and this guy goes— they surround me and they say, “My man say run that phone. I’m like “What?” Nah. You know what’s fucked up? You know my Uncle made sure I knew how to fight, but I didn’t fight because it never came up. But when this time came up, the odds, it was just crazy. “Run that phone.” I’m like, the guy he got like this scruffy shirt on. He slapped me but like his whole hand missed my face and he hit me with his forearm and a bigger guy came around and dropped me and they started stomping me out while I was on the ground. They ran through my pockets and took all my stuff. My phone was gone. All I could do was take my bus card out and kiss it. I was just ready to go home man.
Being a victim of violence and witnessing others being violently attacked, King wanted to find a way to make a difference. He wanted to help make other people in his community safe, especially on their route to and from school.

Yes, I was in this political activist group at my school and I was the president of my chapter. When I was there, that was our biggest issue, safety. We were like trying to get protection for school busses. But I mean for bus stops. We even went around the neighborhood, and ain’t no streetlight here, can’t nobody see us right there. That’s why we get jumped we got robbed right there. It’s a bus stop right in front of an abandoned building. Anything could happen. A little girl could be sitting at a bus stop by herself. Somebody could take her in an abandoned building right behind there. She was just trying to catch the bus.

Regardless of the many trials he encountered, King tried to maintain a positive outlook on life. He found ways to be involved in extracurricular activities in hopes of making a change. His mother and father were both very religious individuals that strived to live their lives according to the Bible. Growing up in a home where Biblical teachings were used to provide structure, King learned to have faith. This was very important, even regarding his outlook on his mother and father. King’s mother has multiple sclerosis which causes her to lose feeling in her hands, and it impacts her mentally.

Actually, I’m not even supposed to be here but by the grace of God. My mom she was completely paralyzed when she had my older sister. She got better and she got stronger. She went from the wheelchair, to a walker, to a cane, and then she started teaching aerobics. She had me and my younger sister. We all got the same mother and the same father. So my Dad, he’s there but not like – it’s some stuff that my
dad taught me. He tells me things that I think about. Again, my father leaving, it had a big effect on that household by not having a masculine figure there. Like my sister is married now and they have a kid. She don’t know what a good marriage look like, ‘cause our Mom and Dad don’t even like each other. He say he love all his kids, but he didn’t have to and we didn’t have to love him. We didn’t have to. He had the option, and I respect him for that. For having the option to actually know us, ‘cause he didn’t have to do that. That’s where he kinda was cool. He had a house and lost it to foreclosure that we was in for three years and had to move out. But, I am grateful for what he did contribute.

Although King desired for his father to be more active in his life and live at home with him, he does not have any anger or resentment towards his father. However, he does believe that his father’s lack of participation had a negative impact on his education. His mother was able to help contribute to his education, however.

During the summertime, King’s mother would make him complete book reports before school started back in the fall to keep him academically engaged. His mother had attended college but was not able to complete a degree. She had a library in her basement and was serious about her children’s education. King recalls having to do a book report on Fredrick Douglass and W.E.B DuBois. He found many of these assignments he received from his mother to be inspiring and motivating. He was able to learn about the many accomplishments of people from his ancestry that he did not learn about in school. He was very appreciative of this. The educational engagement over the summer helped to mitigate many of the counterproductive and easily accessible, harmful things he witnessed in his community. Nevertheless, it did not prevent him from being exposed to the ample amount
of violence and crime that occurred. King explains how in the midst of the largely negative things he saw, there would often be positive experiences, such as drug dealers providing him with constructive advice.

Even the drug dealers leave little thoughts on you. They be like, “King don’t be like us.” You know, ‘cause they know our dads and stuff and now I do music, you know. They go like, “King dawg, be better than us.” I guess they live vicariously through me. They look at me like “Bruh I used to be like you. You can’t be like this”. He rollin’ his blunt in his hand and I understand completely and you know so when I do make my music, I do it for change and I do it for growth. And that’s why I’m studying what I’m studying.

Although King wishes he had received more constructive feedback from community members in lieu of the crime he often witnessed, that was not the case. He was often concerned for his family’s safety in Detroit.

I shouldn’t have to worry about my Mom going out to the grocery store by herself and shit. I shouldn’t and I am at times. It’s more bad than good out here. It’s crazy, ‘cause I hardly go outside anymore. I don’t go outside. I don’t to the park. I just stay at home or stay on the computer or just be reading some shit. I’m saying that it’s that bad out there that they are shooting around the park and shit, but somebody will shoot around the park. Like the chances of that happening – it’s not that often that a kid dies around here, but it’s often that a kid dies in the city. It may not happen that often, but it shouldn’t happen at all is what I’m saying. When you did hear shots, you know, we duck down. I saw a fight like in the community maybe like
once every two months. The houses were becoming abandoned. Schools are closing. The kids don’t be around the schools anymore.

The variety of safety concerns that King held for himself and his family made him more worried about survival than education. His academics suffered as a result of his safety concerns.

High school was very challenging for King for a variety of reasons. Mainly, school was not engaging for him. It was boring. The first half of the day was often very tedious and depressing. However, he had an experience with a friend that made him realize how his life was not as hard as he thought and how he needed to focus more on his education to escape poverty.

Then like around the tenth grade I had a friend named Jeremiah who is in jail now. His life was hard, too. I met him around middle school. He was an orphan and you know and he didn’t really know love. He said my family showed him love. He ran away from his foster home and came to my house. His foster home was in a different city. He always said I’ve been homeless for two weeks. I’ve been riding this bike. Can I please come in? I was like hell yeah. He stayed with us for a minute. This had an impact on him. Despite him recognizing the shortage of resources his family had, he recognized that many Black people have even fewer resources than his family. Moreover, he recognized how many people do not have a loving family. King felt that as a Black man, it was important for him to exploit the resources he did have in order to graduate from high school. He wanted to help show others who look like him that it could be done.
Even though I graduated for me, unconsciously, I graduated for the motherfuckers after me. I did it to show them that it was possible. And just how the Civil Rights Movement, they did that shit just so I can go to school. They don’t even know me. I don’t know them. Low key, unconsciously, that’s what it was.

Many of King’s struggles inspired him to want to continue being resilient and help to motivate others to be resilient. He often recognized and preferred to focus on the positivity in a negative situation.

Life after High School

King was born in 1996, and he is 19 years old. He is currently enrolled in college to gain a better understanding of the entertainment industry. He is a very gifted entertainer that is involved in hip-hop dance performance, acting, and music production. He is currently a freelance actor that has landed positions on local television shows and has received work from national television companies. He learned how to market his talents through various social media outlets, thus creating some national attention for himself.

Dumisile

Introduction

I knew of Dumisile but had no idea of his upbringing. So, when he was referred to me for this research study by a mutual friend, I didn’t know what to expect. However, Dumisile was one of the Black males that were very excited to engage in an interview for this research study, if not the most excited. When I contacted Dumisile by phone, he congratulated me for my accomplishments and seemed impressed that I would pursue this line of research. More importantly, he was happy that he was able to help by providing
his story and experiences growing up in Detroit, attending DPS, and graduating. When I contacted him by phone, I informed him of the days I would be in Detroit to see what day would work best for us to schedule an interview. He assured me that he could be available on any day and would not let me leave without contributing to my study. We scheduled a tentative day and I informed him that I will follow up with him to confirm our meeting once I arrive in Detroit.

During the day of the interview, I picked Dumisile up from his home. We greeted each other and drove to a nearby dine-in restaurant in Detroit. On the way over to restaurant we discussed how each other has been, the current state of Detroit, and then what led me to pursue this line of research. Once we arrived at the restaurant and ordered our food, I shared a story with him and how it led me to pursue this research. After I handed him two copies of the consent forms to sign, I informed him that I will be recording the interview on two devices and sitting them closest to him. Once our meals arrived to our table, he said he was ready, I pressed record on the devices, and we began the interview.

The Narrative

Being the second oldest of his mother’s five children, Dumisile witnessed many changes in his family. He and his four siblings are from the same mother but three different fathers. Dumisile refers to his younger sibling’s father as his step-dad. However, his biological father was actively involved in his life as well. He would often spend weekends and summers with his biological father until he was fifteen years of age. His biological father past away when he was fifteen. During Dumisile’s upbringing, both his mother and his step-father had a chemical dependency. His step-father struggled with an
alcohol addiction and his mother was addicted to drugs. His mother and step-father’s addictions presented many challenges to him and his siblings in the home on how to develop coping strategies when their father was intoxicated and mother had drugs in her system. Dumisile recalls these challenges and explains as follows,

   Between my mother having a drug addiction problem, going back and forth to different rehab centers. My step-father – my younger siblings’ father – had a drinking situation, drinking problem. And so from there… as a child having to learn how to navigate through being a child to a parent that has different challenges, it actually became all our challenge, so to speak. We all had to figure out how to deal with Mom when she was high. We all had to figure out how to deal with the hangovers as well as the drinking nights [from our father]. We all had to figure out as children how to deal with the nights when all you would hear is arguing and fussing, and shouting about who’s messing up the money for the bills and things like that.

The arguing would substantially increase between the parents during the first week of each month. The consistent arguing that Dumisile would experience in the home was traumatic for him.

   We called it “arguing season” whenever the first of the month comes around and the government checks roll around and then too much money is spent, and not enough is saved. We call that “arguing season.” And so from there, that was usually the first weekend or the first full week of every month. The thing about it was, being up all night and hearing that stuff, I just couldn’t sleep well knowing that there’s any type of conflict in the house. So then not being able to sleep, well,
I’m not staying up for school which is the least most engaging thing that I’m doing with my day. Because as we know, the public school, the quality of the teaching is a toss-up: some days you might get a good lesson, some days you might get a crappy lesson, some days you might have something to work with, some days you might not. So at the end of the day, because of that arguing season I just couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t sleep. It was just too much anxiety for… that’s what I would say, is too much anxiety for any child to go through. However, once again, in the inner city, low-income families, children are exposed to so much at younger ages and grow up so much faster.

As a child in high school, Dumisile would drink coffee to stay awake in class due to being deprived of sleep at home. He explained how he would attempt to mimic the teachers who he would overhear saying “I need some coffee to get through this Monday,” so he figured he would do the same and act like an adult.

Dumisile had a good relationship with his biological father and enjoyed spending the holidays with him when he was out of school. His father had an early death while Dumisile was in high school.

My dad had a stroke and a heart attack in the same day. So my dad was in a situation where he was literally fighting for his life, [and this] made me realize a lot. That situation as a 15-year-old young man just grew me up for the sake of all the shenanigans and dumb things I was getting into in a bad environment, I’m going to a better environment to where I could actually change for the better. So out of that painful event with coming to grips of what I would have to do if I lost my dad. I would say it helped to change my perspective, to change my attitude,
change my thoughts and my attitude. As hurtful of a situation as it was, it changed me for the better.

Dumisile found ways to make the best out of traumatic events. He strived hard to find positivity in bad circumstances. Recognizing that he didn’t have power to change his conditions in poverty, he exploited the resources he did have to ameliorate his situation. For example, he speaks about how he could not avoid poverty, but found alternatives ways to situate himself in environment where he would be most productive.

When it’s to the point at where the child and children are ultimately powerless to their situation. . . I couldn’t get away from it as much as I wanted to. That’s what made it significant: it always happened and I couldn’t get away from it as much as I wanted to. From there, after I had my turnaround time when my dad came out of the hospital, that’s where I got into the habit of staying at school as long as possible. So that is when [in] high school you figure out how to be part of the sports team, you figure out how to be a part of the organization and things like that. And you figure out how to build relationships and things like that. So I figure the least amount of time I spend at home as possible, the better. Because you have to. It’s funny how much you can find an escape when you – how do I say it?

When you need it.

Dumisile explained in several ways his resilience when being met with opposition. As early as the age of twelve he discovered how to generate income for himself by selling candy at school on a regular basis. He credits his paternal grandmother for instilling his head that he can be great and achieve. One day she told him, after recognizing he was getting in trouble in the community and going down a dark path, that “the stuff you are
doing is stupid. There’s nothing stupid about you. There are no dummies in this family. So, why you acting like a dummy boy?” Those words spoken by his grandmother drastically impacted him and encouraged him to achieve better.

Life after High School

   Dumisile was born in 1989, and he is 25 years old. Despite his grim upbringing, Dumisile graduated from high school and enrolled in to college at the age of 17. He completed college and earned his bachelor’s degree in business administration. Subsequently, he pursued graduate school and earned his master’s degree in finance and economics. Being raised in poverty, Dumisile preferred to pursue a major which he believed would grant him a lucrative career to escape poverty. In addition, Dumisile wanted to confirm to himself that his being raised in poverty did not define him. To this end, he is not complacent with his major accomplishment of earning an MBA. He has decided that he will soon pursue a PhD so he can conduct research to further the educational advancement of African-American students of low socioeconomic status.

Kwame

Introduction

   On the day of the interview, I picked Kwame up at his family home in Detroit while he was back home for the holidays. It was nice sunny day in December on the day I picked him up. I contacted him when I was outside of his home several minutes before the scheduled time. He grabbed his leather jacket and came outside in less than a minute. With a smile on his face, he came out on the porch, walked down the steps towards my vehicle and we greeted each other with soul-brother handshake and then drove to a restaurant about a half a mile away. During the drive, he provided me with direction to
the restaurant as I told him more about myself and the research study. Kwame seemed to have a very positive spirit from the time he walked out his home until I dropped him back off. By the time we arrived at the restaurant, was seated, and ordered our food, Kwame was ready to share his story.

