Recipe for Resilience: Factors Contributing to Urban African American Males' Post-Secondary Academic Achievement

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

RECIPE FOR RESILIENCE: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ POST-SECONDARY ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

MELVIN THOMAS HARGRETT

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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DEDICATION

I thank God that my Dear Lord had enough faith in me to see me through the past 12 years of this journey and blessed me with a loving mother, an amazing wife along with a close, caring and understanding circle of family and dear friends. This dissertation is dedicated to all of them, but especially to my mom, Mrs. Helen Hargrett-Gaines, who instilled in me the true value of education at a very early age. To my wife, Mrs. Valerie Avery Hargrett, the hope, the joy, the grace, the inspiration, and the absolute love of my life, who throughout this entire project has been my advisor, coach, editor, and my biggest cheerleader. And to all the young brothers out there still sitting on the fence, please don’t give up Black man. Stay strong, have faith and be resilient.
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ABSTRACT

The present research sought greater understanding of and contributes additional insights into supporting the academic success of African American males in urban public high schools and in higher education. The findings based on eight world life interviews of successful African American males from an urban community adds valuable information about the community factors (family, church, schools and community organizations) that contribute to the development of resiliency among African American males. Additionally, the research sought to provide a detailed account of the community wisdom (messages and methods) that informed resilience. Lastly, the transformative nature of resilience was explored in collegiate settings, where stresses and the contested nature of success pushed students to adopt and evolve newer forms of resilience.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 1933, Carter G. Woodson authored an academic work entitled *The Mis-Education of the Negro*; in which he asserts that African Americans of his day were being culturally indoctrinated, rather than truly educated, in American schools. His claim was that this “Mis-Education” caused African Americans to become even more dependent upon White America and African Americans sought out inferior places in a great society rather than full citizenship. He challenged African Americans to become “autodidacts,” that being self-taught (Dictionary.com, 2013), and to “do for themselves,” regardless of what they were taught. Woodson (1933) notes:

History shows that it does not matter who is in power… those who have not learned to do for themselves and have to depend solely on others never obtain any more rights or privileges in the end than they did in the beginning.

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro, thus educated, is a hopeless liability of the race.

This process is described as systematically depriving Negros of their knowledge of self. The mis-education of the Negro is the root of the problems of the masses of the Negro community and that if the masses of the Negro community were given the correct knowledge and education from the beginning, they would not be in the situation that they find themselves in today. Negros often valorize European culture to the detriment of their own culture. (p. 5)
In the 80 years since Woodson lamented on the opportunity gap in the *Mis-Education of the Negro*, educational achievement and attainment for African Americans, particularly males, has not dramatically improved. This chapter reviews the nexus of educational challenges confronting African American males, details the significance of research on Black male educational resilience, and concludes with research questions that guide the present inquiry.

**Statement of the Problem**

The educational achievement and attainment disparities between African American and Caucasian students are commonly referred to as the “Achievement Gap.” The term achievement gap refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as White students and minorities, or students from higher-income and lower-income households (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). There is also an intra-racial achievement gap between African American males and African American females, such that Black females are experiencing greater achievement and attainment when compared to Black male learners. The causes of these disparities are complex, varied, and include a host of sociological, economic and educational factors.

**The Achievement Gap**

Perhaps the most cited factor in the minority achievement gap is poverty, and its impact on the quality of schooling for African Americans (Payne, 2013). In fact, only 6% of Caucasian students and 42% of African American students attend high-poverty schools, defined by the U.S. Department of Education as schools where more than 75% of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. This class segregation persists in
secondary schools as well, where 18% of African American secondary school students attend high poverty schools compared to only 2% of White secondary school students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Poverty not only contributes to racial and class segregation in schooling but also differentials in the quality of teachers and the academic program that students are exposed to (Payne, 2013). For instance, “in high schools with a student population that is at least half African American, 25 percent of math teachers do not have a college degree in math and are not certified to teach math. For predominantly White schools, this figure is 8 percent” (Educational Testing Service/Children’s Defense Fund, 2013). This same report notes that 25% of African Americans and only 5% of White students go to schools that are dubbed “drop-out factories,” where less than 60% of 9th graders are enrolled in the 12th grade four years later.

Moreover, the quality of course work available to students also contributes to achievement disparities (James, Smith, Simmons, & Levy, 2013). For example, fewer than 10% of African American learners participated in rigorous courses in 2009, while White students were at least twice as likely to take classes considered academically rigorous in core subjects when compared to African American students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Overall, African American students comprise 19% of the students attending schools offering gifted and talented programs, but only 10% of the students enrolled in those programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Less than a third of high schools serving African American students offer calculus and only 40% offer physics, compared with 55% and 66% of schools with the lowest African American enrollments (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). These gaps in the educational
opportunity structure produce corresponding disparities in educational outcomes including discipline, standardized test scores, and college attendance and graduation that disparately impact African American males.

The Attainment Gap

The educational inputs discussed in the prior section animate a host of educational outcomes evidencing disparities (attainment gap) in standardized test scores, college readiness and long term economic opportunities among African American males. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show that, over time, African American students have made great strides in improving performance in reading and mathematics, yet a breach still separates them from their White peers (Education Week, 2011). For example, special analyses by the National Center for Education Statistics (2009, 2011) concluded that African American students trailed their Caucasian peers by an average of more than 20 scale-score points on the NAEP math and reading assessments at 4th and 8th grades, a difference of about two grade levels. The size of the gap persists even though the score differentials between African American and White students narrowed between 1992 and 2007 in 4th grade math and reading and 8th grade math (Education Week, 2011). Sadly, what this gap means is that roughly 90% of African Americans failed to meet national standards across all grades and subjects for the past 22 years (Lewis, James, Hancock & Hill-Jackson, 2008).

Outcomes in student discipline are also troubling, and linked to lower test performance considering the number of instructional hours lost by African American males (James et al., 2013). The extent of discipline disparities was explored in a Department of Education study (2012) found that from 2009 to 2010, African American
students were 3½ times more likely to be suspended or expelled than Whites students with males accounting for ¾ of all suspension and expulsions. Also, Elias (2013) landmark study tracked nearly one million Texas students for six years and controlled for more than 80 variables, such as socio-economic class, to see how they affected the likelihood of school discipline. This study found that African Americans were disproportionately punished compared with otherwise similar White students, resulting in one in six African American students being disciplined compared to one in 20 White students (Elias, 2013). In Chicago Public Schools (CPS), one of the nation’s largest education systems, African Americans make up 41.6% of the entire Chicago public school population (CPS, 2013) in 2012, and 75% of students arrested in Chicago’s public schools were African American (www.Project-NIA.org, 2012). Among other things, the 2012 study documented arrests in CPS of 3,240 African American students, and arrests of only 136 White students. These statistics add to the growing evidence that the so-called “school-to-prison pipeline” – a phenomenon in which students are funneled into the criminal justice system for mere discipline violations is disproportionately impacting minority males (Strasser, 2013).

The high school and college graduation rates gaps are also related disparate outcomes evidencing the dismal state of African American males in education (Education Week, 2013). The Schott Foundation Report (2010) indicates that only 47% of African American males nationally graduate from high school (Schott, 2010). Therefore, 53% of African American males nationally have either dropped-out, been kicked-out (expelled) or timed-out (those simply too old to continue attending) of high schools around the country. The Diplomas Count report (2012) concluded that 78.4% of White students in
the class of 2008 graduated on time, while only 57% of African American students graduated in four years (Education Week, 2011). Likewise, overall 68% of male students graduated on time in 2008, and only about one half of male students from minority backgrounds graduate on time (Education Week, 2011).

Additionally, African American males who lead the nation in detentions, suspensions, and expulsions also are less likely to enroll in a degree-granting institution after high school (Noguera, 2008). Furthermore, young African American men are not attending or graduating from college at the same rate as African American women (Valbrun, 2013). Supportively, Fox (2007) notes:

In 1976, some 54 percent of African American undergraduate college enrollments were female. Over time, African American females continue to enroll in degree-granting institutions in larger numbers than African American males, and in 2004, females accounted for 64 percent of the total African American enrollment. (p. 109)

Moreover, although African Americans are 14.1% of the total U.S. population, they are only 4% of students enrolled in college (Lewis, Casserly, Simon, Uzzell & Palacios, 2012). Also, when considering enrollment at public flagship universities African American males are only 2.8% of the student body, despite representing 7.9% of 18-24 year-olds in America. The overall graduation rate for all college students is 57.3%, while only 33.1% of African American men and 44.8% of African American women graduate from college (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This educational gap virtually ensures that men of color, particularly African Americans, will continue to have less earning power than their Caucasian counterparts and be underrepresented across a broad spectrum of high-paying professions.
Finally, the social and moral issues of helping a young person complete high school and college can be debated, but the statistics are quite conclusive concerning the economic impact of a college education, particularly for African American males. The Day-Newburger report from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) notes that the average college graduate will make close to a million dollars more than a high school graduate over their adult working career (1.2 million for high school graduate, 2.1 for a bachelor’s degree, 2.5 for a master’s degree, and 3.4 for a doctorate degree). Although not the one million dollars that seems to be commonly bandied about by colleges and parents alike, college graduates do earn 84% more over their work lifetimes than workers without college degrees (Day & Newburger, 2004). College graduates are also more likely to have jobs and less than half the unemployment rate for high school graduates on average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The average college graduate of the class of 2011 earns $41,701 per year, 58% more than the average median U.S. salary of $26,364. U.S. economists found that 6.7 million high school and college dropouts who have been unable to work in a permanent job cost the U.S. 4.75 trillion dollars, which is one-third the size of the U.S. economy (Kavoussi, 2012). During the economic downturn of 2009, the unemployment rate for African American male college graduates 25 and older was twice that of White male college graduates – 8.4% compared to 4.4%. That race remains a serious obstacle in the job market for African Americans, even those with degrees from respected colleges, may seem to some people a jarring contrast to decades of progress by African Americans, culminating in President Obama’s election (Luo, 2009). Supporting Census data shows that the average weekly earnings for an African American male are $633. The average weekly earnings for an African American male with only a high
school diploma are $532. The average weekly earnings for an African American male with a bachelor’s degree are $974 and it is $1,065 for those with African American males with an advanced degree (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). Yet when the 8.4% African American male graduate unemployment rate is contrasted with the 15.5% unemployment rate of African American males who graduated high school but did not attend college (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), the need for college education for young African American men became clear. The educational achievement and attainment gaps demonstrate the need for a shift in the direction and quality of education provided for African-American males.

**Significance of the Study**

Given the harsh realities articulated to this point, research is warranted to redress the underperformance of African American males in education. Despite the overwhelming odds against urban African American males in public schools, there are those urban African American males whose family make-up and financial resources (or lack thereof) are similar to their peers, yet they go on to successfully complete high school and even college. While the literature is clear concerning the factors that contribute to or predict academic failure among African-American males (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar, 2003); there is a need for the examination of the attributes of successful African American males (those who graduate high school and college). Toward this goal, this dissertation will examine the internal and external factors that produce the resiliency required for African American males to achieve the success both in education and life. Those who succeed in the face of obstacles and hardships have demonstrated resiliency, which Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) defined as “the
process of capacity to, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426).

The researchers contends that studying African American male students who exhibit resiliency may provide information needed to help support the academic success of a greater proportion of young, urban African American males. Specifically, this dissertation will endeavor to answer the question, What is this recipe for resilience?

