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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

BOYS IN THE HOOD: A STUDY OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AMONG A GROUP OF
AT-RISK, HIGH-ACHIEVING, AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN A SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Patrick B. Booker

July, 2015

Linda Purrington, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Patrick Bernard Booker

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This accomplishment is dedicated to my wife, my two sons, and my mother.

I finally did it!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to say thank you to the 11 young men that trusted me with their heartfelt stories and allowed me into their personal and academic lives. You guys are amazing and the epitome of resilience!

To my wonderful wife Liliana, I would like to say thank you your understanding and patience. I know it wasn't always easy being both the Mom and Dad to our two wonderful boys. No more early Saturdays at the library and late nights of rewrites.

To my mother Lucille Booker, thank you for believing in me and making me believe that no matter what, if I put my mind to it I can achieve it.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Purrington, thank you for your kind words and supporting me through this journey. There were times when I wanted to give up but your words of encouragement kept me going.

For my two boys, Ethan and Eli, Daddy did it! Ethan, I remember the times when I would get home late at night from class and then having to leave early the next morning to class and you would cry at the front door. Just know that this sacrifice was to provide a better life for you and your brother.

VITA

EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS

CSU Los Angeles	Educational Administration M.A.
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Intern Program	Multiple Subject Teaching Credential
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the perceptions of high achieving, at risk African American male students from 3 Southern California urban high school with regards to (a) the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, (b) the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success, (c) the characteristics that best describe their resiliency, and (d) what can parents, school and school employees, and the community can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males. More specifically, this study examined the environmental risks that confront the Black males participating in this study, evidence of resilience in light of the risk faced, and explanations for the observed adaptation, and implications for educating young African American males.

This qualitative study collected data from high achieving, at-risk, urban African-American high school males. A total of 11 9th -12th grade, African-American males participated in semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 19 questions and the focus group interview consisted of 3 questions.

Four conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study. First, it takes a network of supportive individuals to promote academic success among at-risk, urban African American males. Second, extracurricular programs were integral in promoting academic resilience for at-risk, urban African-American males. Third, the church was a contributing factor in fostering their academic success. Fourth, the participants possessed a unique set of personality traits, beliefs and temperament that has led to their academic success.

Based on the findings of this current study, it is recommended that parents or guardians seek out opportunities to be involved in their child's education, schools focus on ways to

improve the learning environment for at-risk African-American males rather than the current practice of focusing on the under achievement of African-American males, schools need to create family-school-community partnerships to increase opportunities for school success for student's, and urban communities provide programs that are academic based and include structured activities that promote social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and sense of meaning and purpose.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The academic underachievement of African American students has been a topic of concern among researchers for decades (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Osborne, 1999). African American high school students' score lower than their counterparts on a number of academic measures, from reading, math, and writing proficiency levels to school retention rates. In California, 69% of African American 10th graders passed the 2011 California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in Mathematics compared to 96% Asian, 78% Hispanic or Latino, and 91% White and in English-Language Art African American 10th graders passed at a rate of 73% compared to 92% Asian, 77% Hispanic or Latino, and 92% White¹. In 2009, 37% of African American students dropped out of high school compared to 10% Asian, 27% Hispanic or Latino, and 14% White (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). The disparity in academic achievement among African American students and their White counterparts is referred to as the racial *achievement gap* (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Noguera & Wing, 2006). The disparities in achievement have often been attributed to parent educational levels, low socioeconomic status, lack of resources, and inadequate schools (Coley, 2011; Glen, 2006; Gosa & Alexander, 2007).

Some authors have gone as far as stating that African American males in the United States are becoming an *endangered species* (Gibbs, 1988; Jackson & Moore, 2006). In California, 56% of African American males graduated from high school in the 2009-2010 school year compared to 83% Latino males, and 64% White males. To further illustrate the academic inequities between African American males and their peers, in 2011 4% of African American males scored at or above Proficient in reading compared to 13% Latino males, and 27% White males and in mathematics, 9% of African American males score at or above Proficient while

¹ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

14% Latino males, and 42% White males scored at or above Proficient (Holzman, 2012). Several researchers have attributed this underachievement to low teacher expectations, a higher probability of being placed in special education, and high suspension and expulsion rates (Coley, 2011).

Many African American males, in urban settings in particular, face a myriad of barriers to their academic achievement and success. The majority of African American male students are found in inner-city schools plagued with inadequate facilities, high teacher turnover, inexperienced teachers, high dropout rates, and school cultures of low expectations (Coley, 2011; Lewis & Eunhee, 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Evidence such as broken families, high crime rates, and high rates of poverty describes the surroundings of the African American males who are currently living in our nation's urban neighborhoods (Boyd, 1991).

The transition from middle school to high school creates challenges for many minority students. For African American students, the transition to ninth grade is when a decline in academic motivation and performance occurs, which many times is not recovered in the subsequent years of high school (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994). Simmons, Black, and Zhou (1991) found that as African American males progressed through school their attitude changed. They liked school less, were more likely to experience behavior problems, and their grades dropped.

Despite coming from environments that make it likely they would fail, many at-risk African American students, more specifically African American males, do experience academic success in school (Byfield, 2008). These students are considered to be academically resilient. Academic resilient African American males exhibit a sense of self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and feelings of empowerment (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson, & Wertlieb, 1989; Spencer,

Cole, DuPree, Glymph, & Pierre, 1993). The critical question then is *Why are some high school African American males, who live in urban environments where poverty and unemployment rates are high, drugs and violent crimes are commonplace, and high stress affects both home and school environments, more resilient than others and able to cope successfully in school?* This is an important issue that needs to be investigated. Many children do not concede to the effects of their environment, and it is essential to determine why this happens and what protective factors foster their resilience (Rutter, 1979). Unfortunately, there is minimal research in regards to the environmental characteristics that foster academic success in students with scarce social and economic resources (Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004). Less is known about the positive impact environmental protective factors has on the everyday lives of African American males (Barbarin, 1993; Byfield, 2008). Barbarin (1993) states,

There seems to be little media interest in or research efforts devoted to understanding African American children who live in nurturing but poor households and who experience emotionally supportive and stable relationships in “broken homes”; who develop a positive ethnic identity in spite of rampant denigration of their race; who steadfastly pursue education even though its relationship to gainful employment is uncertain; who abstain from addictive substances even though drugs are ubiquitous and life is unkind; and who avoid gangs, illegal activity, and incarceration in spite of pressure to belong and to make the fast buck. (p. 479)

Risk Factors

Risk factors are those factors that are associated with the increased likelihood of academic, personal, and social failure. Risk factors are characteristics and circumstances that incline students to experience risk outcomes (G. Johnson, 1994). Researchers have attributed the

risk factors: single parent households, low socioeconomic status, school, and communities/neighborhood to academic risk (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003; Gill, 1991; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Milstead & Perkins, 2010; Pong & Ju, 2000).

Low socio-economic status (SES). Many Black youth are in a constant battle to overcome negative life events. Urban Black youth are more likely than their white counterparts to live in poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) report shows that in California during the 2009-2010 year, 32% of Black children lived below the poverty line. Children from low-socioeconomic families often receive limited health care with no consistent health program to monitor their developmental milestones. The lack of consistent health care leads to preventable illnesses resulting in permanent problems which place children at-risk of academic achievement (Schorr & Schorr, 1988).

Another effect of poverty that has a negative effect of academic achievement is the overcrowded households and neighborhoods. According to Wilson (1997), the large number of people residing in a home creates stress and anxiety, which can lead to hyperactivity (Nettles, 1991). In these types of households, the stress and anxiety makes it sometimes impossible for youth to do their homework or study (Nettles, 1991).

Single parent households. The single-parent household can be associated with low academic achievement. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2009), in the United States, 66% of African American families were headed by a single parent and 64% in California. Living in a single-parent household, headed by a mother, does not guarantee academic failure for males. However, if a majority of families in the community are raised by a single mother the effect can be damaging to male children within the community yearning for positive role models

(Schorr & Schorr, 1988). When males look to the streets for their role models, they find people who do not value education or school attendance, and do not believe education is worth it.

Neighborhood or community. The communities that many African American families reside in and their experiences in these communities differ dramatically from the neighborhoods of their White counterparts (Duncan & Aber, 1997). Examples of the differences are the poverty rates in urban communities and the higher levels of criminal and violent acts (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). These differences have shown to have a negative influence on children and families. Generally, children who reside in neighborhoods plagued with violence and poverty were not as academically successful as students, who reside in middleclass neighborhoods (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1991).

School. Inequality remains a fact of life in many schools in the U.S. Resources and opportunities are not readily available to all students within the same district or school. Examples of inequalities are the lack of: teacher commitment, expectations, resources, and the upkeep of the actual school facilities (Kozol, 2000).

According to Van Horn (1999), urban school districts are twice as likely hire unqualified teachers. In some suburban or rural school districts the number of unqualified teachers is 7%. However, in urban school district, the number is as high as 31%.

Urban schools are frequently stigmatized as having higher rates of academic underachievement and behavior problems compared to suburban schools (Allen & Mitchell, 1998). Underachieving students are inclined to take risk because they are frustrated and distracted. This risk taking behavior unfortunately may lead to academic failure.

The relationship that the teacher has with their students may be related to the teacher's beliefs about the students' potential to achieve (Keogh & Burnstein, 1988). Ethnic factors or a

child's behavior style and personality may influence a teacher's expectation for student's performance. Teachers are more likely to have favorable interactions with students who possess an easy temperament versus students with difficult temperaments (Keogh, 1986). Thus students who demonstrate defiant behavior or challenge authority may receive less academic support from their teacher.

Noguera (2001) states that the hostility and anger that many urban African American males exhibit in school can be explained as a coping strategy: African American males learn early in life that presenting themselves as tough is easier to avoid attacks or threats (Anderson, 1990). Consequently, this hostility and anger can have adverse effects upon their academic achievement. Teachers, especially females, may not be as willing to help a young male who exhibits aggressive behavior (Noguera, 2001).

Protective Factors

Protective factors can be described as characteristics within the individual and elements within the environment that foster resilience (Murry & Brody, 1999). Studies have shown that the protective factors; peers, family, school, community, and extra-curricular activities enhance an individual's ability to overcome the adversities tied to the environmental hazards (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1987).

Peers. Peers are influential on an adolescent's attitude towards school. The group of friends a child surrounds themselves with has a correlation with their value of school, motivation, and their academic self-efficacy (Nichols & White, 2001; Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 1992). As a student progresses through school the influence of their peers tend to have more influence on their daily behaviors than that of their family. However, when a student has a

positive peer influence as well as a family influence they are more likely to be academically successful (Steinberg et al., 1992).

For African American students, the influence of their peers has been examined with mixed results. Some researchers have found that African American students who value education do so at the risk of being ridiculed by their peers (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Furthermore, some findings suggest that high achieving African American students reject their culture by identifying with the dominant culture or creating coping mechanisms to help them cope with being smart and Black (Fordham, 1998; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Steinberg et al., 1992). An example of a coping mechanism is developing a *raceless persona*. Fordham (1998) describes *raceless persona* as the attempt of high achieving African American students' efforts to limited contact with other African Americans. Contrary to the belief that high achieving African American students risk being ridiculed by their peers and must reject their culture, Walker (2006) found that African American peer groups served as support for high achieving Black students. Conchas (2006) found that academically successful African American males found refuge and support from other academically successful African American males.

Family. There have been several studies that have linked parents' involvement in their child's education to a myriad of positive academic outcomes (R. Clark, 1983; Epstein, 1990). Parents of high achieving African American students compared to low-achieving African American students are more involved in their child's education. They also spent time at home discussing school and academic expectations. For high achieving African American students, these discussions reinforced parental belief in their child's ability to succeed in school (R. Clark, 1983).

School . The school environment is influential in shaping a students' academic achievement. The schools structure, staffing, resources, and climate can promote or deter academic achievement. There are several school characteristics that evoke favorable achievement outcomes:

(a) a safe climate, (b) strong leadership, (c) positive teacher attitudes and expectations toward students, (d) and emphasis on instruction, (e) careful monitoring of both student progress and staff evaluation, (f) strong parental involvement, (g) an emphasis of the importance of academic achievement. (Stewart, 2007, p. 21)

School belonging is another school factor that has shown to be crucial to the academic success of students who are likely to feel a disconnection between the values of school and their personal values and beliefs of the school (Steele, 1992). When African American and Hispanic students, from low socioeconomic families, feel ignored or unwanted in school they exhibit less motivation and engagement towards school (Goodenow & Grady, 1994).

Community. Just as the school and home environment can provide resources that foster educational resilience in urban youth, so can urban communities. For instance, a cohesive and healthy community supports schools and families; provides clear norms and high expectations, and encourage youth to actively participate in the work and life of the community (Benard, 2004). Benard (1991) states

communities exert not only a direct influence on the lives of youth but, perhaps even more importantly, exert a profound influence on the lives of the families and schools with their domain and, thus, indirectly powerfully affect the outcome for children and youth. (p. 16)

Thus, a cohesive community can help at risk youth overcome adversity and foster academic achievement by providing support and resources necessary to develop resiliency (Benard, 2004; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997).

Participation in extra- curricular activities. Research has shown that participation in extra-curricular activities has a positive impact on the academic achievement for at-risk African American males (J. Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992; Hebert, 1998). Marsh (1993) found that participation in sports had a positive effect on the motivation and investment in school. Similarly, R. Hawkins and Mulkey (2005) found that participating in sports led African American males to see college as a possibility. Broh (2002) examined various types of extra-curricular activities (music, various clubs, drama, and student council) and found that these activities also had positive benefits on academic achievement.

In summary, sports or other creative interest helps to foster self-esteem through success and mediate problems at home, societal and school pressures which can negatively impact the lives of at-risk children (McMillian, 1992).

Problem Statement

African American high school male students in the United States are under-achieving academically compared to their peers. The majority of these young men live in urban settings in which they are in a battle on a daily basis to overcome adverse conditions and continuously these adverse conditions place African American males at-risk for poor educational achievement. Primary risk factors are low socio-economic status (SES), being raised by a single parent, neighborhood or community, and school environment (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

Despite facing adversity, some African American male high school youth do achieve academically and display academic resiliency. Resilient African American male high school

youth demonstrate competence, independence, an internal locus of control, and feeling of empowerment, and social competence (Benard, 1993; Ford, 1994). Yet, minimal research exists that explores the perspectives of African American male students in urban settings who have *beaten the odds* and succeeded academically. Therefore, an urgent need exist to learn more about what the students themselves perceive to be the factors that place them at risk of academic under-achievement and the environmental protective factors that contribute to their resiliency.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of high achieving, at risk African American male students from three Southern California urban high school with regards to (a) the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, (b) the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success, (c) the characteristics that best describe their resiliency, and (d) what they believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this qualitative study are:

1. What factors place high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools most at-risk for under-achieving academically?
2. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success?

3. Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience?
4. What do high achieving; at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?

Importance of Study

This study is important because many urban at-risk African American males are in a constant battle to overcome environmental risk factors that lead to their academic under-achievement compared to their White counterparts. This under-achievement has serious social, political, and economic ramifications (Singham, 1998). Improvements in academic achievement among at- risk, urban African American males will lead to improved chances of sufficient financial earnings and reduce the racial imbalances in crime and incarceration rates, and family structure (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

With so much attention on school reform, it is imperative for educators, policy-makers, and school counselors to understand the protective factors that foster academic resilience among at-risk urban high school African American males. Understanding how urban, at-risk, African American males overcome multiple risk factors may lead to the development and implementation of successful policies, interventions, and practices to support urban, at-risk, African American male students' academic success.

Delimitations of Study

This research study is delimited to high-achieving, at-risk, and academically resilient African American high school male students who attend an urban high school in Southern California. Thus the results cannot be generalized for African American males in rural or suburban settings nor can the results be generalized for other populations of at-risk students.

Limitations

This study is limited to the number of participants willing to participate in the study. Another limitation to this study is the openness, honesty, and the ability of each participant to be able to accurately describe their experiences in relation to the interview questions.

Assumptions

1. The academic and demographic information provided by the urban high school for all participants in this study will be accurate.
2. The background information provided by the participants in this study will be accurate.
3. Participants in this study will respond openly and honestly to all interview questions and communicate their perspectives as accurately as possible.
4. Student perspectives offer important insights as to the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success and, the characteristics that would best describe their resilience.
5. Promoting the academic success of African American high school males in the United States is a compelling need and a moral imperative to educators.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be used for this study is the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological systems theory sees the individual as a work in progress, developing within an intricate system of relationships that are influenced by a series of four nested systems: microsystem; consists of the home or the immediate environment, mesosystem; consists of social structures, exosystem; consists of neighborhoods, government, and schools, and macrosystem; consists laws, cultural values, and societal norms (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

With regard to Blacks and the ecological theory, several studies have found a connection between social and individual variables and the impact on student achievement. For example, studies have illustrated that the deterioration of African American urban neighborhoods have had a negative impact on the youth residing within these environments (Crane, 1991). Because the youths living in urban neighborhoods, characterized by poverty and joblessness, are constantly interacting with unemployed and financially insecure neighbors, they see very little benefits to achieving in school (South & Baumer, 2000). These views create thoughts of hopelessness (MacLeod, 1995) which results in high dropout rates, academic underachievement, and low aspirations (Crane, 1991; Crowder & South, 2003).

Definition of Terms

Academic success: For the purpose of this study, academic success is defined as having a minimum of a 3.0 grade point average (GPA).

Adolescence: A phase in life when individual's cognitive, biological, social, and psychological characteristics are changing from childlike to adultlike (Lerner & Spanier, 1980).

African American: African American refers to people having origins in any of the Black race groups of Africa who were born and raised in the United States. For the purpose of this study, Black and African American will be used interchangeably.

At-risk: Defined by the presence of one or more factors or influences that increase the probability of a negative outcome for a child or youth. Examples of these factors are low SES, poor housing conditions, coming from a single-parent home, inadequate schools, high incarceration rates, and school suspensions (Gill, 1991; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

Educational resilience: “The heightened likelihood of success in school and in other aspects of life, despite environmental adversities, brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1995, p.5).

Protective Factors: Murry and Brody (1999) define protective factors as “those behaviors and circumstances that decrease the likelihood of negative or undesirable outcomes and include resources, skills, and abilities of parents and families” (p. 462).

Resilience: The ability to successfully adapt despite risk and adversity (Masten, 1994).

Organization of Study

This study is organized in five chapters. The first chapter provides the background and foundation of the study. Chapter 1 contains a brief description of the achievement gap that exist between African American and White students. Chapter 1 further describes the descriptive factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of African American students and the protective factors that foster resilience in at risk African American youth. An explanation is given to the need of focusing on the protective factors that promote resiliency in high school at-risk African American males in a southern California school district. Chapter 2 provides a description of the theoretical framework that will be used as a lens to examine the risk factors

that lead to poor academic achievement of African American males and the protective factors that foster their academic resilience. A brief description of the profiles of at-risk and resilient youth as well as an in depth description explaining why African American males are at risk is given. The chapter concludes with a review of literature in regards to the protective factors and interventions that promote resilience in at risk African American males. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used by the researcher in this study. The chapter includes a restatement of the research questions, a description of the research design, and a discussion of human subjects. The chapter further describes the data collection protocol and the instrumentation. Chapter 4 provides a description of each participant, identifies the themes from the interviews with each participant, and the findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents conclusions and implications from the study as well as recommendations for teachers, principals, policy makers, and counselors.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Throughout every public (K-12) school district in the United States, there are millions of students that come from poor urban communities who succeed academically despite facing adversity and extreme circumstances, such as poverty, limited resources, and limited services (Wyner, Bridegeland & DiIulio, 2007). These students not only defy the stereotype that poverty and low academic achievement go hand and hand, their academic success proves that even though they come from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds they can achieve at the highest levels (Wang et al., 1997). Educators and researchers often refer to these high achieving, lower-income students as resilient. However, these resilient students are often ignored or not honored for their achievement nor are they supported to increase their achievement (Benard, 1991).

Numerous causes explain why these students do not maintain their status as high achievers. These causes can be attributed to both the social environment they are surrounded by and the education they receive in school; especially in urban areas plagued by high poverty or unemployment (Barton & Coley, 2009). In comparison to students living in suburban or rural areas, students living in poverty stricken urban neighborhoods are more likely to be influenced by environments that do not place a high regard on educational achievement, experience unemployment disparities, poverty, frequent mobility, and limited availability to quality resources and services (Chau, Thampi, & Wight, 2010). These students more likely attend schools that have teachers with lower expectations, less certified teachers (Barton & Coley, 2009), and lower per pupil spending (Bennet et al., 2004).

This literature review is divided into five sections. The first section provides a description of the theoretical framework that will guide this study. The second section will describe the

characteristics of at-risk learners and at-risk African American males, define resiliency, provide a profile of resilient youths, and describe the characteristics of resilient African American youths. The third section will describe the factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of African American males. The fourth section will describe the protective factors that literature has shown to foster academic success of at-risk African American males. The last section will provide a brief description of recommendations for promoting resilience in at-risk African American males.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of ecological human development is a conceptual framework often used by social scientist to investigate the shared relationship between individuals and their social environment. The ecological model (see Figure1) illustrates how each system interacts with each other creating a highly complex context the child grows up in. The child is located at the center of the model and directly interacts with the people in the microsystem. The interactions between the two go both ways. Just as the people affect the child, the child also has an influence on them.

Parts of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Microsystems. This layer of the ecological model is comprised of the environment where the child lives and is also the immediate setting where individual development occurs. The most recognizable microsystem is the family. Additional microsystems for the child may include schools, school teachers, peers, communities, and religious institutions. The microsystems are nested within the mesosystems.

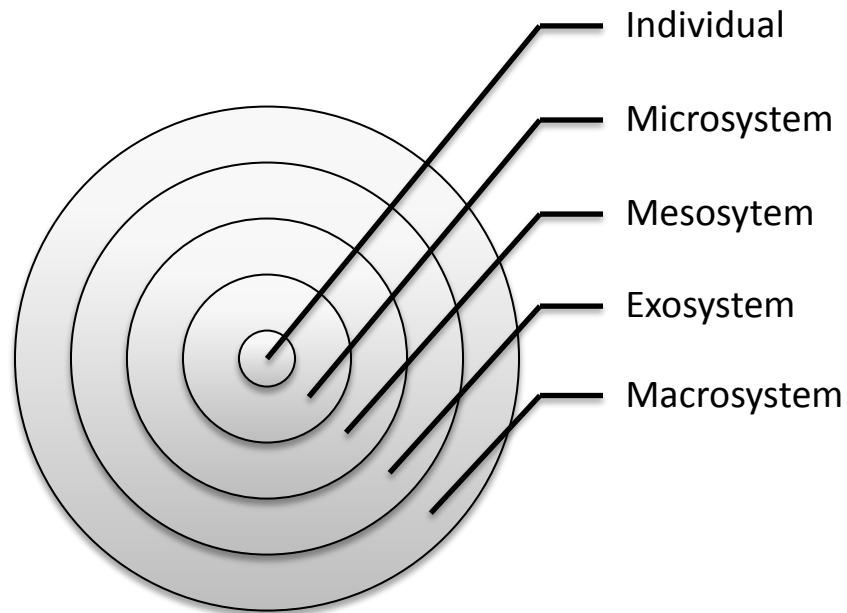


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model describing the set of nested environmental influences on a child and how they interact with one another. Adapted from "Ecological Systems Theory," 2015, in *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_systems_theory. Copyright 2015 by Wikipedia.

Mesosystems. This layer focuses on the interactions between the people within the microsystems. Examples of this interaction are: parents' interactions with teachers or childcare providers, or neighbors interacting with each other.