The Narrative

Growing up without a father made things difficult for Kwame. He was raised in a home with his grandmother, mother, three sisters, and is uncle. Periodically, his aunt would live with them as well. Due to having financial constraints they all lived in the same home. Kwame explains their living arrangements:

We stayed with my grandmother simply because my mother couldn't afford to live out on her own. She could only afford to live with my grandmother. So that is where we stayed. That is where we were born and raised -with my grandmother, who helped out a lot

However Kwame enjoyed the company of his family and suggest they all got along relatively well, despite him having to share one bathroom with five women in one house. He burst into laughter as he orders me to “imagine sharing one bathroom with five women.” Nevertheless he was very appreciative for having the close knit family that he had growing up. He considered himself privilege in this regard and understands that things could have been substantially worse for him growing up financially deprived.

When I looked Kwame directly in his eyes and asked him to describe the main challenges his family faced while he was growing up, without hesitation, he exclaimed out “Poverty. Poverty was the number one challenge we faced.” At this moment, his face went from one extreme to another. He looked really sad while he reminisced his
impoverished upbringing; then seconds later, he displayed a smile suggesting that he is glad things are not as bad today as they once were for him and his family. But, before he went into sharing his story of growing up disadvantaged, he quickly displayed his gratitude by recognizing how bad things were not. Kwame elucidated his family struggles in saying:

We really weren’t ill, so thank God for not having to deal with any illnesses or anything like that. I would just that poverty was the biggest challenges my family faced. . . First of all I think my story is a little different than a lot of other people [in poverty]. I never lived in a house where the lights were cut off or the gas was cut off. But, there was a choice to make. There was a choice between rather you want medication for this month or if you going to pay the light bill. Or, there were many nights we would spend hungry because we couldn't afford to eat. My mother didn't qualify for financial assistance, food stamps, or anything like that. So, we went to bed hungry or somebody came over to give us some food that was . . . you know, or we just went without clothes. We didn't have the best of shoes. All of our stuff was hand-me downs. Our clothes were bought from the Salvation Army. But, you know, we did what we could to make sure that when we walked in a room, a light came on.

After sharing this at this moment, I explained to Kwame that we can always take a break at any moment if he needed to due to the passion and emotions he displayed while sharing his stories. He declined my offer of taking a break and preferred to continue straight through with the interview. At moments, he would take pauses when attempting to recall life his life stories.
When detailing unfavorable times of his life, his voice would crack and he would stare off in an upward-right direction when recalling his experiences. It was as if sharing his stories was therapeutic for him. It was clear to me that it was Kwame’s first time discussing many of the things he discussed. When I asked a follow up question to get him to further detail his experiences growing up in poverty, after staring off in an upward-right direction, he said:

I am trying to nail down a particular story. It is so many. . . [takes long pause] . . . Yeah especially when you just think about being able to eat at night. I think those are more, those stories are more in my mind. Going to bed hungry, night after night, not having enough to eat. We would worry about what the next meal is going to be. Or you are getting up in the morning excited to go to school because you know that lunchtime is coming around. Things like that . . . where it was either my mother or my grandmother, who were really the bread winners in the house and they decided if they would handle the expenses [utility bills], or we would go without dinner, or if we go out and by new clothes or stuff like that.

Kwame believes that being deprived of food at home impacted his academic performance in school. The first half of the day before lunch was often slow for him. He recognized the shift in his class participation after he had food in his system.

Kwame was often bullied while growing up and attending DPS. So often after school, he would go directly home. He did not play any type of sports so he would never hang out around the recreation centers or at the local basketball courts in the neighborhood. Because he was often picked on, he did not like the idea of violence or conflict. While in high school, recall his sisters having a violent confrontation on his
street with a family who lived across the street from them. The girls who his sisters had a
brawl with also attended high school with him and one of his sisters. When I asked him
how this impacted him, he responded:

It scared me! I don't like the idea [of violence]. Even me personally today, I don’t
like the idea of people not liking me. I was running to be president of student
government and all this other types of stuff, and even my mother calls me out on
it. It can be 100 people in line, 99 can vote for me and I’ll push those to the side
and focus on the 1 who don't like me. And I would like to figure out what I can
do. Yeah, I didn't like the idea of my family being into it with another family. I
didn't like the stress of going to school and can't talk to this person because my
whole family is beefing with them. I can say the wrong thing and get jumped up
... stuff like that. That is not a good feeling. You are walking back and forth in
your own neighborhood or you’re going to your own house and just too only
wonder and think or be concerned with your own s safety.

Things that occurred in the community caused Kwame to stress and be concerned about
his safety while at school. His concerns for his safety, coupled food deprivation, in
addition to not having the best of clothing brought about high levels of stress for Kwame.
In some cases, these challenges beyond his power to change caused for him to misbehave
in school.

Things started changing in a more positive direction in high school for Kwame as
he became older and more mature. He was bullied less in high school, by comparison to
his early school years, although he admittedly engaged in bullying others to some degree.
High school was much better than elementary and middle school. In elementary school, a typical day, I was a troubled child. So, if I wasn't being teased, I was doing the teasing. I was the one being kicked out. We have this thing in my family where we said my teacher called every day. And she really did. She had to call nearly every day or send me with a letter home to bring my parent back the next day or an in school suspension. But it was get up and go to school I didn't like it. I hated it. Not only because of the bullying, but because I felt like I wasn't being challenged enough in class. I always got my work done. Always got the work done. Always was the first one finish. I was ready to move on to the next lesson. It became boring. It just wasn't a challenge. Middle school, the bullying stopped around the end of 6th grade and beginning the 7th grade. It finally stopped. But I was still a pretty quiet guy. But high school though, I came out of my shell around then. High school, starting in 9th grade I was still quiet. I was working as an administrative assistant for one of my teachers, my 9th grade English teacher. By 10th grade, I was getting involved because I was helping out with members of our student council. By 11th grade I was elected to the student council. By the 12th grade, I was president of the student body, student council and senior class and other community organizations all at the same time. So high school was much better [laughter].

He founds ways to overcame many of the traumatic events impacting his education in a negative way by engaging in extracurricular activities, having faith, and maintaining a positive outlook on life.
Life after High School

Kwame was born in 1994, and he is 20 years old. He is currently attending a prestigious liberal arts university in the state of Michigan. Highly intrigued by President Obama’s running for president and winning in 2008, he started researching and becoming involved in politics. Kwame was invited to the State of Michigan’s Capital Building due to being involved in youth government in high school. He is currently a political science major and closely approaching graduation. He recall once asking his family members why they were voting for President Obama, not being satisfied with their reasoning, he became determined to know more about politics and make a change in the lives of Black people and poor people through policy.

Eddie

Introduction

On the day of the interview, I went to pick up Eddie from his home. We were supposed to meet earlier in the day, but had to reschedule a couple of hours due to something coming up at the last minute for him. Nevertheless, when I arrived at his home, it was night time and his street had no public street lights. Therefore, his street was very dark, but a few neighbors had porch lights on. I contacted Eddie by phone to inform him that I was pulling up to his home. Outside comes a very small, thin guy with a big a smile on his face. We greeted each other and started heading to a restaurant to have the interview. We had to drive nearly two miles to a decent dine-in restaurant that would provide enough privacy to have the interview. Eddie had a great personality. He had a very humble and respectful demeanor, yet, he was also a very humorous guy. He
appeared very comfortable during the entire interview and never seemed to be holding back any stories.

The Narrative

Being the seventh child of twelve, Eddie often found himself in unique positions among his siblings. He was the youngest out of the males but had younger sisters over whom he had some level of authority and was responsible for protecting. Eddie and his eleven siblings all had the same mother and father. He also has many nieces and nephews that would be at his home. As a result, he explains that an average day in his home was “loud” growing up. This would often complicate his ability to complete homework assignments at home. Nevertheless, he would attempt to find a space in the home that was less noisy and complete his homework as quickly as possible. Despite things seemingly being chaotic, there was still structure in the home. Eddie and his siblings each had household chores and things they were responsible for completing. His family was very religious and very stern. They would attend church regularly several times a week.

Similar to the other Black men in this study, Eddie explained finances to be the number one trial his family faced during his upbringing. When asked what the major challenges his family faced were, he responded:

I say financial would be the biggest thing. Because, at one point, my mom and dad had stable jobs until around my fourth grade year. My mom, she got laid off and she didn’t end up getting her job back until around my fifth grade year, around that time. Again, my mom ended up getting her hours squashed. She didn’t get laid off; she got her hours cut in half. And it hasn’t gone up since then and that was when I was in seventh grade. And then for my dad it was just that his
criminal history from the 80s caught up to him. Yeah, his criminal history from the 80s caught up to him so he got fired from his job. And he was employed for a couple of years but that was a tough time again. He ended up doing security.

His parents being unemployed or employed part-time impacted Eddie’s education. He provided an example of how his parents’ employment challenges brought him educational challenges as well:

There were multiple occasions where I can say, for [example] one occasion… there was an opportunity that was provided to me in seventh grade to go to this… it was some gifted program that I was able to go to, but the only thing was, it would’ve cost somewhere between $400 to $600 for the registration, and everything else would be paid for. But it was supposed to be an opportunity of a lifetime. It was supposed to be a program that was gonna be every year. I’d be able to go to California. It was some great opportunity; I don’t remember the name of it or anything. But I wasn’t able to go because my family couldn’t afford it and my mom felt so bad because it was a great opportunity but she couldn’t afford for me to go and no one else could. And I felt bad, too. I didn’t feel like – I didn’t feel any anger or resentment towards my family because I understood the situation at the time but it was just, it was just at that moment, having money… just having the resources, period, is really important – like, getting opportunities and everything like that. That’s just one example.

Although a major one, finances were just one of Eddie’s problems. He also faced issues of bullying throughout middle school and high school, but found ways to avoid being beat up.
You can’t beat up the smart kid and expect to get answers for one of the quizzes and stuff. So I was always known as the cool, smart kid. I knew how to manage being smart and being cool simultaneously. I knew how to be smart. Whenever anyone needed help with a simple problem, I knew how to critically think. So whenever somebody had a problem, I knew how to solve it. And also I just was cool; I knew the slang, I also spoke super proper. I knew how to balance it out.

He quickly learned how to network with people growing up and leverage his intelligence to improve his safety. Not only was he considered very smart by his peers, but also funny. Having these two traits helped him avoid being the victim of violence in school and in his community.

Not liking his impoverished condition and violent environment growing up, he was inspired early on to pursue college and produce a better life for himself. So as early as ninth grade Eddie was searching for scholarships to help him pay for college. His older brothers had attended college and influenced him to attend college as well. They fostered an atmosphere of competition amongst the siblings to where each person wanted to strive for greatness and receive recognition from the family for their accomplishments.

Moreover, Eddie understood that he did not want to end up dead or in jail from engaging in illegal activities with his friends.

Yeah. As I got older, some of them fell victim to the weed, drug business, and stuff like that. I never did sell drugs or anything like that but I would partake in things like busting out windows, stuff like that. It was just something that we did because there was nothing else to do. You know? There was no recreational center, you know? It’s not like, oh, let’s go work out [at the recreation center] or
anything. Just, there was nothing to do so we had to entertain ourselves. So one thing we did was, we busted windows of a cars, we used to climb up in trees and throw eggs in cars and they’d be wondering where the egg came from, and they wouldn’t know. It was just like, I participated in stuff like that. Just childish stuff like that. But I knew my limit because my mom instilled a lot of fears in me: one was drugs and drinking. And it was just where the line was crossed. And from there I knew that my friends started to shift in a place where I didn’t want to go. Some of them started selling weed, some of them started to do drugs and stuff like that. And that was just something that I just had a complete cut-off on. So as those things started to unravel, that’s when I started pulling myself back because I just knew that it wasn’t gonna be good in the long run if I ever took part in any of that.

Many of these things contributed to Eddie wanting to graduate from high school, attend college and graduate.

Life after High School

Eddie was born in 1995 and he is 20 years old. He is currently attending college and has been recognized and received awards for being the highest achieving student in his discipline. In addition, he has won multiple scholarships and awards while in college. Due to growing up in poverty and wanting to have a better understanding of financial management, Eddie decided to major in finance and accounting with a minor in economics. Eddie, unlike the majority of Black males in this study, attends a major university outside of the state of Michigan that is located in the Midwest. He decided to leave the state of Michigan to gain a different perspective of the world, but not be too far away from his family.
Christopher

Introduction

I met Chris through a friend who is a coordinator at a nonprofit organization in Detroit that focuses on youth development. Chris had previously been involved in the organization and it helped assist him in his academic transition. I contacted him and he was excited to participate in this research study. Like many of the other Black males in this study, I interviewed him at local restaurant. I picked him up at his home at the scheduled time during the early afternoon. I briefly shared with Chris my upbringing that led to me pursuing this line of research. He explained how he could relate to my story and was anxious for me to hear his story in hopes of it making a difference in the lives of future Black males.

The Narrative

Pursing academic greatness was very challenging for Chris, because he received no parental pressure to perform well academically neither in school nor from any of his six older siblings. Out of his six older siblings, not one of them completed high school. One of his sisters unfortunately passed away while Chris was in high school due to a disability. She passed away in her sleep.