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the resilience of African American males who attended an urban community high school, then successfully negotiated the academic and social rigors of the collegiate environment by subsequently graduating from college as well. The intent is to analyze the predictive factors (individual, family, mentors, and community and school-based organizations) that support African American male academic excellence in college. This study will offer recommendations for enhancing college preparatory services, instructional programming and continued curriculum development in addition to social, academic, and emotional supports for collegiate success. Within this context the guiding questions for this study are:

1. How did African American males who graduated from either two- or four-year colleges and had participated in Umoja (these community and/or school-based organization program’s mostly holistic, family-oriented, Afrocentric principled, strengths-based approach and indigenous staff that contribute greatly to urban African American male success, Noguera, 2002) as inner-city community high school students succeed?
2. How did these African American male graduates persist despite challenges in both home and collegiate environments?

3. How did support structures and networks in these African American male students’ environment in and outside of a campus setting contribute to their successful completion of college?

The research results will inform the greater understanding of and contribute additional insights into supporting the academic success of African American males in urban public high schools and in higher education. The findings of this research will add valuable information about the factors (community and college) that contribute to resiliency among African American males, and illuminate how community support structures can further the collegiate and life readiness of urban African American males.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The present research requires a review of resiliency research in education, specifically focused on educational resiliency among African American males, and the impact of community-based organizations on academic excellence. The purpose of this literature review is to uncover the ways in which families, schools, and community organizations contribute to educational excellence among African American male college graduates from urban communities. This review will highlight the major environmental risks, educational needs, protective factors, and predictive factors that help or hinder resiliency in African American males.

Resilience Defined

A review of the extent literature on resilience reveals the multiple definitions of resilience that vary slightly but generally define resiliency with some factors. “The study of resilience traces its roots back a scant 50 years” (Goldstein & Brooks 2006, p. 3). In the 70’s, resilience research “originally developed as an ecological concept, resilience is being applied to coupled human-environment systems” (Berkes 2007, p. 286). Some authors such as Riyanti Djalante espoused ecology as a basis for defining resilience, given that “the concept of resilience was originally developed in the field of ecology” (Djalante, Holly & Tomalla, 2001, p. 3). Resilience theories are nevertheless a relatively
new field of academic inquiry, but are well established among noted educational researchers.

Foundational theorists in systems resilience Crawford S. Hollings and Urie Bronfenbrenner have given somewhat different interpretations of resilience yet they are generally accepted today. Hollings (1973) states: “But there is another property termed resilience, that is a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” (p. 14). Although Hollings’ use of resilience promotes a narrower view of the resilience concept, Hollings’ approach nevertheless has been widely adopted without criticism. Still, Masten (2008) considers resilience as a systematic reaction not just an individual trait, such that there is a “positive adaptation of a system during or following significant disturbances” (p. 76).

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory of human development speaks to the influence of all elements of one’s environment on one’s growth and development. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory consists of five environmental factors: microsystems (those immediate individuals and environments with which the individual interacts and which influence and shape an individual), mesosystems (interrelatedness of experiences across environments which directly impact the individual), exosystems (hospitals, churches, media, community-based services which impact individuals and experiences in the individual’s immediate world), macrosystems (the impact of the ideology of the society, culture, politics, economy, which influences the individual indirectly), and chronosystems (the cumulative experiences and life transitions of the individual). These basic concepts help define the ecological systems theory, which
undergirds most research of resilience, but to a lesser degree educational resilience researchers. These systems theorists view “resilience is a systems concept, and the social-ecological system, as an integrated and interdependent unit, may itself be considered a complex adoptive system” (Berkes & Ross 2013, p. 14).

Yet in social sciences like education, resiliency describes the ability of individuals to overcome adversity and hardships. A widely accepted definition of educational resilience is offered by Wang (1994) as the “likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities, brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (p. 46). Supportively, Henderson and Milstein (1996) define resilience as:

- The capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today’s world. (p. 7)

Henderson (2007) considers resiliency as a method of “bouncing-back,” – even from a lifetime of “risk-factors” or very painful trauma or tragedy. Within the context of education resilient students are: “Students who succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions” (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). Additionally, Goodwin (2007) developed student characteristics of academic resiliency, which include:

- Adaptable temperament, flexibility; tolerant of ambiguity
- Optimism
- Anticipating problems; solving problems logically
- Creative solutions to challenges
- Positive self-esteem
- Seeing humor in self and life situations
- Curiosity; learns from experience
- “Reads” people well
- Durable and independent
- Internal locus of control
- Achievement-oriented attitude. (p. 3)

Given these definitions the present study defines resiliency as the ability among urban African American males to negotiate the harsh elements of urban life and schools, while experiencing academic success, resulting in successful completion of a college degree.

**Resiliency Conceptualized**

Over the years, various researchers have developed models that conceptualize the various elements of resiliency. The research tradition of resilience in urban children has countered deficit-focused models of educational development on which earlier research tended to focus. For instance, the latest wave of resilience studies has concluded that resilience is common among children, even those who experience hardships. Beyond these general contributions, Luthar (2003) conceptualizes two major approaches to studying resiliency: variable-focused and person-focused resilience. Luthar asserts that:

Variable-focused approaches examine the links among competence, adversity, and a host of potential protective factors indexed by variables that describe differences among individual children and the nature of their relationships and interactions within the world they live. (pp. 9-10)

For example, African American males can be studied from a dimensional perspective, focused on variables and their covariance patterns. However, these variable-centered approaches do not fully capture the complex nature of resilience. Variable-focused methods typically include quantitative research methods such as structural modeling (Masten et al., 1999), in which research limit the range of potential variables to those of importance to their research.
On the other hand, Luthar (2003) further highlights the merits of person-focused resilience research:

Person-focused strategies focus on identifying people who meet definitional criteria for resilience, whose lives and attributes are then studied by investigators particularly in comparison to maladaptive individuals who have similar levels of risk for adversity but who display markedly different outcomes. (p. 11)

The present study is a person-focused exploration of resiliency among urban African American males.

Another framework to consider is the Fergus and Zimmerman model (2005) which states,

A key requirement of resilience is the presence of both risks and promotive factors that either help bring about a positive outcome or reduce or avoid a negative outcome. Resiliency theory is focused on strengths rather than deficits. (p. 399)

According to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), there are three models of resilience: compensatory, protective, and challenge. In these models, internal promotive factors are regarded as assets, whereas external promotive factors are viewed as resources. Those internal, adaptive traits that evolve from one’s positive or adverse life experiences that enables one to survive and thrive are assets, which include such things as positive identity or positive self-concept/self-worth, self-compassion, self-efficacy and competence, personal responsibility, autonomy, help-seeking capability, self-advocacy, healthy coping and one’s self-belief in influencing the environment around them positively. Moreover, physical and emotionally safe and supportive environments are considered resources, which can include the family environment, schools, communities and social institutions. Healthy, supportive, safe and caring relationships with family, peers, intimate partners
and/or other adult figures who provide positive advice or constructive feedback, promote high expectations, and set developmentally appropriate limits, rules, guidelines, monitoring and social norms are needed resources for any youth.

In the compensatory model, promotive factors offset and/or protect against negative risk factors. As an example, a young African American boy residing in a low-income urban area can be exposed to certain hardships that can possibly lead to internalization and actualization of social deviance, yet his exposure to promotive factors can shield against the internalization and actualization of social deviance such as dropping out of high school or involvement in the urban drug economy. The researchers offer the following example, “Youth living in poverty, for example, are more likely to commit violent behavior than are youth not living in poverty, but adult monitoring of behavior may help compensate for the negative effects of poverty” (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005, p. 401).

In the protective model, resilience is considered protective when it has the ability to slow-down or even stops someone from succumbing to the negative aspects of social environments (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Protective factors can include behaviors that persons engage in to promote healthy bio-psycho-social development and social-emotional competences. Among these factors are:

1. exercising self-regulation and impulse control
2. building critical thinking, planning, decision-making, conflict-resolution and communication skills
3. displaying a sense of right and wrong
4. understanding one’s personal developmental history and needs
5. committing to realistic, productive goals, positive work habits, activities, values and beliefs
6. experiencing positive emotions (e.g., joy, love, hope, optimism, trust, faith)
7. demonstrating character strengths (e.g., respect, compassion, integrity)
8. identifying productive interests and seeking to excel
9. forming and sustaining healthy relationships
10. engaging in positive risk-taking
11. avoiding drugs, alcohol and risky sexual activity
12. building essential life skills (e.g., financial management, self-care, home maintenance)
13. deepening cultural knowledge
14. exploring spirituality
15. consuming nutritious foods and exercising within one’s physical means. (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2012, p. 33)

It is important to note that Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) contend that youth with protective factors in place can be exposed to moderate levels of risk:

The idea is that adolescents exposed to moderate levels of risk are confronted with enough of the risk factor to learn how to overcome it but are not exposed to so much of it that overcoming it is impossible. (p. 403)

The risk exposure, however, must be challenging enough to elicit a coping response so the adolescent can learn from the process of overcoming the risk (p. 403). A vital point concerning the challenge model is that low levels of risk exposure may be beneficial because they provide youth with a chance to practice skills or employ resources (Fergus & Zimmerman 2005, p. 403). Yet, “risk” can’t be parceled out with any degree of control, and what exactly constitutes the magnitude of risk? Finally, in the challenge model, two forces are at work as youth interact with the adversity in their lives. Troubles are seen as a danger to youth and also as an opportunity. Youth are vulnerable to the toxic influence of hardship, but they are also challenged to rebound from harm by experimenting, branching out, and developing their own resources. Over time, these self-protective behaviors develop into lasting clusters of strength that are termed resiliencies. Instead of regarding themselves as victims, because of the challenges they face, resilient
youths come to see themselves as actual resources in the process of overcoming challenges.

Conceptualizations also seek to understand the adaptive nature of resilience. Fraser (2004) notes that resilience is not an all-inclusive, absolute or stable quality, but a charismatic characteristic consistently changing with the student’s social circumstances, it evolves according to a student’s abilities, environmental surroundings, functional domain (situational), developmental thinking processes, and cultural context. Consequently, resilience in certain domains does not necessarily transfer into other situational domains, although there is some evidence that suggest resilience in one developmental sphere may sometimes impact other spheres of life (Masten & Reed, 2002).

For instance, a young man develops the capacity to overcome socio-economic hardships associated with life in impoverished communities could also experience a transfer effect that could positively influence his academic performance in school. Yet, more research is needed to better understand the factors that promote the de-compartmentalization of resilience from the initial sphere of resilience to other spheres of life. For the purposes of this study the researcher will conceptualize resilience by considering the protective factors supporting successful transition from an urban environment to college, and the nature of protective factors supporting successful matriculation through college. Additionally, the present work will highlight how resilience acquired in urban areas is expended or refined to meet new challenges and rigors of collegiate life.
Community-Based Resilience Among African Americans

Resilience among African Americans has a complex history and research tradition, and includes the Black family, extended family, kinship networks and the Black church. Hill (1972) described five common characteristics that support and contribute to resilience observed in African Americans, including adaptable family roles, extended family and kinship networks, and work ethic. Hill notes how gender roles within African American families are generally flexible with decisions being shared, as are responsibilities for financial support, household care, and child care, based according to abilities and opportunities rather than gender. Parenting roles may be shared not only between mothers and fathers but also with grandparents and other adult relatives, and even siblings. Although boundaries for a few African American families can become too blurred for effective functioning for some families, this characteristic is generally seen as a strength with obvious advantages for handling crises.