Exosystem. The exosystem layer pertains to the wider community in which the child lives. Examples of what comprises the exosystems are extended family, neighbors, workplaces, mass media, legal services, community health services, and social welfare services. The child may not be directly involved with the exosystem, but because the people in the child's life are affected by the exosystems the child is also. An example of how the exosystem affects the child shows up when a life changing event affects the parent. For example, if a parent loses their job and is forced to relocate the family to a different community that is not as affluent or is limited in resources as their old community. Thus a change in the child's exosystem and macrosystem will

have a direct influence on the child's microsystem, such as their peers, schooling, and community.

Macrosystems. This is the outermost layer of the model and is the system under which all other systems operate. It involves the attitudes, laws, customs, values, economic and political factors of society. The influence of the macrosystems has a prominent effect on the development of the child. Examples of this are the view of society in relation to racism, school policies, and funding for community resources. Mandatory criminal sentencing laws and job availability for Black males highlight macrosystem influences.

Previous research substantiates the use of the ecological systems theory in regards to African students and families. Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, and Stephens (2001) used an ecological framework to examine correlations between risk and protective factors connected to the individual, family, and community levels in regards to the strengths and challenges encountered by single-mother families. Ford (1994) states "that to truly understand the learning and development of African American students, researchers must employ an ecological perspective, one that investigates the issue or problem from multiple perspectives e.g., family, school, community, society, and the students" (p. 83). Similarly, Wang et al. (1995) argued that an ecological framework is essential to research on resilience, because its focus on the individuals environment allows researchers to go beyond stating descriptions of resilient individuals to investigating and addressing protective factors that foster resilience.

The use of the ecological systems theory provides the theoretical framework through which the protective factors in resiliency that have contributed to the development and school success of at risk Black males will be examined. This framework considers multiple variables within the students' social environment to aid in identifying the protective factors which

contribute to positive student outcomes (Fraser, 2004). Thus, this framework can be used to identify the *protective factors* or those conditions that foster resiliency in at risk high school Black male students (see Table 1).

Table 1

Protective Factors

INDIVIDUAL	FAMILY	SCHOOL	COMMUNITY
<i>Personal traits</i>	<i>Attachment and Love</i>	<i>Excellent teachers</i>	<i>Adults</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active, outgoing temperament • Academic ability • Emotional strength • Sense of autonomy • Social competence • Problem-solving skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Siblings • Extended family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genuine relationships • Knowledge of children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show support • Affectionate • Culturally proud
	<i>Support</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Prosocial Peers</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material (Resources, financial, access to knowledge) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive • Common interest • Common experiences
	<i>Parental practices</i>	<i>School climate</i>	<i>Helpful</i>
<i>Coping behaviors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered on students 	<i>Opportunities for participation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem Solver • Active participant • Determined • Reflective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent • Disciplinarian, • Realistic and high expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive • Protective • Empowering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High self-identity • Sense of belonging
	<i>Modeling resiliency</i>	<i>Curriculum</i>	
<i>Strong belief in self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Siblings • Extended family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant/Enriched 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High self-esteem • self-efficacy • Sense of purpose • Optimistic and hopeful 	<i>Positive relations with school/involved in school</i>		<i>Stable residence</i> <i>Safe neighborhood</i>

Definition of At-Risk

There are several definitions used to define at-risk. Keogh and Weisner (1993) defined risk as negative or potentially negative conditions that restrict normal development. Risk has also been defined in literature as a “comparative and relative term used to express the likelihood of a current or future development or handicap, that, at present, is uncertain” (Ramey, Trohanis &

Hostler, 1982, p. 8). While risk implies the possibility for negative outcomes, it implies that negative outcomes may be avoided.

Just because some students find themselves in at risk situations, they are not *at risk*. Despite coming from environments that make it likely they would fail, some youth possess qualities that enable them to succeed. They appear to possess socially competency and autonomy, be an effective problem solver, and have a sense of meaning and purpose (Benard, 1991).

Risk Factors

Risk factors are those factors that are associated with the increased likelihood of academic, personal, and social failure. Risk factors are characteristics and circumstances that incline students to experience risk outcomes (G. Johnson, 1994). Researchers have attributed the risk factors: single parent households, low socioeconomic status, school, and communities/neighborhood to academic risk (Gill, 1991; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Milstead & Perkins, 2010; Pong & Ju, 2000).

Single parent households. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014), about one-third of all children in America are living in one-parent families. For African American children, this number is much larger compared to other races. In the 2009 Kids Count Data Book, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2009) stated that 67% of Black children are live in single parent households in comparison with Native Americans (53%), Hispanic/Latino (38%), White (23%), and Asian American (16%).

Children living in one-parent households are at a greater risk for various negative outcomes when compared to children raised in traditional two-parent households. Some of the risks are: low employment and economic status (Milstead & Perkins, 2010); reside in

disadvantaged neighborhoods, lack parental, community, and economic resources (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994); receive an inferior education (Milstead & Perkins, 2010); and lower academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005).

Although students living in single parent households are at a greater risk for negative outcomes, this does not mean that there is a direct correlation between coming from a single parent household and negative outcomes. Rather, children are negatively affected by situations that occur concurrently with single-parent family arrangements; i.e., low economic status or disrupted parenting (Pong & Ju, 2000). These circumstances do not appear in all single-parent families. Each single family has its own unique circumstances that place the children of these families at differential risk for negative outcomes (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Low economic status. Children coming from low- income households face challenges that are not faced by their more affluent peers. According to Bradley et al. (1994) and Fraser (2004), poverty stricken families have limited access to quality social and health services, safe living conditions, transportation, and education. Furthermore, poverty is linked with chaotic and unsupportive home environments (Bradley et al., 1994).

Though it is unclear just how the income level households inversely correlate with academic achievement, there are several explanations that explain the causation (Pong & Ju, 2000). Some of these explanations are (a) children from low-income households are more likely to attend inadequately resourced and high-poverty schools, (b) lack of positive role models (c) lack of stimulating home environments (N. Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Parental behaviors are also negatively affected by the family's socioeconomic status. As the family's economic situation worsens, parents are less nurturing and use punitive discipline towards their children (McLoyd, 1998).

School. Research has found several school characteristics that lead to the academic underperformance of poor and minority students (Evans, 2004). Schools with a larger number of poor children are more likely to spend less money per student, provide less rigorous instruction, inadequately trained teachers, low expectations for student achievement (Carey, 2004; Evans, 2004). These school characteristics contribute to the achievement gap between low socioeconomic children and their more affluent peers (Kober, 2001).

There are also factors within the classroom that lead to the underachievement of minority students (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992). In a study of 54 at-risk students, Phelan and her colleagues found that student behavior, the school facilities, and school culture impacted the learning environment. Phelan et al.'s (1992) key observation was that the absence of classroom community strongly impacted the participation and motivation levels of the study participants. Furthermore, the teachers failed to provide an environment where students felt their teachers had an interest in them. Similar to Phelan et al., Klem and Connell (2005) found that a student's sense of belonging to school is a predictor of academic achievement.

Community or neighborhood. The quality of a child's community or neighborhood has an effect on various educational measures. Though there are a myriad of disadvantaged communities in the United States, ranging from poor rural areas to poor urban areas. However, poor urban communities appear to be more vulnerable to risk factors and adversity (Fitzpatrick & Lagory, 2000). For example, children who reside in low socioeconomic communities are more likely to be enrolled in a school that has limited educational resources (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), a higher number of low-income classmates (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1997), and low expectations and less rigorous instruction (Carey, 2004; Evans 2004), all of which has a negative impact on student achievement.

There is evidence that neighborhood variables are linked to the academic underachievement of low-income students. Disadvantaged neighborhoods put its youth in harm's way because of (a) high rates of crime, violence, and family stress (Evans, 2004); (b) lower quality of housing and fewer educational resources in the home (Buckner et al., 2003); and (c) various forms of violence or crime that put adolescence at greater risk for psychosocial, emotional, academic, and behavioral difficulties (Buckner et al., 2003; Evans, 2004).

Perspective Regarding the At-Risk African American Learner

There are several perspectives regarding what is considered an at-risk learner. There are some who believe that academic achievement data alone places African American male students in the at-risk category (Kunjufu, 2001). While other researchers point to their dropout rates and low rate of post-secondary enrollment (Williams, 2003). Regardless of the perspective, based on the statistics, it is obvious that African American male youths are in greater jeopardy of failing than their White peers or even their female African American counterparts.

Ogbu (1990, 1995) contended that the desolate living conditions that many African American families typically live in has contributed to lack of academic achievement of at-risk inner-city African Americans. Darling-Hammond (1997) interjected those at-risk students in the United States encounter persistent and profound obstacles that inhibit educational opportunities. Furthermore, Ogbu (1990, 1991) asserted that belonging to a racial minority group does not equate with academic failure. He suggested that the success level of the minority student can be measured by the level of which the student readily assimilates with the host society or group. However, stereotyping, economic discrimination, and low expectations add to the difficulties minority students encounter as they attempt to adapt to the culture of the host society. Ogbu

(1991) also noted the drastic difference in perspectives of voluntary versus involuntary immigrant students.

To summarize briefly, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) differentiated minority groups between voluntary and involuntary and argues that membership in these groups is what shapes an individuals' attitude towards and beliefs of the educational system and the behaviors they demonstrate in the school setting.

Voluntary minorities. Voluntary minorities are populations who voluntarily migrated to American with the belief that coming to America will assure better opportunities for them and their children, so their future perspective is optimistic. According to this conceptualization, Asian Americans epitomize successful voluntary minorities and are likely to demonstrate a positive attitude and belief to the educational system than their African American counterparts.

Involuntary minorities. By contrast, involuntary minorities became permanently incorporated into American society through slavery, conquest, or colonization. Ogbu (1991) has argued that being a member of an involuntary minority group is equivalent to existing in a caste. Existing in a caste-like system has significant implications for functioning within all spheres of the social order. This group includes American Indians, Mexican Americans, and Native Hawaiians. However, African Americans are the most notable example of this group.

In opposition to the denial of equal access to education African Americans have developed a culture of opposition. According to Sohn (2011), "The culture delimitates attitudes and behaviors that belong to White Americans, and any Black Americans who cross the cultural boundary are accused of acting White or called Oreo" (p. 220). This fear of acting White is what Fordham and Ogbu (1986) hypothesized as the burden of acting White. According to Fordham and Ogbu, Black students are in a constant struggle to maintain their ethnic identity from "the

imposition of the dominant norms and values by the White society” (Sohn, 2011, p. 3). It is this burden that Fordham and Ogbu believe stops African American students from actively pursuing academic achievement.

Contrary to Ogbu’s and Fordham’s beliefs, several researchers suggest that a strong ethnic identity promotes academic success and educational rewards for blacks (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Harris & Marsh, 2010; Wright, 2011). In a study using high achieving minority high school students, Bergin and Cooks (2002) found that these students did not feel it was necessary to adopt a raceless identity in order to do well academically even when they were accused of *acting white* by their peers. Similarly, Datnow and Cooper (1997) found that there was a positive correlation between Black identity and academic achievement among Black peers. Adelabu (2008) found that black students who expressed interest in and a sense of belonging to their ethnic group were more likely to achieve academically.

Anatomy of the At-Risk African American Male

The lack of positive indicators describing the present state of African American males is disturbing. The problem that young Black males face today can be attributed to the aftermath of slavery and segregation of the past and racial discrimination and prejudice of the present (Mason, 1996).

In order to comprehend the plight of Black male students, a vivid description of social issues that may serve as a hindrance needs to be addressed. At risk is synonymous with vulnerability. School failures and drop-out rates can be contributed to a range of unfavorable life events. It appears that these events seem to be related to an individual’s degree of vulnerability. Beginning at birth, African American males must navigate a rugged terrain during the course of their lives. Thirty-six percent of African American children compared to only 12% of White

children grow up in poverty. Furthermore, more than 75% of Black children, compared to only 5% of White children, born between 1985 and 2000 were raised in neighborhoods plagued by “high rates of unemployment, welfare, poverty, single-parent families, segregation and density of children under the age 18” (Coley, 2011, p. 2).

African American males involved in the justice system are presently at an abysmally high level. Black males are incarcerated six times higher than that of White males (Coley, 2011). In California, Black males have a higher probability of being incarcerated than gaining admission to one of the California state universities. Consequently, for many young Black men prison becomes their institution for higher learning rather than college (Elsner, 2004). Blacks are six times more likely to be victims of homicide than Whites (Coley, 2011). To make matters worse, “young African American men in Philadelphia and Jefferson Parish (Louisiana) face a higher chance of death by homicide than do military personnel in Iraq during deployment” (Coley, 2011, p. 5).

When examining the proficiency levels of reading and math, African American males perform lower than any other group of students (Delpit, 1995). The Schott foundation for Public Education reports that in 2009 only 9% of eighth grade African American males scored at the proficient level in 2009 on the NAEP reading assessment. This is compared to 33% proficient rate for White male students. In California, only 10% scored at least proficient compared to 25% White males. When comparing reading proficiency rates for fourth graders nationally, Black males are at 11% and White males are at 38%. The statistics are just as drastic for math, only 10% of Black males are proficient while 44% of White males are proficient (Coley, 2011).

To further describe the plight of Black males in the American educational system, Black males are more likely to be placed in remedial or special education classes at a rate 3 times

higher than Whites while less than 10% participate in gifted classes (Kunjufu, 2001).

Furthermore, compared to their White counterparts, African American males are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school. Only 62% of Black students graduate and in a majority of large urban districts more than 50% of Black males don't even graduate. Relative to college enrollment, only 18% of African American males over the age of 25 have attained a bachelor's degree (Coley, 2011). In regard to the aforementioned statistics, Kunjufu (2001) states, "It is systemic. In many cases, a debilitating combination of inadequate resources and low expectations in schools that serve large numbers of African American boys results in this group being held back" (p. 6).

Canada (1998) stated that too many at-risk African American male adolescents have a misconception or flawed image of the characteristics of a man. Many view the image of a strong man as violent, promiscuous, and adventurous. Furthermore, they characterized intelligence as being undesirable. Similarly, Reese (2004) found that at risk African American males characterized academic achievement as feminine.

Though the outlook for African American males appears to be bleak, African American boys do not enter the school system academically behind their White counterparts. Up until the third grade, African American boys perform equally as well to Whites academically. Unfortunately, by the fourth grade, Black boys experience a dramatic drop on standardized achievement test (Garibaldi, 1992). Tragically, most Black boys never recover. Consequently, by high school they are not eligible to or lack the motivation to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, thus rendering themselves absent from the academically competitive ranks (Gayles, 2005).

Protective Factors

Two factors have been identified as being crucial in fostering resilience.

The first factor is the presence of biological, psychological, and environmental risk factors. These factors are related to the increase of an individual's vulnerability. The second factor is the existence of protective factors (familial, institutional safety nets, social or peer, and personal) that aid an individual in overcoming the adversities tied to the environmental hazards. (Masten et al., 1990, p. 747)

The focus on protective factors may help to explain why some at risk students, especially African American males, are able to be successful when faced with the same adversities that often force others to give up.

Research pertaining to protective factors evolved from researchers who studied the developmental processes of adolescents exposed to psychopathology and concentrated on the factors that protected them against risk of mental disorders (Murry & Brody, 1999). Murry and Brody (1999) define protective factors as “those behaviors and circumstances that decrease the likelihood of negative or undesirable outcomes and include resources, skills, and abilities of parents and families” (p. 462). Family, school, and community have been associated with being protective factors for at risk students. In relation to the family, some protective factors that have been identified are the quality of care and support experienced by an individual at different stages of their life prior to adulthood. Individuals living in disadvantaged communities are often labeled more vulnerable. However, some characteristics of the community do serve as protective factors that can foster resilience. School, caring teachers, culturally-relevant curriculum, and a positive school environment seem to alleviate certain risk.

Several researchers have emphasized the necessity of finding which protective factors alleviate particular risk. Luthar and Zigler (1991) and Rutter (1987) both concluded that protective factors function at three levels: individual, familial, and societal. These elements have been shown to protect individuals from the outcome of adverse environmental conditions (Rutter, 1987). Consequently, without these elements an individual is more likely to be subject to detrimental outcomes. For example, a student who is not supported by their family or alienated by peers and teachers are likely to display self-destructive behavior which can lead to acting out in class or worst case scenario, dropping out.

The focus on protective factors, such as peers, family, community, school, self-efficacy, attitude towards school, and participation in extra-curricular activities, may help to explain why some at risk students, especially African American males, are able to be successful when faced with the same adversities that often other to give up.

Peers. Numerous studies suggest that peer groups have a strong influence on the academic achievement levels of African-American male students (Ford, 1994; Walker, 2006). For African American males, the period between the fourth and eighth grade is the time when peer pressure to fit in with other African American males can impact the attitude they will adopt towards academic achievement. This is also the time when their peer group's values begin to supersede the values of their parents, family, and influential adults (Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 1998). The peer group's focus shifts to nonacademic activities such as athletic ability. Consequently, academic excellence and high achievement is no longer valued as positive characteristics (Fries-Britt, 1997).

Kunjufu (1988) uses the phrase *silent killer* to describe the negative pressure exerted by members of the underachieving African American male peer group. In regards to academic

achievement, the peer pressure exerted by the underachieving African American male peer group can be tremendously overwhelming. Their actions or *silent killer* may be expressed by ditching class, lack of engagement in classroom discussions, and abstaining from taking challenging courses.

Not conforming with the established norms of behavior of the group or “attempting to construct identities that deviate significantly from prevailing conceptions of racial and gender identity” (Noguera, 2005, p. 63) by members of the peer group, can lead to negative sanctions by other group members. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) support this concept and maintain that some African American students, for fear of being ridiculed by their peer group abstained from studious behavior.

The influence of peer groups on the achievement of African American students is influential regardless of the socioeconomic status of the students (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Ogbu, 2003). In Ogbu’s (2003) work with the upper middle-class community of Shaker Heights, Ohio, he found these African American students believed that being academically successful had a significant impact on their acceptance by their African American peers. The ideology of resisting school success is also evident in low income African American students. Datnow and Cooper (1997) found that low income African American students did not buy into the idea that hard work is rewarded. These students believed that regardless of how hard they work, they will not be allowed to move higher in American society and that school success equated to failure within their peer group.

Academically successful African American male students often face a dilemma with regard to academic success. They are faced with a tough decision to either do well in school and be an outcast or conform to group norms regarding academic performance and be accepted by

other African American male peer group (Walker, 2006). Furthermore, academically successful African American males are often caught between two cultures. On one hand, they are pressured from their peers to resist the White *system* and on the other hand they feel guilty or anxiety because they are different from parents, family, and the community (Slania, 1996). In order to gain acceptance within the peer group, high achievers use coping mechanisms and various expressions that include “becoming an athlete, acting like a clown, not studying in public places, being independent, [being] a good fighter, tutoring bullies, and becoming raceless” (Kunjufu, 1988, p. 35). Even though the high achieving members of the group have the ability to achieve at high levels academically, due to the fear of being ostracized or ridiculed, they do not always demonstrate their abilities of work to their capabilities (Fordham, 1996). For those high achievers that do work to their capabilities the repercussions from their peer group can be harsh. Many of these students become loners with little contact with other Black students. Cose (2005) gives an account of a high achieving Black male who was teased and even jumped after school for answering too many questions in class. To help him fit in and gain acceptance, his father went as far as to purchase him hip-hop clothes.

However, the above mentioned accounts are not always the norm. In fact, there is research that suggests African American male peer groups often serve as positive peer support groups that acknowledge and celebrate achievement (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Walker, 2006). Sustaining the idea of African American male peer groups serving as support networks, Harper (2006) found in a study of 32 high achieving African American male college students that attended predominately White colleges that clubs and activities, specifically dominant Black student organizations provided same-race support. Furthermore, the peer support from other African Americans was a key to success in college among these high achieving African

American males and above all African Americans do value the achievement of their peers and encourage the success of other African American males. To further substantiate the positive influence of peer networks for Blacks attending predominately White schools, Datnow and Cooper (1997) found that African American students used formal and informal peer networks to help them with studying and as mentors.

Similar to Harper's (2006) study, Conchas (2006) found that high achieving African American males supported each other. Most of the participant expressed the importance of education and the idea that an education was a key for social mobility in American. These students did not express the feelings of isolation but instead encouraged and assisted one another.

The strength and support, especially emotional and physical support, that African American youths found in their peers promoted resilience. These characteristics were essential for African American youth because of the problems they face in their environment and school.

Family. From the literature, what emerged as a strong predictor of the positive outcomes for adolescents is the quality of the family environment. Researchers have found that the amount of time family members spend together, family cohesiveness, and family bonding helped adolescents avoid negative outcomes and withdrawn peer networks (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991). Rutter (1979) found that even in a dysfunctional home environment, a positive relationship with one parent provides a substantial protect effect. Werner (1990) further elaborates on the importance of family bonding by stating:

despite the burden of parental psychopathology, family discord, or chronic poverty, most children identified as resilient have had the opportunity to establish a close bond with at least one person (not necessarily their mother or father) who provided them with stable

care and from whom they received adequate and appropriate attention during the first year of life. (p. 102)

Research comparing the existence of protector factors in high and low-achieving, low SES African American youths found that the high-achieving subsamples managed to do well in school despite their living conditions. The factors that separated them from the low-achievers were the organization of their homes and the nature of their parenting practices (M. Clark, 1991).

For high achieving African American males, parental involvement usually leads to higher levels of academic success (Fries-Britt, 1997). Researchers continue to find that parental influences serve as primary forces in sustaining academic achievement (Delpit, 1995). Similarly, Spencer, Swanson, and Cunningham (2003) state “Social resources such as caring parents and involvement in extracurricular activities help to facilitate positive academic outcomes” (p. 610). Contrary to popular beliefs, African American parents are concerned about how their sons are treated by the school system and teachers. This is especially the case for single mothers whose sons are enrolled in rigorous honors and AP courses (Delpit, 1995; Fries-Britt, 1997, Kunjufu, 2001).

High parent expectation serves as a protective factor that contributes to the success of at-risk students (M. Clark, 1991). Lester (2004) reported that African American parents who discussed the academic expectations that they had for their children and demonstrated behaviors that reinforced these academic expectations contributed to positive educational outcomes.

The composition of the family has shown to have no significant relationship to the success or failure of at-risk students (Peng, Wang, & Walberg, 1992). Living with two parents, one parent, or another family configuration did not necessarily affect the level of resiliency in

students. Instead, as stated previously, family bonding and positive parent-child relationships served as protective factors from the environment.

School. Just as the level of caring and support within the family is a predictor of positive outcomes for youth, the same outcome can be said for the degree of caring and support within the school. Whether a student comes from a home devastated by abuse or from a poverty-stricken neighborhood, there is proof validating the effectiveness of schools serving as a protective factor to support student success (Garmezy, 1991).

Resilient students frequently found comfort and support in school. These students involved themselves in school activities and classroom discussions. Many resilient students participated in nonacademic activities at school as a way of *fitting in* with the rest of the students. Because of this involvement, participation bolstered the resilient at-risk student's positive participation in school (Geary, 1988).

Teachers are essential to the positive academic outcomes of resilient students. In several studies, resilient at-risk students contributed their success to school personnel who believed in them (Geary, 1988; McMillan & Reed, 1993). For African American males, the role of the teacher had a greater impact on their success. Polite and Davis (1999) found that African American males valued the role of the teacher in encouraging their academic success more than students from other ethnicities. Teachers can play a critical role in helping high achieving African American male students overcome the pressures that may have adverse effects on their academic and leadership development since there is a lack of male peers in their gifted and advanced level classes to serve as models (Grantham, 2004).