So I have five siblings that are all older than me who all dropped out of high school so they didn’t even make it to the graduation stage of high school. My parents only had a high school education so the conversation about education did not exist in my household. So I went to a couple different [schools], I went to about ten different public schools so I moved all over the city. From pre-school to fifth grade, everything was pretty school. I was just a student that went to school
and did my thing and my grades were pretty nice. Sixth grade I wanted to be like my big brothers. I wanted to be “hard” and I wanted to be cool and I just wanted to fit in. So I went to school on the west side and I was in sixth grade now and that was a big stage and I wanted to fit in. So that sixth grade year I was the class clown and talking back to teachers and disrespecting them and picking on other students all that good stuff. I wasted that whole year. My grades were as low as you could go: 0.3. 1.3, you know? Grades were low. My boys and I would go to school every day and we would just cut up. The school had already had a history with two of my other siblings with suspensions and stuff so they had already had like this microscope on me. So they ended up suspending me and I ended up with a 5-day suspension for a bullying incident that was going on for a while.

Chris was recognized as a troubled student early on in middle school. As a result of being suspended from school, which later progressed to further disciplinary action, Chris was humbled and changed by the negative experiences. He furthered details what happened next after he was suspended:

He [my father] took me back to readmit me to the school after that 5-day suspension and they said you know, we actually don’t want him to come back. So they AT’d me [administrative transfer] and they kicked me out of the school. So my Dad said “there is a school around the corner” and he took me there and they said, “Well actually, it looks like Chris has been kicked out of the entire Detroit school district.” I got kicked out of DPS after my sixth grade year. So I was out of school for almost a whole school year and I went back to school the following school year. After a whole lot of trying to get in touch with the Detroit Board of
Education and being spun around by them and I finally got back into school next year and they were like Chris has to repeat the sixth grade or whatever. I remember being in the office and my Mom was ready to enroll me in a seventh grade course. I was like yeah [Mom], make sure I’m supposed to be there. I don’t want to go to seventh grade and have them come and pull me out and put me back in sixth grade. So she asked this person did I advance to the next grade and they said no.

This is when Chris had an epiphany about education, his life, and his future and what would happen if he did not choose to change his ways to be more productive:

And that moment right there actually had a big impact on me. I kinda felt it. It kinda hurt me. Something about that clicked right there, you know, like . . . you are a little better than this. So I go back to school and my behavior had improved but I still had some touching up to do. I ended up finishing that sixth grade year and then I went on to seventh grade and I did pretty well there. By the time I went to eighth grade the school I went to was right around the corner and I had spent two weeks in the eighth grade and they were like, “There’s a school down the street, a high school, and they got this new program and they need some freshman.” So they went around and tried to recruit the students that were in the ninth grade and my twin sister had repeated a grade for different reasons. So we were in the same class and they sent us both over to the high school for our ninth grade year and we got back on track.
Disappointed by his behavior, Chris wanted to make a positive change when he enrolled in high school. He no longer wanted to be the troubled child that comes from a family with a reputation for misbehaving in school and not completing high school.

Faced with the challenges of wanting to change his behaviors in order to have a better life in the future, he still was confronted with living in everyday poverty. He recalls being evicted from his home due to his parents being behind on rent and how he never wanted to experience that again. Often, there was little to no food in the refrigerator when he arrived home. In addition, he would observe much of the violence that claimed the lives of many of his peers in his neighborhood.

I would still go home to empty refrigerators and holes in my shoes. My parents, they really didn’t work for my high school career. We really grew up off of food stamps and social security checks. So my parents didn’t work but they still had a level of income so I would go to school and come back and my parents would still be there. They would just be chillin’ at the table and listening to some old school music or whatever.

These challenges had deleterious impacts on Chris, yet they were also positive ones that caused him to eventually have an epiphany and realize that a change was needed.

Upon entering high school, Chris decided to focus on what he believed was necessary to graduate. He no longer wanted to assume the “hard” persona in school and engage in violence or misbehaving. Chris heard many stories from his older siblings related to what is required to survive in high school.

I gotta be honest with you, I had heard like different stories about high school. All my sisters had different stories. You gotta be tough, you gotta be fresh, and you
gotta be crispy. So I went to high school with the mentality like, “I gotta be on it.” Another part of me said, “Don’t worry about that. Just do you.” So in middle school it was all about making friends and being popular and getting some laughs out. So in high school I said let me switch it up a little bit. Let me isolate myself from people and let me stay by myself so I don’t go through that again. So I don’t get kicked out. So I was in class for the first time in years and people were like, “You are a little shy.” I’m like, “Shy?” I’m like you don’t know what you are talking about. People were like “he is quiet” and I just distanced myself and focused on my grades. I did my homework every day and when I needed help I asked questions and I finished that year, that first semester in high school with a 3.7 GPA. So I had all A’s and two B’s and when I looked at my grades, I was real shocked because I had never seen anything like that. At best, I had a 2.8 or something so I had never made it to a 3.0. So I’m like woah what’s this? So I’m like okay cool. It felt kinda good. It boosted my academic confidence and it boosted my esteem about my person and so I’m like yeah, my next goal is to get a 4.0 so I did all that. High school was – my high school experience was pretty great. Good grades, good community related opportunities. So it was just a really good experience. So I’m glad that I made the decision in ninth grade to kinda turn things around. But the thing that kinda held me back before was just that lack of people in my household who had that experience of going through education and understanding the importance of it so I really had no idea how important education was.
Chris had a few teachers and community members being supportive of his education. His parents were also supportive although his parents did not help him academically.

Life after High School

Christopher was born in 1995 and is 19 years old. He currently attends a large university in the state of Michigan where he majors in public administration. He has served as a mentor to many young Black males in Detroit through various grassroots organizations. Chris has a reputation in his neighborhood for being actively involved in improving the community. He desires to learn more about public policy and nonprofit organization to make a positive change in Detroit. He has a very optimistic outlook on the future of Detroit, despite him confessing that things have become worse over the last few years. Chris is also a consultant for a non-partisan think tank that is dedicated to improving the State of Michigan.

Omowale

Introduction

Similar to many of the other Black males in this study, I came into contact with Omowale through an acquaintance who is the director of community organization that is targeted at engaging high school students to become more civically engaged. Omowale was certainly interested in the study but expressed some reluctance in participating. I later discovered that his reluctance was due in large part to his ability schedule the interview for a specific date and time and honor that commitment. He was experiencing some financial hardships and did not have a cellular phone to be contacted on, transportation to meet at a specific place, or a stable home to have the interview at. These things concerned him. Omowale and I communicated electronically through social media as an alternative
to communicating via cellular phone or through email. He suggested that it would be more efficient to contact him using social media as a communication outlet.

We schedule for me to pick him up and conduct the interview at a local restaurant. When I inquired about the location that I would be picking up Omowale, he would not provide me with a specific address to a home or building to pick him from. He gave me the name of a main road between the names of two side streets and informed me that there would be a bus stop there. He described to me the color and type of coat that he would be wearing and that he would be near the corner by the bus stop. Certainly this seemed a little weird to me. Therefore I decided to increase my level of vigilance and proceed with high levels of caution. Omowale did not know what type of vehicle I would be driving, so that provided me with an advantage to circle around the corner a couple of times to see if anything seemed suspicious to me. Nothing seemed suspicious. At this time, I pulled up to Omowale at the bus stop, introduced myself, and invited him to get inside of the vehicle. Omowale was a very large size guy appearing a few inches pass 6 feet and about 300 pounds. Nevertheless, he was very soft-spoken and appeared to be a very nice guy.

I drove to a nearby restaurant just a few blocks away from where I picked up Omowale. He ordered a meal for dinner and I ordered a beverage. After sitting down, I provided further details about the study, why I am interested in the study, and my upbringing in Detroit as Omowale enjoyed his meal. I provided him with two blank copies of the consent form to sign and he did. I sat the tape recorders on the table and we started the interview.
The Narrative

He is the youngest of three children; he has an older brother and older sister. He describes the family as close to one another growing up.

We were a pretty close-knit family. We didn't really have a lot. She [my Mother] quit her job for the city when I was pretty young because she didn't really like the way things were headed for her there – sexual harassment and different issues – so it was just us and her, you know. Moving from house to house. She doing her best to try to keep our heads above the water, trying to give us good lives. Early on, I mean, we were really good, you know, we were very close, we ate dinner together, stuff like that, you know, things that families do.

The family started to experience internal conflict as Omowale got older. He started noticing a shift in attitudes and in the behaviors of family members.

As we grew though, with the big age gap between me and my sister, she moved out. I was fairly young when she did. She started her own life you know. During this time, you know, I was progressing, getting older, my father came back into the picture. You know, he was an abusive guy, so they [Mother and Father] would be on and off over the course of my childhood until he just left, you know. Haven't really – think I've seen him twice since then.

Omowale witnessed a great deal of violence growing up, both inside and outside of the home. Aside from witnessing his father engage in abusive acts, Omowale also experienced seeing his mother become physically violent many times.

There were a lot of conflicts between my brother and myself, and him and my mother, some physically, you know. A lot of occasions it got really out of hand,
you know. My sister eventually moved back in and that just added more stress to the whole situation. Her trying to save up to get back out, and--my mom would kind of, you know, do things that were . . . you know, not kind or motherly things. Like, she would take my sister's money, like, after she would go out working and save it, then she would take it, saying she had to go buy groceries, but there wouldn't be any groceries, you know. She would get really angry at a certain situation and she would go to very great lengths to try to, you know, hurt us. She would break our things. During one altercation, afterwards, she killed my brother's pet turtle. She broke the tank and the turtle died. She threw our stuff out of the windows. She told us to get out and go live with our father, and then she called the police because we were trying to leave, and told them that we had hit her. It was definitely a high-stress time for all of us, and she didn't always react the best to certain situations.

Many of these instances of violence occurred before Omowale was a teenager. In addition to the high level of violence he would witness in the home, his father would also enter and leave out of his life. He found this to be very confusing and damaging.

My father initially came back to the first house. I can remember, he knocked on the door and he kind of just introduced himself because I had never met him at this point. So, he and my mother talked for a minute and she talked to us about him coming back. So that lasted maybe a year and a half before things, you know, started getting a little violent again and he left. After that, he came back, about when I was eight. He tried to make it work. We had moved about two times since then. They tried to make it work again, couldn't do it, and from that point he just
kept popping up wherever we moved. He would kind of stalk her to where she was, you know, trying to convince her to take him back. I think, one more time when I was 10 or 11, he tried to come back, and that one ended in a really big fistfight between the both of them and, yeah, that was kind of how that one wrapped up. So, at the final break-up of them, I was about 11 or 12.

Omowale and his brother would attempt to intervene as children when things turned physically violent between their parents, but their strength could not match that of their parents. However, when they did attempt to stop the violence in the home, his father would then turn and threaten them with violence.

The foremost challenge for Omowale growing up that had an impact on his education was poverty. The family lacked finances and this caused a great deal of problems.

You know, after my mom quit her job with the city, you know, there was never that steady income again. She never really got another job after that. She would, I don’t know, I guess she would hustle in the streets some; she would borrow money from people; she would sell certain items and pawn certain items to get money for us. Of course she would file taxes and stuff like that, she would try to stretch that. Other than that, she would go to casinos and try to win money, and lost more often than not, so you know, that was a real big stressor.

Not having money would cause him and his family to have to move often. As a result of this, he would constantly have to be enrolled in new schools and have to meet new friends while ending other friendships. Moreover, many schools are covering different lessons from the school’s curriculum at different times of the year. Enrolling into a new
school in the middle of the school year can cause a student to have problems adjusting. This is why moving so much caused such a high level of stress for Omowale as well.

You know, it would probably just be, every time we had to move probably had the biggest impact. Because, I lived at least 12 places, including a hotel for a couple a years. It was probably, like, the first house I can recall we lived in, it was a nice street, decent families on the street, I had, little neighborhood friends. And then we moved from there to another place, and from there to another place, and, you know, I would say, I just started becoming more closed-off to people. Because you let people in, and then you eventually have to leave them, so, you know, after two or three moves, I just stopped letting people in. Because I kind of felt like, no matter what I do, they're going to leave or I'm going to have to leave them. So what's the point of, you know, going through the motions of developing this relationship that's never going to last. So, you know, that kind of lead to me being, you know, very quiet and, you know, just pretty much alone. That was I believe, the beginning of the depressive era in my life. That was the beginning of decisions that would define a lot of my decision making, you know, in my adolescence.

He believes these experiences hindered his ability to more effectively socialize with other students more effectively. The inability to socialize compounded the academic challenges he had.

In high school, Omowale struggled most with math. Due to lacking proper social skills, he did not want to ask anyone for help. He learned how to educate himself in math using the internet.
Oh, I was--well, me, personally, I was terrible at math. And I was always socially awkward, so I never knew exactly how to ask for help. So, you know, being in that situation, if you don't ask for help, you know, you don't get it. Closed mouths don't get fed.

He explained how he would go to various websites that would teach math lessons and learn from there. In addition, he would attend afterschool tutoring to get caught up on assignments. Omowale was determined to graduate and his mother always encouraged him to complete high school. “My mom had always said, if not anything else, please graduate.”

Life after School

Omowale was born in 1995, and he is 20 years old. He currently attends a major research university in the Midwest outside of Michigan. As a result of the many trials he faced growing up, he decided to major in psychology in hopes of better understanding the mindset of individuals.