The nature of the extended family has also been a noted support structure within the African American community, which helps with the survivability and resiliency of African-American family (Wallace & Fisher, 2007). An extended family support system apparently contributes to the resiliency often seen in African American families. Extended family support systems lead to fictive kinships, “people within a given society to whom one is not related by birth but with whom one shares essential reciprocal social and economic relationships” (Fordham, 1996, p. 71). Wallace and Fisher (2007) described an extended family as “a close network of relationships within and between families who may or may not be related” (p. 443). The extended family remains a major support structure within the African American community assisting with the sharing and
exchanging of resources and experiences needed to address the needs of families within
the community that go beyond the capacity of the immediate unit to meet (Fordham,

Extended family kinship networks exist in several forms among African
American families. A three-generation household allows for pooling finances and bodies
for the care of children and elderly, as well as for emotional support. Another is family
members living separately but in close proximity so that daily interaction is not only
possible but probable by design. A third way quite common in African American
families is that of “fictive kin,” as labeled by Billingsley (1968), and described as African
American familial relationships with people not blood relatives who may or may not
actually live with the family. Friends, neighbors, co-workers are most likely to have
these “fictive kin” relationships and may even be given kinship titles, such as aunt, play-
aunt, auntie, uncle, play-uncle, or just plain “unc”.

Another source of resilience among African Americans is the church, which
historically has been a major cultural part of life and social uplift in the African American
community. It provides hope, relief from adversity, allows self-expression and a
leadership voice often not available to minorities and can provide overall material support
system; the “quintessential kin network” (Scott & Black, 1989, p. 22). The church links
family members and its member families together, especially in the face of adversity
through sustained support, sharing and strong religious faith. For historical context,
Billingsley (1968) and Nelson and Nelson (1975) studies described the church as one of
several sources of achievement in African American families. More recent studies have
found that the church remains strong in the African American community (Brega &
Coleman, 1999; Brody, Stoneman, & Flor 1996). Brega and Coleman (1999), for example, found that African American children who kept strong lines of communication with the church were highly unlikely to internalize negative stereotypes concerning themselves. Molock (2008) proposed that the “church may provide an ideal context in which to develop interventions for depression and suicide in the African American community because of its broad acceptance and strong history of helping all its members” (p. 330).

**Educational Resilience of the African American Male**

Studies that specifically address educational resilience among African American males from urban high schools throughout college generally focus on how these young men overcome social-emotional hardships to achieve academically, despite obstacles (Seccombe, 2002). Hall (2006) concluded, “For males of color, academic failure is a consequence of three overarching factors: (a) curriculum; (b) negative treatment in schools and classrooms; and (c) the lack of personal accountability” (p. 18). Hall suggested that educators take part of a process whereby classrooms become less dominated by adult authority and more youth-centered and focused. “The objective is to construct learning environments that foster youth empowerment, free expression, self-discipline, and self-respect” (p. 25). Moreover, Gayles (2005) contributed to resilience literature on African American males in impoverished high schools an urban community. Gayles argues that students developed strategies to diminish the degree to which their academic achievement separated them socially from their peers. Additionally, these students learned to situate their education and academic achievement within a utilitarian worldview, so that their educational achievement was linked to the potential to transform
the limits of their opportunity structure. Ultimately, redefining the purpose of education and reorganizing related behaviors around this evolved notion of education positively impacted student resilience (p. 250). Investigating the potential and impact of rites of passage programs upon African American male resilience is another emergent trend in this line of inquiry. West-Olatunji and Goodman (2008) highlight the strengths of low-income African American male adolescents, articulate the academic and dispositional outcomes of rite of passage programs, and provide recommendations for organization rite of passage programs for African American males as strength-based intervention. Mentoring organizations such as rites of passage programs traditionally target and mentor African American males to provide a community countermeasure to the nexus of negative obstacles confronting this population.

**Conceptual Framework**

This literature review concludes with the conceptual framework of how the researcher will define, use and extend the theory of research on resiliency, specifically educational resilience among African American male college graduates from urban environments. The research conceptual framework includes several assumptions informed by the resiliency research tradition that provides an intellectual framework within which this study will be conducted:

1. This study defines a resilient African American male as a graduate from an urban high school who has also earned either a two-year or four-year college degree.
2. This study is an application of Luthar (2003) person focused approach to understanding resilience by focusing on individuals who are exemplars through an analysis of their whose “lives and attributes.”

3. This study will seek insights into how promotive and protective factors may have shifted in college years, and how these shifts may have contributed to refinements in resilience among Black males (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

4. This study recognizes the African American community as a key strength for Black males and will explore how urban-based community supports (the Black family, extended family, kinship networks, the Black church and community based organizations) might extend their influence to Black males while they are in college and the impact of such efforts in promote successful transition and matriculation in college (Fordham, 2000; Wallace & Fisher, 2007).
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Methodological Rationale

The aim of this study is to explore resilience in college-educated African American males, who matriculated through urban 9-12 education with the support of Umoja Student Development Corporation. The most appropriate and useful research tradition to support this inquiry is qualitative research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research is useful “whether the topic of study is the individual, family, an event, behavior, agency, organization, and/or culture, all qualitative research yields descriptive data foremost” (Holosko, 2010, p. 343). The expressed purposes of qualitative research are to document human experience and voice with “rich text” or thick descriptive data through the analysis of written or spoken word and/or observable behaviors (Holosko, 2010). Researchers such as Duncan (2002), James and Hill-Jackson (2012) and Lynn (2002) employed qualitative methodologies (interview, focus groups and narrative analysis) to explore Black male educational issues, and to provide asset-centered analysis of Black males’ educational realities. This chapter will detail how the researcher: (1) an African American male educated in urban schools plans to approach a deeply personal inquiry with a critical lens; (2) selects the site of research and sampling strategy; and (3) plans to collect, triangulate and analyze the individual interviews of participants.
Researcher’s Lens

Winddance-Twine and Warren (2000) admonishes researchers to consider how their race may serve as a form of capital in research particularly when there is a cultural match between researcher and participant. Yet, race is an imprecise marker of identity (Feagin, 2006), but as an African American male educated in urban P-12 schools this researcher shares a common lived experience with potential participants in this study. Thus, lived and shared histories are more critical forms of capital, the researcher contends that his personal journey from a child raised in a single-parent household to an Ed.D. candidate exploring the dynamics of African American male resilience will be a valued resource during this research, not necessarily sharing the same race as participants.

Through a researcher's lens I was able to look back at how I was able to overcome adversity in my life as an African American child raised within a single-parent household in urban America. I give credit for my survival and maturation to my mother, Mrs. Helen Hargrett-Gaines, my grandmother, Mrs. Hattie Jackson, my two older brothers, and being a role model for my younger sister at a young age. Additionally, there were many teachers (Mrs. Drayton, Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Franken, and Dr. Young) and community programs (The Creatively Gifted Program and the Art Institute) that helped me along the way. These people and programs provided me opportunities, support and insulation to achieve academically unencumbered by the negative elements of urban life. Although my father lived near us on the west side of Chicago and had the financial means to assist his family, he chose not to. Yet, my mother refused to seek child support, beg him for money to help take care of his children, nor force him to spend time with us. Later in high school when it became fairly clear that one of my brothers
and I were college bound, he established regular contact and took credit for our academic achievement. He also blamed my mother for my oldest brother's academic and life struggles that resulted in him not finishing high school.

These experiences educated me about the realities of being poor, Black, fatherless, living in high crime areas, and attending underfunded public schools. Persistence taught me not to give up; urban poverty, crime and economic hardship served as warning signs. Though my family circumstances financially were often dire, the love and emotional support were superior to most in my estimation. We were tight as a family and I was blessed to have found a few committed organizations with dedicated staffs that supported me through high school graduation.

After graduating from college I joined the Chicago Police Department, and was promoted to detective in a few years. Then I was assigned as a Special Victims Unit (SVU) investigator for juvenile cases. In this role, I met any number of young urban African American males who were succeeding academically despite living in even more dire socio-economic circumstances than I did. These encounters prompted me to ponder how they persisted against the odds? Years later, I decided to pursue a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, so that I might study this question and work to develop support systems to facilitate resilience among African American males.

**Site of Research**

To assist with identifying individuals who meet the study’s selection requirements, the researcher obtained a research agreement with a community service organization supporting the educational development of students in Chicago Public Schools. The Umoja Student Development Corporation was founded in 1997 at Manley
Career Academy High School on the west side of Chicago by Lila Leff. “Umoja organization …, has been successfully providing support to low-income, high-risk students in Chicago’s public high schools since its inception” (Umoja Student Development Corporation, 2012). Their philosophy is based upon restorative justice, social emotional learning, and college and career development. As stated in the recent organizational pamphlet:

Umoja’s main premise is that with the right opportunities and encouragement, all young people can succeed, yet if Chicago public school students are to transition from high school to college, Umoja believes that they needed more than just academic support; they needed strong, positive relationships with adults as well as the challenge and support to take responsibility for their own actions. By integrating a range of skills, experiences and perspectives, Umoja provides opportunities for students that connect education to real-life success. (Umoja Student Development Corporation pamphlet, 2013)

Currently, Umoja programs reach students year-round and allow staff to forge the powerful one-on-one relationships that are at the heart of Umoja’s mission. During the 2010-2011 school year, Umoja provided services and support to more than 8,000 students and 250 teachers at nine inner-city Chicago public high schools (Umoja Student Development Corporation, 2012). Umoja delivers before, during and after-school support to urban teens, helping them to develop self-confidence, resourcefulness and the encouragement to achieve their college and career goals. Umoja programs and services include constant reassurance, college and career counseling, educational as well as social/emotional mentoring, student leadership development and professional development for teachers. Since partnering with Umoja, the graduation rate at Manley rose from 50% in 1998 to 71% in 2010, and the college enrollment rate increased from less than 10% to almost 70% during those same years (Umoja Student Development
Corporation, 2013). Over recent years, Umoja has expanded its services citywide, and now serves 12 Chicago public high schools.

Additionally, Umoja has close to two decades of high school and college graduates, and they would like to better understand how to support their student’s post-secondary matriculation. Also, a majority of Umoja’s graduates go on to community colleges, so this study will examine factors supporting matriculation in both community college and four-year colleges and universities. The partnership with Umoja provides an opportunity to access urban African American males who were succeeding academically with the support of local community resources. More importantly, it provides an authentic opportunity for the meaningful application of the findings of the research to redress African American male underperformance.

**Research Questions**

The research conceptual framework includes several assumptions informed by the resiliency research tradition that provides an intellectual framework within which this study will be conducted:

1. This study defines a resilient African American male as a graduate from urban high schools who have also earned either a two-year or four-year college degree.

2. This study is an application of Luthar (2003) person-focused approach to understanding resilience by focusing on individuals who are exemplars through an analysis of their whole “lives and attributes.”
3. This study will seek insights into how protective and promotive factors may have shifted in college years, and how these shifts may have contributed to refinements in resilience among Black males (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

4. This study recognizes the African American community as a key strength for Black males and will explore how urban based community supports (the Black family, extended family, kinship networks, the Black church and community-based organizations) might extend their influence to Black males while they are in college and the impact of such efforts in promoting successful transition and matriculation in college (Fordham, 2000; Wallace & Fisher, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to explore the resilience of African American male college graduates who attended urban high schools. The intent is to analyze the protective and promotive factors (individual, family, mentors, and community and school-based organizations) that support African American male academic excellence in college. This study will offer recommendations for enhancing college preparatory services, instructional programming and continued curriculum development in addition to social, academic, and emotional supports for collegiate success. Within this context the guiding questions for this study are:

1. How did African American males who graduated from either two- or four-year colleges and participated in Umoja as high school students, successfully negotiate the academic and social rigors of the collegiate environment?

2. How did these African American male graduates persist despite challenges in both home and collegiate environments?
3. How did support structures and networks in these African American male students’ environment in and outside of a campus setting contribute to their successful completion of college?

Methods

The Participants

Eight former Umoja alumni participated in the individual interviews, and four Umoja organizational staff members were also interviewed. The alumni participants were stratified into three distinct groups:

1. At least two recent college graduates up to two years removed from a two- or four-year college degree;
2. At least two early career college graduates who are two to five years removed from a two- or four-year college degree;
3. At least two mid-career college graduates, five to ten years removed from a two- or four-year college degree.