As stated in numerous studies, African American males can achieve academically when they are supported by teachers who push, nurture, and have high expectations of them (Kunjufu,

1998; Polite & Davis, 1999). High achieving, successful African American males attribute their success to caring teachers, challenging curriculum, caring learning environment, and supportive school staff (Conchas, 2006; Delpit, 1995).

For African American students, the school environment is crucial for academic success. This can also be said for academically successful Black males. The role of the school administrator and most importantly the teachers all contribute to the climate of the school. They also have an impact on how at-risk students manifest their potential to achieve or fail. The impact of the school climate on academic achievement or academic failure is even more crucial for African American males. If students perceive the school climate as being positive then achievement becomes high (Ford, 1993a, 1993b). This assertion is supporting by Comer (1993) who states that “for Black children in particular, school climate plays a significant role in their adjustment to school and their ability to perform well” (p. 199). Contrasting Ford’s (1993) findings, Kunjufu (1988) noted that if students perceive school to be hassle, their attitude towards school would be low thus negatively affecting their achievement.

The learning environment must display a climate of trust, mutual respect, harmony, and collaboration. A school with a positive learning environment will empower all students, produce high expectations, show concern for academic excellence, and meet the needs of its student population (Delpit, 1995).

When examining the school as a protective factor it is also important to discuss the engagement behaviors and school beliefs of at-risk African American males that have contributed to their academic success. Examples of these engagement behaviors are coming to school on time, participating in classroom discussions and completing homework, and not being disruptive in class (Finn & Rock, 1997). In Finn and Rock’s (1997) study of 1,803 Black and

Hispanic students in grades eight through 12, they investigated the process that distinguished academically successful, low-income, minority students from their less successful counterparts. They found that teachers reported that resilient students were harder workers, attended class more often, and were more engaged in their learning when compared to non-resilient students. Furthermore, the resilient students in this study reported that they attended school more regular, arrived at school on time, and were less disruptive in class when compared to non-resilient students.

The importance of academic self-efficacy to urban African American high school students is viewed as a critical factor to school success. Academic self-efficacy can be defined as an individual's beliefs of their capabilities to perform a given academic tasks (Schunk, 1991). These beliefs may help to support the school performance of at-risk students during stressful times in their lives. In researching urban Black students, Spencer et al. (1993) found a correlation between academic self-efficacy and academic performance for African American students regardless of gender. This study also implies that academic self-efficacy can serve as a pathway to understand the academic achievements of Black adolescents.

Community. As with the family and school, the community also supports the positive development of at-risk youth. *Community competence* is a term used to by community psychologist that refers to the ability of a community to construct resiliency (Iscoe, 1974). There are three distinct traits of communities that promote resilience; availability of social organizations, consistent expression of social norms, and opportunities for children and youth to engage in the functions of the community as valued members (Benard, 1991). The role of the community also serves as a key contributor in the revitalization of failing urban school systems. When the community that is served by the school system unites focusing on improving the

effectiveness of the schools in their community then the school system is able to improve (P. Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1989).

Therefore a competent community should provide support for its families and schools, promote engagement and partnership of its families and schools in the life of the community, and have high expectations and clear standards for its families and schools. Furthermore,

the long-term development of the *competent community* depends upon the availability of social networks within the community that can promote and sustain social cohesion within the community. That is, the formal and informal networks in which individuals develop their competencies and which provide links within the community are a source of strength (i.e., resiliency) for the community and the individuals comprising it. (Kelly, 1988, p. 14)

For at-risk, high achieving African American males, there is a need for support that goes beyond the classroom and into the community (Conchas, 2006; Grantham, 2004). Black male role models in the school and community have served as positive influences in the development of high achieving at risk African American males.

Academically successful Black males, who participate in athletics, found the support of coaches as extremely important and they held their coaches in high regards. They also welcomed the discipline instilled in them (Harper, 2006). Caring coaches were like fathers. Some young men even went as far as to admit that their coaches had a bigger influence on their lives than their parents (Hebert, 1995).

Church also plays a positive role in the lives of some at-risk high achieving African American male students (Conchas, 2006). Herndon and Moore (2002) further reported the significance of religious expression for high achieving African American students. “Black

church has helped members survive in times of oppression, depression, and regression by providing a voice and support for Black people” (Peoples, 2003, p. 2). In the Black community the role of the church serves more than just a place of worship. The church provides a safe and comforting place to protect against societal racial injustice and provides affirmation and hope (Peoples, 2003).

Participation in extracurricular activities. Participating in athletics may have a positive impact on the academics of students-especially African American males (J. Hawkins et al., 1992). The time, energy, resources, and effort these students devote to athletics is seen as one way to acquire resilience and persistence (Hebert, 1998). Sports also teach individuals how to positively respond to any given situation or problem, using their abilities to meet a variety of challenges (J. Hawkins et al. 1992). These skills can be transferred from the field to the classroom. In a study comprising of 1,105 African American males and 1,112 African American female eighth graders, J. Hawkins et al. (1992) sought to investigate whether there was a correlation between participation in sports and academic resilience for eighth grade African American youths. The findings of this study were that athletic participation had a positive impact on student motivation and engagement. Furthermore, participation in athletics provides a safe haven for resilient students.

Participation in athletics is not the only extracurricular activity that has shown to improve the self-esteem and increase the academic achievement of African American males. After school programs and other organizations such as clubs serves as places for African American males to socialize with their peers in a cooperative, team building environment (Hebert, 2000). These organizations created a safe place for intelligent young African American males to develop a sense of achievement and self-efficacy through the participation in various activities. Hebert

(2000) stated that these students gained a sense of self-worth from being a member of a group that was known for something positive. Participating in an organization gave young African American males a sense of belonging from being needed within the organization. These African American male participants, served as mentors to younger members, planned activities, and served as ambassadors for the organization to the community. After school programs provided structure and predictability that might be missing in the lives of the young male participants. Furthermore, participating in after school programs provided an opportunity for these males to learn what is considered acceptable behavior outside of their neighborhoods (Halpern, 1992).

The most important contribution that extra –curricular activities provided was the presence of an adult who viewed the young men as young adults, cared for them as individuals, and served as their mentor or advocate, and as a protective factor in stressful environments (Hebert, 1998). Harper (2006) found academically successful Black male college students attributed their membership in athletic teams, organizations, and clubs during their high school years to their outstanding academic achievements.

Definition of Resilience

In attempting to understand the concept of *beating the odds* or being resilient, it is important to provide several definitions that have been used in the literature to define resilience. Resilience has been defined as protective mechanisms that aid in successful adaptations in spite of the presence of risk factors during the course of development (Benard, 1991). Linqanti (1992) defines resilience as “that quality in children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in their lives, do not succumb to the school failure, substance abuse, mental health, and juvenile delinquency problems that they are at greater risk of experiencing” (p. 2). Gayles (2005) explained resilience in a more specific term. He defined resilience in terms of academics,

stating “academic resilience is defined as academic achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar sociocultural context” (p. 250). Simply stated, resilience is viewed as the ability to successfully adapt regardless of the risk and adversity (Masten, 1994).

Historical Perspective on Resilience

The concept of resilience originated in the field of psychology and medicine before later emerging and developing in the educational literature. The most prominent study on risk factors began in 1955 in Kauai, Hawaii. The study investigated 700 children from birth to the age of 35 years. Because one-third of the participants were exposed to the risk factors—poverty, parental stress, and low parental education—they were labeled *high risk*. About one-third of this high risk group was labeled as resilient because they had adapted well in childhood and adolescence. As adolescents, these resilient youth were more responsible, mature, achievement motivated, and socially connected than their less competent high risk counterparts. Early assessments suggested that these resilient adolescents possessed several early advantages, including positive relationships with their caregivers, more attentive and supportive caregivers, fewer conflicts within the family, susceptible to fewer life stressors, and greater physical health (Hanewald, 2011).

During the early 1970s the researchers investigated *invulnerability*: immunity to harmful influences. From this research the term *invulnerable children* was coined referring to a subset of children born to parents diagnosed with schizophrenia (Hanewald, 2011).

At the time, researchers investigated risk factors from a deficit approach focusing on an individual’s shortcomings and solution. This deficit approach led researchers to investigate children identified as being vulnerable to negative life outcomes possibly induced by a myriad of

family, individual, and environmental factors. The research at this time had its limitations. The research however did not explain why some children were resilient to life's adversities and other was not (Hanewald, 2011). In order to shed light on this limitation, Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Hanewald, 2011, p. 23) theorized that "children are located in nested systems, which are constructed from elements with philosophical and/ or economic orientation (i.e. unemployment, poverty, changes in government policies regarding housing, working conditions, health, law, and order)" (p. 23). These elements have a strong influence on the environment in which children are raised in. However, each child responds differently even when some risk are the same.

Research on resilient children in the 1980s focused on specific populations of resilient children. Garmezy and Rutter (1983) studied 200 children from urban environments who were at risk of developing psychiatric disorders. Even though these children lived in high risk environments, their lives had positive outcomes. Unfortunately, this study had several limitations. It failed to explain why some *at risk* children had positive outcomes.

The new wave of research with regard to resilient students began to focus on the factors that fostered success in some youth but not in others. The focus shifted from identifying the *risk factors* to identifying the *protective factors*.

Luthar (1991) found that there was a difference in the protective factors and vulnerability factors between the three participating groups in her study. The protective factors that helped the resilient group of students were internal locus of control and social skills. Surprisingly, the *at risk* factors included intelligence and positive life events. Her study took place in an urban setting with 144 subjects. Of the 144 subjects, 45% were Black, 30% were Hispanic, with the remaining being Caucasians and others. The subjects were placed into three groups. One group of students was classified as resilient. They possessed high capability even though they faced

extreme stress. Another group of students was classified as non-resilient. They possessed low capability along with extreme stress. The last group was classified as low stress high achievers.

McMillan and Reed (1993) found that the four factors; individual attributes, family, school, and positive use of time showed to have a significant impact on resiliency. They further concluded that extracurricular activities seemed to provide a haven for resilient students. It was also noted that “being recognized and supported for special talents are also important, but the simple involvement in an activity considered special appears to increase self-esteem and a belief in one’s ability to succeed” (p. 21). Peng et al. (1992) agreed with the four attributes of McMillan and Reed’s study. Peng et al. found that approximately 19% of the students who could be classified as at-risk developed into academically successful students that maintained positive goals and plans for the future.

A major obstacle facing African American students is the difference in their culture versus the mainstream culture. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that African American students do not identify with academic success because the black culture negatively sanctions those whom do well in school. Furthermore, because of the limited success that African American youth have witnessed for their hard work, academic success is not connected to their future attainment and ambitions (Adelabu, 2008). M. Clark (1991) studied resiliency in the face of the cultural obstacle facing African American students and found that academically successful African American student took on a bicultural identity. Bicultural identity can be defined as the process through which some black students are able to maintain their identity and a connection to their culture yet are able to become socialized in the mainstream.

Profile of Resilient Youth

Resilient at-risk students possess a unique set of personality traits, beliefs and temperament that has led to their academic success. Garnezy (1991) describes a resilient child as holding high expectations, working and playing well. Simply stated these students possess a high level of locus of control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and autonomy. McMillan and Reed (1993) also found that *at-risk* students possessed a certain set of personality characteristics, beliefs, and dispositions that contributed to their academic success regardless of their background or current circumstances. Benard (1991) further describes a resilient child as one who is socially competent, an effective problem solver, autonomous, and has a sense of meaning and purpose that is able to navigate through a web of adversity (see Table 2).

Table 2

Profile of the Resilient Child

Category of Resilience	Characteristics
Social Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive • Flexible • Empathetic and Caring • Communicates well • Has sense of humor
Problem Solving Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good critical thinking skills • Has good planning skills • Flexible • Imaginative • Resourceful/take initiative
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem, self-efficacy • Control over environment • Self-aware • Sense of mastery • Adaptive distancing

(continued)

Category of Resilience	Characteristics
Sense of Meaning and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special interest • Goal directed • Educational aspirations • Achievement motivations • Persistent • Hopeful and optimistic • Compelling future • Faithful/Spiritual • Coherence/meaningfulness

Note. Adapted from *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, Schools, and Community*, by B. Benard, 1991. San Francisco, CA: Western Regional Center for Drug Free Schools and Communities. Copyright 1991 by the author.

Characteristics of Resilient African American Youth

Resilient African American youth possess characteristics that went beyond the general characteristics found in resilient youth; autonomy, competence, independence, and self-sufficiency (Ford, 1994). Resilient African American students tend to have an internal locus of control, high self-esteem, and feelings of empowerment (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson, & Wertlieb, 1989). Many of them either assumed a raceless identity or used biculturalism to be successful (M. Clark, 1991). Furthermore, their peers provided emotional support that led to their resiliency (Ford, 1994; Garmezy, 1991).

Recommendations for Promoting Resilience in At-Risk African American Males

Family-school-community partnerships. School-family-community partnerships can be defined as “collaborative initiatives or relationships among school personnel, parents, family members, community members, and representatives of community-based organizations such as businesses, churches, libraries, and social service agencies” (Bryan, 2005, pp. 220-221).

Creating protective factors in the environment of at-risk children is one way to promote and foster resilience (Benard, 1991, 1995). Protective factors have been shown to lessen the negative effects of adversity and stressful life events (Benard, 1995). The primary protective

factors that “families, schools, and communities can foster to increase resiliency in children are caring and supportive adult relationships, opportunities for meaningful student participation in their schools and communities, and high parent and teacher expectations regarding student performance and future success” (Bryan, 2005, p. 220).

Several researchers have discussed the role of school-family-community partnerships as a protective factor in fostering educational resilience in adolescents (Benard, 1995; Wang et al., 1997). School-family-community partnerships create cooperative relationships between teachers and parents. It also involves school, family, and community members engaging in cooperative efforts to create and establish programs that nurture academic success for students. The collaborative effort between schools, families, and community members’ help to foster protective factors as well as to minimize risk in four ways: (a) the impact of risk that children come in contact with on a daily basis is minimized, (b) the risk is altered, (c) an increase in self-efficacy and self-esteem, and (d) an increase in opportunities for purposeful community involvement for children (Benard, 1991, 1995).

Partnership programs for enhancing academic achievement. Creating partnerships is not enough. Schools must continue to facilitate the establishment of partnerships that increase academic achievement and resilience in at-risk children. As stated earlier these partnerships provide students with: (a) caring and supportive relationships, (b) chances for purposeful involvement in their community and school, (c) after-school extracurricular activities, (d) high expectations, and (e) increased self-esteem and self-efficacy (Benard, 1995; Hebert, 1999). Researchers have identified two types of successful partnership programs that promote resilience and academic achievement: (a) family centered partnerships (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie., 1996) and (b) extracurricular enrichment (Hebert, 1999).

Family-centered partnerships. Examples of family-centered partnerships include family centers, family outreach programs, and parent education programs. These types of family-centered partnerships have been effective in urban schools in involving parents and guardians in their child's education (B. Johnson, 2001). Not all schools have the same needs. Therefore, partnerships must be tailored to the needs of the families it serves.

In urban areas, where there are a large proportion of racially and ethnically diverse families, including immigrant families, it is imperative that parent education and family outreach programs identify the needs of family members and students and tailor partnership programs to meet their needs. (Bryan, 2005, p. 225)

Extra-curricular enrichment partnership programs. Clearly, mentors and tutors have a positive influence in the lives of children (Benard, 1992). Tutoring programs and after-school enrichment programs have shown to be influential in fostering academic achievement and resilience in children (Hock, Pulvers, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2001).

In urban schools, school personnel need to understand the role the community plays in serving as a resource in fostering resilience and providing academic support for students and their families (Atkinson & Juntunen, 1994). More importantly, the role the church plays within the African American community. Black churches not only provide spiritual support, many of them provide tutoring through after school programs (Nettles, 1991). In a study of 378 Black churches, findings showed that 57% offered tutoring, 56% offered preschool or day care, 52% participated in fieldtrips, 23% provided college entrance counseling, and 21% provided role modeling and mentoring (George, Richardson, Lakes-Matyas & Blake, 1989).

Rite of passage programs. A sense of control, coping, self-efficacy, spirituality, and self-esteem are characteristics of resilience in African Americans (Waller, 2001). Research has

shown that family is a key protective factor in fostering resilience (Rutter, 1979; Werner, 1990). For African Americans, some recognized familial resiliency factors are role models, involvement, close family bonds, warmth and consistency (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Zapert & Maton, 2000). Furthermore, community and organization cohesion are also protective factors for African Americans (Jarrett, 1997). “Resilience, therefore, can be seen in the strong sense of self and appreciation of African American youth for their own cultural and ethnic background” (West-Olatunji, Shure, Garrett, Conwill, & Rivera, 2008, p. 135).

Rite of Passage (ROP) programs possess essential resilience factors for Black males at three key levels: familial, community, and educational. ROP programs provide support for families, serve as a connector between churches, community agencies and organizations, and provide tutoring. ROP programs are centered around culture with a focus on the strengths of marginalized youth. There are several components to an effective ROP program: positive role models, cultural and personal identity development, high expectations, community involvement, an emphasis on purpose and achievement, and a safe and supportive environment (West-Olantunji et al., 2008).

High expectations are a hallmark in ROP programs. Having high expectations can foster motivation and self-efficacy (M. Clark, 1991; West-Olantunji et al., 2008). Research has shown a connection between a youth’s awareness of expected high achievement by the adults in their lives and their motivation to achieve (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). For low-income African American males, high expectations by parents and teachers serve as a protective factor for positive academic outcomes (Wood, Kaplan & McLoyd, 2007).

Community involvement is a key component of ROP programs. Role models are usually in the form of responsible and successful men and women from the same community as the

youths and take part in the instruction and ceremonies in the ROP process (West-Olantunji et al., 2008). By using responsible and successful adults from the community, a connection between the community and the students in the program is established. Furthermore, the established connection between the community and the program illustrates to students how their academic achievement is relevant to their community and their lives. “Such a link fosters increased engagement with the community because it validates who they are and where they come from, as opposed to many public school environments that all too frequently emphasize Eurocentric ideals and educational values” (p. 136).

ROP programs protect African American males against the societal factors that marginalize them through engaging the community and the family with an importance on civic engagement, and focusing on self-efficacy and achievement (West-Olantunji, et al., 2008). Warfield-Coppock (1992) found that ROP programs were successful in improving school behavior, increased interest in attending college or vocational programs, and academic performance.

Although the implementation of family-school-community and mentoring programs have been found to have positive outcomes, ROP programs go beyond the two previously mentioned programs by focusing on the environmental factors that marginalize African American students. The cultural strengths, families, and the community of the students are acknowledged and promoted (Warfield-Coppock, 1992). “ROP programs are a preventive measure that shows promise for ameliorating the effects of educational hegemony for low-income African American male adolescents” (West-Olantunji et al., 2008, p. 138).

Summary

Literature in regard to the educational attainment of African American males paints a bleak future for these young men. Though their environment make it likely they would fail, many at-risk African American students, more specifically African American males do experience academic success in school have done so because of a number of protective factors. The literature suggests that peers, family, school, community and participation in extra-curricular activities serve as safety nets to support the resiliency in *at risk* African American males.

The strength and support, especially emotional and physical support, that African American youths found in their peers promoted resilience. These characteristics were essential for African American youth because of the problems they face in their environment and school.

In relation to the family, living with two parents, one parent, or another family configuration did not necessarily affect the level of resiliency in students. Instead, as stated previously, family bonding and positive parent-child relationships served as protective factors from the environment.

Whether a student comes from a home devastated by abuse or from a poverty-stricken neighborhood, there is proof validating the effectiveness of schools serving as a protective factor to support student success (Garmezy, 1991). The learning environment is essential in promoting resilience in African American males. The learning environment must display a climate of trust, mutual respect, harmony, and collaboration.

As with the family and school, the community also supports the positive development of at-risk youth. For at-risk, high achieving African American males, there is a need for support that goes beyond the classroom and into the community. According to the literature, the church, positive Black male role models, and sports are key to fostering resilience.

Based on the literature, the study of resilience is applicable in the field of education. Since the present study will be using an ecological framework to examine resilience and protective factors, researchers may use the perspective of the participants to guide in the implementation of interventions to foster resilience in *at risk* Black males.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of high achieving, at risk African American male students from three Southern California urban high school with regards to (a) the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, (b) the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success, (c) the characteristics that best describe their resiliency, and (d) what they believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities could do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this qualitative study were:

1. What factors do high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools perceive to place them most at-risk for under-achieving academically?
2. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success?
3. Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience?
4. What do high achieving; at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?

Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature and utilizes a phenomenological methodology. The researcher interviewed 11 at-risk, academically successful African American high school males from three urban high schools (Pinnacle, Horizon, and Valley) all located in Horizon Unified School District in Southern California. The names of the high schools and district are fictitious to preserve confidentiality. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at each school site with individual student subjects and one focus group interview was conducted at Pinnacle High School's library with the same student subjects.

Qualitative studies are a method of inquiry for exploratory studies to “identify variables and generate hypotheses germane to populations and groups that have been previously overlooked” (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996, p. 539). Qualitative research seeks to describe and explain the particular phenomenon under investigation while discovering the themes that helps to describe the essence of the experience for all individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Morse & Richards, 2002). A qualitative approach was selected for this study because the goal of the researcher was to learn from the participants about: the risk factors that challenge their academic success, the environmental protective factors that foster their resilience, and the characteristics of a resilient child that they possess. Morse and Richardson (2002) state that

if the purpose is to learn from the participants in a setting or process the way they experience it, the meaning they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience, you need methods that will allow you to discover and do justice to their perceptions and the complexity of their interpretations. (p. 28)

Thus, a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to describe and explain the particular phenomenon being investigated.

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). A researcher using a phenomenological research design seeks to define a commonality in experiences between all participants (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) highlights two approaches to phenomenology: (a) hermeneutic phenomenology and (b) transcendental, or psychological phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology. This form of phenomenological methodology is described as research focused on lived experience (phenomenology) and translating the *context* of life. There are several interplaying steps that are part of this type of research:

1. The researcher determines a phenomenon that interests him/her.
2. The researcher ponders on important themes, what comprises the nature of the lived experience.
3. The researcher writes a description of the phenomenon with a direct connection to the topic of inquiry.
4. The researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Transcendental or psychological phenomenology. Moustakas’s (as cited in in Creswell, 2007) transcendental or psychological phenomenology’s main focus is on the description of the lived experiences of the participants and less on the meanings of the lived experiences interpreted by the researcher. When using this type of phenomenology methodology, the researcher examines the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants by limiting the influence of their experiences.

For this study the researcher used the transcendental or psychological phenomenology approach because it allowed the researcher to understand the essence of the experience of at-risk,

high achieving African American males through inquiry that is reflective, descriptive, interpretive, and engaging (Morse & Richards 2002) while limiting the researchers own lived experiences of the same phenomenon. To accomplish this, the researcher selected a phenomenon. In this case, being an African American male and achieving academically in spite of being labeled at-risk. The researcher then collected data through interviews from individuals that have experienced the phenomenon in question and constructed a cumulative description of the significance of the experience for all of the individuals.