Kofi

Introduction

I met Kofi to conduct the interview at night time due to him working during the day time. I met him at his home as soon as he got home from work. It was raining the night of the interview. I pulled up in front his home on a dark street, so I could hardly make out his address. He came outside and walked swiftly to the vehicle wearing a dark hoodie sweater, opened the door, and got inside of the vehicle. We drove off to find a nearby place to conduct the interview, but it was challenging because many restaurants were packed at this hour on a Friday night. We concluded it would likely be best to find a
quiet place inside of a nearby mall to conduct the interview while eating dinner. I explained to Kofi that would be recording the interview and provided him with two consent forms to sign before engaging in the interview. Prior to this, I shared with him my reasoning for pursuing this research and how my upbringing in Detroit inspired my research pursuit.

The Narrative

Kofi grew up in a home with several of his family members. Early on in his life, he recalls many of his family members getting along great and being very supportive of each other. As time progressed, relationships amongst his family began to dissolve and many of his family members passed away.

My family is pretty big. I used to live in a two-family flat and my whole immediate family used to live there: Mom, my great auntie whose house it was, we had my uncles, my grandma, my auntie and, you know. It was a pretty big house. Auntie, uncles, like I said, they lived upstairs. And my mom and me, and my grandma, and my grandma’s youngest daughter – my auntie – she stayed downstairs with us. We were actually, at the time, we were all very close. . .very, very close. Because we saw each other every day, we all played with each other. We were real close; we used to be, we’re not as necessarily no more, though. Used to be. Once people started moving, getting their own homes, starting their own family, you know. My mom and one of my aunties don’t… my mom actually don’t talk to none of her sisters. They don’t really get along. Two of my uncles are passed away and one of my uncles, he’s in jail. Actually, he was in jail 15
years, he got out and went back in. We’re awaiting his trial to see how many more years he’s gonna get. And my other uncle, my mom talks to that uncle. When many of these shifts started taking place, Kofi would usually only see his uncles and his grandmother who lived with him before she passed away. The family tension dictated which of the other family members he could be around growing up. Often, Kofi would be around his uncle who was a bad influence on him.

My uncle used to beat up his girlfriend, and they used to sell drugs, and have guns, all around, all their friends did too, and be high all the time, drinking and stuff like that. My grandma, when she was around, she used to drink a lot. She used to be a drug addict. My uncle would go over different women’s houses, and smoke weed, or buy drugs, go sell drugs, and stuff like that. That was pretty much a basic, everyday thing. They used to buy me beer as a kid. He would get the big Heineken and he’d get me the little one. I’d drink it, but I don’t like beer.

These early experiences observing the dynamics of the family helped to mold Kofi’s outlook on life and what it means to be a man. He did not approve of his uncles’ violent treatment of women, yet the violence still startled him. He tells of a story that cannot escape his memory:

One day my uncle, him and his girlfriend were arguing – which was normal. I guess she found out he was cheating on her and he had this big, big fish tank in his room and he used to have all these exotic fish. And she got mad, and she bust it open. And he got so mad... we in he two-family flat, they upstairs – he grabbed her by the hair and dragged her down the stairs. Punched her, she rolled down. My great auntie, she’s up there yelling and stuff, screaming trying to get him to
stop. Then he shoves her down the stairs. He pushed her outside, hit her again, and knocked her down those. You know, concrete steps. And I was just looking at that like I didn’t understand but I knew, “This isn’t right.”

He would think about much of the chaos and violence that took place at home while he was in school—there was some disturbing imagery one cannot rid their mind of. Such was the case for Kofi.

Kofi’s mother took his education very seriously. She once attended college but could not complete it due to financial constraints and other responsibilities. Nevertheless, she wanted to make sure Kofi could complete school and would learn in school. He details how his mother had an impact on his education:

My mom is very smart. We could get in trouble at home or whatever. But when it came to school no matter what it was, if the teacher wasn’t calling saying that we was being good – if it was anything bad, we was getting our ass whooped. It was no, “the teacher is lying.” We couldn’t, you know, we didn’t have one of those mamas you could say, “Oh, the teacher lying” and mama would believe it. Hell no! Just straight up – my mom would believe the teacher ‘cause she knew us and she just gave us an ass whooping. We always had to do our homework. If you wanted to eat, you finished your homework. There was no eating before homework. The first thing you did when you got home, you could use the bathroom, then you do your homework. That was just the way it was. You had math homework? She didn’t let us use calculators; you just had to figure it out in your head. She was very smart. She was one of those people who could do the
mental math real good. I still can’t do it – I have to write it out. She was one of those types.

He did not have any major struggles with completing assignments due to not comprehending the material, but he did not want to do the work in school because he was bored. Kofi had other things on his mind in class caused by the commute to school and things that transpired at home.

Life after High School

Kofi was born in 1993 and he is 22 years old. He is currently attending college part-time at a nearby community college while working full-time. He is looking forward to transferring from the community college to a four year university next year. He preferred to attend a community college for his first two years to better adjust to college and determine if it is really for him. Moreover, he pursued community college to reduce the cost of college while also earning an income working full-time. Nevertheless, Kofi is determined to earn a bachelor’s degree to make his mother even more proud of him. He believes he owes it to his mother to complete college with four year degree.

Egypt

Introduction

Egypt and I greeted each other before he sat inside the vehicle. We drove across town to a restaurant closer to his uncle’s home where I would be dropping him off after the interview. During the travel, I further explained the purpose of the research study and had casual conversation to help get a better vibe of Egypt due to him appearing shy. In sharing the purpose of this research study, I shared important parts of my upbringing in Detroit in hopes of making him more comfortable sharing his life experiences. When we
arrived at the restaurant, we ordered our food and sat down to eat. Before eating, Egypt signed two consent forms and explained he understood the objective of the research. He expressed that we can get started as soon as he finish eating his meal to ensure there will be no interruptions. He finished eating, and we began the interview. I placed two recording devices on the table in front of him and pressed record on the devices.

The Narrative

Egypt is the sixth child out of eight from his mother. He grew up with both his mother and father present in the home. While he considers having both his parents in the home to be a benefit to his upbringing, he explains how his parent’s often quarrels with each other created an unpleasant home environment for him.

My family is not put together very well. Because, when my mother got with my daddy she already had 4 kids. So, she had 4 by him and 4 by someone else. And it was like my older brother, he had ran away when he was like 13. He used to babysit us and stuff. So when he ran away and stuff, I was like next in line. I had to watch us. Then another one of my brothers tried to run away but he didn't succeed. My brother that ran away, he got adopted by my granny. She took care of him and it was just, I don't know, it was kind of weird because my mother and daddy was always gone. They would go out partying or whatever. When they were there, they would just fight or whatever. Umm me and my brothers and sisters got along good until we got older. As little kids, because we were there with each other 24-7, but once we got older we didn't like each other for certain reasons. I don't know what that is about. Umm, my mother is an alcoholic. So it was always an issue with her and my daddy used drugs, crack.
The quarrelsome relationship of Egypt’s parents often caused a divide between the children. Often, he and his siblings took the side of the parent they favored most when the parents were at odds with each other. Subsequently, the siblings would be at odds with each other resulting in a “house divided.”

Egypt’s parents were not the only members in the family that caused his upbringing to be traumatic. Egypt, in an emotional state, slowly reflected on his upbringing and detailed a few traumatic events and how they impacted his education while he was growing up.

My older brother that had ran away had got raped. He got raped by my [male] cousin. Then he turned gay. My second brother, once we got older, I think I was like 16, he lost his mind. He became schizophrenic and started needing help. He not right. He stayed in the house with us. My older sister, she have 3 children. My sister right above me, she dropped out of school. She stopped going to school about 7th grade. She stopped going to school just because she did not want to go anymore. Then my two sisters younger than me, they good. First I was like, I didn't like school and everything. Then, I started looking at my family like . . . damn. I have to do something because everyone have dropped out of school. Its five kids older than me and no body graduated from high school. And I am like dang I have to do something. So I started going to school every day. We moved over on the Westside and I caught the bus every morning to school on the Eastside. I caught the bus at 7:00am and got to school at 8:03am in the morning. So it was a whole hour bus ride. I made sure I made it every day. It was just funny to me because I was like I have to do something. So, I started going to school and
stopped getting suspended. Usually I didn't care about school or the teachers or anybody in the building or what they had to say. I would curse them out. I fought with people. Once I seen, like, I have to do something because aint nobody going to take care of me. My mom doing her thing. My daddy doing his thing. They really aint care. If we aint want to go to school, we aint have to go to school. She be like, "Y’all going to school today?" and I'd be like, "I don't feel like it!" Then, she would be like, "Oh ok." That was that. But every time she would say like y'all don't have to go to school, I'd be the one like, I'm going because I didn't want to be there. Because it wasn't anything there [home].

The more aware Egypt became of his home environment and his families lack of accomplishments the more he understood he needed to do things they did not do to accomplish the things they did not accomplish. To this end, he began to take high school more serious and became more focused on going to college.

The communities that Egypt was reared in were neither in very peaceful nor appealing areas in Detroit. Often his family would experience altercations with neighbors and residents in the community. Egypt explains how his family became so accustomed to confrontations that, when they were not engaged in a feud with the neighbors, they would feud with each other.

Before we moved over on the Westside we were staying over here on the Eastside. We stayed there for 2 years, and there were only two houses on the block. And I think this is when our family kind of broke up. Like as little kids, we were getting along. But once we moved over there, we didn't have anyone to argue with or fight with. So we started fighting each other. It was just bad over
there. So my mother and dad, they have been together for like 23 years. But, over there is when they kind of like split. They really split and umm some [of the kids] took my momma side and some took my daddy side. I was with my momma. It don't matter. So it was kind of like the girls took my daddy side and the boys took my momma side. So, that is when it was like having the house divided and we still stayed with each other. He [father] would say something to me and like my mom would say something to him. It was like family war. Our lights and gassed had got cut off and they had stayed off for like a year and ... no they stayed off for 2 years.

Eventually, Egypt’s situations started to change as he started making a positive impression on his teachers and principal. They knew of Egypt's impoverished and hostile living environment and recognized his work ethics that suggested that he wanted to graduate and attend college. While his teachers and principal were recognizing his work ethics, Egypt continued to have disagreements with his parents and siblings.

My teacher started helping me and the principals and everybody started helping me because they seen it’s not him. And umm, I think I was like 17, me and my momma got into an argument. Actually me and my brother got into it and my mother took his side and so we was already kind of beefing. So I moved out. Well actually, she put me out of the home and I couldn't come back. So, I called this place, a teenage homeless shelter. I moved in and stayed there. They helped me out and I started going to school. Everything I needed, they helped me out. They guided me. When I turned 18, I moved to a different portion of the program. They put you in a house with three other housemates and y’all have to get a job and
split up the bills. You have to pay the shelter 30 percent of what you earn and they pay the rest. You have to get a Bridge Card [EBT card] and purchase your own food. This helped teach me to be more independent. Although I didn’t have to get a job because I was still in school. But, they had already knew that I was going off to college, so they said that I was didn’t have to worry about that. When it came time for me to graduate, they paid for my prom stuff and paid for my ticket to fly to college. I graduated from the program and from high school and moved to college.

Egypt credits much of his success to his understanding of poverty and his desire to no longer wanting to be subjected to such circumstances.

The day Egypt and I were scheduled to meet for this interview, I picked him up from his grandmother’s home and dropped him off as his uncle’s home afterwards. My first impression of Egypt was that he was different from many other young Black males in Detroit when I initially seen him. He had a different style as it relates to dress code and demeanor. He came out of his home on a sunny afternoon day in December wearing flip-flop sandal, jeans with stylish holes in them, and a white t-shirt under an unzipped hooded sweater. He had his hair in a high-top fade with half of his hair the color brown and the other half black, in a style that became popular in the late 1980s by singer Bobby Brown. He seemed slightly shy and reserved.

Life after High School

Egypt was born in 1995, and he is 19 years old. He currently attends a historically Black college in the South where he studies business administration and marketing.

Being heavily involved in entertainment, Egypt desires to grasp a better understanding of
how to market and manage himself. The talents that he focuses on exhibiting most are
dancing, singing, and, acting. He was involved in school plays in high school and now he
is actively involved with performing in school plays in college. Egypt records many of
his acting demonstrations and dancing performances and shares them on social media
where he has thousands of views on average, from around the world, per video.

Summary of Narratives

The 10 Black males in the study each provided very unique narratives of their life
experiences growing up in Detroit and how their families, communities, and schools each
shaped their experiences and outlooks on life. Nevertheless, the Black males also
revealed through their narratives the commonalities that often exist for Black males in
inner-cities displaying educational resilience while attending public schools. Several of
the commonalities amongst the Black males in this study are presented in Table 3. Out
the 10 Black males, 80 percent were involved in at least one extra-curricular or after
school program and believed their involvement helped them to become more engaged in
their academics and thereby increasing their chances of completing high school. The
extended influences of friends, peers, and school leaders’ involvement in the extra-
curricular activities helped to foster environments of high achievement for the Black
males as supported by the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem.

*Table 3* also reflects how only 40 percent of the Black males did not experience
being a victim of violence throughout high school. However, each Black male has
observed someone being a victim of violence during their high school experience. From
the 60 percent of Black male who did experience being a victim of violence, over 66
percent experienced being robbed for their belongings. Unfortunately, 40 percent of the
10 Black males who were robbed experienced this form of terror being on the opposite side of the barrel of a gun. Having experienced being robbed myself for my belongings in Detroit, while having a gun waved in my face, I know firsthand the level of terror it causes. Fortunately for me, I was no longer a high school student at the time and can only imagine the impact this traumatic event might have had on my school experience.