The four organization leaders are purposefully sampled and included in this study given their roles within the organization and their knowledge of the services Umoja provides. The final participant demographics are added below.
Table 1

Demographic Information of African American Male Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Barry</th>
<th>Charles</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Edward</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Henry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Denison College</td>
<td>Ohio State Univ</td>
<td>Tuskegee and Auburn</td>
<td>Southern Illinois University</td>
<td>Univ of Illinois</td>
<td>Univ of Illinois</td>
<td>Malcolm X College</td>
<td>Univ of Illinois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Sociolog y</td>
<td>I.T.</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>A.A.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Status #</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Order</td>
<td>Second oldest</td>
<td>Oldest</td>
<td>Second oldest</td>
<td>Second oldest</td>
<td>Oldest</td>
<td>Second oldest</td>
<td>Second oldest</td>
<td>Second oldest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 Parents</td>
<td>1 parent home</td>
<td>1 parent home</td>
<td>2 parent home</td>
<td>2 parent home</td>
<td>2 parent home</td>
<td>1 parent home</td>
<td>1 parent home</td>
<td>1 parent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Job</td>
<td>Grad Student</td>
<td>Loan Officer</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>None currently</td>
<td>Recent Grad</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>None currently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary Range</td>
<td>$15,000 - $25,000</td>
<td>$36,000 - $50,000</td>
<td>$51,000 - $70,000</td>
<td>None currently</td>
<td>None currently</td>
<td>$36,000 - $50,000</td>
<td>$15,000 - $25,000</td>
<td>None currently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These Umoja staff have interacted directly with students and helped to determine the quality of programming provided by Umoja. Their names and official positions are held in confidence, and pseudonyms were provided.

As previously stated the participants will be primarily stratified into three distinct groups: recent college graduates up to two years removed from school, early career college graduates who are two to five years removed from school, and mid-career college graduates who are five to 10 years removed from school. To add further variation in the participant’s backgrounds, the researcher has included those with associate, bachelor and master’s degrees; those from out-of-state, down-state, and Chicago-area schools; and
those from predominantly White universities, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

**Research Methods, Sampling and Triangulation**

This qualitative study has the potential to make a valuable contribution to all stakeholders concerned with African American youth achievement within school and community settings and the larger society. According to Yin (2009), qualitative designs:

(a) enable participants to be the center of the study; (b) maximize what can be learned about a phenomenon; (c) provide for multi-perspective analysis; (d) explain a situation; (e) provide a basis to apply solutions to situations; and (f) explore differences within and between cases. The researcher anticipated that each career strata and school type (two- or four-year college) would yield findings that were unique, yet similar across the breadth of participants due to socio-demographic similarities (Yin, 2009). In addition, this method will enable the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how resilience is facilitated in the face of risk and promotive/protective factors.

The primary sampling approach used for identification of participants throughout this study was criterion sampling, and criterion include African American male college graduates who are also alumni of Umoja. As indicated by Patton (2002), criterion sampling “focuses on selecting information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” and yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (p. 230). Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (p. 238).

Additionally, the researcher asked gatekeepers (i.e., staff members and program directors or coordinators) at the Umoja Student Development Corporation to assist with
identifying African American male college graduate alumni of the Umoja program that fit the present study’s description of educational resilience. The gatekeepers at Umoja provided directory information and the names of urban African American male students she/he believed would fall into the category of at-risk, but who demonstrated academic success in high school and throughout college. These lists were used by the researcher to contact the potential student participants via email and telephone. During initial contact with the prospective participants, the researcher discussed the details of the study and screened student participants to evaluate whether or not the participants meet the criteria to participate in the present study.

Eight subjects were targeted from potential participants, and initially contacted by phone to gauge their interest in taking part in the study, and to schedule two separate meeting times at a location of their choosing. These first interviews were scheduled for one hour in length with a thirty minute follow-up interview which I conducted by phone, in person or Skype. The follow-up interviews checked the accuracy of conclusions drawn from the first interview sessions, and discussed any points of clarification from initial coding of themes. As a confirmation of the scheduled meetings, the researcher sent an email to each prospective participant with the date/time and location of the meetings and with the demographic questionnaire and the approved consent forms attached. These documents were discussed and signed during the initial, one hour long individual interview.

Participants were also asked to bring an unofficial copy of their high school and college transcripts, diploma or other documentation of their academic success. This added credibility to the study and verified that participants met the study criteria. During
the consent process, neither incentives nor undue influence were used by the researcher to coerce student participants or social support providers (Umoja) to participate.

Additionally, Stake (2005) details the importance of accuracy in subject descriptions, interpretations and judgments, which can be accomplished in part through triangulation. Triangulation is the procedure by which qualitative researchers seek clarity through “the use of multiple data sources and pursuing the diversity of perception, even the multiple realities within which people live” (p. 454). Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Using triangulation to establish validity, in qualitative research, refers to whether the findings of a study are true and certain – “true” in the sense that research findings accurately reflect the situation, and “certain” in the sense that research findings are supported by the evidence (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2002). Patton (2002) cautions that it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches; in fact, such inconsistencies may be likely given the relative strengths of different approaches. In Patton’s view, these inconsistencies should not be seen as weakening the evidence, but should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data.

Data triangulation involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study. The present study relied on comparisons across graduation strati and type of college attended, and staff and student in general comparisons. During the analysis stage, transcripts from the stakeholder groups were compared to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence. This type of
triangulation, where the researchers use different sources, is perhaps the most popular because it is the easiest to implement; this type of data triangulation is particularly well-suited given the different stakeholder groups that have vested interest in the program.

**Data Collection**

Every one of the initial interviews and subsequent follow-ups from the criterion sample of participants were semi-structured, audio-taped, securely stored, and the researcher hired a transcription company to transcribe the collected data to further guard against any potential researcher bias. Personal bias is a distortion in cognition and decision making due to emotional factors (Angie, Connelly, Waples, & Kligyte, 2011). That is, a person will be usually inclined to believe something that has a positive emotional effect that gives a pleasant feeling, even if there is evidence to the contrary. Secondly, a person will be reluctant to accept hard facts that are unpleasant and give mental suffering. Those factors can be either individual and self-centered, or linked to interpersonal relationship or to group influence. Its effects can be similar to those of a bias, it can even be considered as a subcategory of such biases (Angie et al., 2011). The specificity is that the cause lies in one's desires or fears, which divert the attention of the person, more than in one's reasoning. Neuroscience experiments have shown how emotions and cognition, which are present in different areas of the human brain, interfere with each other in decision-making process, resulting often in a primacy of emotions over reasoning. Emotional bias might, for example, help explain the tendency towards over-optimism or over-pessimism, even when evidence for a more rational conclusion is available (Angie et al., 2011).
Transcripts and field-notes were additionally stored and secured by being placed in a fireproof safe at the researcher's residence with only the researcher having access to opening the safe. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and privacy. Any electronically stored data on the participants was coded with each participant's pseudonym and in a password protected capacity; also with the researcher only having access to the password.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research through individual interviews was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The data collected was analyzed according to the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The process of grounded theory is described as the constant comparative method where the analyst begins analysis with the first data collected and constantly compares indicators, concepts and categories as the theory emerges (Glaser, 1965). The researcher sorted and analyzed the interview data to uncover common themes that emerged from the interview process (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Loland, 2006). The data was analyzed in order to reveal major themes pertaining to the research questions. The data then was reduced into themes through a process of coding and finally represented in the study through tables, charts and discussion (Creswell, 2003, 2005). The data was coded so that statements from the participants pertaining to factors and causes of academic success and resilience are conceptually grouped. Thus, the abstract view of the data will allow categories and themes to emerge and be clustered based on similarities and meanings derived from the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews and amend their statements in a process
termed member checking, which serves to increase the validity of the study by allowing participants the opportunity to confirm the information was realistic and complete (Creswell, 2007).

**Limitations**

One of the limitations of conducting qualitative research methods can be from utilizing the often relatively small sample sizes and the subsequent analysis of the findings cannot necessarily be extended to a wider population (Thomas, 2010). Quantitative methods generally incorporate large samples to enable statistical generalizations with a goal of generalizing findings and inferences to a larger population (Leech, 2005). Yet, qualitative methods can allow for “analytic generalizations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which are “applied to wider theory on the basis of how selected cases ‘fit’ with general constructs” (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000, p. 1002). In qualitative research, the focus is on the generalizability of a conclusion within the specific setting or population studied (Leech, 2005; Maxwell, 1992).

Participation in the study was limited to eight academically successful African American men from the inner-city of Chicago. Because of the relatively small study sample that was limited to male participants from the above stipulated urban areas, the research findings may not be generalizable to other African American male students from suburban, rural, or areas within the Chicago city limits or other urban centers (Thomas, 2010, p. 106).

Concluding, all data is contingent upon the participant's willingness to answer openly and honestly all the questions during the interview process. Therefore, the validity of any qualitative study will be limited to the reliability of information provided
by participants (Thomas, 2010). In order to ensure openness and honesty during the entire interview process, special attention was given to providing a comfortable and confidential atmosphere to promote open and honest answers from participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The upcoming findings will detail observations and generalizations as it relates to the perceptions of educational resilience and the factors that influence academic achievement among African American males matriculating from urban public high school systems through post-secondary graduation.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter details how community transference of protective and promotive factors facilitated the development of resilience among African American males from urban communities, and how participants’ resilience evolved or transformed in collegiate settings. Before detailing these findings the researcher will review critical demographic information about the eight participants to provide a context for interpreting the findings, followed by a relisting of the research questions. Next the researcher will provide an overview of major emergent themes from the qualitative interviews of participants synthesized into a typology illustrating the transference of resilience from community agents to students, and the transformation of resilience in collegiate settings. Following an introductory review of the major themes illustrated in Figure 1, the detailed explanations of how this model emerged from the lives and experiences of the participants will constitute the balance of the chapter (Luthar, 2003).

Participant Demographics

Participant data is recorded in Table 2. The average age of the eight participants was approximately 25 years-old, all were not married, three were science-technology majors, and five were social sciences majors. They were raised in largely single-parent families with only three being raised in a two-parent family. Participants graduated from
a diverse array of post-secondary institutions including; one attended a private liberal arts college, one a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), one graduated from a community college, and five graduated from large predominantly White universities. Most graduates from four-year institutions graduated five to six years after their high school graduation year, which mirrors the trend of a prolonged college experience among African American males discussed in the prior sections on the attainment gap. Only three participants were employed, and of these only one is employed in an occupation directly related to his college major. The high unemployment rate of the sample is partly caused by two of the students being enrolled in graduate school or seeking a bachelor’s degree following graduating from a community college, and an additional two participants graduating in the spring of 2014.

**Research Questions**

This study sought insights into three interrelated questions regarding the formation of resilience among successful urban-educated African American males. The guiding research questions are:

1. How did African American males who graduated from either two- or four-year colleges/universities and participated in Umoja as high school students, successfully negotiate the academic and social rigors of the collegiate environment?

2. How did these African American male graduates persist despite challenges in both home and collegiate environments?
3. How did support structures and networks in these African American male students’ environment in and outside of a campus setting contribute to their successful completion of college?