Though a phenomenological approach is best suited for this study, there are some challenges that are specific to using this approach. One is that the researcher has to ensure that the participants selected for this study have all experienced the phenomenon being investigated. Another challenge is that the researcher has to be able to *bracket* or limit the influence of their personal experiences in order to clearly understand the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Setting

The district selected for this study was Horizon Unified School District (HUSD). HUSD is located in the city of Horizon. Horizon is located in Southern California and is one of the oldest cities in the county. Of the nearly 100,000 residents, 32.9% Black, 65% Latino or Hispanic origin, 0.8% White not Hispanic, 0.7% American Indian, 0.7% Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Asian. The city comprises of low income families with the median household income equaling \$43,201(U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

HUSD serves 24,781 students in 22 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and 3 high schools. The student demographics are made up of 78.7% Hispanic or Latino, and 19.4% African American. The percentages for other ethnicities are too small to report. 82.5% of the students

qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Even though HUSD has shown some improvement on state level assessments, it still is underperforming in many state achievement indicators. Table 3 summarizes the achievement indicators of HUSD.

Table 3

*Summary of HUSD Performance*²

Achievement Indicator	Student Outcomes
Academic Performance Index (API)	2011 Student Base API is 679
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)	In 2011, the HUSD met 14 of the 26 criteria
Program Improvement (PI) Status Title I	HUSD is in year three of PI In 2010-2011, 82.5% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch
California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)	In 2012, 64% of students passed CAHSEE Mathematics and 65% passed CAHSEE English
Advanced Placement Test Program (AP)	In 2010-2011, 27.7% of students enrolled in AP courses attempted the AP exam
SAT Reasoning Test (SAT)	In 2010- 2011, 21.9% of students took the SAT, only 8% scored equal to or above 1500
ACT Test	In 2010-2011, 16.8% of students took the ACT, only 11.3% scored 21 or higher

Pinnacle High School. Pinnacle High is a comprehensive 4-year high school with 2,400 students, making it the largest high school in HUSD. Of the 2,400 students, 78.3% are Hispanic or Latino and 19.3% are African American³. Academically, Pinnacle High underperforms in many achievement indicators:

- Pinnacle High's estimated API for the 2011-2012 school year was 551.
- Has been considered a PI school since 1997-1998.
- 67% graduation rate.

² Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

³ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

- The state of California ranks schools from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) in 10 categories of equal size and schools also are ranked from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) that indicates how well the school performed compared to similar schools. Pinnacle High has a statewide and similar schools ranking of 1.
- In 2010-2011, 65% of the students scored less than Proficient on the English portion of the CAHSEE test and for math, 73% scored less than Proficient. For the same year, 70% of African American students scored less than Proficient in English and 82% in math.
- Even though Pinnacle High offers 15 AP courses, less than 2% of the students are enrolled in AP courses⁴.

The achievement indicators are far worse for African American students at Pinnacle High. Table 4 summarizes the achievement indicators for African Americans enrolled at Pinnacle High.

Table 4

Pinnacle High School: Summary of African American Student CST Performance

Proficiency Level	English Language Arts (ELA)	Mathematics
Advanced	7	1
Proficient	24	4
Basic	70	21
Below Basic	62	82
Far Below Basic	33	85

Note. The numbers indicate the number of students scoring at each level⁵.

Horizon High School. Horizon High is a comprehensive 4-year high school with 2,100 students. Of the 2,100 students, 80.1% are Hispanic or Latino and 17.4% are African American. Academically, Horizon High underperforms in many achievement indicators:

⁴ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

⁵ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

- Horizon High's estimated API for the 2011-2012 school year was 604.
- Has been considered a PI school since 1997-1998.
- 65% graduation rate.
- The state of California ranks schools from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) in 10 categories of equal size and schools also are ranked from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) that indicates how well the school performed compared to similar schools. Horizon has a statewide ranking of 1 and a similar schools ranking of 2.
- In 2010-2011, 67% of the students scored less than Proficient on the English portion of the CAHSEE test and for math, 67% scored less than Proficient. For the same year, 75% of African American students scored less than Proficient in English and 75% in math.
- Horizon High only offers seven AP courses and less than 1% of the students are enrolled in AP courses⁶.

The achievement indicators are far worse for African American students at Horizon High.

Table 5 summarizes the achievement indicators for African Americans enrolled at Horizon High.

Table 5

Horizon High School: Summary of African American Student CST Performance

Proficiency Level	English Language Arts (ELA)	Mathematics
Advanced	12	1
Proficient	35	3
Basic	67	30
Below Basic	59	93
Far Below Basic	37	82

Note. The numbers indicate the number of students scoring at each level⁷.

⁶ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

⁷ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

Valley High School. Valley High is a comprehensive 4-year high school with 1,200 students, making it the smallest high school in HUSD. Of the 1,200 students, 66.5% are Hispanic or Latino and 31.2% are African American. Academically, Valley High underperforms in many achievement indicators:

- Valley High's estimated API for the 2011-2012 school year was 551.
- Has been considered a PI school since 1997-1998.
- 57% graduation rate.
- The state of California ranks schools from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) in 10 categories of equal size and schools also are ranked from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) that indicates how well the school performed compared to similar schools. Valley High has a statewide and similar school ranking of 1.
- In 2010-2011, 66% of the students scored less than Proficient on the English portion of the CAHSEE test and for math, 72% scored less than Proficient. For the same year, 73% of African American students scored less than Proficient in English and 81% in math.
- Valley High only offers nine AP courses and 2.3% of the students are enrolled in AP courses⁸.

The achievement indicators are far worse for African American students at Valley High. Table 6 summarizes the achievement indicators for African Americans enrolled at Valley High.

⁸ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

Table 6

Valley High School: Summary of African American Student CST Performance

Proficiency Level	English Language Arts (ELA)	Mathematics
Advanced	6	0
Proficient	23	1
Basic	44	11
Below Basic	52	61
Far Below Basic	37	87

Note. The numbers indicate the number of students scoring at each level⁹.

Subjects

The participants for this study were purposely selected. By purposely selecting participants for a study, the researcher was attempting to find good participants who were aware of and willing to reflect on the phenomena being studied, and had the time and willingness to participate in the study (Morse & Richards 2002). To gather a list of perspective participants, the researcher contacted counselors from each of the three high schools to get a list of all African American males that met the five criteria employed in selecting participants. Participants must:

1. Be an African American male high school students
2. Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. Enrolled in A-G courses
4. Come from a family in which the parent(s) or guardian has not graduated from college
5. Qualify for free or reduced lunch

The researcher obtained the address of each potential participant from their counselor. The researcher then mailed home a packet that included a letter to parents describing the data collection protocol (see Appendix A) about the study, as well as a parent informed consent (see

⁹ Information was obtained from the website of participating institution and is therefore confidential.

Appendix B), and a pre-addressed stamped envelope for parents to return the signed informed consent form to the researcher.

Once parents consented, the researcher arranged to meet with the prospective participants individually, after school, in a secured office or classroom. There was a scheduled make-up meeting two days later for any prospective participants that were absent. During the meeting the students were informed of the purpose of the study and that the results of this study may be used to implement interventions that foster resilience in *at-risk* African American males. They were informed that participation in this study is voluntary and at any time they may exclude themselves from the study. Students who assented to participate in the study were asked to fill out an assent form (see Appendix C) and then a Student Demographic Form (see Appendix D). At the end of the meeting, the researcher scheduled an interview time and location with each student that agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix E). After the individual interviews, the researcher invited all participants to participate in the focus group interview (see Appendix F).

Of the 582 African American males attending the three high schools targeted for this study only 38 had a GPA of a 3.0 or higher and of those 38 only 20 met the criteria below to participate and of those 20 only 11 parents consented for their child to participate in this study. The 11 participants in this study were between the ages of 15-18 years old. The study took place during the 2012-2013 school year. The participants were selected because by meeting the above mentioned criteria they have shown to be academically successful despite coming from environments that make likely they would fail. No participant was compensated for their participation in this study.

Human Subjects Considerations

Care was taken by the researcher to assure that the study adhered to all ethical guidelines established by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher obtained formal written permission from the school district and the administrator from each school site prior to submitting an application to IRB before. The researcher informed the participants and their parents or guardians the protocol of data collection, confidentiality, and the storage and security of the materials after the study. Care was taken to protect the emotional safety of each participant. Because of the possibility that the interviews may elicit discussion pertaining to painful life experiences, the researcher did not introduce any sensitive topics that were not relevant to the study. The benefit to participating in this study is that the perspectives of the high achieving African American males interviewed will be shared with district leaders which may lead to the implementation of interventions and/or policies that promote resiliency among all at-risk African American males in the district.

Confidentiality and anonymity was maintained for all participants. The names of the students was not be used in any oral or written notes. Instead each student was given a pseudonym to ensure that no one was able to trace their responses back to them or know that they participated in the study. All data collected in this study was stored in a locked file cabinet or a password protected file and only the researcher had access to these files. The tapes and notes will be destroyed 3 years after the study is completed.

Instrumentation

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was used to gather background information about each participant. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions that inquired about the personal information (name, gender, and age), parental or guardian

information, educational information (GPA, SAT/ACT scores, list of Honors or AP classes), and home and community information of each participant (see Appendix D). The information provided by each participant was used to create student profiles for each participant.

Semi structured interviews. Data was primarily collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. In conjunction with semi-structured interview the research also used anecdotal notes, document analysis, and focus group interviews to collect data. Semi-structured questionnaires are appropriate when the researcher already has enough knowledge about the phenomenon being researched to create questions about the topic prior to interviewing the participants (Morse & Richards, 2002). According to Morse and Richards (2002), “Such interviews offer the researcher the organization and comfort of preplanned questions, but also the challenge of presenting them to participants in such a way to invite detailed, complex answers” (p. 94). Semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to investigate general topics in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants. Pre-determined, open ended questions used during semi-structured interviews lend purpose and structure while allowing for the ability to delve beneath the surface of the participants’ responses (Morse & Richards, 2002). The researcher made every attempt to make the participant as comfortable as possible during the interview process by assuring that the interview location was well lit, the temperature inside reflected the outside conditions, and a beverage and a light snack was provided. The researcher verified the accuracy of the Student Demographic Sheet with the participant prior to starting with the interview questions. The researcher used a scripted interview protocol to ensure that each interview is conducted the same way (see Appendix G) and each question was directly linked to one or more of the four research questions. The interview consisted of 19 questions that inquired about the level of academic support the participants

received from their family, their relationship with friends, their community (mentors, coaches, sports or club involvement, and religious affiliation), and school. Table 7 shows the correlation between the research questions and interview question.

Table 7

Connecting Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Research
#1. What factors place high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools most at-risk for under-achieving academically?	Demographic Questionnaire	Buckner et al., 2003; Gill, 1991; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; G. Johnson, 1994; Milstead & Perkins, 2010; Pong & Ju, 2000
#2. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success?	Peers	Conchas, 2006; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Ford, 1995; Nichols & White, 2001; Steinberg et al., 1992; Walker, 2006
	1. How do your friends feel about school?	
	2. How do you encourage your friends to do well in school?	
	3. How do your friends encourage you to do well in school?	
	4. What do your friends think about students who get good grades?	
	Family	M. Clark, 1991; Dishion et al., 1991; Fries-Britt, 1997; Peng et al., 1992
	1. What ways does your family support you with school? Future goals?	
	2. In what ways does your family set high expectations for you?	
	3. Does your family provide a caring and encouraging environment? If so, how?	

(continued)

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Research
	School	Finn & Rock, 1997;
	1. Do you think the school provides a caring and encouraging environment? In what ways?	Garmezy, 1991; Geary, 1988; Grantham, 2004; Polite and Davis, 1999; Kunjufu, 1998
	2. Do your teachers have high expectations for you? In what ways do they show it?	
	Neighborhood	Benard, 1991; Conchas, 2006; P. Hill et al., 1989; Iscoe, 1974; Kelly, 1988; Peoples, 2003
	1. Is there anyone in the community that you look up to? If so why?	
	2. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Why or Why not?	
	3. Tell me about a time when your peers tried to talk you into a dangerous situation in your neighborhood? How did you resist the negative peer pressure?	
	Extra-curricular activities	Halpern, 1992; J. Hawkins et al., 1992; Hebert, 2000
	1. Are you a member of a team, club or any other organization? If so which one?	
	2. How many hours do you spend during the week in your extra-curricular activities?	
	3. How has being a member of a team, club, or organization helped you academically?	

(continued)

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Research
#3. Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience?	Characteristics of a resilient child 1. How would you describe yourself as a student? 2. What do you do if you are having trouble with your classwork? Homework? 3. Do you plan on attending college? If so, what are you doing now to prepare? 4. How much control do you have on your future success?	Benard, 1991; M. Clark, 1991; Ford, 1994; Garmezy, 1991; Hauser et al., 1989; McMillan & Reed, 1993
#4. What do high achieving; at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?	1. In what ways, if any, can parents or guardians help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males? 2. In what ways, if any, can schools and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors, or administrators) help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males? 3. In what ways, if any, can communities help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?	R. Clark, 1983; Eccles et al., 1993; Epstein, 1990; Hebert, 2000; Herndon and Moore, 2002

Focus group interview. At the conclusion of the individual interviews with each participant, the researcher invited all participants to participate in a one-hour focus group interview. There are several advantages to using focus groups to gather qualitative data:

(a) Focus groups allowed the researcher to interact with several participants at one time allowing for clarification of responses, probing of responses, and follow up questioning, (b) participants had the opportunity to react and add to the responses of other group participants which resulted in ideas and data that might not have been discovered in individual interviews, and (c) the open format lends to the opportunity to gather rich amounts of authentic data (Lambart & Loisele,

2008; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The focus group served two purposes. The first purpose of the focus group was to have the participants respond to the collective findings from the individual interviews to add insight and depth to the data. The second purpose of the focus group was to provide insight into the participants beliefs in regards to ways parents or guardians, school and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors, and administrators), and communities can help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males. To accomplish this, prior to the meeting the researcher analyzed the individual interview responses for generalizations, commonalities, or contradictions. Then, the researcher facilitated a discussion around the generalizations, commonalities, or contradictions to illicit responses from the participants. The focus group interview guide (see Appendix H) was used to solicit the beliefs of the participants in regards to ways parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors, and administrators), and communities could help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males.

Instrument Content Validity

The researcher solicited feedback from two to three experts with regards to the content validity of the interview instrumentation. The two to three experts have an expertise in the topic of this study through either their own research or personal knowledge. The selected experts were asked to review each interview question and provide feedback related to: (a) the interview questions content, (b) paraphrasing of questions, (c) structure of questions, and (d) number and order of questions. Once the researcher received the expert feedback, the researcher made the appropriate edits to the instrumentation.

Data Collection and Data Management Procedures

Upon receiving the parent informed consent forms and student assent forms, the researcher forwarded the forms along with a spreadsheet with the names of the students, their student ID numbers, and their birthdates to the districts research and evaluation department to review the academic records of the participants, to verify the GPA, and provide a list of all of the courses taken by each participant.

On receiving the academic data from the research and evaluation department, the researcher contacted the counselor at each school site to discuss the logistics of the study. The researcher allowed one week at each high school to conduct the semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews took place either in a secured private office at the school. Each interview lasted between one to two hours.

The participants' responses were recorded by audiotape and anecdotal notes were taken to supplement the students' verbal responses to questions. Anecdotal notes included facial and body expressions that indicated more importance to a particular comment or changes in the participants' emotions during a particular response. These notations led to probing questions that provided insight to the explanations of the participants. At the end of each interview, the digital recordings were transcribed by the researcher and stored in a password protected Microsoft Word document. The researcher then scheduled a second interview with each participant to review the transcribed interview to ensure representation and accuracy of their responses.

Data Analysis

The researcher used open coding to analyze the transcribed interviews from the individual and focus group interviews to complete the data analysis process. Open coding is the method of analyzing qualitative data by breaking down the data, examining, comparing,

categorizing, and conceptualizing it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was used to identify themes and categories that appeared in regards to the students' understanding of how certain protective factors fostered their resilience and impacted their academic success as well as their perception in regards to what parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males.

The statements from the participants were analyzed line by line and grouped by their relationship to the protective factors and causes of academic success and resilience thus creating the themes and categories. The researcher solicited the help of two to three experienced external coders to independently analyze the transcripts of the individual and focus group interviews. The reason for using external coders was to remove any bias the researcher may have and to triangulate the findings of the external coder with that of the researcher to ensure trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of high achieving, at risk African American male students from three Southern California urban high school with regards to (a) the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, (b) the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success, (c) the characteristics that best describe their resiliency, and (d) what they believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males. Using semi-structured interviews, 11 high-achieving Black male students were interviewed. Presented in this chapter are the four research questions that were used to guide this study as well as the results of the student interviews and student demographic form. The comments of the 11 high-achieving Black males were analyzed and coded for themes that described their academic resilience despite being at-risk.

The following four research questions guided this study:

1. What factors place high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools most at-risk for under-achieving academically?
2. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success?
3. Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience?

4. What do high achieving; at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?

Research Design

This study is qualitative in nature and utilizes a phenomenological methodology. The researcher interviewed at-risk, academically successful African American high school males from three urban high schools (Pinnacle, Horizon, and Valley) all located in Horizon Unified School District in Southern California. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, consisting of 19 questions, conducted at each school site with individual student subjects, one focus group interview, consisting of three questions, that was conducted at the local library with the same student subjects and a Student Demographic questionnaire. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using open coding to identify themes and categories that appeared in regards to the students' understanding of how certain protective factors fostered their resilience and impacted their academic success as well as their perception in regards to what parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males.

Subjects

Of the 582 African American males attending the three high schools targeted for this study only 38 had a GPA of a 3.0 or higher and of those 38 only 20 met the criteria below to participate and of those 20 only 11 parents consented for their child to participate in this study.

The participants for this study were purposely selected because they met the following five criteria:

1. Be an African American male high school students
2. Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. Enrolled in A-G courses
4. Come from a family in which the parent(s) or guardian has not graduated from college
5. Qualify for free/reduced lunch

Student Participant Profiles

For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality, the names of the students were not used in any oral or written notes. Instead, each student was given a pseudonym to ensure that no one would be able to trace their responses back to them or know that they participated in the study. Table 8 provides a detailed profile of each participant.

Cameron. Cameron is an intelligent young man with a strong personality. During the interview he was very talkative and had a lot of questions about the current study. Cameron is a junior at Pinnacle High with plans on becoming a marine biologist. His cumulative GPA was 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. Cameron has taken several honors classes such as English, Algebra II and U.S History. He reported his family income to be \$20,000-\$30,000. Cameron lives with both of his parents and three other siblings, one of which is his twin brother. Cameron reported that his father graduated from high school. His mother became pregnant during her senior year of high school and did not graduate.

Table 8

Demographic Information of Student Participants

Name	Cameron	Charles	Elijah	Ethan	Jacob	Jason	Joseph	Keith	Marcus	Philip	Rodney
Age	16	15	15	17	15	18	16	15	14	16	16
Sex	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Ethnicity	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American
Grade	11	9	10	12	9	12	11	10	9	11	10
GPA	3.5	3.4	4.5	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.8	4.2
Free or Reduced Lunch	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AP/Honors Class	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School	Pinnacle	Horizon	Horizon	Valley	Pinnacle	Pinnacle	Pinnacle	Horizon	Valley	Valley	Horizon
Mother's educational attainment	Didn't Graduate	Unknown	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	Didn't Graduate	High School Graduate	Didn't Graduate	High School Graduate	Some College
Father's educational attainment	High School Graduate	Some College	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	Some College	Didn't Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate
Estimated family annual income	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$30,000-\$40,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	Less than \$20,000

(continued)

Name	Cameron	Charles	Elijah	Ethan	Jacob	Jason	Joseph	Keith	Marcus	Philip	Rodney
Type of Dwelling	Apartment	Apartment	Single Family Home	Single Family Home	Apartment	Duplex	Apartment	Single Family Home	Apartment	Single Family Home	Apartment
Number living in home	6	4	6	5	7	5	5	5	3	5	6
Career Goal	Marine Biologist	Aerospace Engineer	Surgeon	Lawyer	NBA	Engineer	Dentist	Engineer	Lawyer/Engineer	Police/Fireman	Doctor/Scientist

Charles. Charles is a 15 year old freshman at Horizon High School. The researcher found Charles to be an ambitious and engaging young man. Charles aspires to be an aerospace engineer when he grows up. His cumulative GPA is a 3.4 on a 4.0 scale. Charles has taken several honors classes such as English and Algebra. Some of Charles special recognitions and awards include the Principals Honor Roll, various sports awards, and high CST scores and other academic achievements. Charles is raised by his father. He does not have any contact with his mother and when the researcher tried to get him to explain why he doesn't see his mother her refused to answer. Charles reported his family income to be \$20,000 - \$30,000. His father has attended some college and works in the maintenance department at the airport. Charles lives in a two-bedroom apartment with his father, uncle and cousin.

Elijah. Elijah is a 15 year old sophomore at Horizon High School. The researcher has a personal relationship with Elijah and his family because Elijah was in the researcher's fifth grade class and his older brother was in the researcher's fourth grade class. Elijah has always been an ambitious young man who takes his education seriously. Elijah aspires to be a surgeon when he grows up. His cumulative GPA is a 4.5 on a 4.0 scale. Elijah has taken several honors classes such as: Honors English, Honors Algebra II, Honors General Chemistry, and Honors Geometry. Elijah has participated in the LEAD Program, when asked what LEAD stood for he couldn't remember, and College Bound. Because the researcher knows Elijah on a personal level, when asked why he didn't mention any Honor Roll or Student of the Month achievements, Elijah stated:

I really don't see those types of achievements as doing anything special. It really isn't hard to get on the Principal's Honor Roll. All you have to do is get a 3.0 and to me

Student of the Month is a joke. I have seen students get the award just because they raised their C to a B. I would rather talk about achievements that not every student is earning.

The above quote is further illustrated when he talked about earning a scholarship to Stanford University to study Computer Science, for the summer, as part of a summer program that he participated in with other minority students. When he was asked to explain how it felt to be selected for this program he stated:

It felt bomb because no one else at my school or in my district got to participate in this.

This made me stand out and feel really special. I was the man. I liked having people come up to me and ask me about it.

Elijah is raised by his mother and does not have a relationship with his father. He reported that his mother has a high school diploma and works as a 911 operator. He stated that his mother earns \$30,000 - \$40,000. Elijah lives in a three bedroom home with his grandmother, three other brothers, and his mother.

Ethan. Ethan is a 17 year old senior at Valley High School. He is the older brother of Philip who was also a participant in this study. Throughout the interview, Ethan was shy and timid and because of this, the interview took the longest of all the interviews. Once the researcher built trust with him, he willingly answered all of the questions posed to him in depth. Ethan's cumulative GPA was a 3.4 on a 4.0 scale. He prides himself in working hard and taking AP and Honors classes. Throughout grades 9-12 he has taken AP English, AP Calculus, Honors Government, and Honors English. He plans to be a lawyer or go into hotel management when he grows up. Ethan reported that his mother graduated from high school and he believed his father did to. But since he has never met his father, he couldn't confirm it. Ethan shared that his mother has been struggling with drug addiction throughout his life and because of her addiction has been

in and out of prison which is why his aunt has custody of him and his brother. Ethan reported that his aunt's income to be \$20,000-\$30,000. Ethan lives in a 3 bedroom home with his aunt, brother, and two cousins.

Jacob. Jacob is a 15 year old sophomore at Pinnacle High School. Jacob definitely stands out in a crowd. He is a muscular young man, standing over 6 feet tall. The researcher found Jacob to be self-confident bordering cocky. The researcher found it hard to keep him engaged throughout the interview and the researcher had to repeat many of the questions. Jacob is considered one of the top freshman basketball players on the West Coast. Jacob's cumulative GPA is a 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. He is currently enrolled in two Honors courses; English and Algebra II. He aspires to be a professional basketball player when he grows up. Jacob lives with both of his parents and reported that they are both high school graduates. The family's income was reported to be \$20,000 - \$30,000 a year. Jacob stated that his mother did not work and declined to state his father's occupation. Jacob is raised in a three-bedroom apartment with three sisters and one brother.