<Table 3> High School Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
<th>Number of High Schools Attended</th>
<th>Extra-Curricular or After School Activities</th>
<th>Victim of Violence</th>
<th>Lived without public utilities at some point during high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>JROTC, policy debate, student council, and robotics team</td>
<td>Arm robbery, victim of gang violence, and shot at gun</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Student organization and football,</td>
<td>Arm robbery, and victim of gang violence</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Prep rally and community organization</td>
<td>Arm robbery and victim of gang violence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumisile</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>No involvement</td>
<td>Strong armed robbery</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Student government, student council, community organizations, and debate team</td>
<td>Physically bullied</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Upward Bound and student organization</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>After school job and community organizations</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Student organization</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omowale</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>No involvement</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Community organization</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it relates to the home living conditions of the Black males, 60 percent lament growing up in a home where their utilities were not functioning at some point during their high school experience which influenced the ways they learned in school. Each Black male who lived in a home at some point where the heat, hot water, or lights were cut off expressed some form of shame when attending school. Out of the 4 Black males who did not experience having their utilities cut off at some point during high school, 3 of them had a father figure living inside of the home during their high school experience.

In sum, the combination of events experienced by these Black males at the home, in the community, and in the school created the motivation for these Black males to display their resilience by completing high school. In addition, many of the misfortunes and traumatic events experienced by the Black males fostered a strong desire to remove themselves from the environments that they experienced such misfortunes and trauma. Obtaining a high school diploma at some point became seen as a prerequisite for removing themselves and their family from such conditions.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The objective of this narrative inquiry was to explore the educational resilience of African-American males from impoverished backgrounds who graduated from a Detroit public high school. The overarching questions guiding this research were:

1. How do African-American males who were raised in poverty and graduated from high school describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit?

2. When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) have the largest impact on Black males’ education from the perspective of Black males?

3. What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the African-American males exhibiting resilience?

This chapter presents my efforts to search for answers from the data for the three research questions. In doing so, I reveal the findings from the research study through an investigation of common themes constructed across the data set. I first provide a data display as an overview of each thematic section and its accompanying sub-sections. Next, I present and discuss four emergent themes: “Microsystem: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child,” “Mesosystem: Poor at Home is Poor at School, Too,” “Exosystem: I Will Make It out of Here,” and finally, “Macrosystem: Another Day in the Hood.” I then conclude this chapter with a summary of the thematic presentation.
Data Display

There are four major themes in this chapter. Each of the major themes includes a sub-theme or multiple sub-themes. The first theme was, “Microsystem: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child” which had three subthemes: Family Members and Friends’ Influences; The Impact of Religion; and, The Impact of School. The second theme was, “Mesosystem: Poor at Home is Poor at School, Too” which had one sub-theme: Poverty Wears Different Shirts. The third theme, “Exosystem: I Will Make it out of Here” had two sub-themes: This Should Not be Normal, and I Need to Graduate from High School. Finally, the forth theme, “Another Day in the Hood,” had two sub-themes: Being Accepted as “Cool” and Nobody Cries No More. The themes and subthemes are revealed in the following data display:

I. Microsystem: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child
   a. Family Members and Friends’ Influences
   b. The Impact of Religion
   c. The Impact of School

II. Mesosystem: Poor at Home is Poor at School, Too
   a. Poverty Wears Different Shirts

III. Exosystem: I Will Make it out of Here
   a. This Should Not be Normal
   b. I Need to Graduate From High School

IV. Macrosystem: Another Day in the Hood
   a. Being Accepted as Cool
   b. Nobody Cries No More
Microsystem: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

The microsystem of the ecological model consists of people and objects that are within the immediate environment of a person and influences him through direct involvement of activities, interpersonal relations, and roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Ungar, Gazinour, & Richter, 2012). The Black males in this study revealed how the people and objects in their microsystem that had the largest influence on their development were: family, friends, school employees (teachers, principals, and coaches), community, and religious environments. Research contends that the people and objects in a person’s immediate environment impacts their development, intelligence, and resilience (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

There is an old African proverb that states, “It takes a whole village to raise a child.” The proverb implies that raising a child is a communal effort which requires the help of family, extended-family, and the community at large. This phrase is often heard in African-American communities, especially those of lower socioeconomic status. In many instances, as mentioned by the Black males I interviewed, parents might often rely upon one or more of the following people to watch their child or help to provide food for their child: an uncle, aunt, grandparent, god-parent, cousin, or a neighbor. Several of the participants in this study explained that they were required to watch their younger siblings when their parents were not home because they could not afford childcare services. Many poor families are not able to afford child care services and rely upon other family members to provide child care service while the parents are working (Children Defense Fund, 2015; Giannarelli, Lippold, Minton, & Wheaton, 2015)
An analysis of the Black males’ narratives suggests that the males either had support outside of their immediate family or they desired it. In most cases, the Black males understood that they were poor and wished that their conditions would change or that someone would help to change their conditions. Out of the ten Black males interviewed, only Eddie, Chris, and Egypt had their biological father in the home while growing up. Research has revealed that children achieve better academically and are less likely to drop out of school when a father is present in the home and engaged in their child’s education (Demuth & Brown, 2004; National Center for Fathering, 2015; Tillman, 2007). Children living in the home with both parents are more likely to not experience acts of violence, witness violence, or have fear of experiencing violence (Turner, 2006). Omowale explained that his father was at home for a short period of time during his childhood but then disappeared and had no contact with him or the family until his teen years. However, at that point, his father soon left again. While Malik, Dumisile, and Kofi did not have their biological fathers in the home while growing up, each had a step-father in the home at some point during his upbringing. However, Kofi’s father came into the home later during his high school years; Malik’s step-father was in the home during his earlier years and left during his high school years after divorcing his mother; and for most of his upbringing, Dumisile’s step-father was in the home, for which Dumisile was grateful.

Malcolm never met his father, but he did have a grandfather in his life and lived with his grandparents for most of his childhood. On the other hand, King knew who his father was, but King’s father never lived in the home. Like Malcolm and King, Kwame did not have a father at home while growing up, but Kwame did have an uncle whom he
credits for teaching him to be “masculine.” While many would argue that these Black males grew up in unstable households, they usually had someone on whom they could depend for some form of support to improve their situations, at least to some degree.

Each person alluded to this idea of desiring or understanding the need for a village to help raise them or other children living in poverty. Kwame puts it as follows:

    Well obviously we didn’t have any electronics. We didn’t have a lot of income. School activities were being cut out by the school system itself. So those were slowly going away. I would say the resources we had was community. That is something that doesn’t exist today. They always say it takes a village to raise a child. You don’t realize it today, but it use to be. The whole village raised your kids. But I think that the main resource that we had was that feeling of community. We had our family which was a large family, our community, and we had our church family who was always there.

The individuals within the microsystem (family, extended-family, peers, and community members) served as the “village” for many of the Black males in this study.

*Family Members and Friends’ Influences*

Everyone is an example—of either what to be or what not to be. Each participant shared a story of how a friend or family member had an influence on him, either negative or positive, that in turn impacted his education. For many of the participants, it was a combination of influences all intertwined over a period of time that they described as having an impact on their completion of high school. For example, Kofi explained that he had no intention of graduating from high school. He lacked the motivation to graduate, alluding to the fact that he had not seen any Black people who graduated from high
school and subsequently became successful. Thus, he was apathetic toward graduating from high school, as he explains:

I was my challenge; I mean, I felt like in high school I was in my own way. I wasn’t doing well like, 10th grade, at all. I did alright 9th grade but 10th grade? No. I wasn’t doing my work. I was smoking [marijuana]. No reason, I was just doing it. Just because… and I didn’t want to graduate high school. I wanted to go to the Army [and] that was it. I was like, “What the fuck am I here for? I’m gonna smoke this weed and… even though they won’t let you in if you smoke. That was just my mindset at the time. I was only, what, 16? I was fucking dumb. I didn’t really see no point of it [graduating from high school]. I mean, I figured if I did, then what? That was my whole thing, like, what after that? I mean, I know my grades weren’t that good to go to college – what am I gonna do, then? I just graduated. That’s gonna be it. But that was pretty much my whole mindset on all that. Didn’t really see the point in it. I stopped seeing the point in going to school.

Kofi suddenly had a shift of thinking after his friends and peer group started graduating from high school and enjoying and celebrating the exciting times. More important than his peer group was the influence his family had on him. He wanted to create the excitement for his mother that he had seen in the mothers of his friends. In addition, when his older sister graduated from high school, it became the motivating point for Kofi. He had a lightbulb go off in his head and needed to have a conversation with himself to graduate from high school:

I overcame that mindset. Just being self-observant. You know? When you step outside yourself and you just look, you just gotta have that [conversation with
self, like] “What the fuck are you doing? You don’t wanna graduate? Why? Look at your mother. She’s smart. She’s very smart. At least graduate for her, or at least do something. I mean, you’re smart. Just seeing everybody else getting ready to graduate and whatnot. And seeing my sister walk across the stage – she graduated in 2008. Seeing her and the look on my mom’s face. You know. I wanted to graduate. I mean . . . {Laughs} . . . but just stuff like that. And I didn’t think about it until I was like, man! That was a good feeling seeing my sister graduate, and cheering for her when they called her name, see her walk across the stage to get her diploma, and everybody happy. It was that – that happy feeling. And all my family was there, and seeing all of us there, being happy.

Malcolm had also explained how family and friends had an impact on him graduating from high school. He spoke about how he got tired of letting down his grandparents who really believed in him and had high expectations of him. Malcolm had friends who encouraged him to engage in unproductive behaviors, but they also encouraged him to have a balance. They taught Malcolm that it was ok to have fun, which might lead to him getting in trouble, but that he must balance the fun by also being productive. Malcolm’s friends encouraged him to not lose sight of graduating. His friends, who were often older than him explained how they are already on track to graduate as seniors to motivate him on toning down his behaviors that might lead to school suspension. He viewed their advice as positive motivation. Also, he had friends who inspired him in a different way due to their unfortunate decisions and fates.

First half of tenth grade I was still trying to fight people and stuff because I was in a new school trying to make a name for myself. Second half of tenth grade I was
like it’s over, I gotta be different. I want to go to college. I started thinking like I want to go to college. I’m like, because some of my friends were dropping out, all my friends were dying, it was crazy. Like, you know how people say “you know, some of your friends are going to be dead or in jail”? My friends were dying and going to jail, like for real. And I couldn’t do it no more. I had to choose where I was going to be. Staying in the same position or be successful. Friends of mines were just dying and going to jail. It was sick. And it was getting closer to home. Closer and closer to home. Soon I was like, I got to get up out of here. Like, I didn’t have any money to move. So, my only way to move was to go to college. So, I was busting my butt in every class.

Christopher also had friends similar to those of Malcolm. However, Christopher had five older siblings who all dropped out of high school. Despite being kicked out of many Detroit public schools, Christopher wanted to graduate and be the first of his siblings to bring his parents joy from completing high school.

I went to high school and me and my twin sister both graduated at the same time and we just had to kind of figure it out. Through high school my parents were very supportive. But, it wasn’t like . . . here’s the report card and what did you get in this class. It was just kind of a good job kind of thing for performing well academically in school because they were not use to that kind of stuff. They were used to kids getting suspended and getting kicked out and whatever. So my parents were very supportive but I had some very supportive teachers and some supportive people in the community who kind of helped me figure it out.
In addition, Christopher shared how he wanted to be a source of motivation for his younger nieces, nephews, and cousins. This contributed to him wanting to graduate. The influence of individuals in the microsystem (i.e. family, friends, community members, DPS staff) has shown to contribute significantly to the development of the Black males in this study and their educational outcomes.

The Impact of Religion

Church groups are part of the microsystem in the ecological theory of human development model. Religion came up several times throughout the interviews without me asking any questions specifically about it. King spoke about how it was only by “the grace of God” that he is even alive due to his mother having a disability that should have prevented her from giving birth to him. Growing up with both a God-fearing mother and father, King explained how his mother used the Bible to provide structure in the household and instill in him discipline. Likewise was the case with Eddie. Religion played a major role in his development. While sharing his story, Eddie said how he, “grew up in a very, very religious background, so it was very stern. It was like, basically, we had to go to church and we had church four times a week, approximately.”

For Kwame, he considered church to be very motivating. Kwame even considered the individuals at the church to be like family, because the members at his church were very involved in helping him and his family. His church family would often inquire about his academic achievements and behavior in school. He saw his church family as additional people to hold him accountable for performing well in school.

I mean in church, they use to teach education is a very important thing that you should have. You know, do well in school. Then you know, our church family is
there when report cards come around. You not only have to show momma, but you have to show auntie and uncles and you have to show pastor [laughter]. Because pastor wants to know what you got on that report card. You know, of course the whole church. And any of the kid in the church, pastor wants to see your report card too? The pastor knows your report card is due. So, it was like that. It motivated you to do better. And if you got low in a class and couldn’t get anyone in your family to teach you or tutor you, call someone at church. There is someone at church that can help you out. Or for parent teacher conference, if my mother or grandmother couldn’t go, call someone from church. Call one of the deacons, they would show up at the parent teacher’s conference for you. My mother was big on those parent teacher conferences. If she didn’t go, someone went in her place. My pastor was right up in there. Pastor would come.