Table 2

Demographic Information of African American Male Participants

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Barry</th>
<th>Charles</th>
<th>David</th>
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Findings

Thematic Overview

This chapter synthesizes the emergent themes from the qualitative interviews of participants into a typology illustrating the transference of resilience from community agents to students, and the transformation of resilience in collegiate settings. An overview of the major themes illustrated in Figure 1 will be reviewed followed by
detailed explanations of how this model emerged from the lives and experiences of the participants (Luthar, 2003). To begin, the researcher conceptualizes that resilience is a community’s productive response to the structured opposition its members experience as they seek to actualize the full benefits of American citizenship; resilience is not a generic systematic reaction to disturbance asserted by Masten (2008). Based upon the forthcoming findings resilience is a quality imparted or transferred primarily through social interactions within the social structures of the African American community (family, schools, community organizations, and churches). Resilience eventually manifests as internalized attitudes and actions, but originates from exposure to community wisdom, which comes in various forms (application of wisdom, achievement orientation, self-actualization, and accountability) and from a variety of sources.

The researcher contends unlike Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) that resilience develops best not when students are exposed to low-moderate levels of risk, but when there is synergy between the qualities of wisdom transferred across different social groups within which students interact. Furthermore, the emergent themes to be presented are in agreement with Fraser (2004) and (Masten & Reed, 2002) notions that resilience is a living and evolving force capable of adapting to the situational demands of various milieus. In this case, resilience is transformed to promote matriculation and maturation in collegiate settings, but was promoted via a new cluster of transference agents and a trial and error style of learning.

**Emergent Themes**

This section details the emergent themes through participants’ voices that informed Figure 1. The major themes are:
1. Community transference – the process by which marginalized communities instill agency within community members;

2. The nature of community wisdom; and

3. Transformative resilience in the maturation process in collegiate settings.

Each theme will be presented with voices from participants and their insights will be integrated with the theories that inform the present study’s research questions and conceptual framework.

Figure 1. The Typology of Transference and Transformative Resilience

Theme 1 - Community transference. This section provides insights into how families, communities, schools, churches, and community/school-based organizations not only assisted in mitigating or eliminating risk factors but also actively contributed to
resilience via transference of promotive and protective factors. The researcher conceptualizes that resilience is developed through a social process termed in the present study, *transference* or the process of instill agency within marginalized communities. Yet, participants expressed complex and contradictory views on their communities, reflecting the presence of both supportive structures and relationships, and the oftentimes overwhelming negative influences present in far too many urban communities. For instance, Edward and Henry both benefited from various forms of community transference, yet they lament the toxic elements in their home communities in the following statements.

Edward: Within the community is a lot of distractions, a lot of negative influences. It’s a lot of potential in individuals old and young…

Henry: I knew I didn’t want to live back in the area in which I grew up in because there was nothing there. I wanted to see more, I still wanted to see new things and grow. And just being in the area where I grew up at, I seen so much damage in my life at an early age it just wasn’t settling for me.

Like all communities, there were positive and negative elements, and the participants gravitated to interactions that edified their development, and avoided others that could undermine their development. Community transference addresses how communities minoritized by racism and classism instill within its members a form of agency to counter pathologies within their community and to protect them from the long-standing social constraints of racism and classism.

*School transference.* Educators who took a personal interest in the development of the participants transferred resilience through quality and supportive relationships within K-12 schools. Barry, at 28 years old was the oldest of the entire group, a political science major with a bachelor’s degree from the Ohio State University added:
It felt like when I was successful, my high school was successful. When my school was successful, I was successful. So there was a shared sense of outcome, a shared outcome like I couldn’t succeed without them succeeding and they couldn’t succeed without me succeeding.

Charles is 27 years old, and is currently a doctoral candidate at Alabama State University. He recalled the impact that supportive relationships had on his development following the untimely death of his father.

When I was a freshman at Manley Career Academy High School, I believe, my father passed away. From that moment on my world obviously changed and my perspective on education was significantly altered.

There was another teacher Mrs. Thomas. She was a guidance counselor that was a sponsor for the National Honor Society and everybody loved her. She always was the one, I’m not sure if she is still working at Manley but I know that after school and on weekends she was always there and always helping me out. I know I put plenty of gray hairs on her head, but she helped me out with that.

Also, Adam, a 24 year-old History major with a bachelor’s degree from Denison University, recalled the importance of K-12 and collegiate educators to his development.

Now within Manley, the one person that was always there was Charmin Steward, my track coach. She was a teacher there during my freshman, sophomore and early junior years, and she helped me a lot along the way. She was that support system when I broke down because I wasn’t sure if I was going to pass the ACT, she was that person I went to. Within college it was Eric Follie, he was the associate or he is the associate dean of Multicultural Student Affairs. He really took me under his wing and helped me understand the institution and how to navigate it. And so without him I don’t think I would have been successful as I was at Dennison or am now, without his mentorship.

An important factor in African American male development is positive and supportive relationships with educators; such interactions provide educators with an opportunity to develop students beyond the curriculum. Yet, these instructive moments typically
happen above and beyond, and in many cases outside of the official workday and contractual responsibilities of educators.

*Church transference.* Many of the participants spoke of their religious upbringing and the impact it had on their development of resilience and continued refinement to this day. Yet, some had much deeper insights into the role that the church played in their development. Adam’s statement represents the three participants with positive but superficial insights about the role of church in their development.

Religion in my family is very complex. My grandmother is a Jehovah’s Witness on my father’s side and so most of my religious or spiritual understanding comes from that denomination. So she goes out and she goes door to door and goes to people houses and tells people about Jehovah God and the completion of his whole system things becoming a new system. So, that has shaped me in a way.

Adam clearly valued religion but primarily through the experiences and dedication of his mother, who served as an important role model and was key in his development. The majority of the participants spoke at length about the personal importance of their church communities, beyond their families’ religious expressions.

Barry: My church, I mean sometimes it can feel a little restrictive, but all in all it’s definitely a community. They were the people when I couldn’t find a job helped me, who told me I still had value when I didn’t feel that way.

Likewise, Frank, a 24 year-old recent college graduate from the University of Illinois with a degree in sociology, detailed his church experiences and the protective measures his church provided to ensure his success in education and life.

So my church family is also involved in my life. With that being said, a lot of stuff that happens at home is also being brought up while we are in church. So our pastor (inaudible) stuff that’s going on in our lives. So he also steps in and helps us with things… work, my education. So when working in that field, actually when I was in high school, you know,
through high school he used to always come out…. that was part of the
job. So now he checks up on me while he was in the building as well as
when I go home or when I am in church. On Sunday they help pray for us
and protect things that are going on in our life.
I speak highly of the church. My church was very positive, had a good
impact on… someone I can always go to even though my extended family
was – I mean my real family was actually around. I can always go to my
church for advice. Whenever I was struggling with school subjects, my
family, I mean my Church family was there to help.

… I know in my church, we had actually like three teachers who were
actually teachers in schools. So not only were they there to help tutor us
when we were struggling with certain areas in school as well as just give
us good feedback to different schools it would be good to attend.

Supportively, Charles an HBCU graduate and counselor added,

Now when I got to college and stuff all that changed because obviously
there’s none of my family in Alabama, everybody is up there, but it just
changed a whole lot. And when I was in church my pastor and the
congregation used to always make sure we were okay. They set us up
with scholarships and did everything to boost us up, you know, that
personal and social support, religious support, academics or whatever.
They always were there to make sure that we got it together. So family
and friends always pushed me a whole lot to get me to where I am today.

Finally, Henry a 23 year-old, recent graduate from the University of Illinois provided
insights into how churches can be sites of reciprocity, within which successful Black
males not only receive support but also can serve as role models.

Another strength for my church is being a male that attends church
consistently. As far as my church and where I’m at in my career and all
that sort of stuff, just being a role model to other Black people, males in
particular. Being able to give back and like show them that I’m young, not
too older than some of the kids that I work around, showing them that I
went to school and you can go to school and you can come out and be just
as good as what I’m doing.

Overall the experiences of the participants’ were fairly similar when it came to the
impact that their church experiences had on their lives. For the majority of participants
the Black church, regardless of denomination, served as a hub for support, and eventually
service to the next generation. In agreement with Brega and Coleman (1999) and Brody, Stoneman, and Flor (1996) the Black church remains a critical source for education and life support, and a critical element in both promoting and protecting resilience among African American males.

**Community organization transference.** Given the samples’ past affiliation, the role that Umoja Student Development Corporation played in transference was highlighted. This organization has operated out of Manley Career Academy High School for the past 17 years. All of the interviewed participants are Umoja alums and were aware of Umoja’s assistance in the interview recruitment process; therefore speaking about Umoja was not unexpected. They were very forthcoming about their experiences in Umoja. Charles’s (23 years-old with a recent bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering, University of Illinois) comments were typical of the entire group:

Charles: I was at Manley for the summer program and my mom called my principal to let her know that my father had passed away. So, from that moment on my world obviously changed and my perspective on education was significantly altered. It wasn’t until I actually started going to Manley and started getting into Umoja that many other opportunities opened up. And through Umoja, a lot of the Umoja members had really embraced me as a young man and as a student there.

…So I sat around the school a lot and my best friends were in a gang there. I didn’t associate with the gangs but my friends did. We would hang out and I would say that maybe that is something that I did not want to do. And so again, Umoja was there to give extra stuff after school and stuff during the summer. And they always tried to make sure that we knew things that were outside of this arena, outside of our homes, and outside of our school.

…I wanted to have a strong GPA to get into college because Umoja was supporting us, setting us up and letting us know how important it was and when was the perfect time was to get your GPA up. Like they were really on us about that kind of stuff and so by me knowing that I decided to take another route compared to my friends. I decided to just hit my studies
really hard and apply for every college and scholarship that I could. And even when the time came that I wasn’t able to or didn’t feel like applying, Umoja staff …they stayed on me; they didn’t allow me to not apply anywhere that I could because I believe they knew at that time even though I didn’t know, they knew that African Americans, especially African American males were not afforded those opportunities and that when they have somebody produce, who has a GPA over a 3.70, you know, we’re going to take that and use that to our advantage and do everything we can to get this boy everything that he can and push him to where needs to go. And so, I really believe that they did that for me and some of the people who work there really did over and beyond. I don’t think there was anybody on the Umoja staff who wasn’t willing to help me.

Another participant, Frank is now employed as a counselor, and recalled the impact that Umoja had on his development while he attending Manly High School.

I think how it happened was I got invited to join the National Honor Society, and when I joined the National Honor Society, I believe, my sophomore year, then it opened up a door for me to join other programs and stuff, such as the Umoja program. So I joined Umoja in which I met the counselors, Tracy, Edward, Jeff and Tiffany, and…I never forget those people pushed me like no others. So my experience at Manley became to be much easier.

Like I said the four names, I won't forget--I’ve never seen somebody pushing me like that. Like I say, my family and stuff like that, of course your mother is going to push you and I will get to that aspect later. But as far as in the school to have a stranger to kind of like--I want to say dictate your life. But for somebody to see something in you that you didn’t see in yourself and then push you, like a stranger actually not giving up on you, that stayed strong with me.

Adam added concerning the impact of Umoja,

I have close relationships with the staff at Umoja because they advised me and counseled me and helped me get to where I’m at now. They all played essential roles in developing me outside of just academics, so that the social element of who I am, the development, they helped me with. They helped to build up my self-esteem by actually preparing me to go to college because that’s one thing that doesn’t happen in the classroom because they spend so much time teaching us with direct instruction. So teachers don’t facilitate the other aspect of development in a young person. But Umoja has really helped me mature as an individual.
David graduated with a degree in Criminal Justice recalls the importance of the caring relationships with Umoja’s staff.

I love Mrs. West with all my heart. There's nothing I wouldn't do for her. I love Mrs. West so much because of all the work she did for me. I ultimately got into college because of Mrs. West. She pretty much made me go to college, I would say, because ultimately during my senior year I wasn't thinking about college. I wasn't thinking. My mind was focusing on basketball and just living. She, every day, asked me what college I was going to? Had I applied for any colleges? My reply to her was “nah, not really.” And one day she had a college application in her hand and she walked through it with me step-by-step. She helped me to know what to look at in a college application. Even when I got denied from the college, she reached out to the school and told them that I would be an excellent candidate and that my aptitude for success was really high and how much she believed in me.