Jason. Jason is an 18 year old senior at Pinnacle High School and the oldest of all the participants in this study. The researcher found Jason to be articulate and engaging young man. Jason aspires to be an engineer when he grows up. His cumulative GPA is a 3.2 on a 4.0 scale. Jason has taken several honors classes such as Art and World History. Some of Jason's special recognitions and awards include the Principals Honor Roll, community service certification, a chemistry award, and an art contest winner. Jason is raised in a two parent home and reported his family income to be \$20,000-\$30,000. Both of his parents are high school graduates. His mother is a licensed vocational nurse and his father is a barber. Jason lives in a two-bedroom apartment with a younger brother and sister.

Joseph. Joseph is a 16 year old junior at Pinnacle High School. He is the twin brother of Cameron, another participant in this study. Joseph's personality was just the opposite of his brother Cameron. The researcher found Joseph to be quiet and soft spoken. Joseph has plans to become a dentist. His cumulative GPA was 3.8 on a 4.0 scale. Joseph has taken several honors classes such as English, Algebra II and French. He reported his family income to be \$20,000-\$30,000. Joseph lives with both of his parents and two other siblings, one of which is his twin brother. Joseph reported that his father graduated from high school. His mother became pregnant during her senior year of high school and did not graduate.

Keith. Keith is a 15 year old sophomore at Horizon High School. Keith aspires to be a civil engineer when he grows up. His cumulative GPA is a 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. Keith has taken several honors classes such as English I and II and Biology. Some of Keith's special recognitions and awards includes the Principals Honor Roll and was the valedictorian of his eighth grade class. Keith is raised by both his mother and father. His father graduated from high school and his mother attended some college. Keith reported his family income to be \$20,000 - \$30,000. His father works as a security guard and his mother is a receptionist in a doctor's office. Keith lives in a single family home with his brother and sister.

Marcus. Marcus is a 14 year old freshman at Valley High School and the youngest of all the participants in this study. Marcus aspires to be an engineer or lawyer when he grows up. His cumulative GPA is a 3.3 on a 4.0 scale. Marcus has taken several honors classes such as Geometry and Biology. Marcus is extremely proud of the fact that he has made the Honor Roll every year since the 3rd grade. Neither of Marcus' parents has graduated from high school. His father was killed in a drive by shooting when Marcus was in the 4th grade. His mother has been battling a substance abuse problem for as long as he can remember. When asked to be more

specific on how long his mom has had a substance abuse problem, he stated, “I cannot remember a time when she wasn’t high on crack.” Because of his mother’s drug addiction, Marcus currently lives in a two-bedroom apartment with his baseball coach. Marcus reported his coach’s income to be less than \$20,000.

Philip. Philip is a 16 year old junior at Valley High School. He is the younger brother of Ethan who was also a participant in this study. Just like his brother Ethan, Philip was shy and timid. Philip’s cumulative GPA was a 3.85 on a 4.0 scale. He prides himself in working hard and taking AP and Honors classes such as: AP U.S. History, Honors Biology, Honors Geometry, and Honors English. He plans to be a police officer when he grows up and if that doesn’t work out he said that he would love to be a firefighter. Philip reported that his mother graduated from high school and he believed his father did to. But since he has never met his father, he couldn’t confirm it. Philip shared that his mother has been struggling with drug addiction throughout his life and because of her addiction has been in and out of prison which is why his aunt has custody of him and his brother. Philip reported that his aunt’s income to be \$20,000-\$30,000. Philip lives in a 3 bedroom home with his aunt, brother, and two cousins.

Rodney. Rodney is a 16 year old sophomore at Horizon High School. Just like Elijah, another participant in this study, the researcher was also Rodney’s fifth grade teacher. Rodney is a tall, lanky kid with a speech impediment. Because of his impediment, Rodney can be shy at times and many of his answers were short and to the point. Rodney has plans to become a doctor or a scientist. His cumulative GPA was a 4.2 on a 4.0 scale. Rodney has taken several honors classes such as English I and II, Algebra II, Geometry, Chemistry, Biology, and World History. He reported his family income to be less than \$20,000. Rodney lives with both of his parents,

two other siblings and his aunt. Rodney reported that both his parents have graduated from high school. His mother is a cashier and his dad delivers medical supplies.

Responses to the Research Questions and Findings

The four research questions served as a framework for the design of the probing questions used during the individual interviews and focus group interview asked of the study participants. The individual interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted the school site the participant was enrolled at. The interviews took place either before school or after school. The following sections include an analysis of the responses for the probing questions related to the four research questions.

Research question one findings. What factors place high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools most at-risk for under-achieving academically? Using the participants' self-reported responses from the demographic questionnaire, and their responses to the interview questions several factors emerged that placed the high-achieving African-American participants at-risk to underachieving academically. Figure 2 illustrates the factors that affected the everyday lives of the participants and placed them at-risk for underachievement.

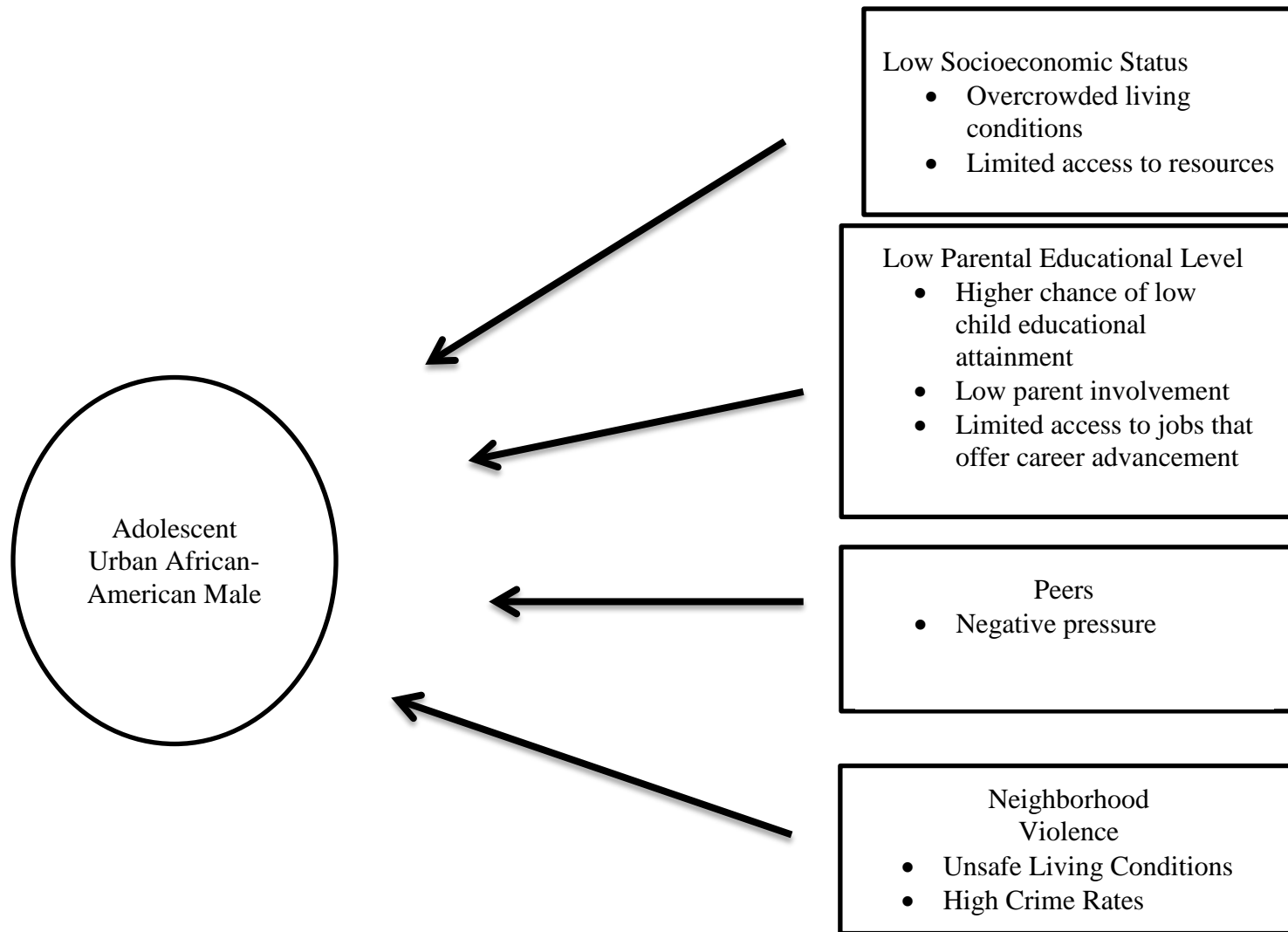


Figure 2. Factors that place high-achieving African American males at-risk for underachievement.

All of the 11 participants (100%) were males and self-identified African American. In regards to family income, two (18%) participants reported an income less than \$20,000, eight participants (73%) reported an income between \$20,000-30,000, one participant (9%) reported an income between \$30,000- \$40,000. All of the participants (100%) school records confirmed that all of the 11 participants (100%) met the criteria for being at or below federal poverty guidelines which qualified them for free and reduced lunch. Six (55%) participants lived with both of their parents, one (9%) participant lived with their mother, one (9%) participant lived with his father, two (18%) participants lived with other relatives, and one (9%) participant lived with his baseball coach.

In regards to parents' or guardians' educational background, two (18%) participants reported that their father attended some college; nine (82%) participants reported that their father graduated from high school. With regards to the mother, one (9%) participant reported that their mother attended some college; three (27%) reported that their mother didn't graduate from high school, six (55%) participants reported their mother graduated from high school, and one participant (9%) did not know the educational background of his mother. All of the participants (100%) reported that neither their mother nor father has obtained a college degree.

With respect to their household, seven (64%) participants reported living in an apartment and four (36%) participants reported living in a single family home. All participants (100%) reported that either their neighborhood or the surrounding neighborhoods was violent. Within their neighborhoods or community eight (73%) participants reported that they have friends that have tried to talk them into participating in illegal behaviors.

Research question two findings. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools

identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success? The interview questions that were correlated to question two were placed into five subgroups and each subgroup contained probing questions that were related to the research question (see Table 9).

Table 9

Probing Questions Correlated to Research Question Two

Subgroup	Probing Questions
Peers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do your friends feel about school? 2. How do you encourage your friends to do well in school? 3. How do your friends encourage you to do well in school? 4. What do your friends think about students who get good grades?
Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What ways does your family support you with school? Future goals? 2. In what ways does your family set high expectations for you? 3. Does your family provide a caring and encouraging environment? If so, how?
School	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think the school provides a caring and encouraging environment? In what ways? 2. Do your teachers have high expectations for you? In what ways do they show it?
Neighborhood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there anyone in the community that you look up to? If so why? 2. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Why or Why not? 3. Tell me about a time when your peers tried to talk you into a dangerous situation in your neighborhood? How did you resist the negative peer pressure?
Extra-curricular Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are you a member of a team, club or any other organization? If so which one? 2. How many hours do you spend during the week in your extra-curricular activities? 3. How has being a member of a team, club, or organization helped you academically?

The probing questions correlated to research question two allowed high-achieving, at-risk African-American males from three Southern California urban high schools describe what environmental protective factors contributed to their resilience and academic success. Table 10

shows the themes, sub-themes, and discrepancies that emerged regarding at-risk African American males from three Southern California urban high schools descriptions of their peers, family, school, community, and participation in extra-curricular activities.

Table 10

Themes, Sub-themes, and Discrepancies Related to the Environmental Factors Contributing to Resilience and Academic Success

Themes	Sub-themes	Discrepancies
Peers as Support Groups	Competition to get good grades Valuing the importance of school	Social groups varied
Supportive Family	Other relatives Having high expectations Personal Narratives	
School Engagement	Participation in sports/clubs Getting good grades Positive Relationships with Teachers	
Support from School	Having high expectations Caring and Nurturing Staff	Teachers only cared about the Honors students
Neighborhood Violence	Ability to resist peer pressure	Not all participants lived in a neighborhood plagued by violence
Community Engagement	Community relationships Participation in church	Not all participants had a role model in the community

The themes that emerged were: (a) peers as a support group, (b) supportive family, (c) school engagement, (d) support from school, (e) neighborhood violence, and (f) community engagement. The patterns that emerged for peers as a support group were competition to get good grades, and valuing the importance of school. The patterns that emerged for supportive family were other relatives, having high expectations, and personal narratives. The patterns that emerged for school engagement were participation in sports, getting good grades, and having

positive relationships with teachers. The patterns that emerged for support from school were teachers having high expectations and being caring and nurturing. The pattern that emerged for neighborhood violence was the ability to resist peer pressure. The patterns that emerged from community engagement were community relationships and participation in church.

Peers as a support group. The first major theme of the present study highlights the importance of peers as a support group for the high-achieving African-American males in this study. Within the theme *peers as a support group*, two subthemes emerged. These subthemes were: (a) competition to get good grades; and (b) valuing the importance of grades. All of the participants in this study reported that their peers served as a support group for them in various forms. Nine of the participants reported that they competed with their friends for grades. In terms of valuing school, six of the participants reported that their immediate peer group valued education, while three participants reported that even though they associated with their high-achieving friends, they had a group of friends that did not value school and two participants reported that their peer group did not value education.

Competition to get good grades. Nine of the participants reported that they competed with their friends for grades. For these high-achieving African –American males, competing with their friends pushed them to do better in school because they wanted to outperform their peers. Elijah stated, “My friends and I compete all the time. It’s a competition between us. If one of them gets an A then I have to get an A+. If he gets 90% then I have to get 95%. That’s just how we do it.” Rodney stated, “In class we compete. We see who could get the best, like, GPA or the best in stuff so it’s more like competitive.” Keith reported, “The same way that I encourage them [friends] through competition they encourage me. If I know that one of my friends did well on a

test then I know that I have to study harder and work harder so that I can score higher than they did.”

Not all of the participants competed with their peers for grades or saw competition as a way to motivate them to do better in school. Charles stated,

I really don't compete with my friends to do well in school because the group that I mostly hang out with doesn't really care too much about doing and the other group that does do well only care about themselves. As long as they are getting good grades, they could care less about anyone else.

Similar to Charles, Jacob stated,

I have two groups of friends. One group doesn't care about school because they have a low GPA. They ain't tryin' to compete for grades. The other group really cares about school because they are always talking about school and tryin' to outdo each other on tests and stuff like that. I like to hang out with my group of friends with the low GPA because when I'm with them I don't have to worry about competing for nothing, at least not grades, I can just hang out and have fun.

Valuing the importance of school. Six of the participants reported that their immediate peer group valued education, while three participants reported that even though they associated with their high-achieving friends, they had a group of friends that did not value school and two participants reported that their peer group did not value education. For several of the participants school was valued because a good education provides these high-achieving African-American males an opportunity to leave the hood. Jason stated, “My closest associates feel that school is very important. Most of them see school as the only way to succeed and get out of the hood.” Keith had the same sentiments as Jason stating, “They see the importance of school. Since the

majority of my friends are A students, they know that school is important and is basically the only way for them to get out of the bad environment that they live in.” Rodney stated, “They [friends] really enjoy school. They know that, like, if you want to be something in life it is necessary.

For some of the participants, their peers know that school is important however, they do not value the importance of school. Cameron clearly explains this paradox stating,

Most of them are pretty serious about it [school] but they do not take it serious. The ones that do not take it serious, I don’t think they see any positive results from going to school because no one around them have gone to college or succeeded. As for my friends that are serious about school, they are more optimistic. Even though many of them may be the first person in their family to go to college, they don’t let the failures of their parents and the people in their community get them down. School is their only option.

Similarly, Elijah states, “Most of my friends do not like school but they come because they know that they have to. They understand that school is going to make them successful in life.”

Supportive family. The second major theme highlights the importance of a supportive family as contributing to their academic success. Within the theme *supportive family*, three subthemes emerged as contributing to the academic success of the high achieving African-American male participants. The three subthemes were: (a) other relatives, (b) having high expectations, and (c) personal narratives.

Other relatives. Kinship networks were essential in the success of these high achieving African American males that participated in this study. For some of the participants ($n = 9$), kinship networks served as an extra source of support. While for other participants ($n = 2$), kinship networks served as the only source of support. Regardless of the level of involvement, a

network of relatives provided support, structure, and guidance for these high achieving African American males. The network of relatives included aunts, siblings, and grandparents who made it a priority that these African American males were successful in school. For example, Philip stated,

My aunt has always been there for my brother and me ever since my mom went to prison.

I know that I can go to her whenever I have a problem or just need someone to talk to.

Her advice is always helpful. She always says that it is her job to make sure that I get out of the hood and do better than my mom and dad.

Ethan, the older brother of Phillip, also echoed the same sentiments about his aunt. He indicated,

I don't know where my brother and I would be without my aunt. For me personally, her belief in me is what makes me strive in school. I don't want to let her down because of the sacrifices she has made to provide a family structure for my brother and me. I know that I can talk to her about anything and she will tell me what I need to hear and not what I want to hear.

Three participants reported that they received extra support from a sibling. Jason acknowledged that his brother provided care, protection, and support. He stated,

My brother protects me and I know that I can go to him if I have any problems with anyone in the neighborhood. Because of his reputation, many people are scared of him so they know not to mess with me. He also gives me money to buy school supplies, or if I need something for a project. He also tells me not to be like him. He reminds me that even though he always has money, it's not the way he wants me to earn money. He tells me that he messed up but I have a chance to be better than him and if he finds out that I am up to no good he will kick my ass.

Rodney relied on his sister for support. He saw his sister as a “second mom.” He further explains, “My sister nags me about school just like my mom. It doesn’t bother me as much because I know that she cares. Just as much as I want to impress my mom, I also want to impress her which is why I work so hard.” Keith also counted on his sister. He viewed her as a “role model.” He stated, “I know that I can talk to her about anything and she won’t judge me.”

Two participants cited support from their grandmother. Elijah stated,

I know that I can go to Big Mama for anything. She shares stories with me about growing up during the time when Blacks had to use different water fountains and couldn’t eat at the same places Whites could. She tells me that it is important for me to do well in school because so many Blacks gave their life so that I can attend college. When I was younger, I didn’t understand what she meant but know that I am in high school I understand everything that she has been telling me and I appreciate her for that.

Charles described his enduring love for his grandmother. He reported, “My grandmother is everything to me. She is not only my grandmother but she is also my mom. She doesn’t allow me to get away with anything. She is stricter than my father but for some reason I don’t get mad when she puts me in my place.”

Having high expectations. All of the participants stated that their parents or guardians set and communicated high expectations in regards to academic performance. The participants’ responses illustrate the importance of their parents’ expectations in shaping their positive attitudes towards school and their determination to succeed. The following participant responses illustrate this sentiment:

- My mom expects me to have straight A's and if I don't have all A's it's a lecture. She wants to know why did you get a B? Why can't it be an A-. So she pushes me to do better which makes me work harder. I don't want to let her down (Elijah).
- They expect me to get good grades. My mom is constantly asking me what grade I got on a test. If I bring home a B she gets mad at me and tells me that I need to study harder (Joseph).
- My dad accepts nothing but A's and B's and if I bring home one C or have more B's than A's, I am pulled out of sports automatically so that I can use that extra time on studying (Charles).
- Like, in my house, a B is like a D or an F, They [my parents] see it as I should get an A. They know I can get an A. I have been getting A's [on my report card] for the longest so they expect it (Rodney).
- Even though my goal is to play in the NBA, they [parents] are always telling me that I need to have a back-up plan because at any moment I can get hurt on the court. They also tell me that the NBA is not guaranteed. My dad tells me that even if I make it to the NBA I can still end up broke like lots of other professional athletes but if I have my education I will be able to have another career after basketball (Jacob).

The parents or guardians high expectations for their high achieving African American sons were not only focused on grades. Two participants stated that their parents' expectations went beyond just grades. Cameron shared, "Not only do they want me to get good grades; they make sure that I enroll in higher [AP or Honors] classes." Philip stated, "My aunt expects me to get high grades and she expects me to have behave like I have some sense at school. She tells me to go to school and get my education and don't worry about anything else."

Personal narratives. Six of the 11 high achieving African-American male participants in this study stated that their parents, guardians, or other relatives used personal stories to motivate them to succeed in school. Jacob stated,

They [parents] are constantly telling me that I can be the first person in my family to graduate from college. They are constantly telling me about how hard life is if you don't have an education and it's even harder if you are a Black man without an education.

Every now and then, my dad will sit me down and tell me that I have to do better than him because the way he makes his money isn't safe and the consequences can be deadly. Keith's parents also echoed the same sentiment in regards to being the first in the family to go to college. Keith reported,

My family is always telling me and letting me know that I can be the first one to go to college. My mom reminds me about how hard her and my dad has to struggle to put food on the table and pay the bills. I sometimes feel that there is a lot of pressure placed on me to succeed but when I think of how hard my parents work and they have nothing to show for it, I suck it up and do what I have to do.

Several other students also shared how the use of their parent's personal stories helped to motivated them to succeed in school. Elijah stated, "My mom tells me that just because she didn't go to college doesn't me I cannot go to college. She tells me, 'You don't want to have to live paycheck to paycheck. This is the reason why we are living with your grandmother.'" Philip shared, "The stories that my aunt tells me about my mom and the affect that her drug addiction has on her life makes me want to do better for myself."

Jason stated that he feels encouraged and motivated to succeed from the stories his brother shares with him.

My brother tells me about how tough it is on the streets. He states, “Just because you see me with a nice car and money you don’t understand how dangerous it is. I am constantly looking out for the police and rival gangs.” My brother tells me that this isn’t the life he wants for me and because he has been in and out of prison several times, I know that he knows what he is talking about.

School engagement. The third major theme of the present study highlights the importance of a school engagement as contributing to their academic success. Within the theme School Engagement, three subthemes emerged as contributing to the academic success of the high achieving African-American male participants. The three subthemes were: (a) participation in sports/clubs, (b) getting good grades, and (c) positive relationships with teachers.

Participation in sports/clubs. All of the high-achieving African-American male students in this study stated that they participated in extracurricular activities. These activities included sports, organizations, and clubs. Table 11 provides a list of sports, organizations, or clubs that each participated was involved in as well as the number of hours per week that they spent participating in these activities.

Participating in extracurricular activities helped these high achieving African-American males academically by requiring them to maintain a certain GPA. Philip stated, “To play [basketball], you have to have a certain standard or grade. I mean GPA. I believe it is a 2.3. Since the coach knows that I am smart he expects me to have a 3.0 but of course I want higher than a 3.0.” The expectation to maintain a certain GPA has also influenced other participants in this study to work hard. Marcus stated, “It motivates me because if I don’t get good grades I can’t be on the team and being on the team is what keeps me out of trouble.” Similarly, Jacob stated, “It [basketball] helps me because if I don’t get good grades then I can’t play.” Joseph added, “When

you play a sport you have to have good grades, so I work hard to keep my grades up and I know that if I work hard in the classroom I might be able to get a basketball scholarship.”

Table 11

Extracurricular Involvement and Number of Hours Per Week Involved in Activities

Participant	Sport, Club, or Organization	Self-Reported Hours Per Week
Philip	Basketball and Baseball	20
Ethan	EOAP	1.5
Marcus	Baseball and Basketball	15
Jacob	Basketball	10
Jason	Mentoring Program through church	10
Joseph	Basketball	10
Charles	Baseball	11
Elijah	Football, Basketball, MESA, and church	15-20
Rodney	Football, Basketball	10-12
Keith	Football	10-15
Cameron	Church	6

Not only did participating in extracurricular activities help these high achieving African-American males maintain a high GPA, it taught them how to use the lesson learned playing a sport or participating in a club in the classroom. Charles stated, “Like in math, if I don’t get it, I keep working at it or I try another way to solve the problem. This is just like on the baseball field, I keep practicing so I can get better” Keith also transferred his determination learned from sports into the classroom. He shared, “Playing football is like being in class, when things get tough during the football game or your team is losing you don’t give up. So when I am in the classroom, I don’t give up.” Similar to sports, Ethan used what he learned as a member of EOAP

to help him in the classroom. He stated, “Being a member of EOAP has helped with being organized and they show me how to take good notes.”