This did not stop Kwame from getting in trouble, but having more people to help and hold him accountable certainly helped him to overcome some academic challenges. Now, Omowale’s experience regarding religion differed from those of King, Eddie, and Kwame. Omowale’s mother was religious and attended church, but she never forced him to choose a religion or to attend a church service with him.

You know, she never said you had to be this, she never said you had to go to church, we could choose what we believed in, you know. And you know, I’ve seen religion do a lot of good but I’ve seen it also do a lot of harm to a lot of people. And I always thank her for letting me decide what I, you know, wanted to believe in. So I think it—not having a definitive religion aided me in a way.
Despite Omowale not declaring a definitive religion, he felt as if his religious freedom helped to shape him as a person.

Religion helped to instill in these participants a belief system that required discipline, faith, and a positive outlook on life. After King gained an understanding of his mother giving birth to him, despite being paralyzed, coupled with observing her faith in the Holy Bible, it culminated in him having faith in overcoming obstacles and having a more positive outlook on life. To this end, King started to conceptualize high school completion as an obtainable goal despite living in deplorable conditions at times with no hot water or heat in the home. King believed that “I can accomplish all things through Christ who strengthen me” as the Holy Bible teaches. The faith and positive outlook on life helped to sustain King through many hard times.

*The Impact of School*

Attending school for many Black males is about more than just getting an education from the school’s curriculum. There are other lessons that are learned outside of the classroom. Many people form friendships at school and meet their best friends and even their future spouse at school. It is therefore a social place and as Omowale put it, “we are social creatures.” Due to him and his family moving many times throughout his schooling, he believed it contributed to his lack of social skills. Every time he would meet friends at school, he would find himself moving and having to change to a new school. This caused him to socially shutdown, because he did not want people to continue coming in and out of his life. This loner identity he developed in turn did impact his academics, because he never wanted to be in groups at school or network with other people.
Each Black male in this study highlighted in some way how they wanted to be accepted by their peer group in school and have friends. Egypt and King both were talented dancers and gained popularity due to their talents. Being popular at school removed a layer of despair which made learning easier for them. Eddie considered himself to be comical, and his peer group thought he was a comedian. Prior to developing a sense of humor that others found funny, he was a person that was seen as a nerd and was bullied. Eddie would do other people’s work to prevent from being bullied. Once he revealed that he was funny, people stopped picking on him and accepted him as being “cool.” In addition, he recognized an increase in girls becoming attracted to him and socializing with him. Similar to Eddie, Malcolm recognized an increase in women being attracted to him as he displayed that he could fight and even more so for “dressing fresh,” or wearing nice brand-name clothes. Each Black male understood they had to have a niche to be accepted by a larger audience at school, which in turn would make academic learning more feasible.

For Malik, Malcolm, Kwame, and Chris, being involved in extracurricular activities at school had an enormous impact on them. Being involved in extracurricular activities like sports, debate, or programs that involved community engagement gave them a sense of purpose. It developed or brought out a competitive spirit in them. At some point, each of them had taken on a leadership role where they had commitments, deadlines to meet, and people who depended on them. These extracurricular activities brought about a discipline in them that helped enable them to graduate from high school.
Summary

For this theme, the men in this study revealed several factors that contributed to their development and resilience. Not one person remotely indicated that he was autonomous and deserves all the credit for his survival in growing up in Detroit and the completion of high school. Each Black male spoke to the concept of it taking a village to accomplish these things. They all spoke about a traumatic event they experienced and how either a family member, friend, or community member was of assistance. Nevertheless, having assistance does not negate the extreme challenges many had to experience nor the requisite hard work each had to implement to overcome the challenge. They simply shared their stories of how they recognized there were people and objects in their environments that molded them into the resilient individuals they have become. The most salient of these people and objects happened to be family members, extended-family members, friends and peers, members of churches, school, and growing up in Detroit in poverty.

Mesosystem: Poor at Home is Poor at School

The mesosystem within the ecological model centers on the relationships between the people, objects, and activities within the microsystem and how these relationships impact the child’s development (Fraser, 2004; Brofenbrenner, 2005). Congruent with the research on the mesosystem (Ungar, 2012; Ungar, Gazinour, & Richter), the Black males in this study revealed how their relationships with family, friends, and members of the community often influenced how they behaved and performed academically at school.

Many of the Black males in this study articulated how being poor was not a situation that applied only at home, but rather one that spilled over into their experiences
in school and community and had a deleterious impact on them and how they operated in those spaces. Poverty, they realized, was not analogous to that of a light switch to where they can determine in what spaces they were economically deprived. The things these Black males often faced in their home, school, and community had a cyclical relationship to where one experience impacted another, and these experiences would all be intertwined in a way that could not be parsed apart. These experiences were not only limited to lack of resources, but all things that were experienced and observed by these Black males. What happened at the home in the morning before school or at night just before bed, often impacted the ways in which these Black males would carry on throughout their school day. Some went to bed many times without eating dinner due to poverty. Some woke up in the morning and had to head out to school foregoing breakfast.

While each participant in this study alluded to how living in poverty impacted them at school, Kwame really voiced his feelings towards it. In a shift of emotions, Kwame with his eyes brimming with tears, and a drop in his tone of voice succinctly explained these relationships. The following excerpt is from Kwame:

Because when you are hungry, nothing else matters. School doesn’t matter. You don’t see the importance of school because it doesn’t feed you. You don’t see the importance of anything else and that leads, it opens the doorway for you to do things you shouldn’t do. It is amazing what people will do when they are hungry. It is absolutely amazing. You become a different person when you’re hungry. And when you are dealing with the fact that, here I am walking around in Payless shoes and getting teased because of it. In school, children are just like that. I am getting teased because of it in school. But, I can’t go home and change it. And
there is no change in the future. There is no remedy for the future. It is just is what it is and it hurts. It hurts!

He took a long pause after reflecting and explaining this feeling of powerlessness. Understandably, one can grasp how being poor at home can have an impact at school, resulting in less than stellar academic performance due to lack of resources. Kwame reflected on how going without food and not having the most popular clothing and shoes upset him in school while growing up. Nevertheless, food is not the only necessity a student might need to perform academically. Students need to be able to also do homework when they get home. If a student does not have running water, gas, or electricity at home, it complicates his or her ability to focus on academics.

Four out of the ten Black males interviewed – King, Kofi, Dumisile, and Egypt – have lived in homes without gas, electricity, and running water. Dumisile speaks about the resources he desired as a child to perform better in school:

The most important resource is electricity. Basically, you’ve gotta have the basic essentials because that’s what makes life easier, through basic essentials. You would never realize how important having a bed is. You would never realize how important having heat is, running water is. Forget about a car. I’ve been in winters with no water, having to go to auntie down the street house to take a bath. I’ve been in winters, pipes broke and it cost a ton of money to fix the pipes so there was no water. We’re gonna be at our family’s house for the next couple of weeks until we figure it out. No electricity. We’re out of here – we can’t live like this. And to the point where… because the situations I was powerless in as a child, with my parents’ living situations, I knew how to refuel and light a kerosene
heater before I was 12 years old without burning the house down. Because if I burn the house down, that’s my ass. The children knowing how to navigate in these kinds of situations, you can’t expect them to be kids. I’ve been put in situations to where if I go out and shovel that snow, that’s gonna bring us home some money so that we can cook something – for that night. So I’m struggling, I’m walking in about a three-mile radius of my house to try to get together at least $20. If I make $25, I’m the best son in the world. This while I am 12 and 13 years old.

Earlier in chapter four, King spoke about how he would go to school smelling like charcoal due to having to light a charcoal grill in the house to keep warm and how he was teased for it. Kofi, in a similar situation, had to take different actions due to not having hot water. He explains,

Even though my mama worked at Chrysler, I mean, we were still poor. No heat, no hot water. I used to have to get cold water from outside, put it in the microwave, warm it up, and dump it into the bath. That’s how we took warm and hot baths.

Egypt had a different response all together with recognizing he was poor at home and how it impacted him in school. He shares his story:

I was around 16, and my lights and gas were cut off. It was during my 9th grade year and my 10th grade year. So I was younger. I was like 14 and 15. Then, they [my parents] had got the lights cut on illegally. But the gas stayed off because they [the gas company] dug it up and cut it off. And we had kerosene heaters and like the propane tanks in the house in the dining room. It was just, it was hard. But
I was just like, I got to get out of here. That is another reason I went to school every day. Because I can just go and be in... Well, it would be warm in school. So I went to school and chilled. My friends didn’t know about me. I was one of the most popular kids in school. They didn’t know. But once I got older and I started seeing other people had struggles too and, I was like Oh. These other people have issues, and not just me. But I didn’t tell them my business or whatever.

Egypt wanted to go to school, because he believed it was warmer in school than at his home. In addition, he was able to get to school earlier and eat breakfast followed by lunch a few hours later.

*Poverty Wears Different Shirts*

Poverty often is dressed differently depending on who is wearing it. While the term poverty often suggests the current inability to earn an income that can provide basic life needs, it often has levels to it. Each male in this study articulated how they were raised in poverty and how they understood and observed the various levels of poverty. As explained in the above section, some went nights without food while others went cold seasons without gas and electricity. Eddie had two parents, but he has eleven siblings. There was often not enough food in the home and he had to learn how to improvise.

When I was 10 years old, I was extremely hungry. I played basketball at night so I missed dinner, and all the dinner was gone. And then I waited… the next morning she was gone, I missed her right when she was gone and there was nothing in the house – absolutely anything. So what I did was just like, I’m not gonna be hungry! So I went around the whole street collecting bottles – you know, bottles are like 10 cents. So I went around the whole street just collecting… I ended up
collecting 15 bottles so it was like $1.50. So I ended up getting something to eat. I just remember collecting them, like… it was just something that you just think about. I remember at least once a month how hungry I was. I was extremely hungry and I knew I wasn’t gonna eat until Mom got home. That would mean 16 to 18 hours without actually eating, or actually more than that but I knew I had to find food for myself. So that’s a certain situation in which, you know, it sticks out to me. I feel like I probably learned it from my dad. I guess whenever my dad had a job – even when I was younger – he would always find a way to make money on the side. Like, he would always do some type of security hustle or something, but he always found a way. My dad was a very, very frugal guy so he would measure how much dish detergent we used and put a mark on it. He was all about saving money. So since he was like that I just picked up on those same things. I was like, OK, I’ve gotta get it somehow; I can’t just keep sitting here hungry. So I had to take initiative and look for it.

Summary

While many of the Black males in this study were conscious that many of their peers were also living in poverty, it was not sufficiently alleviating. They all felt a certain type of shame when going to school, despite whatever niche they had there that allowed for them to fit in or to be considered popular. They often carried their poverty to school with them as much as they would have preferred to leave it at home. This was not an option and it was beyond their abilities to change their conditions.
Exosystem: I Will Make it Out of Here

The exosystem focuses on those innumerable remote interactions which indirectly influences a child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Some of these influences within the exosystem are: social networks between parents, social welfare services, structural barriers, mass media, and friends of family. Bronfenbrenner (2005) argues that the exosystem effects the quality of the mesosystem and microsystem. The Black males in this study spoke passionately about moving outside of Detroit due to understanding how the external environments impacts them in ways that they have no control over.

Each of the Black males in this study explicated how they intend to either move themselves or their families out of Detroit or help to remove their family out of the impoverished conditioned they are in. These ambitions started early on once many of them were conscious of their living arrangements as being destitute. Similar to Kwame’s views, many looked forward to the day where their living conditions would look different than how they were raised. Kwame spoke to this idea by stating:

I think all of us, including my mother, we all looked to the day that, soon enough, we would all be out of here [Detroit]. Soon enough we will get through. We are getting by now, we are surviving now, but one day we will actually be able to just live. So, just with that hope that today was jacked up but tomorrow will get better and better and better.

Each Black male echoed the sentiment of Kwame in wanting to escape Detroit which was often being used synonymous to poverty.
This Should Not be Normal

Growing up, the Black males in this study often were oblivious to their destitute living arrangements. At different ages and through visiting different communities and homes of friends and family, each Black male recognized how their living situation varied from others. Some Black males spoke about more homelessness in their community, more violence, and more illegal activity occurring than others. When reflecting over the things they witnessed and experienced and how they survived, each had a moment that displayed appreciation and celebration. They recognized the way they were raised lacking resources and how others should not have to experience it. They often used their impoverished upbringing as motivation. Kofi illuminated this in the sharing of the following story:

I mean, it would get to the point where we would get a big jar of peanut butter and jelly, scoop it out, put it in a bowl and that’s what we ate. Sometimes all we had was [expletive] orange juice and that was dinner. Or strawberry milk – that was dinner. I mean, just stuff like that. And that really had an impact on us – I think all of us. We don’t want to live like this ever!

When asking Kwame to describe his neighborhood, he provided the following story:

There is the good, the bad, and the ugly. You got the good. The all-around neighbors, especially told timers who would look out for you. You could be walking down the street coming from school and they may need their trash taking out. You take their trash out and they give you a sandwich and send you on your way. And you have vandalism. You have these abandoned buildings and structures that are just standing for no reasons. But you have to look at walking
past and deal with it. You see drug dealers on one corner and the drug users on the
next corner. Then you have the ugly. You have the hit and runs. You have the
people who just want to shoot for no reasons. A guy got shot not too long ago
over $5. My best friend was killed. He was shot in the head and left in his
grandmother’s yard just a year and a half ago over $20. He was killed over $20.
He went a week without paying them and was shot in the head in his grandmother
back yard. So, I mean, you have all of that wrapped up in one.