Community organizations like Umoja serve the vital role of filling in the gaps left by schooling or the limited experiences of parents. In urban communities, such programs are needed to provide individualized attention to students who may otherwise fall through the cracks. The transference facilitated by Umoja was made possible by caring relationships, proactive strategies to encourage, inform and advocate for African American male learners.

**Family transference.** The most critical source for transference of resilience was the African American family. In fact, it was the most spoken about community resource among all participants, and generated the most in-depth reflections. Each participant viewed their family as the initial source of their acquired resiliency and the subsequent development and refinement of educational resilience, as well as the critical support system for sustaining their resilience. Yet, all spoke more to the role that their mothers have played in their maturation, and relatively little about their fathers. This is likely
caused by 5/8 reporting being raised in signal-parent homes, and another participant reporting that his father was deceased. Moreover, as reported in the literature review, the African American family also includes extended family and kinship networks, and participants spoke of this structure as a source of strength. The researcher chose six definitive responses from the interviewed participants regarding their family, which captures the essence of participants’ sentiments.

Adam: …one strength is that my family is pretty close, so when there’s a problem that comes up, there’s always someone there to help you… they give out great advice.

My grandfather… he was very active and he really kind of expanded the notion that a family is a community, that although you have a family, blood relatives, but the community you reside in, the block you live on serves as your outside family.

My grandfather, for a number of years, worked for the park district and he coached basketball. Besides doing that within our block, also he would shovel the whole block during the wintertime. In the summertime he would cut our neighbor’s lawn because she was unable to do it herself.

Barry: …I’ve always said I was more afraid of my mom than I was afraid of the people on the street because eventually I can get away from those people, but I can’t really get away from my mom. I would say my mom, very early on throughout my primary and secondary education, my mom was very involved. She was at the school all the time, like involved in school councils. All my teachers, all my principals they knew her. They knew what she looked like. They always threatened me with calling her even when I did something well.

My mom was very honest with me about the cost of selling drugs whether it was being arrested and going to jail, her beating the hell out of me or what it had done to my family… My peers, I think that they were caught by the trappings of the instant gratification, it just appealed to them more.

On my block everybody knew each other and I think a lot of it was because it was my grandmother… the house that she lived in was the house that she raised my mother and my mother’s siblings in. So they all grew up in that house on that block so all the kids knew each other, all the
families knew each other. It's a little bit different now that everybody’s moved away but I grew up at the tail of that experience.

Charles: Now as far as church was concerned, she was what you would call a prayer warrior because she was always in the church. So, we were always in church and always in the community doing something. Now church impacted my life. As you may already know, the vast majority of African Americans, or the African American culture totally relies on religion and family for anything. And then my mom always held us together, it was kind of, sort of different. So family and friends always pushed me a whole lot to get me to where I am today.

David: In my family structure, being the fact that for the most part of my adolescence and growing up my father was in jail so my mother at some point was like the head of the household. And from that point on once I became 12 years old and my mom was the primary leader of the household, I became less the son where I saw it as me having to protect my mom… make sure that my family was taken care of. So I had to grow up a lot earlier.

Edward: I think the women in my family are really good role models… they know how to make a lot out of a little… they have perseverance, through a lot of adversity.

Frank: I come from a very supportive family as well as I come from a church going family... besides being supportive, they are very consistent and they are very open. They are very open to actually hear my thoughts and feedback. So I would say my family was consistent. There was an open mandate… it was just real good caretaking, it was actually caring people.

I would say like yeah that was another strength as far as them being just the working-class family. To live in those environments where a lot of my family members had the same friends that I had and maybe they were doing the wrong things or some people can be steered off into the wrong direction for a long time. But a lot of my family members pretty much stayed on the right track. I had a lot of relatives in my intermediate family that actually went to jail before. So I recently found out that my family members really never went to jail. So that wasn’t a problem that I had to keep worrying about. So I didn’t have those problems.

My mom was so positive. She is just so strong in my life, she is always so present. She supported me no matter what. I never felt like it was nothing I could not talk to my mother about.
George: My family …we all stick together and support pretty much each individual in whatever endeavors they want to do. And they just want to see their family be successful. Also, I had a great sister who gave me great examples to follow as far as doing the things that you need to do to stay on track and stay out of trouble and things like that. I used to be in a singing group from freshman year of high school and I didn’t have time to go into the streets and do things that were unimportant to me. I was so into the music and I wanted to be successful in that that I basically stayed and engulfed myself into the studio and I engulfed myself into the other members of the group I was in. We just pretty much did the music thing my entire four years of high school. So, that pretty much really kept me going straight forward.

Taking together the participants’ responses provide voice to the complex web of nurturing common in African American families, communities and kinship networks. Given their responses, successful programs designed to promote resilience among African American males must be built to complement the nexus of support provided by the Black community. Despite widespread notions that the Black family is dysfunctional, this vital unit remains critical in supporting the maturation of African American males.

The work of the family should therefore be supported not undermined. This section provided a number of qualities within educators, community organizations and churches that enable quality relationships with African American males; the most central is authentic care. It is within the context of these caring relationships that resilience is transferred; yet the exact nature of the messages and methods instilled is explored in greater detail the next section.

**Theme 2 - Nature of community wisdom.** There are a variety of types of wisdom imparted by community members into African American males from family, church, school and community organizations. Interestingly enough, participants spoke of this wisdom not only coming from positive community role models but in some
instances, from not so positive individuals or from their mistakes. Generally, community wisdom came in the form of situational tools or methods and messages designed to guide future actions by providing insights into the consequences for positive and pathology choices.

**Applications of wisdom.** A primary concern for family’s and community is preparing African American males to make sound choices in uncertain situations. All participants provided examples of how community-based know-how guided future decisions:

Charles: I had…brothers and sisters ahead of me, so I always watched what they did to learn what not to do. So staying out of trouble was just a matter of me watching someone getting in the same crap. But I was able to be smart enough to learn to apply what I was learning when I was growing up. I was still able to apply what my mother taught me to life today.

David also recalled the many skills that his time with Umoja instilled in him.

Umoja did a great job of being there for me when I needed them. Helping me to understand how to operate within college, and how to succeed, and how to plan, and the importance of time management, and just provided me with a strong base of support once I was in college.

Yet, participants also learned from observation of bad examples and the consequences they endured.

George: In the community because you have so many barricades or obstacles that keep you from trying to complete the dream that you want to complete. When I was younger there was a lot of gang activity and then at the school, you have to overcome it and put it out of your mind and just concentrate on what’s important to you and continue toward your goal.

The environment as far as the gangs, drug activity and things that were going on, a lot of peer pressure because I had a lot of friends who were into that type of thing, but I tried just to stay focused on school.

Henry: I think the reason why I was able to detour away from a lot of the violence that occurred in my lifetime and even when I was in school was
because I knew what I wanted. I had a drive. I learned from others, you know, versus going through everything that people actually go through to learn. I'm the type person that if I see it and it comes out to be the wrong outcome, why should I have to go through the same experience to tell someone else? I don't want to be a statistic.

**Achievement orientation.** Another type of wisdom offered by the community was a steadfast commitment to identifying, setting, working toward and achieving goals related to receiving a higher education, and being a responsible citizen. Participants offered several examples of how their achievement orientation was developed.

Adam: But I'm patient and I know when you have a big dream, you can’t rush it because when you do, you usually miss your goal. So, I’m gonna to be patient and see where my journey is taking me now, and wherever the cards may fall, that’s where I will land. But I won’t give up the dream, I’ve come too far to do that and I have too many people backing me to let things fall by the wayside.

Charles: But it’s clear to me that I’m not going to let anything stop me from getting to where I am. If the front door doesn’t open then clearly I can go around the side or the back. That’s just the mentality I have about it. So it got to the point where I ended up by myself saying I just knew that I wanted to do something different; I knew that I wanted to go somewhere and do something different.

David: I think my resilience was based upon these and wanting to make something of myself, my inner being, as it is being a resilient person and coming from a family that was resilient and all we had to do was survive. I think as an African American that's part of our nature--survival. You can put any one of us in any instance, and we'll find a way to survive. And I think that's ultimately a good and bad thing. It's a double-edged sword because ultimately what I know through my white counterparts that they're not surviving, they're thriving. They are looking at ways to thrive and particularly there's a slash downward whereas we're at the bottom trying to climb up and just doing the bare minimum. And surviving is usually essentially barely making… Ultimately that's what I was taught to do, was survive and continue to be--the stick-to-itiveness and the fortitude to set goals and make them. That's in my DNA.

Henry also added,
It made me feel that anything is possible. Yeah, I came from a small school where a lot of the college things that I went through and learned wasn’t taught to me in high school. But when I got to where I needed to get to and got real acclimated with the environment in terms of how the coursework was gonna go, you know, I pushed myself. I’m not gon give up. Yeah it’s hard, it’s something new, but I’m not gon give up. The desire to want to finish a… Being able to get a C+ in a class that I never thought I’d get a C+ in, you know, makes it that much hungry for me to get an A in next time. So, it was all about character, … it was all about motivating myself, to encourage myself knowing that I could achieve the highest level.

Frank: It was a part of me not wanting to disappoint myself or disappointing my family. My family has just been supportive and I don’t want to let them down. When you have some people so close to you in your life like that, you just don’t want to see them, you know, disappointed, especially when they speak so highly of you. Like I say, I was second generation for the most part, I was the second person to college.

So to actually let them down and like to let somebody down when their expectations of me were so high, which is been so disappointing not only to myself but to my family. So that’s what was heavy on my mind just not the sense of disappointment. So that helped me stay out of trouble for the most part. Because for me for the most part, I consider myself like not like street smart but I was quite intelligent. Like the stuff that people was doing for the most part that was bad, it didn’t impress me.

George: …my goals are not met at all. I still feel hungry and I have a lot of goals that I have to reach, and I plan on reaching them. So sometimes you have to double your resilience, you have to be extra keen to certain things that you have to adapt to, your environment basically. So in a situation like that you have to swallow the pill and you just have to concentrate and buckle down and do what you have to do.

All the interviewed participants were somewhat hesitant and apparently humble about detailing their own achievements, perhaps because an achievement orientation among this sample of African American males was co-mingled with a clear understanding of their indebtedness to others whom they credit for their success.
Self-actualization. The road to becoming a resilient African American male is not a straight line, but it is full of detours and U-turns. Far from the Maslow’s notion, the participants are seeking their fullest potential despite encountering experiences associated with being a member of a minoritized population.

Adam: I always felt I had to combat this notion on a stereotype that I’m this Black angry person all the time. And so that was another thing having to do that, and so being aware and cognitive of that even in my speech. When I raise my hand to answer a question that is race related, or when I ask a question in general, I describe it as the White gaze. And so I think that part of being Black is what distinguishes me from other racial groups.

It’s easier to do something that you know is wrong because it comes easy to you. But to do something that is right and to maintain a standard for yourself, whether it be in morals or anything else, any other area, it takes practice and it takes time. But for me I knew what my goals were. I knew that I didn’t want to be like everyone else on the streets. And so I knew my actions had to reflect something different than what was the social norm of where I grew up. And so I switched how I reacted to certain things. And I think Umoja helped me with that as well. But I will say my life has been based off of maintaining a sense of freedom and living it to the fullest without trying to damage other people.

David: …there’s a tougher rule, because I notice that because I’m African American I have expectations. I have to live a double life. I have to be able to maintain my Blackness while trying to succeed in corporate America or with people the Black community or White America. It is kinda walking a fine line between trying to succeed as an African American. So it’s one of those instances where either I’m too Black in one instance or I’m not Black enough. So it’s always trying to keep a balance.