Getting good grades. All of the high achieving African-American males that participated in this study aspired to get good grades. Each quarter Elijah sets goals for himself. He stated, “Every time our grades come out, I try to set goals for myself so that my grades will be higher by the next grading period.” Similar to Elijah, Rodney stated, “Grades are a reflection of who I am as a student. If I want people to take me serious as a student then I have to get good grades.” Philip not only competes with his classmates to get good grades, he knows that it is competitive to get into a good college. This is illustrated with his statement, “I am constantly striving to get the highest grades possible. I know that just because I am doing well in comparison to my friends at school, this won’t be good enough to get into college. I have to work hard to be equal to or better than other students around the country.” Jacob compared his desire to get good grades to his competitiveness in everything he does,

I take getting good grades as a personal challenge. I want to be the best in everything that I do whether it is on the basketball court, having the prettiest girl, or the best swag. So it doesn’t matter how hard I have to work or how long I have to study. Getting an A is like icing on the cake. When other students see me play on the basketball court and then know that I get good grades, I like the jealousy in their eyes.

Positive relationships with teachers. The academic resilient Black male students that participated in this study created strong relationships with their teachers. These bonds provided them extra time to complete assignments, personal tutoring, and important information. These benefits allowed high-achieving African-American males to negotiate the struggles of being a

student, participation in sports, and the dangers in their community. Jason described how he went about creating good relationships with his teachers. He stated,

I always sit in the front of the class and participate during discussions. The teachers really like when students participate. I also make sure that I don't get on their bad side. I also make sure to greet my teachers every time I enter their classroom. I believe that in order to succeed in school you have to have a good relationship with your teachers because one day I may need them to write me a letter of recommendation for college or a scholarship.

Rodney described how he created relationships with some of his teachers,

I pick and choose which teachers I um, really try to create a relationship with. If the teacher is one of my um, honors teachers I make sure to go out of my way to build a bond with them. I do this because I know their classes are going to be really hard and I may need them to help a brotha' out [smiling]. When I am in their classrooms, I make sure to follow their rules and to do whatever they ask of me. I've seen how teachers treat students who are disrespectful towards them. The teachers really don't care about them or go out of their way to help them. I don't want this to happen to me.

Elijah described the benefits that he has received from his positive relationship with his teachers,

Since I play football, basketball, and a member of MESA (Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement), there is a lot of demand on my time and sometimes I don't always get my homework done or you know study like I should. But what's cool is that my teachers know that I'm one of the good ones. I mean, I don't talk back and I want to do something with my life. So they allow me to make up work that I miss or they give me extra time. One teacher even let me make up a test because I got a C and I didn't even

have to ask her. She just told me to come after school to make it up. I was like cool. I ended up getting an A on that test.

Jacob also described the benefits he received from his teachers, “There has been times when my teachers have allowed me to retake a test. I also have had teachers give me information about college or have talked to me about the whole college application thing, you know, the steps you have to take to get into college.”

Support from school. The fourth major theme of the present study highlights the importance of a supportive family as contributing to their academic success. Within the theme Supportive Family, two subthemes emerged as contributing to the academic success of the high achieving African-American male participants. The two subthemes were: (a) having high expectations, and (b) being caring and nurturing.

Having high expectations. The Black males in this study believed that their teachers had a positive impact on their lives. Their teachers held them to higher expectations than they did for other students. Ethan shared, “If I do bad [sic] on a test my teachers get disappointed because they know that I can do better. They wanted me to be the top student in the class.” Cameron also shared, “I have a few teachers that have pulled me to the side and told me that they really do care about me and want me to succeed and that I should always give 100%. Elijah stated, “Yeah my teachers have high expectations for me. If I don’t get an A they say, ‘Why not an A?’ It is always, “Why not an A? Why not an A?” It makes me want to get an A so they will stop talking.”

Joseph shared the expectations that his teachers had for him,

Most of my teacher do [have high expectations] because I take advanced classes and I seek out their assistance. If I get a bad grade or a grade that they feel is too low they will

talk to me about it. If I don't do the homework they will ask me why. They will also lecture me about the group of friends that I choose to hang out with.

Jacob shared,

Because I have Honors classes and so they expect me to do well. One time when I didn't do well on a test because I didn't study, my teacher was really upset with me. She lectured me on the importance of always being prepared and compared it to me playing basketball. She said that if I am always prepared for my basketball games then I should be just as prepared for class.

Keith also had the same sentiments about his Honors teachers,

I find that the teachers in my Honors classes care more because all of the students in the class are Honors students so they expect us to always do our best and get A's on every test. They communicate with our parents and if we don't understand something they sit with us after school to help.

Caring and nurturing. As stated earlier, the Black males in this study believed that there teachers had a positive impact on their lives. Because of their positive relationships, for some of the students their teachers served as confidants that provided support and guidance.

Keith stated, "Mrs. [XXX] is like a second mom to me. When I need someone to talk to she is there for me. I like hanging out in her classroom. It is like home and stuff." Joseph shared, "I always go and visit Mr. [XXX] class because he is cool. He comes from the neighborhood so he understands the drama that goes on in the hood. He's strict but it's because he doesn't want me to be like a lot of brothas that never leave the hood."

Not every participant in this study felt that the school provided a nurturing and caring environment. Many of them felt that the teachers only cared about the students that received

good grades or the ones that took the initiative to seek out their help. Ethan stated, “Many of the teachers only care about the students who try or the ones who get good grades. If you don’t care about your school work it seems that they don’t care about you.” Joseph also agreed with Ethan, “A lot of teachers and staff here really don’t care unless you put forth an effort. That’s probably why many of my friends don’t go to class and have given up already.” Jacob felt that the teachers supported him but did not support all students. He stated, “The teachers are helpful because they let me stay after class if I am having problems. But this is only because I get good grades. I notice that if you don’t get good grades the teachers really do not care about you.” The teachers were not the only staff members that high achieving black males felt only catered to students with high grades. Cameron shared,

Sometimes the counselor’s will call us to the office to make sure we are on the right track and selected the right classes. They even talk to us about college and the necessary classes we need to get into college. But I notice that they only do this with the students who get good grades. I have a homeboy that isn’t a good student but he isn’t a bad student. He gets some B’s and C’s. His counselor has never called him to the office to discuss nothing with him.

Neighborhood violence. The fifth major theme of the present study highlights the role that neighborhood violence plays in the lives of the high-achieving African-American males that participated in this study. Within the theme *neighborhood violence*, one subtheme emerged as contributing to the academic success of the high achieving African-American male participants. The single subtheme was the ability to resist peer pressure.

The participants shared that the violence within their neighborhood or community made them feel unsafe. Jacob shared an incident that occurred in his neighborhood,

Every weekend I hear gunshots or someone is fighting in the streets. One time a guy was running from the police and he hid in our backyard. There were police in our yard looking for him and there was a helicopter flashing its light on my house.

Philip shared an incident in his neighborhood that he would never forget,

I was hanging out with the homies, you know, not doing anything bad just hanging out. Then we seen [sic] this car rolling up with its lights off. Everyone knows that when a car rolls down the street with its light off you better drop. We all dropped and they shot up the house at the end of the block. All you heard was rapid gun fire and then screams. Two people were killed and I knew one of them. Man, sometimes I think that could have been me.

Joseph described his neighborhood as, “pretty dangerous because there are gangs and drug dealers and sometimes they get into fights and shoot at each other or rival gangs will roll through the hood and shoot at them.” Jason’s neighborhood is similar to that of Joseph’s. Jason stated,

My hood can be like a war, you know like Iraq. Sometimes I feel like I need a bulletproof vest. The Crips are always trying to kill the Bloods, the Bloods are trying to kill the Crips, and the Mexicans are trying to kill the Bloods and the Crips. I have to be careful what I wear because I don’t want to get caught slippin’. I try to stay in the house especially at night.

Even though all the high-achieving African-American male participants resided in a city that is synonymous to gang violence, drugs, and murders, some of them reported living pockets of the city that were safe. Ethan described his neighborhood as, “being safe, calm, and not noisy.” Charles stated, “I feel safe because no one really bothers me and I try to keep to myself.”

Similarly, Elijah stated, “I feel safe because I’ve been living in my neighborhood since I was five years old and it’s pretty quiet.”

Ability to resist peer pressure. Even though the high achieving African-American males in this study lived in a community where drug abuse, murders, and gang violence are common and has claimed the lives of many young black males, none of the participants reported having a criminal record. They all have been able to resist the peer pressure and the temptations of the streets. Marcus shared an incident where a group of guys he called associates tried to persuade him to take part in a robbery. He stated,

One day, there was this old lady that was getting out of her car and she left the door open. My friend said that we should jump in her car and grab her purse. I immediately told him no and kept walking with the other guy that was with us. The other guy went back towards the car but changed his mind because we didn’t go with him. When he caught up with us, I told him that it is not worth getting in trouble and going to jail.

Philip shared,

I was walking home one day when we seen [sic] some rival gangsters. Some of the guys I was with are gangsters and they wanted to do something to them. They tried to get me to do something with them but that is not the type of life that I want to live. I walked off and said, “I’m cool. I will catch you guys later.” I later found out that they ended up jumping the guys and then those guys came back and shot one of my friends in the stomach.

Not all of the participants were tempted to commit crimes or harm others. Some of them have friends that tried to tempt them to do drugs or drink alcohol. Jacob stated, “They [my friends] have never tried to talk me into anything dangerous but they always try to get me to smoke weed but I don’t do it because I don’t want it to affect my basketball game.” Joseph

shared, “They [my friends] want me to smoke weed with them or to sell drugs to earn some money. I haven’t done any of that stuff because I don’t want to disappoint my mother.”

Similarly, Cameron stated, “Sometimes they [my friends] have tried to talk me into drinking, smoking or doing drugs but I have a mindset of saying no and overcoming it.” Similar to the other young men, Keith shared, “The guys in the neighborhood tried to get me to smoke weed but I turned it down because I didn’t want to get involved with something bad. I just told them that I don’t want to try it and they left me alone.” Elijah used a higher power to help him resist peer pressure. He stated, “My friends have tried to get me to smoke weed and steal a car. Really it’s God. I mean, I just think what would God want me to do and I do it.”

Community engagement. The sixth major theme of the present study highlights the significance of support systems and positive relationships within the community. Several participants identified support systems (i.e., churches, friends, and community members) within their community as being beneficial to their academic success. Two subthemes emerged within the major theme of Community Engagement. These subthemes were (a) community relationships and (b) participation in church.

Community relationships. The first subtheme that emerged in the domain *community engagement* was community relationships. Five of the student participants mentioned their relationships with people within their community that has contributed to their academic success despite the adversity they face on a daily basis. Philip shared, “I look up to my neighbor. She works at UCLA so she always talks to me about college and she helps me out by answering any questions that I may have. She has even taken me to UCLA during my summer breaks so I could see what a college campus looks like. Marcus shared,

I look up to my baseball coach. He is like a dad to me. He would bring me home from practice every night and he noticed that my home life wasn't the best. He talked to my mom and they decided that it would be better for me to live with him. He didn't have to take me in but he did. Living with him has helped me because I can concentrate on my school work.

Jason described his relationship with a neighbor. He stated,

He [neighbor] is going to school to be an engineer. He is very humble and he looks after me. He makes sure that I go to school and he always want to see my report card to make sure that I am getting good grades. I definitely do not want to disappoint him so I make sure to bust my butt at school.

Charles shared a similar relationship with a neighbor, "There is a neighbor down the street that takes responsibility of the community. He tries to get all of the neighbors together to keep the neighborhood safe. He has started a Neighborhood Watch program. He is a family man that spends time with his kids. Elijah stated, "I look up to my pastor. He has everything set for him. He went to school. He's smart and manages everything well, his work, kids, and God. I want to be like him one day."

Several of the participant reported that they did not have a relationship with anyone in their community nor did they have any role models within their community. Keith stated, "No one in my neighborhood is really doing anything that I feel is successful. I mean there are people who go to work every day but it is just a regular job, nothing that you have to go to college to do. Joseph shared, "Every one there [my neighborhood] is in the same position that my family is I so what can they tell me about future success." Jacob also stated, "There are nothing but gangsters and drug dealers in my neighborhood. Why would I look up to them?"

Participation in church. The second subtheme that emerged within the theme Community Engagement was the participation in the church as being beneficial to their academic success.

Jason stated,

Being a member of the church has helped me because as a Christian I read the bible and that guides me to get through things that may go through at school. I know that God has a plan for me and I know that my mind and intelligence is a gift given to me by God.

Whenever things get tough, I turn to the bible for guidance. I also serve as a mentor for some of the younger members of my church. They see me as a role model.

Elijah stated:

Church has helped me understand that school is not hard if you have God. I don't stress about school or anything because I have God. I know that the Lord gave me this mind and I do the best I can to show him that he didn't give it to me for nothing. I have God and I know that God will always be there but I have to take care of school to be able to take care of my family when I get older.

Cameron stated, "Church has helped me to have a good mindset to be able to overcome any problems that I might encounter. At church there are lots of kids like me. You know good kids. They are not A students like me but they are not thugs."

Research question three findings. Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience? The primary probing questions that correlated with question three were:

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
2. What do you do if you are having trouble with your classwork? Homework?

3. Do you plan on attending college? If so, what are you doing now to prepare?
4. How much control do you have on your future success?

The probing questions correlated to research question three allowed high-achieving, at-risk African-American males from three Southern California urban high schools describe which characteristics best describe their resilience. Table 12 shows the themes and sub-themes that emerged regarding at-risk African American males from three Southern California urban high schools descriptions of the characteristics that best described their resilience.

Table 12

Themes and Patterns Related to the Characteristics that Best Described the Resilience of the High-Achieving African-American Male Participants

Themes	Sub-themes
Autonomy	Control over the future Planning for the future Strong belief in self
Problem Solving Skills	Resourceful/Taking initiative

Autonomy. The seventh major theme of the present study highlights autonomy as a characteristic that best describes the resilience of the high-achieving African-American male participants. Within the theme Autonomy, two subthemes emerged as contributing to the academic success of the high achieving African-American male participants. The three subthemes were: (a) control over the future, (b) planning for the future, and (c) strong belief in self.

Control over the future. Despite the adversities that the high-achieving African-American males in this study faced throughout their lives, they did not blame others for their current circumstances, did they see their present situations as being unchangeable. They took responsibility for their actions and believed they have total control over their future success. For

example, Jacob stated, “I believe that I have total control over my future. As long as I focus on my goals, I know that I will have a bright future.” Jason shared the same sentiments as Jacob when he stated, “I have all the control over my future. I can’t allow anyone to get in the way of my goals. I know along the way there will be obstacles like some of my friends or other people might not believe in me. But I believe in myself so I know that I can do it.” Elijah also commented,

I have 100% control of my future success. I know that no one is going to feel sorry for me because I come from Horizon [pseudonym used for city] or because I was raised by a single mom. In order for me to be successful I have to take control and create my own opportunities.

Keith shared,” I believe that I have all of the control. I also want to prove that not all Blacks are thugs or bad people. Ya’ know what I’m sayin’? If I become successful, then I’m proof that you can make it out of tha’ hood.”

Conversely, two of the participants believed they had control over their future success. However, they felt that their control was limited due to their race. Philip stated, “I say about..In the world we live in, I say about 89% [control over future success] because being African-American, they try to put you down so you have to push yourself and believe that you can do it.” Similarly, Cameron shared, “I have most of the control. I would say like 70% because people will judge me because I am black. I think that may hurt me when it comes to getting a job because with a college degree, I will be competing with whites.”

Planning for the future. Not only did the high-achieving African-American male participants believe that they had control over their future success despite the adversities they faced, they also had a plan to achieve that success that included attending college. Furthermore,

they were preparing for college now, not leaving college admission to chance. For example, Charles shared, “I just recently applied to CAL-SOAP (California Opportunity & Access Program). It is a program that provides counseling on college admission, tours, tutoring and a bunch of other stuff. I also research what classes I need to take to get into certain colleges.”

Keith shared,

I plan on taking classes at the local community college at night and during the summer break and next year I will continue to take honors and AP courses. I would like to also visit UCLA and UC Santa Cruz so I can see the campuses because these are the two colleges I would like to attend.

Similarly to Keith, Ethan stated,

In order to get into a really good university, All my classes are Honors so they are preparing me for college and I plan on taking college classes this summer at Horizon Community College [pseudonym used for community college].

Other participants shared the same sentiments as illustrated subsequently:

- I plan on attending college. I am looking for different colleges that I want to attend what will look better on my transcripts and what programs will help me to get to college. Last summer, I received a scholarship to attend Stanford University during the summer for a computer science program for smart minority students. I know that will look good on my application (Elijah).
- Yes, I plan on attending college. I’m in a program but I can’t remember the name of it. It helps you with school and provides information about college. I also try to take as many hard classes as I can so that I will be ready for college (Marcus).

- I am definitely attending college. I have signed up to take the SAT's and I am taking an SAT prep courses. I also continue to take advanced level classes (Joseph).
- Yes, I am going to college. I am currently enrolled in AP and Honors classes. I also spend a lot of time talking to my counselor to ensure that I am taking the classes necessary enough to get me to a UC school (Jason).

Strong belief in self. From the interviews, it was obvious that the high-achieving African-American male participants had a strong belief in self. Several of the participants possessed a strong sense of self-efficacy and saw themselves as capable students. For example, Joseph shared,

I am a great student that works hard. Even though I sometimes hang out with the wrong crowd, I know who I am and I know the importance of school. No matter who I hang out with, I won't allow that to stop me from going to college and being successful because I believe in myself even when others sometimes don't.

Charles stated, "In some ways I'm a typical student. I talk in class when I'm not supposed to. But I am also focused, hardworking, and I have goals and dreams that I want to accomplish. I think that is what separates me from a lot of other students. I believe in my ability." Keith shared,

I wouldn't say that I am a perfect student because I slip up sometimes. I do have areas that I can improve in. But I know what I need to improve in and I don't mind putting in the work to get it right. I am also ambitious, hard-working, and focused on my goals.

Above all, I believe that I can do anything that I put my mind to.

Jason saw himself as a very dependable person that enjoys helping others. He stated, "I am an excellent student and very assertive. I help students not only for their benefit but for my own benefit. I learn by helping others."

Problem solving skills. The eighth major theme of the present study highlights problem solving skills as a characteristic that best describes the resilience of the high-achieving African-American male participants. Within the theme Problem Solving Skills, one subtheme emerged as contributing to the academic success of the high achieving African-American male participants. The single subtheme was resourceful or taking initiative.

Resourceful or taking initiative. In this current study, the high-achieving African-American male participants demonstrated problem solving skills characterized by their ability to be resourceful and taking the initiative when they had difficulty with school work. Surprisingly, only two participants sought out help from their teachers when they had difficulty. Keith stated, “I always go to my teachers because that is what they are there for.” Similarly, Ethan shared, “I ask my teacher for help.” A testament to their resourcefulness, many of the participants sought help from their family, community, or friends. For example, Elijah stated, “I always ask my friends when I have difficulty with my classwork. I try to interact with my peers and see what they know so I can learn from them.” Jacob shared, “First, I try to work through it on my own but if I can’t do it then I go to my mom or some of my smart friends.” Charles also stated,

Whenever I have trouble with my work, I first try to solve the problem myself. If I still can’t figure out the right answer, I have a group of people that I can get help from. Most of them are my smart friends. I make sure to have their phone numbers so that I can contact them.

Research question four findings. What do high achieving; at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and

communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males? The primary probing questions that correlated with question four were:

1. In what ways, if any, can parents or guardians help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?
2. In what ways, if any, can schools and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors, or administrators) help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?
3. In what ways, if any, can communities help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?

The probing questions correlated to research question four allowed high-achieving, at-risk African-American males from three Southern California urban high schools describe what they believe what parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males. Table 13 shows the themes and patterns that emerged regarding what high-achieving at-risk African American males from three Southern California urban high schools believed that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?

Table 13

Themes and Patterns Regarding What Parents, Schools, and Communities Can Do to Increase the Academic Achievement of Urban At-Risk African-American Males?

Themes	Sub-themes
Parents	Reward good grades Communicate importance of school and grades High expectations
School	Support for all Black students Create partnership with Black parents
Community	Increase community programs Reduce Crime

Promoting resilience to increase academic success among at-risk urban African-American males. The ninth major theme highlights the conditions of the home, school, and community that might foster academic resilience in at-risk urban African-American males. Focus group interviews was used to allow participants to share their suggestions and recommendations in regards to what parents, schools, and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African-American males. Of the 11 participants, six took part in the focus group interview.

The first question asked to the student participants was: “In what ways, if any, can parents or guardians help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?” Three subthemes emerged: (a) reward good grades, (b) communicate the importance of school and grades, and (c) high expectations.

Reward good grades. During the discussion several students mentioned that being rewarded for their hard work motivated them to work harder at school and that parents should try rewarding their son(s) for their hard work as a way of motivating them to do better in school. For example, Rodney shared, “Parents could give rewards for good grades and effort like my mom

does. Knowing that I am going to get a reward, like Beats By Dre headphones if I get a 4.0 make me work harder because I really want those headphones.” Keith shared the same thought as Rodney when he stated, “Yeah, my aunt bought me a pair of those headphones because on the last report card I raised my grade from a B to an A in my math class. After I got the headphones, I was motivated to work even harder.” Elijah added,

I know that some people think that you shouldn’t give your child gifts for getting but isn’t that what happens in the real world? I mean when you do a good job at work you get a bonus or when you work really hard to get into college and graduate you are rewarded with a good job that pays well.

Rodney shared, “Kids need to know that with hard work come rewards. They need to be able to see that when you work hard you get things. Sometimes getting good grades are not enough. You know what I mean, you can’t see grades.”

Communicate the importance of school and grades. All of the participants agreed that at-risk urban African-American males would benefit from having parents or someone in their lives that discussed the importance of grades and school. Ethan shared,

Parents need to show them the reality that if they don’t do what they are supposed to do then they will be another Black stereotype. You know what I mean? I mean like the rest of the Black guys you see in the neighborhood that just sit on the porch or stand on the corner all day.

All of the parents of the participants in this current study as well as many of the African-American families within the community work entry level jobs and do not have college degrees. However, their lack of a college education should not hinder their ability to communicate the importance of school to their son(s). Cameron agreed by stating,

I know that it is hard in many families. Parents are more worried about just surviving and paying the bills so school is not discussed as much as it should be. Even though parents don't have a college education, they can still show that school is important by sharing their life experience, asking about school activities, and giving praise and encouragement.

Rodney shared, "In an article that I read, it said that the more you [parents] talk to your kids about school the farther they will go in school." He also added, "Even though some parents may be struggling to pay bills and working a lot, they still need to give their child attention."

Having high expectations. The participants shared that parents could foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males by setting and communicating high expectations in regards to academic performance. Keith shared, "It should be option of doing well in school. It should be mandatory. If parents set high expectations when their son(s) first start school, then by the time they get to high school they will already know what is expected of them." Cameron agreed with Keith stating, "Kids should know what is expected of them at home. This needs to be drilled into their heads from the start." Elijah stressed the role of the parent in their son(s) academic success when he stated, "I agree that parents should set high standards and motivate their child to succeed. They shouldn't settle for low grades [and] make them work for higher grades." Similarly, Charles shared, "Parents are the first teachers and if they don't believe in their kids then who will."