Both Kwame and Kofi discovered that graduating from high school would increase the
chances of them no longer having to face more of the horrible experiences they once did.

*I Need to Graduate from High School*

Chris, like each of the Black males in this study, believed education would lead to
a better life. Kofi was apathetic about the thought that education could lead to a better life
during his early years of high school, but then had a change in perspective after
witnessing his sister graduate high school. Chris recognized the benefit of graduating
from high school during the later years of high school as well. He explains how education
would serve as a road to escaping poverty:

By the time I got to my junior year, I knew that education was my only way out of
that situation [poverty]. It was the only way for me to make it and for me to help
my family to get out of the situation. So it’s kinda and I’m glad it kinda clicked. If
I had relied on the footprints my family left behind, I wouldn’t be where I am
today. So I’m just kinda glad it clicked.
He recognized how many of his older siblings and parents lacked education and subsequently were still living in poverty. He desired a better life than the one that he experienced while growing up and believed education would aid in his journey.

When speaking about how he was once robbed while living in poverty, King stated “that was really my main frustration but my motivation for graduating was to bring my family out of poverty.” King made the case that graduating high school is a prerequisite for escaping poverty for young Black males. King and each Black male in this study discussed how they witnessed many of their friends and peers not complete high school and how the world was not accepting towards them for dropping out of school.

More than just graduating high school for himself, King believed he needed to graduate high school to inspire other young Black males and show them that it is possible.

Yes, I think it did matter. Even though I graduated for me unconsciously I graduated for the [expletive] after me. I did it to show them that it was possible and just how the Civil Rights Movement they did that shit just so I can go to school. They don’t even know me. I don’t known them. Low key, unconsciously, that’s what it was. And what’s change for now affect them later.

Malcolm shared the same sentiments as King. Malcolm wanted to leave a benchmark for his younger siblings to hurdle over. Regarding his future and how to become successful, he explained:

All I gotta do is sit here chillin’ laid back and do this work. I know I can do this. That pushed me and motivated me right there and my brother and my sister even
if they don’t say they following behind my path, they are potentially following what I’m doing, because they want to live up to what I did. Expectations and goals already set. For me it was no expectations and goals set. I had to create expectations and goals because no one else went to college and no one else fully completed high school and did well. So I wanted to create expectations and goals so that the people that was younger than me, they wouldn’t have to. It’s hard to create goals and expectations for yourself. It’s hard.

Summary

The Black males in this study revealed their desire to escape from the impoverished conditions in Detroit that houses violence and crime. Despite being oblivious to their living conditions at an early age, they discovered they should not be subjected to being a victim of violence and that they need to move to a location where the probability of being a victim of violence is lessened. Because they cannot change the behaviors of their neighbors or control the crime in their community, for their own safety, they need to relocate to escape from it. Once they graduate from high school, the probability of them being able to afford to move will increase.

Macrosystem: Another Day in the Hood

The Macrosystem narrows in on the attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of the culture in a region and its impact on the child (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 2005). Often individuals acclimate to the environment that they are reared in (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). The Black males in this study unpacked how they were oblivious, in many ways, to how the larger culture in Detroit influenced their appearance, language, and mannerisms. Around high school, many of the Black males realized that they were behaving in certain
ways that were in alignment with the larger culture despite not seeing the positive benefits of doing such.

At some point throughout the interviews, each participant in this study spoke about poverty, crime, and violence as the norm. After pondering and analyzing their upbringing and things experienced, most of the participants displayed bewilderment to how they even survived the numerous things they experienced and managed to complete high school. Moreover, each participant also articulated how a change is needed to alter the complacency towards poverty and crime that places many students at risk of not only not completing high school, but also staying alive. In the meantime, being identified as “cool” allows for the development of relationships with other people that could, in turn, allow for a safer navigation throughout the community and in school.

*Being Accepted as “Cool”*

Each Black male in this study articulated a desire to be accepted or approved by their peers or community at large. More specifically, in Detroit, young Black males aspire to be accepted as “cool” and implement different methods for achieving this goal. Malik indicated in many ways his desire to be “cool.” When discussing his future plans for employment, he stated he “want[ed] to be a physicist because that shit sounds cool.” Then he recognized he was not good at science so he wanted to join the Army. He received a job offer prior to undergoing a severe leg injury. He explains, “They gave me a cool-sounding job. Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear Specialist. Ok? 74 Delta.” More than anything, he wanted a cool sounding job that brought awe to people when hearing of his title. In addition, several times he used the word “cool” to describe his popularity in school and relationships with other people.
Malcolm explained several methods he used to be seen and accepted as “cool” which included having nice brand name clothes and being able to defend himself. He wanted to dress nice to impress females and be seen as “hard” or tough by the males. Accomplishing these two things would, from his view, heighten his level of acceptance. Jordan desired to have better clothing in school so that he could gain a better level of acceptance. When reflecting upon his days of wearing Payless shoe store tennis shoes and second-hand clothing, he appeared sad and argued how other students should not be subjected to the teasing and torturing that comes with wearing less expensive products. Royce and Egypt leveraged their dancing talents to become popular in school and be seen as “cool.” Eddie found ways to use humor in school and throughout the community to be accepted and not bullied. Often, he would make individuals who were popular laugh while onlookers would recognize his acceptance from those perceived as “cool” or tough. This reduced bullying that Eddie used to receive and increased his acceptance. Several others Black males in this study revealed how they engaged in bullying others to gain notoriety.

Nobody Cries Anymore

Violence in Detroit has been accepted by many as a cultural norm. Detroit has been listed as the “most dangerous” city in America by many sources (Forbes, 2013; Neighborhood Scout, 2013). At a young age, several of the Black males in this study witnessed and experienced horrific crimes take place. Kofi recalls witnessing a murder take place with his own eyes on his street. Kofi tells the following story as he recalls:

When I used to go to school, there was someone at school called Makella – you know, she was a girl – and she was in my class and she used to live down the
street. And her mama used to do my mama nails and stuff like that, and we would be over there just down the street. And one day me and my sister, we were bored. She was like, “Let’s walk down there. They on the next block.” We asked my mom if we could go down there, watch movies and stuff. And this was when DVD players first started getting out – we didn’t have one and they did, so we went over there. And we were watching “Fast and Furious 2.” I’m just sitting there on the couch and something told me to look outside. And I looked outside and I saw these two dudes, they were talking. One of them back up and pulled out a gun – bam, bam, bam – shoots the other guy forward. And I’m just looking at it like, “What the hell?” I mean… she [Makella] cut off all the stuff [lights], she talking about, “Everybody get down!” About an hour later you see the police outside. They got the stuff over the gun shells. Dude is dead, of course. His family outside crying, trying to figure out what happened. I didn’t know the guy. I think my uncles knew him or something. I guess it was over some money and stuff like that.

Although it had some impact on him, he learned to become immune to violence in some regards. Despite not being able to fully relinquish himself from the fear of victimization, he made attempts to mask his fears in hopes of not appearing weak and vulnerable. He sometimes trembled with fear during the morning commutes to school as he traveled past the vacant dilapidated homes, vagrants, and stray dogs. Nearly first thing in the morning before school starts, Kofi is experience psychological trauma. Yet, he never received any professional therapy or counseling to help him muddle through these traumatic experiences to mitigate the negative impact it might have on his academic learning. Many
others share stories of being a victim of robbery or witnessing shootings, dead bodies, and assaults growing up. Out of the 10 Black males in this study, not one spoke about receiving any form of therapy or counseling after being victimized, assaulted, or residing in deplorable living conditions.

Temporarily accepting many of these living conditions as the norm affected the Black males in this study in several ways. Each had an epiphany at some point that their living conditions do not have to be permanent. An understanding of “situational poverty” versus “generational poverty” (Payne, 2005) was reached by each Black male in this study along with a sensational desire to eventually change their living conditions without “crying” about it. Rather, the resilient Black males in this study decided to continue to earn their education and leverage it in an effective manner to advance further in life, subsequently riding themselves of poverty.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The objective of this narrative inquiry was to explore the educational resilience of African-American males from impoverished backgrounds who graduated from a Detroit public high school. The overarching questions guiding this research were:

1. How do African-American males who were raised in poverty and graduated from high school describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit?

2. When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) have the largest impact on Black males’ education from the perspective of Black males?

3. What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the African-American males exhibiting resilience?

Conclusions

Overall, three major conclusions were drawn from this research study: 1.) African-American males from Detroit that were raised in poverty describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit as daily war on several fronts; 2.) Events at home have the largest impact on Black males’ education when considering household, community, and school; 3.) There are specific roles that the home, community, and school play in Black males exhibiting resilience. I discuss these conclusions in relation to the research questions and literature.
Following this, I discuss implications of this research, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Educational Experiences Growing up in Detroit

The overarching goal of this research study was to explore how Black males use their voice to share their narratives of growing up in Detroit, attending a DPS and graduating, despite facing traumatic events. The first conclusion addresses the first research question: How do African-American males who were raised in poverty and graduated from high school describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit? It is established from this research study that the educational resilience of Black males is an integrated concept that connects the home, school, and community. The Black males in this study commonly agreed that learning does not simply take place in a vacuum better known as school, more specifically Detroit public schools (Wang & Williams, 2012). Moreover, challenges to education do not merely take place within the confines of a classroom, but at home and in society at large.

Many events experienced by a young Black male at home and in the community during the school year and during the school breaks influence the way he engages with his teacher, other students, and with the school’s curriculum (Bronfenbrenner, 1991, 2005; Sampson, 2002). Each Black male expressed a major challenge they encountered outside of the classroom that impacted how they interact within the classroom or in school. Some have lost family members due to violence in Detroit throughout a school year. Some of the Black males in this study have been robbed at gunpoint on the way to and from school. Multiple Black males in this study have been bullied throughout their
schooling in DPS and harbored fear of the violence escalating to being murdered. Some of the bullying takes place in the community outside of school, but the bully often attends the same school or travels the same route home as the person being bullied. Black males have had to navigate warzones to graduate from high school where the battlefields have taken place on several fronts: at home, in the community, and at school. This finding echoes the existing literature on Black males’ experiences in urban poverty and educational risk and resilience (Bernard, 1997; Noguerra, 2003; O’Connor, 1997; Task Force on Resilience, 2008).

Out of the ten Black males in this study, not one spoke at length regarding how high school was difficult for them due to the academic rigor of the school’s curriculum. Two of the Black males, Malik and Kofi, spoke how science and math respectively, was complicated for them in high school as a single subject. Kofi also revealed that he was his primary obstacle in high school due to the apathy he had for education as opposed to what he believe to be the real world. To this point, The Black males in this study never felt academically incapable in school. Too often, they simply had an issue more pertinent to their survival than the school lesson being taught that school day, school semester, or school year. To this end, the Black males in this study who were raised and attended schools in high-risk environments, educational challenges for completing high school centered more on access to resources than mental capacity to academically achieve.

Impact on Black Males’ Education

The next conclusion addresses the second research question: When considering household, community, and school, what event(s) have the largest impact on Black
males’ education from the perspective of Black males? The second conclusion is that multiple events that occur at the home, have both the largest positive and negative impact on Black males’ education. While observing and experiencing events in the community and at school does have a significant impact on the educational experiences of Black males, the participants in the study overwhelmingly revealed the home experience impacts are the most noteworthy.

Students spend the bulk of their school years at home and under the influence of their parents and family. The discipline, ethics, and morals taught at home often have a direct impact on the caliber of student a Black male becomes. Several participants in this study disclosed how important education was to their parents. Over half of the Black males in this study spoke to how a family member in authority had high expectations of their education and constantly encouraged them to achieve academically or encouraged them complete high school. In some cases, homework was expected to be the first thing completed upon arriving home. Several Black males had siblings at home to foster academic competition by setting an academic standard. Often, there was positive reinforcement that took place at the home for academic achievement.

There are combinations of positive and negative events occurring at the homes of Black males that cause direct and indirect impacts on their education. The Black males in this study interpret positive and negative things differently. For example, Egypt, Kofi, and Dumisile discussed their willingness to attend and spend longer hours at school to escape from experiencing the poverty at home. Egypt wanted to get away from witnessing the quarrels between his parents at home, and he found the school building to often be a warmer place than his home due to the heat at his house being cut off several
times. Likewise was the case with Kofi; he preferred to be at school to escape from being home, even if he did not complete the required work at school. While this can be seen as being negative from an academic perspective, Kofi considered escaping the poverty at home as long as possible to be positive to his survival. Furthermore, he became engaged in extra-curricular activities to stay at school longer, which had a positive impact on his academics. Dumisile directly mentioned how he got involved in extra-curricular activities to delay coming home after school.

Black Males Exhibiting Resilience

In answering the third research question, “What specific roles, if any, did home, community, and school play in the Black males exhibiting resilience?”, it was found that much of the Black males’ educational resilience in Detroit is often motivated by an autonomous desire to escape poverty. Nonetheless, their resilience can be seen as a product of several dynamics: household chores/discipline, parental and family influence, peer influence, and self-esteem. These dynamics are often interlinked in various ways that manifest a foundational strength in Black males contributing to their educational resilience (Randle, 2012; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013; William, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Discipline being taught and reinforced at home through household chores and responsibilities often provides Black males with the self-restraint and persistence needed to accomplish tasks and overcome obstacles (Bronfenbrenner, 1991; Sampson, 2002). Black males in this study articulated how household chores provided them with a responsibility and contributed to them developing work ethics that they were transferable
to their academics (William, 2012). The parents and guardians of the Black males in this study enforced these household chores and responsibilities, and even sometimes their siblings did. These external influences contributed to their human development and views on what it means for a Black male to be responsible (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Johnson, 2014; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013).