Charles: It’s not until I have to show them how literate and competent I am by sharing my knowledge base. We have to acquire a strong knowledge base in order for them to have to give me the respect that I need. But regardless whether it comes or not, it’s still an obstacle because nobody should have to prove themselves or to show that they’re an equal or greater than the next person out there. It becomes irritating, I guess. Outside of that I don’t really worry about it. I always consider myself a minority in more ways than one in the profession I’m in.

David: When I got to college, the reason why I struggled a little bit is because I was ultimately trying to find my passion in life, what I wanted to
do. So through trial and error, and as I matured and started going out and trying to find out my passion, it led me into the law field. Honestly, by just simply deciding that I wanted to become a lawyer and that was my passion and going out and finding out what avenues I need to take to achieve that goal.

These reflections reveal challenges during the process of self-actualization that may be unique to minority populations. Intraracial and interracial tensions, social stigmas and negotiating the harmful effects of stereotyping are inescapable aspects of actualization among African American males.

**Accountability.** Participants made it clear that collegiate and life success among African American males require being accountable to yourself, loved ones, and to a sense of responsibility to better the condition of Black America. Yet, taking steps to be a responsible African American male may result in being labeled as an atypical Black or an additional burden of not wanting to disappoint those who have invested in your development, and trying to advocate for community betterment. The following set of reflections offer some specific examples from participants.

David: I've always been a very resilient person, but I think I'm more so resilient when people tell me I can't do anything or that when they make the "You're not a typical Black person" remark. So and those stigmas of what is typical of African American males always motivated me because I always saw myself and see us and generally as much more than what people deem us to be. So that's probably why I'm being in my experiences or my resilience come from, to always transfer in my best self and to continue to move our culture forward as an African American male. I view myself as one of the leaders, and in doing so, I try to hold myself to a high standard on everything that I do because I know that when people see me they not only see me, they see an African American male. And it would be my actions and my mannerisms that are indicative of typically what African American males are. So when I operate on my own, I'm doing it for African American males in general.

Frank: That’s like every time I do something I know which is not quite right, I can’t do it because it’s always this inner voice that’s telling me like
that’s not right, that’s not right, that’s not right. And then because I work so hard for things that I know that I don’t want to lose them… That’s very important for me to know where I don’t want to be.

As far as avoiding it was a part of me not wanting to disappoint myself or disappointing my family. Just being supportive of being consistent; I don’t want to let them down. When you have some people so close to you in your life like that, you just don’t want to see them disappointed, especially when they speak so highly of you. So that helped me stay out of trouble for the most part.

George: I just made sure I stayed focused. I concentrated on the things I needed to concentrate on. I did things in almost a step pattern -- I just take small steps. I do this section first, then do that section second, and then do the last section third. I think you can get things done quicker when you have a process and steps to it, so that’s pretty much what I did.

Overall, community wisdom took the form of messages and methods to guide actions and to avoid the negative consequence for engaging in pathologies.

**Theme 3 – Transformative resilience.** This final theme explores how participants’ resiliency transformed throughout college in response to collegiate stresses, and the contested nature of success among African American males.

*Coping with college stresses.* The key element in their collegiate experience seemed to be struggle then success. Although their community provided some transferable skills to gain their entrance into college little was done to support their matriculation through college given the physical, social and even experiential distance between them and their support structures. Yet, these stresses were just that, points of tension and growth which they ultimately learned to overcome.

Adam: So when I went off to college, being a Black male in the beginning, you have that initial phase where you say okay I can do that. But that didn’t happen to me. It was a slow process that I realized I was going through it. Because being a Black male in a predominately white institution where there is not that many people who are of ethnic origin in the first place or who are of a different hue is challenging, and I
experienced a lot of challenges while there. As far as with issues with race, engaging in in-depth dialogue about it, for me it wasn’t something that was difficult to do because Umoja had prepared me to engage in challenging conversations.

In college it’s a process that you do go about change and I recognize that but not to the extent where it had that alienated me from my family. And so I would go through a process where my father would say when I would say something, he would say yeah you think because you go to college that somehow makes you better or different than a person. And to which I would reply, yes in a way it is. I’m not going to deny that. But I don’t consider myself being above you. But I do think college has made me a better person, a better brother, a better son. And so having to combat that constantly of people telling me that I think I’m more than I am because I went to school. ...but I do know that there is a level of regret or remorse or some pain that prompts my father or another family member to tell me that even though when my actions don’t warrant that type of response. So, that’s something that I still struggle with to this day.

Henry: Yeah, I came from a small school where a lot of the college things that I went through and learned wasn’t taught to me in high school. But when I got to where I needed to get to and got real acclimated with the environment in terms of how the coursework was going to go, I pushed myself. I’m not going give up. Yeah it’s hard, it’s something new, but I’m not going give up. The desire to want to finish. So, it was all about character, it was all about motivating myself, to encourage myself knowing that I could achieve the highest level.

Charles: It was a culture shock coming from Chicago to Tuskegee Alabama, Montgomery, Alabama. Everybody here with their rules and regulations. How they are is sort of different. And down here is something I’ve learned over the years and to this moment I’m still really shocked by it. It is the way people handle issues that deal specifically with a specific way. For instance, racism is still alive down here each day of the week. That’s an understatement. In the North, it’s more so de facto where everybody already knows that White people does this, they stay up north. Black people stay out south or on the Westside. You got the Ukrainian Village, you got Chinatown on 35th or 33rd, you have the Mexicans, they stay northwest. Chicago is a very segregated city but it’s all de facto. We don’t talk about it as much as they do down here. It’s always understood that this is just what’s going to happen.

Now here in the South, they have more of a de jure situation where although they the laws over here that keep people from doing XYZ, and those laws have been abolished, or eliminated or even minimized because
there are some that still out there, it’s still talked about. You will hear somebody blatantly call you the “N” word if it got to that point and it’s not just an African American who calls you that. And so when you know that and you have that kind of stuff, you always expect the best but prepare yourself for the worse. That’s the only way you can stay out of trouble… Now I got into a lot of trouble when I got here cause it’s like I’m fresh off the boat. I come from another world. And I’m sitting here and I’m trying to grasp everything and barely knew what people are saying because I don’t know the dialect. Up North we have our own special way of talking here. In the South it’s like one word swallows the next which swallows the next and you don’t really understand what they’re saying. And it’s hard and so you have a communication barrier that causes problems. And I feel that was a lot of how I ended up getting in trouble here and it’s not even like trouble with the law but it’s just trouble like in I’m offending this person. I’m doing wrong by this person. It’s not even that I know I’m doing it. It’s just different and I’m not from around here so I really am… do some things that maintain unconventional some people might have a problem with it. That was the only way in college.

I guess for me at the end of the semester when I know how hard I’ve worked. I’ve received my progress in order to know how much harder I need to work. One example I will give you is I was getting ready to graduate from Tuskegee. Like I mentioned before when you’re in high school all you think about is here comes the next class, here comes the next class. And in a way I felt that same kind of way with Tuskegee University by it being the first school that I ever went to and nobody was giving me that support in college like it was in high school.

It was difficult where I felt like here we go we’re going again… here we go, it’s another semester and I don’t see the end of the light. And so it wasn’t until that last year that I’m like oh my God, I’m getting ready to graduate. And so as I got close to it, it was time to apply to a master’s degree program and it didn’t hit me that all man you got to go ahead and you should have been setting yourself up to get into a good master’s program. The same way you set yourself up in high school to get in a good college, you should have been setting yourself up so that you can get into a good master’s program. But one of the things that I did was I prayed to God that if you give me a second chance to do right, I will get the best grades I could. And eventually I did; I graduated summa cum laude from a program at Auburn.

In general these resilient men were able to transfer much of their community-based resilience to confront new challenges and new environments, and develop greater
commitments to excellence. Yet, this process left some scars and tensions with family and some personal regrets about taking full advantage of their time in college.

**Contesting success.** All interviewed participants challenged the researcher’s notion that they had achieved success and were hard pressed to even accept the compliment that they were successful. They all wanted to achieve more and most would not concede that they had made it to the level they wished to achieve.

Adam: I don’t consider myself having succeeded yet or having made it because I still see myself as a work in progress. So I’m still constantly moving toward my dreams. I think that when I, if I, acknowledge I have made it or that I have succeeded, that I will somehow lose the vigor of attempting to reach or obtain those goals. I don’t consider me moving to one plateau to be a major success, an end goal but a new place to move on to the next goal. I have issues with the word success because it notates finality to me, something that is done, that I am finished so that I don’t have to hustle or to move forward with my grind.

Barry: I’m slow to say yes in that there is still things I need to do that I haven’t done yet. I don’t have to worry about the things I had to worry about in high school or as a kid. I can feed myself. I can come and go when I want to so I have certain freedoms that I wouldn’t have had if I chose the life like some in North Lawndale, I think.

Charles: I definitely feel successful in the sense that there were not a lot of opportunities afforded to me. Now with the opportunities that I was given, I always made sure that I took advantage of it. I didn’t take it for granted but I always took advantage of it and that’s something that I’m confident of today. No I’m not successful yet, but very soon it’s going to happen. I do believe that.

David: ...because of the way I look at things, I don't think I've achieved excellence. I think that I've achieved my excellence by ultimately completing all of my goals. So that's how I look at my particular successes. I'm successful but I don't think I've achieved the ultimate level of excellence that I deem I am able to achieve. Not only am I continually reaching for success and striving for success, but I’m trying to help bridge the gap and pull those guys into the area that I’m in. I hope for them, me pulling them along my way, versus them pulling me back into the same area that I'm trying to escape from. So my success is predicated on my ultimate successes... mentorship as well as reaching back into my
community and pulling those guys out of that mentality. Having them look at themselves other than what they see themselves as.

Frank: At this point, I would say I achieved some point of excellence. I used to beat myself up a lot. After graduating from college and you didn’t get the job that you wanted, and you have just got to beat yourself up like what’s going on in my life? Is this really what life is about? I didn’t actually see the bigger picture of me coming from a low poverty neighborhood and actually graduating from high school as well as graduating from college. I used to just say okay well this is the norm. You seek higher education to get where you want to be. But I was actually not giving myself some credit.

So as far as like excellence, I would just say yeah but I'm not done, I am not done at all. I would say I achieved a certain level of things but I am not where I want to be so I am not quite there yet. As far as my short-term goals, they are achieved. My longer-term goals are still down the road. I think I feel that’s a good way to put it.

George: Well, me personally, I haven’t felt like I have achieved excellence because excellence is almost perfect and no one is perfect. I’ve achieved some goals that I’ve set in my life and I’m happy with those goals that I have achieved. But there’s many more things that I need to accomplish in my life before I can even begin to think about excellence. I try to do everything I can on a daily basis. I try to do it to the best of my ability and I try to put my all into it. There are still goals I haven’t reached so I wouldn’t say that I have reached the point of excellence yet.