The second question asked to the student participants was: "In what ways, if any, can schools and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors, or administrators) help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males? Two subthemes emerged: (a) support for all Black students, and (b) create partnerships with Black parents.

Support for all Black students. The participants shared that schools could increase the academic success of at-risk, urban African-American males by supporting all Black students. Several of the participants shared that at their high schools not all Black students are supported. In their opinion, only the smart Black students get support and receive positive attention from the school staff. Ethan shared,

Don't just show attention to the smart kids. The teachers should show attention to all kids. The ones that are failing are the ones that need the most help. They just don't know how to ask for it or they feel that no one cares about them anyway because they are not one of the high achieving students.

Cameron shared,

At my school, I notice that a lot of the black boys are kicked out of class so they spend the whole period just walking around campus causing problems or smoking weed in the bathrooms. I think that if they get kicked out [of class] they should have to go somewhere to do work instead of just walking around. Does anyone care?

Support for the low performing African-American males should go beyond reacting to bad behavior. Schools need to be proactive to reduce misbehavior and to build self-efficacy.

Rodney share the same sentiments when he stated,

Maybe the schools can start a program where Black male college students can come on campus and work with Black boys who are struggling with school or having other problems. I think this would help because then they will see college students that look like them and maybe they will want to go to college.

Elijah also felt that the schools should support all black males. He stated, "They should help all students regardless of their GPA." He further stated,

How come in school all we learn about is slavery? The schools should teach about the positive things Blacks have done. My grandma always shares with me the good things that we have done in this country to make me feel proud to be Black and to motivate me to accomplish things also.

Create partnerships with Black parents. Several participants shared that at their schools there is not only a lack of support for all African-American students but there exist a lack of

support for the parents of African-American students at each school. Ethan shared, “The school needs to do something to attract more Black parents to the school. I know that they have groups for the Mexican parents but I don’t think that there is a group for the Black parents to voice their opinions. I don’t think that is fair.” Charles added, “I know, I always notice that whenever there are conferences or Open House, I always see the Mexican parents but never the Blacks. It was the same in elementary and middle school.” Rodney further stated, “I agree. But I think that the schools should also have classes for African-American parents. The classes should help them with information about college, parenting classes, and just a place where they can meet and share ideas with each other on what is working for them.”

The third question asked to the student participants was: “In what ways, if any, can communities help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males? Two subthemes emerged: (a) increase in park and recreation programs, and (b) provide resources.

Increase in community programs. When participants were asked to make recommendations in regards to the community’s efforts to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African-American males, responses emphasized the importance of not only an increase in community programs, but effective community programs. Ethan noted, “Members of the community need to create programs for us [African-American males]. These programs should center on academics, like tutoring programs.” Charles shared, “Besides tutoring programs, the parks or community centers can sponsor college tours.” Elijah stated,

It would be awesome to have after school programs at every park that was staffed with college students and parents where kids could go and do their homework. The more people that are at the parks the fewer gangsters and drug dealers there would be hanging out there. This would make the parks safer and more families and students would come.

It would be like we are taking back our parks from the thugs. This could be done if the leaders wanted to make it happen.

Cameron went further and stated,

My grandmother always says that it takes a village to raise a child. So the people of the community should take responsibility of every Black male to ensure that they don't end up dealing drugs or joining a gang. They should speak up and demand programs to keep kids off the streets. An example of these programs could be fieldtrips to colleges, or big brother mentor programs.

Reduce crime. All participants' responses in some way or another alluded to the need to reduce crime in the city or to beautify the city. Rodney shared, "The first thing that needs to be done is that the city needs to get rid of all the crime. On the way home from school I always see people selling drugs or prostitutes standing on the corner. No matter what resources are available in the community no one will go if they are scared to go out." Cameron agreed with Rodney's statement and further added,

With the drug dealing going on in the community and the prostitution, being a pimp or a drug dealer is a goal for a lot of the boys in the hood. There has to be something done about this. The police needs to work with community members to try and clean up the streets. Maybe they can start a program with community volunteers or hire more police officers.

Contrary to the beliefs of Cameron and Rodney, Keith shared,

No matter what the cops do it is up to the people living in the community. They are the ones committing the crimes. Each neighborhood needs to step up and do something. The

police should support the people and provide them with the resources they need. But it is up to the members of the community to end the crime in their communities.

Summary of Key Findings

The 11 high school African-American males who participated in this study ranged in age from 14 to 18 years old. All of the participants possessed a GPA above a 3.0 with two having a GPA above a 4.0 and they all had aspirations of attending a 4-year university upon their completion of high school.

In response to question one, the student responses to the demographic questionnaire suggest that there were several factors that placed the participants at-risk for underachieving academically. These factors were living in poverty, parents' educational level, residing in a violent community, and peer pressure. One of these factors in isolation does not equate to academic underachievement, but the combination of all of them can make the academic outcomes for urban African-American males bleak.

In response to question two, the narratives of each participant revealed six themes that they felt contributed to their academic success. The themes that emerged were peers as a support group, supportive family, school engagement, support from school, neighborhood violence, and community engagement. Within each theme, subthemes emerged. The sub-themes that emerged for peers as a support group were competition to get good grades, and valuing the importance of school. All of the participants in this study reported that their peers served as a support group for them in various forms. Nine of the participants reported that they competed with their friends for grades. For these high-achieving African –American males, competing with their friends pushed them to do better in school because they wanted to outperform their peers. In terms of valuing school, six of the participants reported that their immediate peer group valued education, for

several of the participants' school was valued because a good education provides these high-achieving African-American males an opportunity to leave the hood. Three participants reported that even though they associated with their high-achieving friends, they had a group of friends that did not value school and two participants reported that their peer group did not value education.

The sub-themes that emerged for supportive family were other relatives, having high expectations, and personal narratives. For some of the participants ($n = 9$), kinship networks served as an extra source of support. While for other participants ($n = 2$), kinship networks served as the only source of support. Regardless of the level of involvement, a network of relatives provided support, structure, and guidance for these high achieving African American males. The network of relatives included aunts, siblings, and grandparents who made it a priority that these African American males were successful in school.

All of the participants reported that their parents or guardians set and communicated high expectations in regards to academic performance. However, the parents or guardians high expectations for their high achieving African American sons were not only focused on grades for some of the participants, their parents also expected them to enroll in Honors and AP courses. Six of the 11 high achieving African-American male participants in this study stated that their parents, guardians, or other relatives used personal stories to motivate them to succeed in school.

The sub-themes that emerged for school engagement were participation in sports, getting good grades, and having positive relationships with teachers. All of the high-achieving African-American male students in this study stated that they participated in extracurricular activities. These activities included sports, organizations, and clubs. Participating in extracurricular activities helped these high achieving African-American males academically by requiring them

to maintain a certain GPA. Not only did participating in extracurricular activities help these high achieving African-American males maintain a high GPA, it taught them how to transfer the lessons learned from playing a sport or participating in a club to the classroom. At times when things became difficult in the classroom many of the participants were able to persevere and become successful similar to playing a sport.

All of the high achieving African-American males that participated in this study aspired to get good grades. Several of the participants set goals for themselves at the beginning of each grading period and others take it as a personal challenge to do better than they did the previous quarter.

The academic resilient Black male students who participated in this study created strong relationships with their teachers. These bonds provided them extra time to complete assignments, personal tutoring, and important information. These benefits allowed high-achieving African-American males to negotiate the struggles of being a student, participation in sports, and the dangers in their community.

The sub-themes that emerged for support from school were teachers having high expectations and being caring and nurturing. The Black males in this study believed that their teachers had a positive impact on their lives and appreciated that their teachers held them to higher expectations than they did for other students. Furthermore, for some of the students their teachers served as confidants that provided support and guidance.

The sub-theme that emerged for neighborhood violence was the ability to resist peer pressure. Even though the high achieving African-American males in this study lived in a community where drug abuse, murders, and gang violence are common and has claimed the lives

of many young black males, none of the participants reported having a criminal record. They all have been able to resist the peer pressure and the temptations of the streets.

The sub-themes that emerged from community engagement were community relationships and participation in church. Five of the student participants mentioned their relationships with people within their community that has contributed to their academic success despite the adversity they face on a daily basis. While several of the participants stated that they did not have a relationship with anyone in their community nor did they have any role models within their community.

Participation in church served as a protective factor for many of the participants. Church provided a spiritual guidance that helped them to overcome the adversities they faced in their everyday lives. Also church placed them in an environment with young adults who shared the same values as they do.

Responses to research question three revealed two major themes that described the resilience of the African-American male participants. Within the two themes, autonomy and problem solving skills four sub-themes; control over the future, planning for the future, strong belief in self, and being resourceful/taking initiative emerged. The narratives from the participants revealed that they all had an inner drive that pushed them to succeed in the face of adversity. Furthermore, they did not use their current circumstances as a reason why they could not succeed.

In response to question four, the participants discussed what they believed parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities could do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males. Based on their narratives, the three major themes; parents, school, and community

emerged. Within each theme, subthemes emerged. The sub-theme that emerged for parents were reward good grades, communicates the importance of school and grades, and has high expectations. During the focus group discussion several students mentioned that being rewarded for their hard work motivated them to work harder at school and parents should try rewarding their son(s) for their hard work as a way of motivating them to do better in school.

All of the participants agreed that at-risk urban African-American males would benefit from having parents or someone in their lives discuss the importance of grades and school and that the educational level of the parents should not hinder them in having these conversations with their sons.

In terms of setting high expectations, the participants shared that parents could foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males by setting and communicating high expectations in regards to academic performance.

For school, the sub-themes that emerged were; support for all Black students and create partnerships with Black parents. The participants shared that schools could increase the academic success of at-risk, urban African-American males by supporting all Black students. Several of the participants shared that at their high schools not all Black students are supported. In their opinion, only the smart Black students get support and receive positive attention from the school staff.

In regards to the parents, several participants shared that at their schools there is not only a lack of support for all African-American students but there exist a lack of support for the parents of African-American students.

The sub-themes that emerged for the community were; increase community programs and reduce crime. When participants were asked to make recommendations in regards to the

community's efforts to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African-American males, responses emphasized the importance of not only an increase in community programs, but effective community programs. The participants felt that these programs should focus on academics, like tutoring programs. All participants' responses in some way or another had alluded to the need to reduce crime in the city or to beautify the city. However, one participant felt that it is up to the residence of the community and not the cops to step up and take a stand against the criminals in the community.

Chapter 4 illustrated the findings and narratives from 11 at-risk, high achieving African-American males. The narratives of each participant described the environmental factors that contributed to their academic success. Chapter 5 will discuss study findings and conclusions linked to present literature and emergent themes. Furthermore, Chapter 5 will present recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

The final chapter of this study will present a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications, recommendations for further study, and will end with a chapter summary.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of high achieving, at risk African American male students from three Southern California urban high school with regards to (a) the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, (b) the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success, (c) the characteristics that best describe their resiliency, and (d) what they believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males. The use of the ecological systems theory provides the theoretical framework through which the protective factors in resiliency that have contributed to the development and school success of at risk Black males will be examined. This framework considers a broad range of variables within the students' social environment to help identify the protective factors which contribute to positive student outcomes (Fraser, 2004). Thus, this framework can be used to identify the *protective factors* or those conditions that foster resiliency in at risk high school Black male students.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What factors place high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools most at-risk for under-achieving academically?

2. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success?
3. 3) Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience?
4. What do high achieving; at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?

Research Design Overview

Minimal research exists that explores the perspectives of African American male students in urban settings who have *beaten the odds* and succeeded academically. Therefore, an urgent need exists to learn more about what students perceive to be the factors that place them at risk of academic under-achievement and the environmental protective factors that contribute to their resiliency. As such, a qualitative approach was selected for this study because the goal of the researcher was to learn from the participants about: the risk factors that challenge their academic success, the environmental protective factors that foster their resilience, and the characteristics of a resilient child that they possess. Morse and Richardson (2002) state that

if the purpose is to learn from the participants in a setting or process the way they experience it, the meaning they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience, you need methods that will allow you to discover and do justice to their perceptions and the complexity of their interpretations. (p. 28)

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to describe and explain the particular phenomenon being investigated. This qualitative study used individual, focus-group, and a demographic questionnaire to gather data from the participants. The participants for this study were comprised of 11 urban African-American high school males who met the below criteria:

1. Be an African American male high school students
2. Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. Enrolled in A-G courses
4. Come from a family in which the parent(s)/guardian has not graduated from college
5. Qualify for free or reduced lunch

Nine major themes emerged from an analysis of the responses of the study participants: peers as a support groups, supportive family, school engagement, support from school, neighborhood violence, community engagement, autonomy, problem solving skills, promoting resilience to increase academic success among at-risk urban African-American males. The following section provides an in depth discussion of the themes as they relate to the guiding research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one. What factors place high achieving, African American male students in three Southern California urban high schools most at-risk for under-achieving academically?

The student participant demographic form indicated three factors that placed high achieving, African American male students at-risk for under-achieving academically. The three factors included: low socioeconomic status, race and gender, and parental educational background.

Results from the Demographic Questionnaire revealed that all participants met the criteria for being at or below federal poverty guidelines. Living in poverty affects every aspect of their lives. Children that live in poverty are more likely to live in communities with limited resources, lack of positive male role models, and schools with sub-par teachers and facilities (Coley, 2011; Lewis & Eunhee, 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Consequently, this leads to limited opportunities for the young Black men residing in the community. Research substantiates the effect that living in poverty has on the healthy development both psychological and physiological on children of color. Furthermore, research has shown that “growing up in chronic poverty contributes directly to stress at a level that can affect children’s health, brain development, and social and emotional well-being” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014. p. 3).

Another finding from the Demographic Questionnaire that placed the participants at-risk for under-achieving academically was the mere fact that they are Black males. Being male, Black, living in a poor household or a single-parent household are characteristics that have been identified as risk factors for low achievement (Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Valden, 1990). Furthermore, African American males are more likely to; not be placed in gifted programs, classified as mentally retarded, not be represented in AP classes, be suspended from school, and are at a higher risk of being expelled from school.

A common factor that is frequently cited as a cause for high African-American male dropout rates is low parental educational levels (Ingrum, 2006; Hunt & Colander, 2011). Combining low parental educational levels with other factors creates a prescription for dropping out of school. Parents with low educational levels are more than likely to have limited access to jobs that offer career advancement which leads to limited resources (Hunt & Colander, 2011).

Research question two. What environmental protective factors do high achieving, at-risk, African American males in three Southern California urban high schools identify as contributing to their resilience and academic success?

A major finding in regards to question two was that all of the participants in the current study possessed a network of internal and external protective factors that served as agents in fostering their academic resiliency. These support agents aided in fostering positive outcomes for these Black males when faced with difficulty in and out of school. More specifically, these males all possessed at least one person either at home, at school, or in the community who served as a positive support agent in their lives (Benard, 2007; Pollard, 1989; Reis, Colbert, & Herbert, 2005). In this current study, the network of support for the participants consisted of peers, family, extracurricular activities, support from school, and the community.

Peers. For the African American male participants, their peers served as a member of their supportive network. Their peers motivated them to succeed and persevere academically through competition to get good grades. Many of the participants shared that they often compared scores with each other.

For many high achieving Black males, their academic success is seen as an anomaly and they are frequently ridiculed by their peers and accused of acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Grantham & Ford, 2003). However, hanging out with other African American males that are equally gifted provided a safe place for them to be themselves (Conchas, 2006; Harper, 2006; Datnow & Cooper 1997). Within the group, these young males competed to get good grades, reinforcing their value of education without fear of being ridiculed or being accused of acting White.

For two of the participants, competition to get good grades did not play a role in their academic resilience. What was interesting in the findings for these two young males was their ability to maintain two identities. While in school, they were able to play the role of the smart kid by getting good grades and avoiding trouble. However, once school was over, they were able to cross-over to their group of friends where academics weren't emphasized or even cared about. For them, it was necessary to maintain a friendship with the *other* group of African American males in their neighborhood to avoid being accused of thinking they were better because of their academic success.

Family. All of the Black male participants discussed the importance their family played in contributing to their academic success. Participants shared that their family supported them in various ways. They shared stories, rewarded academic success, and set high expectations.

For some of the participants, extended family members contributed to their academic success. At times, these extended family members provided support with homework, caregiving, and communicating the importance of an education.

Extra-curricular activities. All participants were involved in extracurricular activities including athletic teams and clubs. For the participants, involvement in sports and clubs fostered resilience, self-esteem, and confidence. The Black males in this study were able to transfer the skill of overcoming adversity during an athletic competition to the classroom (J. Hawkins et al. 1992). In addition, coaches served as mentors that provided support, guidance, and encouragement (Richardson, 2012).

Support from school. All of the males in this study discussed the need of having a personal relationship with several adults within the school. For some of the Black male participants, some of the teachers served as a mother or father figure. Teacher classrooms served

as a second home where the participants often hung out and received advice and motivation. Furthermore, race was not explicitly mentioned by any of the participants. Whether the teacher was Black or White, as long as they cared for these Black males and set high expectations for them, they were respected and seen as a mentor.

Community engagement. The community and its members served as a network of support for the Black male participants of the current study. Despite living in poverty stricken neighborhoods filled with violence, several of the participants were able to develop strong interpersonal relationships with several members of their community. These members of the community fostered resilience by: (a) communicating high expectations, (b) providing positive feedback, and (c) providing assistance in career goals and college information.

In regards to community based organizations, the church played a major role in fostering academic resilience. Several of the participants cited that their belief in God is what helped to motivate them to succeed and that the church provided a safe place for them to hang out with peers that had the same beliefs and values as they did.

Research question three. Which characteristics do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools report as best describing their resilience?

Given the obstacles that many urban African American males have to navigate through to be successful in school, one might assume that these males have given upon their future. However, findings from the current study suggest the opposite. Specifically, believing that they possess control over their future kept them focused on their goal to succeed. However, for two of the participants, cultural stereotypes influenced how much control they believed that they had over their future success. Though many African American males succeed academically, there is

still a belief that others have control over their fate. This belief of not having complete control of your own destiny may also be a reason why so many urban Black males are disengaged from school which leads to them underperforming academically. This is similar to the findings of Datnow and Cooper (1997). They found that low income African American students did not buy into the idea that hard work is rewarded. These students believed that regardless of how hard they work, they will not be allowed to move higher in American society and that school success equated to failure within their peer group. This belief could stem from the fact that when they look at their community very few people have succeeded. This finding is similar to the findings of Mickelson's (1990) study of achievement attitudes between Black and White students. She states that "Working-class and minority youths have parents, older siblings, and neighbors whose real-world experiences challenge the myth that education equals opportunity for all" (p.59). She further shared a story from a former student that illustrates the pessimism Blacks have about the opportunity that comes with getting an education:

Larry, a young black man enrolled at UCLA, walked into a local bank and spotted Antoine, a friend from high school, who was working as the security guard. They exchanged greetings. Antoine asked Larry how he was doing. Larry complained that he was exhausted from working full time to support himself while carrying a full load at UCLA. "Why are you working so hard?" laughed Antoine. "You're gonna end up as a security guard like me, but you'll just lose your hair sooner" (Mickelson, 1990. p.59).

Furthermore, a testament to the resilience of these young African-American males was their ability to solve problems. More specifically, they were able to be resourceful when faced with adversity. Benard (1991) describes a resilient child as one who is socially competent, an effective problem solver, autonomous, and has a sense of meaning and purpose that is able to

navigate through a web of adversity. Findings of this study are consistent with Benard's description of a resilient child. Several of the participants purposely selected certain teachers to build meaningful relationships with in order to promote their academic success. For them, they were navigating through a system and using the resources necessary to be academically successful.

Research question four. What do high achieving, at-risk, African American male students from three Southern California urban high schools believe that parents or guardians, schools and school employees (i.e., teachers counselors and administrators), and communities can do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males?

The responses from the focus group participants suggested several recommendations to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males. The recommendations fell under three themes: parents, school, and the community.

Parents. When the participants were asked what they believe parents or guardians could do to increase the academic achievement of urban at-risk African American males, student participants had several recommendations. One was that parents should provide rewards for good grades. It appeared that for the participants of the current study, receiving gifts and other extrinsic rewards provided an extra form of motivation.

Another recommendation was the importance for parents to communicate the importance of school and getting good grades. The participants believed that it would be beneficial to all African American males if they had a parent or another relative discuss the importance of grades. However, what was interesting in the participant's recommendation was that none of the participants mentioned that parents should spend more time at their child's school. It was apparent that these young men understood that parent involvement doesn't necessarily mean that

parents have to be present on campus for every event. They understood that at many times parents in urban communities, because of economic hardships, struggle to provide the essential needs for a family so they are forced to work two or more jobs or work double shifts. This often leads to them missing out on school functions and identified by school staff as being a non-involved parent because of their non-traditional forms of parent involvement (Mapp, 2002).

The last recommendation for parents was the need to set high expectations. Participants noted that parents need to set high expectations early so that by the time their sons reach high school, they will already know what is expected of them.

Schools. When the participants were asked what they believed schools and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors and administrators) could do to increase the academic achievement of urban, at-risk African American males, student participants expressed the need for schools to provide support for all Black students and to create partnerships with Black parents. Specifically, the participant responses alluded to the lack of empathy and support teachers showed towards low-performing African American male students. An explanation to why teachers often neglect this group of young men may be because they have been influenced by the message as to how society presents African American males. African American males are stereotyped as being dangerous, uneducable, and dysfunctional (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992). The belief in these stereotypes by school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors and administrators) affects their ability to nurture and build relationships with these young men which lead the males to become disengaged with academics (Hooks, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Steele, 1999).

In regards to parents, student participants mentioned the lack of support the school's provided for African-American parents. In their opinion, the schools focused on attracting the

parents of the Latin students but did very little to address the needs of Black students and their families. The lack of identification with academics or school culture displayed by African American males can be a result of the way their parents are treated by the school system. If their parents do not feel welcomed or included in the school's decision making process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) then there is a possibility that they pass their negative feelings about school to their children.

Community. When asked what the community could do to increase the academic achievement of urban, at-risk African-American males, participants responded with having access to effective community programs. For example, the participants discussed the need for tutoring programs, and community center sponsored college tours

Conclusions

Four conclusions were drawn from the findings: First, it takes a network of supportive individuals. Second, extracurricular programs were integral in promoting academic resilience for at-risk, urban African-American males. Third, the church was a contributing factor in fostering the academic success of the at-risk African American male youth in this study. Fourth, the participants possessed a unique set of personality traits, beliefs and temperaments (i.e., social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose) that has led to their academic success.

It takes a network of supportive individuals. Based on the comments of the participants, one can conclude that in order for at-risk, urban African American males to persevere through challenges, there must be a network of supportive individuals to provide guidance. For the participants of the current study, their network consisted of parents or guardians, peers, teachers, and the community.

Parents or guardians served as a source encouragement and motivation. Furthermore, it appears that parents or guardians who established meaningful relationships with their sons were able to motivate them to succeed in school. The use of storytelling in the form of personal narratives was a way that the parents or guardians of the participants built meaningful relationships with their sons and aided in motivating their sons as they persevered through adversity. The personal narratives served as constant reminders to stay focused and helped them to understand that the sacrifices made today will eventually pay off in the future. This finding is consistent with studies that connected familial support to the academic achievement of African American students (Roderick, 2003).