Throughout this study of Black males, peer influence has proven to be a significant factor on each person’s development. Each Black male in this study has spoken to how a peer influenced them throughout their schooling in numerous ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Fraser, 2004). Malcolm credits his friends in high school in large part for him graduating due to them providing him with advice to keep him balanced in school. Being accepted by their peer group contributes to an easier learning environment for Black males in school (Waxman, Gray, & Pardon, 2003, 2004; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Furthermore, not being accepted by a peer group has revealed to have a deleterious impact on the education of Black males. This study has revealed that being rejected by peers is damaging to Black males’ self-esteem, and this in turn impacts the way they learn at school.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, implications of this study for theory, practice, and research will be presented. The implications for this study are drawn from a combination of the study findings, interpretations, and existing literature based on Black males’ educational resilience in urban inner-cities. In addition, recommendations for future research that can inform individuals, school districts, and policy-makers will be presented.
Implications for Theory

This study expands on the meaning of Black males’ educational resilience in urban inner-cities. In addition, this study adds the narrative inquiry dimension to existing literature as a majority of the Black males’ resilience and achievement literature has been conducted through quantitative methodology research and other qualitative methods which do not provide voice to the participants in the way of narrative. There is a moderately small number of narrative research studies on Black males’ educational resilience in inner-cities (O’Connor; 1997; Randle, 2012; Task Force on Resilience, 2008; William & Bryan, 2013). Black male resilience needs to be understood beyond the limitations of academic achievement in the school. By revealing Black males’ stories in their own voice, this study contributed to a richer understanding of the roadblocks Black males often encounter in urban America, how they hurdle over them, and how they complete high school.

The findings in this study have implications for fostering Black males’ educational resilience in inner-cities (Tugade, 2004), as well as contributing to the gaps in the ecological theory of human development and Black males in urban inner-cities (Wang, 2007). Black males’ educational resilience often focuses on high academically achieving Black males and not those who are confronted with life-challenging issues and contribute to the closing of the graduation gaps (Bonner et al., 2009; Masten, 2001; Randle, 2012). As the ecological theory of human development focuses on how factors embedded in multiple systems impact the development of human beings, it does not indicate the severity of the impacts and what that might indicate for Black males’ educational experiences in poverty. The findings from this narrative research study
noticeably foreground the significance of incorporating resilience as the unit of analysis when studying Black males’ academic achievement and high school completion.

This research study allowed for the theorizing about Black male resilience as it pertains to earning an education in an inner-city using an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005). Many scholars frame Black males’ educational resilience around the high levels of academic achievement (i.e., honor roll grades, gifted programs, awards) of Black males not specific to urban inner-cities (Ford, 1994, 2011; Randle, 2012; Sampson, 2002; William & Bryan, 2013). Nevertheless, the Task Force on Resilience (2008) asserts that “resilience is a fluid process not easily captured in a list of protective factors” (p. 21). To this point, coupled with the understanding that resilience cannot take place in the absence of hardship, the Black males in this study overcoming of traumatic experiences and completion of high school is a declaration of educational resilience. Moreover, I argue that Black males that have defied similar odds as the 10 Black males in this study are resilient. This study allows for a better understanding of how to measure the accomplishments of Black males who would ordinarily be depicted throughout educational literature as underachievers. Understanding the environmental factors influencing and challenging Black males through the ecological model assists in providing imperative context to how and why might Black males be performing in the manners in which they are.

The findings in this research study also have implications for critical race theory. Critical race theory centers on matters of race and class, voice and counter-narratives, and social change (Bell, 2005). Critical race theory was initially introduced in the legal field and later introduced into the field of education (Crenshaw, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate,
Critical race theory was introduced in the field of education to counteract negative narratives from the dominate group which depicted people of color as academically inferior. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued “the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 58). The lived experiences of Black males and their voice need to be included in educational literature to counteract the negative narratives.

**Implications for Practice**

In company with the theoretical implications, there are also practical implications brought forth through this study of Black male high school graduates. The findings of this study indicate three major implications for practice. Firstly, due to the influence that relationships have on Black males’ academic achievement, it is vital for inner-city school districts to ensure Black males have more after school programs where students not only can foster great relationships, but can also engage in competition and take on leadership roles (Bryan, 2005; Payne, 2005). The Black males discussed how they are looking to be accepted by peers. Developing more school organizations to participate in for Black males can potentially decrease their desire to be a part of a street gang. Developing after school program and school organizations needs to include a mentorship component to it where students can receive positive reinforcement from those who have accomplished what the Black males aspire to accomplish.

A second implication for practice is parents need to become more engaged in the academic affairs of Black males. Schools need to strategically find ways to engage the family and community through workshops and partnership initiatives to get involved in
the academic proceedings of Black males. Many of the Black males in this study spoke about how their parents did not complete high school and were not actively engaged in the school affairs of these Black males. We know from the literature that students with parents who are engaged in their academic affairs perform better academically (Garibaldi, 1992; Task Force, 2008). Sampson (2002) argues how “familial changes are necessary to improve education” as it pertains to Black students even to a greater degree than school changes (p. 193). Moreover, Bryan (2005) argues how “schools alone lack the necessary resources to address the large number of obstacles to learning that many minority and poor students in urban schools confront on a daily basis” (p. 220). To this point, better partnership between Black male students, family members, and urban public schools need to be development.

Lastly, due to Black males expressing not seeing themselves in the school’s curriculum and the fact that this impacts their level of apathy towards education, Black males should see more and learn more about their culture to engage them in learning (Gay, 2000; Mazma, 2015; Mazma & Lundy, 2012 Moses, 2002). This learning can take place at home, throughout the community, or in afterschool programs until educational policy allows for the modifying of the school curriculum. Milner (2007) articulates how a “no excuse” approach is needed in the teaching of Black males.

Black male student can and are succeeding in all types of schools—urban included—and the time has come for those of us in education to stop making excuses and to teach and empower Black males to reach their full capacity in urban school across the nation. (p. 5)
If students are not learning things to help empower them inside of the school, then alternatives methods for empowering Black males to learn and take pride in learning needs to be implemented.

Recommendations for Future Research

Scholars conducting research on the Black males’ educational resilience and Black males’ achievement in inner-cities are adamantly suggesting there is an uninterrupted need for conducting research that highlights the successes of Black males in education and not simply the deficits. The process of answering the research questions for this study leads me to further research questions regarding Black males that need exploring as they pertains to resilience and high school completion. One of the questions is related to parenting and its impact on Black males. What are the experiences of Black male graduates from inner-cities who never had a father or father figure involved in his life? What are the experiences of Black males with parents who conceived them at age 20 years old or younger? Also, what are the experiences of Black male graduates that have been placed in either the foster care system or the juvenile justice system? Future research needs to be done in these areas to have a more in-depth understanding of Black males’ educational resilience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented three conclusions based on findings from the data and educational literature. First, African-American males from Detroit that were raised in poverty describe their educational challenges, safety, and overall experiences growing up in Detroit as a daily war on several fronts. Second, events at home have the largest impact
on Black males’ education when considering household, community, and school. Finally, there are specific roles that the home, community, and school play in Black males exhibiting resilience. I discuss these conclusions in relation to the research questions and literature. In conclusion, implications for theory, practice, and research were also presented.
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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

Researcher’s Statement
We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. April Peters-Hawkins
Department of Lifelong Education Administration and Policy
(706) 542-4154; alpeters@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this research study is to identify key influences associated with the educational resilience of Black males who graduated from a Detroit public high school. More specifically, the research aims to discover the types of significant or traumatic events experienced by Black males from Detroit. In addition, this research seeks to understand how their traumatic experience have influenced (positively or negatively) their high school completion, if at all.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- 1) Answer questions about your personal background and provide basic demographic information. Answer questions about the home environment you grew up in, community environment, and school environment. You will also answer questions about your motivations for graduating high school and your commitment to fulfilling that goal. This process should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes.
- 2) Potentially, take part in an audiotaped individual interview with the researcher that will last between 60 to 90 minutes.
- 3) Someone from the study may email or contact you by phone to clarify your information.

Risks and discomforts
• No risk is expected, but you may experience some discomfort or stress during the in-depth interview (if selected and agree to participate) if you choose to reflect upon a previous traumatic event. You can choose not to speak up at any point during the study if you feel uncomfortable or otherwise do not choose to speak.

Benefits
• The benefits for you include providing voice to the academic research community and society about the experiences of Black male graduating from a Detroit public high school despite the resistance faced. You will also provide insight into effective measures and key strategies for improving academic achievement and positive inner-city experiences among Black males from impoverished cities.

Incentives for participation
Participants will not be receiving any monetary or non-monetary incentive for their participation in the study.

Audio/Video Recording
Audio recording will be used during the interviewing phase of the research. The audio recording is necessary to have an accurate account of the interview that will later be transcribe. After the audio recorded interview is transcribed, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview recorded. You may not participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_______ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_______ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality
No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others without your written permission, except if required by law. You will be assigned an identifying pseudonym and this pseudonym will be used in place of your name each time you are referred to. After transcription and analysis is completed on the audio recordings, the tapes with your voice on them will be destroyed. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
You understand that your participation is voluntary. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.
If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Farris Muhammad under the direction of Dr. April Peters-Hawkins both from Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia. Farris Muhammad can be contacted by phone at (919) 633-581 or by email Muhammad@uga.edu. Dr. April Peters-Hawkins can be contacted by phone at (706) 542-4154 or by email alpeters@uga.edu. Please ask any question you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Farris Muhammad or Dr. April Peters-Hawkins at the contact information provided above. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject’s Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

________________________________________  __________________________
Name of Researcher                          Signature                          Date

________________________________________  __________________________
Name of Participant                          Signature                          Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
In-Depth Individual Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Farris Muhammad and I am a graduate student at the University of Georgia. I am pursuing a doctoral degree in the area of Education Administration and Policy. I am conducting a research study on the educational resilience of African-American males who graduated from a Detroit public high school. The purpose of this study is to identify key influences associated with the educational resilience of Black males who graduated from a Detroit public high school. With your permission, I would like interview you today about your experiences as a Black male who have graduated from a Detroit public high school and the impact these experiences have had on your life.

Throughout the interview, I will ask you questions related to your personal background and your experiences (home, community, and school) living in Detroit. I will also ask about your personal motivations for graduating high school. All information we discuss will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed on any documentation associated with this study. No identifiers will be used for this research with exception of a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and the documentation of your demographic information. Do you have questions in regards to your participation in this study?

I anticipate this interview will last nearly an hour, but you are not limited to an hour to tell your story. Therefore, we do not have to rush through any points you feel are critically important. You may end the interview at any point. You may decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. You may also feel free to take a break during any portion of the interview. Also, feel free to let me know if you need additional clarification or explanation about any of the questions. Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

IN-DEPTH INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I would like to begin with talking about you and your upbringing and family background.

Background Experience

- Please tell me about your upbringing related to your family and household.
  - Tell me about your family background
  - What, if any, major challenges did you face growing up?
  - What were the major factors in your life that would say helped you overcome those obstacles?
Thank you for sharing that information with me. Now let’s move on to talk about the community you grew up in.

**Community Experience**

- Tell me about your neighborhood(s) you were raised in.
- Can you speak about the major challenges, if any, you faced growing up there?
- What were the major factors in your life that helped you overcome those obstacles?

Thank you for sharing that information with me. Now let’s move on to talk about your academic experiences.

**Educational Experiences**

- Tell me about your educational experiences in Detroit Public Schools.
- What were some challenges you faced academically in DPS?
- What factors helped you overcome those academic challenges?
- Specifically, as it relates to high school, tell me about those experiences.
- What recommendations would you provide to improve academic achievement levels for Black male student in inner-cities?

Thank you for sharing your academic experiences with me. Now let’s talk about the things that have motivated you throughout your life.

**Motivation**

- Tell me about the people an things you found to be motivating
- Tell me about your relationships with some of those people and things.
- How has being a Black male contributed to your motivation?

That concludes our interview. Is there anything else you would like to mention or talk about? If not, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. The information you provided me will be extremely useful to my research. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns pertaining to this interview. I will send you a copy of the transcribed interview for your records and for you to review. Thank you again for your participation. Have a great day.
APPENDIX C

INVITATION LETTER
Invitation Letter

September 2014

Greetings Participants:

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study entitled *The Educational Resilience of African-American Males in Detroit: A Reflective Analysis of Lived Experiences*. You may participate in this study if you graduated from a Detroit public high school after 2007, overcame a significant obstacle associated with poverty or violence, and you are an African-American male. The purpose of this study is to examine how African-American males overcome significant obstacles growing up in Detroit and managed to graduate high school despite the challenges faced hindering their academic achievements.

As a participant you will be asked to complete a 60-90 minute face-to-face interview. Findings from this research study may provide information on how to better serve the academic needs of African-American males. Your involvement in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Identifying information will be kept confidential and stored in a secured location. Information for this study will not be released to anyone other than individuals working on this project. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Farris Muhammad (919) 633-9581; muhammad@uga.edu, or Dr. April Peters-Hawkins at (706) 542-4154; alpeters@uga.edu. Thank you for your consideration!

Respectfully,

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