Contrary to Chen's (2008) findings that low-income parents are less likely to be involved in school, findings from the current study confirms previous research that found low-income parents do care about education and are involved in their child's education (Mapp, 2002). Further research has found that parent involvement had a positive influence on student morale and academic achievement (Yan, 1999). Based on the comments by the participants, it appeared that the expectations of their parents fostered a sense of personal responsibility to succeed for the young men. Furthermore, these findings suggest that even when faced with adversity, when there is an expectation of excellence urban Black males are more likely than not to succeed academically. These findings are consistent with the findings of Mandara (2006) who found that African American parents who used effective parenting practices such as: (a) monitoring homework, (b) limited nonproductive and destructive activities, and (c) sustained positive communication with teachers and other school staff increased the probability that their sons would succeed in school.

Many of the participants lived in a home with one parent or either the mother or the father was periodically absent. However, regardless of the family structure as long as there was a caring adult to motivate the Black male participants; they were able to succeed in school. Previous research has shown that the composition of the family has no significant relationship to the success or failure of at-risk students (Peng et al., 1992). Living with two parents, one parent, or another family configuration did not necessarily affect the level of resiliency in students. Instead, family bonding and positive parent-child relationships served as protective factors from the environment.

For at-risk, urban African American males their peers had a major influence on their academic achievement (Ford, 1995; Walker, 2006). In fact, there is research that suggests African American male peer groups often serve as positive peer support groups that acknowledge and celebrate achievement (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Walker, 2006). The strength and support, especially emotional and physical support, that African American youths found in their peers promoted resilience. These characteristics are essential for African American youth because of the problems they face in their environment and school.

Teachers played an important role in motivating and fostering resilience in the lives of urban Black adolescents. These present findings are consistent with other research that found that school personnel are essential in fostering resilience, improving the behavior and academics of at-risk students. At-risk students who have a positive relationship with a school staff member are likely to be more engaged in school (Ferguson, 2002); are highly motivated and possess a positive attitude towards learning (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hambre, 2002); and invest more time in studying and earn better grades (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000).

Though the participants all agreed that they had positive relationships with their teachers, they were aware that there were many Black males at their respective schools that didn't have positive relationships with their teachers. It appeared that only the high achieving African American males received extra support while the low achieving African American males were often neglected. An explanation to why teachers often neglected this group of young men may be because they have been influenced by the message as to how society presents African American males. African American males are stereotyped as being dangerous, uneducable, and dysfunctional (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992). The belief in these stereotypes by school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors and administrators) affects their ability to nurture and build relationships with these young men which lead the males to become disengaged with academics (Hooks, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Steele, 1999).

The lack of identification with academics or school culture displayed by African American males can be a result of the way their parents are treated by the school system. Based on the responses of the participants, schools did not do enough to make Black parents feel welcomed at school. If their parents do not feel welcomed or included in the school's decision making process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) then there is a possibility that they pass their negative feelings about school to their children.

A connection exists between the community, school, and family. The community can play a major role in promoting resilience in at-risk urban African American males (Barrow, Armstrong, Vargo, & Boothroyd, 2007). For at-risk, high achieving African American males, there is a need for support that goes beyond the classroom and into the community (Conchas, 2006; Grantham, 2004).

Several participants reported that they had formed a supportive relationship with someone within the community that has provided them with guidance and has motivated them to succeed academically. However, six of the participants reported that the community was not an influential factor in their academic success. The lack of mentors or other influences available in the community may be a result of the high levels of crime, gang violence, and drug trafficking. It can be concluded that the lack of influences available within the community caused the participants to withdraw from the community.

Extracurricular programs were integral in promoting academic resilience for at-risk, urban African-American males. All participants reported that they were involved in extracurricular activities and that their participation in extracurricular activities had a positive influence on their academics, and their behavior. More specifically, one participant mentioned that the GPA requirement to participate in athletics is what pushed him to maintain good grades. Another participant reported that participating in a mentoring program helped him with his organizational skills.

One can conclude that participating in extracurricular programs provided the Black male participants; (a) access to positive role models, (b) taught them how to handle adversity, and (c) provided a safe place for Black males to hang out after school. Several researchers have concluded that participation in extracurricular activities; tutoring, mentoring or athletic teams promotes resiliency and mitigates risks (Harper, 2006; J. Hawkins et al., 1992; Hebert, 1998; Spencer et al., 2003).

The church was a contributing factor in fostering academic success. Several of the participants expressed their affiliation with the church. For them, the church provided: (a) a faith-based environment where at-risk African-American males could interact with other males that

shared their same values, (b) after-school tutoring and other programs, and (c) access to positive role models.

Research has shown a positive relationship between religion and academic achievement. In a study examining the religious socialization and educational attainment of 921 Black adults, Brown and Gary (1991) concluded that when a person embodies and conducts themselves based on the attitudes, behaviors, and values of their religion, their religion has a positive influence on educational outcomes. They further concluded that religion socialization had a larger influence on educational attainment than belonging to a close knit family, family structure, or affiliation to a particular denomination.

In a study examining the influence of the Black church on the family, school, and community, Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) reported that educational programs was one of the three most sponsored community outreach programs by the church. They further concluded that the Black church plays an important role in encouraging and assisting Blacks with education by providing tutoring and scholarships. Furthermore, they assert that African American families continue to rely on the church to help create relationships with schools to foster academic excellence with their kids.

The participants possessed a unique set of personality traits, beliefs and temperament that has led to their academic success. All of the participants related their academic success to having good work habits, creating and maintaining a good relationship with their teachers, not giving in to peer-pressure, and possessing good behavioral and social skills. Their responses provided evidence of social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. Several researchers have concluded that the above mentioned traits are attributes of resilient individuals (Benard, 1993; Garmezy et al., 1984; Werner, 1985). Similarly,

Lee (1985) concluded that specific characteristics existed among academically successful African American adolescents between the eighth and 12th grades. Lee considered the characteristics as being internal and central to the student. Some of the characteristics that he found included, realistic future orientation, relationships with positive role models, possess high educational goals, positive view of self, accountable for their actions, strong internal locus of control. Lee's findings indicate that there are a set of identifiable characteristics of academically successful students. These characteristics appear to operate as protective factors for these students.

Characteristics of social competence are flexibility, empathy, communication skills, and a sense of humor. The participants reported their ability to effectively communicate with their teachers helped them to succeed academically. One participant shared that his teachers allowed him to make-up tests or gave him extra time to complete assignments because he informed them ahead of time when he had a football game or when he wasn't able to finish an assignment because of his dysfunctional home environment.

Being resourceful in seeking help was a skill that helped the participants in their academic pursuit. The participants shared that they specifically sought out certain teachers to build relationships with that would help them succeed academically. Two other participants spoke of the difficulties that they faced living with a parent that was addicted to drugs.

Each participant demonstrated having a sense of purpose. All of the participants were driven to obtain a college degree. They spoke of wanting to be the first person in their families to graduate from college and to be a role model to their siblings and other African American males in their community. All of the participants were goal oriented and believed that there was nothing that would stop them from reaching their goals.

Implications

Parents. This study produced findings that have clear implications for parents or guardians of urban Black at-risk students. Based on the findings, it is imperative that parents or guardians seek out opportunities to be involved in their child's education. The responses from the current study participants illustrated the parenting practices that helped to foster academic resilience. These findings were: (a) set high expectations for their child, (b) communicate the importance of school and obtaining good grades, and (c) recognize their child's efforts by rewarding achievement. Furthermore, though not stated by the participants, parents can also increase family support systems, promote participation in clubs or community organizations, and seek positive male role models.

Schools. The findings of this study are of interest for schools that serve at-risk, urban African-American males. Schools need to focus on ways to improve the learning environment for at-risk African-American males rather than the current practice of focusing on the under achievement of African-American males. Furthermore, schools need to do more to recruit and reward teachers to become advisors, mentors, or role models. The students in the study discussed the importance of having meaningful relationships with their teachers and based on the findings of this study these relationships were crucial in promoting educational resilience among the at-risk, urban African-American male participants.

Though counselors were not mentioned by the participants as a school member that they have built a relationship with, school counselors, who often serve as advocates and advisors (Constantine, 2002) can play an important role in promoting educational resilience in at-risk, urban African-American males. With input from various stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, and administrators), counselors could design and implement programs designed to increase

resiliency. Such interventions should focus on programs that teach strategies to help at-risk Black males overcome adversity, and create and maintain positive relationships with adults on campus.

Another implication is the need for schools to create family-school-community partnerships to increase opportunities for school success for student's (Bryan, 2009). Based on the findings of the current study it would be advantageous for schools to create partnerships with churches and other organizations to engage families from low-income who often feel that they do not have a voice in the creation of policy and procedures at their child's school. The implementation of ROP programs could be used as a vehicle to engage the above mentioned families. ROP programs are centered around culture with a focus on the strengths of marginalized youth. There are several components to an effective ROP program: positive role models, cultural and personal identity development, high expectations, community involvement, an emphasis on purpose and achievement, and a safe and supportive environment. ROP programs possess essential resilience factors for Black males at three key levels: familial, community, and educational. ROP programs provide support for families, serve as a connector between churches, community agencies and organizations, and provide tutoring (West-Olantunji et al., 2008).

Community. The findings of this study are of interest to community leaders and community-based organizations. This study found that extracurricular programs were integral in promoting academic resilience for at-risk, urban African-American males. Participating in extracurricular programs provided Black males: (a) access to positive role models, (b) taught them how to handle adversity, and (c) provided a safe place for Black males to hang out after school. It is imperative that urban communities provide programs that are academic based and

include structured activities that promote social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and sense of meaning and purpose.

These programs should also focus on reducing risk factors that are present in the community as well as promoting positive factors. Furthermore, community organizations need to create partnerships with schools, parents, and churches to increase the network of support available to at-risk, urban Black males.

Recommendation for Future Research

The academic underachievement of African American students has been a topic of concern among researchers for decades (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Osborne, 1999). Unfortunately, minimal research exists that explores the perspectives of African American male students in urban settings who have *beaten the odds* and succeeded academically with scarce economic and social resources (Richman et al., 2004). Less is known about the positive impact environmental protective factors has on the everyday lives of African American males (Barbarin, 1993; Byfield, 2008). The current study helps to fill the void by examining the protective factors that promoted academic resilience in a group of at-risk, urban African-American high school males. The findings of the current study suggest that protective factors within the home, school, and community promoted academic resilience for at-risk, urban African-American males. However, these findings have some limitations. There is a need to further explore the protective factors that mitigate at-risk factors using a larger sample size. A larger sample size would produce more findings that could be used to make greater generalizations. Another type of future research could include studying African-American males from other urban areas or from rural areas. It would also be valuable for additional research to be conducted at the elementary and middle school level to identify the protective factors that prove to be more beneficial during the

developmental stages. Parents of the current study participants had higher aspirations for their sons and the parents shared these aspirations through sharing personal narratives or storytelling. The participants of this current study saw this storytelling as a way of motivating them to succeed academically. Additional research in the use of personal narratives or storytelling by parents or guardians to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males would help to further shed light on ways to motivate urban, African American males.

Chapter Summary

African American high school male students in the United States are under-achieving academically compared to their peers. The majority of these young men live in urban settings in which they are in a battle on a daily basis to overcome adverse conditions and continuously these adverse conditions place African American males at-risk for poor educational achievement.

Despite facing adversity, some African American male high school youth do achieve academically and display academic resiliency. Resilient African American male high school youth demonstrate competence, independence, an internal locus of control, and feeling of empowerment, and social competence (Benard, 1993; Ford, 1994). Yet, minimal research exists that explores the perspectives of African American male students in urban settings who have *beaten the odds* and succeeded academically. To address this gap in research, the current study explored the environmental factors that fostered academic resilience among at-risk, urban African-American high school males. These young men shared their stories to provide a deeper understanding of how the role of the family, school, and community mitigated the at-risk factors they face day to day and contributed to their academic success.

The results of this study highlighted the need of a cluster of protective factors and a network of support ensures that at-risk, urban African-American high school males are

academically successful. Research such as this, is important to shed light on how at-risk, urban Black males were able to beat the odds.

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APPENDIX A:

Letter to Parents

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Patrick Booker, and I am a doctoral student in Education at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology. I am also an employee in [REDACTED] School District. I am currently a Curriculum Specialist at [REDACTED] Elementary School. I have been employed with [REDACTED] School District for 10 years. This letter is to inform you that a research project is being conducted at the three high schools in [REDACTED] School District as part of a doctoral dissertation. Your child is invited to participate in this research project because he meets the following criteria:

1. Be African American male high school students
2. Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. Enrolled in A-G courses
4. Come from a family in which the parent(s)/guardian has not graduated from college
5. Qualify for free/reduced lunch

Students that participate in this study will participate in two interviews; an individual interview and a group interview with the rest of the participants. Both interviews will take approximately one hour. The individual interviews will take place afterschool or on the weekend at school, home, or the library. All interviews will be audio-taped to ensure accuracy of the data collected.

The interview will consist of questions that will ask students about the level of academic support they receive from their family, their relationship with friends, their community (mentors, coaches, sports or club involvements, religious affiliation, etc.), and school. The results from this study will help educators, policy makers, and school counselors to understand how urban, at-risk, African American males overcome multiple risk factors to become academically successful. Furthermore the results may lead to the development and implementation of successful policies, interventions, and practices to support urban, at-risk, African American male students' academic success.

Your child's name will be kept confidential and no one will know that your child is participating in this study. At any time during the study your child can remove himself from the study. All audio-tapes and interview notes will be kept in a secure location and destroyed at the end of the study.

Students who are 18 years of age may sign their own consent form. If you allow your child to participate in the study, please sign the consent form and return it to your child's counselor. If you do not want your child to participate in this study, you do not need to do anything. Your child will not be penalized for not participating in the study.

If you should have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the researcher, Patrick Booker at [REDACTED] or Dr. Linda Purrington at [REDACTED].

Should you have any questions in regards to your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact Dr. Leigh at [REDACTED]

Thank you,

Patrick Booker

APPENDIX B:

Parent Consent Form

PARENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience among a Group of At-Risk, High Achieving, African American Males in a Southern California School District

Researcher: Patrick Booker

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Linda Purrington

Introduction:

Your child is being asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Patrick Booker for a doctoral dissertation at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University.

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he meets the following criteria:

1. Be African American male high school students
2. Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. Enrolled in A-G courses
4. Come from a family in which the parent(s)/guardian has not graduated from college
5. Qualify for free/reduced lunch

All African American males at the three high schools in Horizon Unified School District that meet the above criteria will be asked to participate.

Purpose:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of high achieving, at risk African American male students from three Southern California urban high school with regards to (a) the factors that make them at-risk for poor academic achievement, (b) the protective factors that contribute to their resilience and academic success and, (c) the characteristics that best describe their resiliency.

Procedure:

If you allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be asked to participate in two interviews; an individual interview and a group interview with the rest of the participants. Both interviews will take approximately one hour. The individual interviews will take place after school in a private office. The interviews will consist of questions that will ask students about the level of academic support they receive from their family, their relationship with friends, their community (mentors, coaches, sports or club involvements, religious affiliation, etc.), and school.

Risk/Benefits:

Care will be taken to protect the emotional safety of each participant. Because of the possibility that the interviews may elicit discussion pertaining to painful life experiences, the researcher will

not introduce any sensitive topics that are not relevant to the study, however all participants are free to stop answering questions at any time. The benefit to participating in this study is that the perspectives of the high achieving African American males interviewed will be shared with district leaders which may lead to the implementation of interventions and/or policies that promote resiliency among all at-risk African American males in the district.

Compensation:

Students will not receive any compensation for their participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The researcher will be the only person that will have access to any information provided by your child. The responses provided by your child will be kept in a password-protected file and destroyed after the study is complete. The consent and assent forms will be kept in a locked file and the researcher will only have access to this file. Your child will be given a false name. This false name will be used to identify your child and connect them to their responses.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study please place a check next to the statement “I give my child permission to participate in the study: Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience among a Group of At-Risk, High Achieving, African American Males in a Southern California School District.”

If you should have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the researcher, Patrick Booker at [REDACTED] or Dr. Linda Purrington at [REDACTED].

Should you have any questions in regards to your child’s rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact Dr. Leigh at [REDACTED].

Statement of Consent:

Please place a check on the line if you give your child permission to participate in this study.

_____ “I give my child permission to participate in the study: Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience among a Group of At-Risk, High Achieving, African American Males in a Southern California School District.”

_____ “I do not give my child permission to participate in the study: Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience among a Group of At-Risk, High Achieving, African American Males in a Southern California School District.”

Your signature on the line below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above and is consenting to allow your child to participate in this study. If you do not want your child to participate in the study, simply return this form sealed in the envelope provided. If you allow your child to participate in this study please return this form signed and sealed in the envelope provided to your child’s counselor.

Your child's name

Parent's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C:

Student Assent Form

November 10, 2012

Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience among a Group of At-Risk, High School African American Males in a Southern California School District

My name is Patrick Booker, and I am a doctoral student in Education at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology. Your parents have given me their permission to speak with you about a study I am conducting on the protective factors that has contributed to your academic success. I would like to invite you to participate in this study if you are interested. Before I explain more about the study, I want you to know that the choice to participate is completely up to you. No one is going to force you to do something you are not interested in doing. Even if you start the study and decide that you are no longer interested in continuing, just let me know and we will discontinue the study.

Let me tell you about what you will be asked to do if you decide to participate in this study. I will ask you complete a demographic questionnaire. There will be questions that ask for your sex, age, GPA, race, your parents' education level and marital status. The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

I will then conduct individual interviews that will last approximately one hour and will be audio taped to ensure accuracy. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your family, your relationship with friends, community (mentors, coaches, sports or club involvements, religious affiliation, etc.), and school.

Two weeks after the individual interviews, you will be asked to meet for a focus group interview along with the other study participants. This interview will last approximately one hour. This group interview will also be audio taped to ensure accuracy. During the group interview you will be asked to respond to the collective findings from the individual interviews to add insight and depth to the data.

The audio recordings of the interviews will be used for data-recording accuracy and all comments will be kept confidential. At the end of the study, all recordings will be destroyed.

If you get bored or tired during our meeting, just let me know, and we can take a break. If you are bothered by some of the things we talk about, let me know so we can talk about what is bothering you. Most of the time what you say to me will not be repeated to your parents unless you wish for me to do so. The only exception would be if I am convinced your parents might be helpful to you if they knew what was going on. If such information comes up, we will talk about it before I speak with your parents.

Your participation in this study may not provide information that will be helpful to you, but what is hoped is that what I find out from you may be of help in the future to others who are undergoing a similar experience.

When the results of this study are published or presented to professional audiences, the names of the people who participated in the study will not be revealed.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at [REDACTED]

You will receive a copy of this form during our individual interview.

Youth's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date assent obtained

APPENDIX D:

Student Demographic Form

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions as accurate as you can. The answers you give will be kept confidential. If you have any questions please ask the researcher, Patrick Booker.

Personal Information

Student's Alias _____ (Name given by researcher to protect identity; to be filled out by researcher).

1. Student's Name: _____
2. Nickname: _____
3. Date of Birth: _____ 4. Age: _____ 5. Sex: _____
6. Race: _____ 7. Grade: _____
8. Currently living with (Please check the one that applies to you):
 Parent (s) _____ Relatives _____ Foster Parents _____ Other _____
9. How many siblings do you have? _____

Parents/Guardians

10. Father's Name _____ 11. Occupation: _____
12. Highest Level of Education (Circle the one that applies)
 Didn't Graduate High school graduate Some College College Graduate
13. Mother's Name _____ 14. Occupation: _____
15. Highest Level of Education (Circle the one that applies)
 Didn't Graduate High school graduate Some College College Graduate
16. What do you estimate to be your families overall annual income?
 ___ less than 20,000
 ___ \$20,000-\$30,000
 ___ \$40,000-\$50,000
 ___ \$50,000-\$60,000
 ___ over \$60,000

Educational Information:

17. GPA: _____ 18. SAT or ACT scores (if applicable) _____

19. List any AP or Honors Classes that you are currently enrolled in or have taken:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

20. Special recognitions, awards, and honors:

Home and Community

21. Lives in: _____ Single Family House _____ Apartment _____ Duplex _____ Other

22. Number of people living in household _____ Number of rooms _____

23. How would you describe your neighborhood?

APPENDIX E:

Interview Confirmation

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. As a reminder we have scheduled our individual interview for [Date] at [Time] in [Location].

Attached you will find a copy of your signed Informed Assent Document for this study. The Informed Assent Document will provide you with more information about my research study.

Please contact me using the information provided in the assent document if you have any questions about the study or if you need to reschedule our meeting.

Once again, thank you for participating in my study.

Sincerely,

Patrick Booker

APPENDIX F:

Focus Group Interview Confirmation

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group interview. As a reminder we have scheduled the group interview for [Date] at [Time] in [Location].

Please contact me using the information provided in the assent document if you have any questions about the study or if you are unable to attend our meeting.

Once again, thank you for participating in my study.

Sincerely,

Patrick Booker

APPENDIX G:

Individual Interview Guide

Part I. Environmental Protective Factors*Peers*

1. How do your friends feel about school?
2. How do you encourage your friends to do well in school?
3. How do your friends encourage you to do well in school?
4. What do your friends think about students who get good grades?

Family

1. What ways does your family support you with school? Future goals?
2. In what ways does your family set high expectations for you?
3. Does your family provide a caring and encouraging environment? If so, how?

School

1. Do you think the school provides a caring and encouraging environment? In what ways?
2. Do your teachers have high expectations for you? In what ways do they show it?

Neighborhood

1. Is there anyone in the community that you look up to? If so why?
2. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Why or Why not?
3. Tell me about a time when your peers tried to talk you into a dangerous situation in your neighborhood? How did you resist the negative peer pressure?

Extra-curricular activities

1. Are you a member of a team, club or any other organization? If so which one?
2. How many hours do you spend during the week in your extra-curricular activities?
3. How has being a member of a team, club, or organization helped you academically?

Part II. Characteristics of a resilient child

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
2. What do you do if you are having trouble with your classwork? Homework?
3. Do you plan on attending college? If so, what are you doing now to prepare?
4. How much control do you have on your future success?

APPENDIX H:

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. In what ways, if any, can parents or guardians help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?
2. In what ways, if any, can schools and school employees (i.e., teachers, counselors, or administrators) help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?
3. In what ways, if any, can communities help to foster academic resilience in at-risk, urban African American males?

APPENDIX I:
IRB Approval Letter

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

March 18, 2013

Patrick Booker

Protocol #: E0203D05

Project Title: Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience Among a Group of At-Risk, High-Achieving, African American Males in a Southern California School District

Dear Mr. Booker,

Thank you for submitting your application, *Boys in the Hood: A Study of Academic Resilience Among a Group of At-Risk, High-Achieving, African American Males in a Southern California School District*, for expedited review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your advisor, Dr. Linda Purrington, completed on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR

46.110 (Research Category 7) of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

I am pleased to inform you that your application for your study was granted **Full Approval**. The IRB approval begins today, **March 18, 2013**, and terminates on **March 18, 2014**.

Your final consent form has been stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. One copy of the consent form is enclosed with this letter and one copy will be retained for our records. **You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the GPS IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.**

Please note that your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the GPS IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For **any** proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a Request for Modification form to the GPS IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond **March 18, 2014**, a **Continuation or Completion of Review Form** must be submitted at least one month prior to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our

best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to “policy material” at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

lease refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,



Doug Leigh, Ph.D.
 Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
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 Graduate School of Education & Psychology 6100
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cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives Ms. Alexandra Roosa,
 Director Research and Sponsored Programs Dr. Linda Purrington, Graduate School of Education
 and Ps