In sum, their responses to the static notion of success that is so often popularized which was refreshing; yet revealed how success is contested among African American males. Despite having achieved what most consider the ideal goals of an American education, these young men certainly wanted more. They seemed not to be referring to goals beyond more education or a better job, but preparing themselves to make a meaningful difference for other African American males.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided insights into how African American males from urban communities utilize transferable and transformative resilience in their pursuit of a higher
education and a meaningful life. This chapter highlighted how the African American community itself is the critical ingredient for a recipe for resilience. Community wisdom provides African American males with a transferable set of methods and messages to apply into new situations and environments. Yet, struggle seemed to be the central theme of their collegiate experience: a struggle to transition, a struggle to balance interracial and intraracial tensions placed upon educated African American males, and a struggle to find a deeper form of success beyond a college degree enabling them to be their brother’s keeper. The upcoming concluding chapter considers the contributions of the present research, and recommendations for African American males seeking excellence and sage recommendations for families, schools, churches and community organizations.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro, thus educated, is a hopeless liability of the race. (Woodson, 1933, p. 5)

The purpose of this research was to understand, explain and expand present insights into the nature of resilience, and how it animates the post-secondary academic achievement of urban African American males. This inquiry was guided by the question: What experiences and interactions support the development of resilient African American males, so equipped to actualize their spark of genius? To explore this question, eight African American males were interviewed. Each of them participated in the Umoja Student Development Corporation program while attending Manley Career Academy High School, which is located on the Westside of Chicago in the North Lawndale community. They then matriculated through various institutions of higher education, and some to graduate school. By most standards, these young men have achieved – at least educationally – the American Dream. Yet, the nuances of their journeys and insights that can inform guidance for other African American males were uncovered during this study. This final chapter addresses the contributions of the present study to resilience literature.
and implications for future research, and provides applicable recommendations for promoting resilience among urban African American males.

**Implications for Research**

**Resilience as Collective Resistance**

Educational resilience as a line of inquiry asserts that resilient individuals can face hardships in school and life, and maintain “normalcy” or even excel beyond social standards (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). Moreover, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) define educational resilience as “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (p. 46). Supportively, researchers like Gordon and Song (1994) identify resilient individuals as having a set of personal attributes including: (1) positive self-concept, (2) drive, (3) cognitive style, (4) temperament, (5) motivation identity, (6) knowledge of dominant culture values, (7) health and nutrition, (8) social competence, (9) life-course organization, and (10) autonomy (p. 33).

Yet, the present research challenges the notion that resilience is an individualized and internal adaptation. The researcher contends that resilience is a community’s productive response to the structured opposition its members experience as they seek to actualize the full benefits of American citizenship. Resilience is not a generic, individualistic, nor a systematic reaction to disturbance asserted by Masten (2008). Given the results of the present study, resilience is a form of collective resistance, a re-education of the mis-educated via community resources and know-how.
Assets-Based Resilience

Unfortunately, the acceptable conceptualizations of resilience often view communities, and typically communities and families of color as the key source of “risk.” In other words, African American children who want to be “successful” most shield themselves from their own culture and community. This negative overgeneralization has resulted in critiques of resilience research, and this deficient-centered view of the African American community is not supported by the data that informs the present study.

Supportively, Howard and Johnson (2000) detailed several short-comings in resiliency research: (1) the majority of children considered “at risk” mature to be productive adults; (2) most studies rely on educators’ views to select children considered at risk, which are mostly based on how a student behaves in school rather than measureable ability; (3) resiliency models tend to blame the academic shortcomings of students on their families, while ignoring social equalities in American education (Kozol, 2005); and (4) the “at-risk” label is typically reserved for culturally diverse student groups, despite the presence of pathologies in White families and communities. The present results support a more nuanced view of urban communities and an assets-based approach to understanding how African American families contributed positively to student development, despite living in challenging urban environments. Understandingly, the participants noted the pathologies of gangs, poverty and violence within their communities, but also the power within families, schools, churches and community organizations to support individuals as they chose more productive paths.
Synergistic Community Wisdom

Furthermore, according to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) “…a key requirement of resilience is the presence of both risks and promotive factors that either help bring about a positive outcome or reduce or avoid a negative outcome” (p. 399). While this may very well be accurate, the present results also highlight why the level of risk exposure should not be central to the study of resilience. In urban spaces, risk is an everyday part of life; it is a factor controlled by chance and circumstances, not just choices. In many cases, the onset of “risk” or life challenges is even outside of the control of the individual, their family and school; it’s just life, particularly in urban spaces. Furthermore, who can determine the magnitude of risks generated by life challenges? For instance, five of the eight participants were raised in single-parent homes, another participant’s father passed away in his freshmen year of high school, and still another recalled when he lost his father due to incarceration. Which of these life circumstances constitute greater risk? The researcher concludes that a more refined approach should focus on the quality of interactions between African American males and adults in schools, communities and families (Gay, 2000). Such interactions must exude authentic care that goes beyond professional and contractual duties (Gay, 2000). Second, efforts to promote resilience should focus on how synergistic messages and methods (community wisdom) are across various spheres of interaction. A subtle but critical finding of the present study was that messages communicated in one setting (the family for example) were strengthened when participants heard a similar message in other environments like church or school from individuals who they trusted and perceived cared for them.
Transferable and Transformative Resilience

The final contribution warranting consideration is how transferable is resilience from one setting to another. Conceptualizations also seek to understand the adaptive nature of resilience. On one hand, Fraser (2004) notes that resilience is not an all-inclusive, absolute or stable quality, but a charismatic characteristic consistently changing with the student’s social circumstances, it evolves according to a student’s abilities, environmental surroundings, functional domain (situational), developmental thinking processes, and cultural context. Yet, Masten and Reed (2002) contend that resilience in certain domains does not necessarily transfer into other situational domains. This study detailed how resilience developed primarily to survive urban spaces and matriculate to college, transformed to meet the stresses of college, to promote self-actualization despite constant intra/inter-racial tensions, and evolved even more as participants began to see themselves as community leaders who were now capable and responsible for developing resilience in others. The transferable nature of resilience may foster a predisposition to adopt or overcome challenges; enabling the resilience acquired in urban spaces to be transformed to meet new challenges typical of collegiate life.

Recommendations

Toward the goal of promoting resilience among more African American males, recommendations will be offered for family, churches, schools and community organizations. These recommendations are informed by the major conclusions of this study and trends in research on successful African American males.
Recommendations for Families

The present study confirmed the importance of the African American family to successful African American males. The family as a web of relatives, kinships and relationships proved critical to the positive development of African American males. Based upon factors that promoted the success of the participants, the researcher recommends that families:

1. Proactively seek positive and caring African American male mentors to supplement fathering roles. Homes in which both parents are present still such seek mentors for young boys by their freshmen year of high school to reinforce messages and methods of addressing the challenges faced by African American males.

2. Express verbally and consistently expectations tied to academic achievement, college attendance and avoidance of the various pitfalls common among urban African American males. Use personal and real life examples of positive outcomes for choices and negative outcomes for non-productive choices.

3. Mothers should understand the power that they have in directing the positive development of their sons. Mothers don’t have to be college educated to inspire their sons to seek a college education.

4. Parents or guardians stay engaged at your son’s school, teachers should know your name, have several ways to contact you, and know that you expect your son to go to college.

5. Parents or guardians never approach your son’s teacher in anger, it only feeds stereotypes and teachers are not trained to see past your anger. Instead, if
there is a problem with your child, speak with your child first to understand their perspective (in many cases this has not been addressed by any adult).

Speak with male influencers (fathers, relatives and mentors). Then engage the teacher in a dialogue, providing insights into how your son learns and how you adjust behavior. Develop a plan in which you adjust misbehavior at home, and ask that the teacher let your son know that a plan is in place, and he is accountable. Remember that teachers of classes of 20-30 kids are limited in meeting the specific needs of your son. Home should be the most responsive and supportive environment for your son.

6. Stay engaged with a local faith community, they can provide support, insights and positive examples.

7. Seek out community organizations to provide collegiate readiness support; needing this type of assistance does not mean you are a bad parent. Do not assume that schools are preparing your son for college. Separate the rhetoric that schools prepare all kids for college from the fact that half of African American males drop out of high school, and only 27% finish college.

8. Cultivate the academic abilities and interests of your son as a requirement for their participation in athletics or leisure activities. Understand that less than one percent of high school athletes will earn a college athletic scholarship.

9. Be sure that your son has homework five nights a week, even if their teacher does not assign homework. Use online homework sites to create a homework curriculum that fills in the gaps of what’s missing from school. African
American children report receiving only one night of homework per week; Asian American children receive homework five nights a week.

**Recommendations to Faith-Based Communities**

Positive faith-based interaction with religious leaders and mentors also helps to establish that initial experience that leads to attributes of resiliency and can propel a young African American male teen in the right direction to a positive collegiate experience and beyond. For instance, the family engagement in local churches was a common theme among successful African American males. Faith-based organizations provide:

1. A structured set of values and acceptable behaviors that families can use to reinforce teachings from home.
2. Organized mentoring, tutoring, teen programming, and summer support structures at low to no cost.
3. Men’s conferences are annual occurrences at many Black churches now, and provide a great opportunity for fathers and sons, or mentors and mentees to engage men of all ages in in depth instruction around spiritual issues confronting African American males.
4. Men’s or young men’s classes are also held weekly or monthly at an increasing number of churches, push your son to attend or fathers bring your son.
5. Church membership was one of the most critical factors for successful Black males, yet the void they felt after leaving their church for college was
tremendous. Church leaders should work to connect their graduates to local churches for support while they are in college.

**Recommendations for Schools**

Although schools were often sources of tension among successful African American males, staff members that displayed authentic care were able to positively influence African American males. Within this context schools should:

1. Seek out Black male teachers, counselors, para-professionals, student-teachers, community leaders, and volunteers. Black male students need to see themselves in professional roles.

2. Seek out professional developments for teaching and developing Black male learners, teachers are not provided any pre-service training in teaching Black male learners.

3. Disaggregate student data by race and gender to reveal how African American males are performing, experiencing discipline and graduating. If specific attention is not provided to this sub-population do not expect improvements.

4. Communicate early and often with parents about learning and behaviors observed in the classroom. Be sure that information provided to parents is not based on biases but observed behavior on all available facts from those involved.

5. Contact both parents and guardians; know which adult the male child responds best to. Report patterns with behavior and learning early on, because if parents don’t receive information in a timely fashion their ability to support teachers diminishes.
6. Assign homework that is graded consistently, it provides a child a chance to self-organize, rethink, relearn and self-teach.

**Recommendations for Community Organizations**

Community organizations like Umoja play a vital role in the preparation of African Americans for college and life. The following recommendations address ways to further support student development:

1. The central factors in influencing African American males is the demonstration of persistent care, and insights into the common challenges faced by African American males, and tried solutions. All the interviewed participants agreed that Umoja has done an excellent job of having a positive influence on them through their persistence and insight and would like to ensure that they keep it up:

   Adam: I think because of the staff, they position themselves to complement the teachers. And so, …where teachers deal with direct instruction and teaching lessons, Umoja is able to facilitate the other aspect of the whole development of the person. And so, students recognize that and they recognize that in the friendliness, in the care and the concern, and the genuineness of each staff member. They see it. They hear it and then they can feel it. …and so I think that’s one of the major things is that Umoja helps students see that not only that a college life is for them, but also see that they as individuals could live a life different from the circumstances in which they’re in and their mind is the most positive tool that they will ever have.

   …but what matters is that you are able to relate to people, that you are able to understand people, and that you are able to reach your fullest and highest potential academically and intellectually. And I think that is what makes Umoja unique, it’s what is Umoja’s niche. It’s powerful.

2. Community organizations must be careful not to paint entire communities as pathological, but work to understand how families and churches are working
toward the same goals. The strength of community wisdom is not determined by the quality of one source, but by how synergistic the message is across multiple sources.

Charles: And so, ...I can’t speak for any other community but the Lawndale community. That community right there has gangs on one end, many gangs in the middle of it and many gangs on the outside of the neighborhood. So you have nothing but trouble in the community. And the teachers have given up on you, the community basically has given up on you because they’re not going to help themselves, the churches try to do all they can but they really can’t do anything, and school is just like “hey we can’t turn you away.” That’s all you got is Umoja to be there and say “hey we care and support you, we’re doing any and everything we can. We will do whatever we have to to get you over that finished part.” When you have people like that you’re gonna get a success rate, you’re going to get people to come back for more... And I feel that’s one of the main reasons they’re able to make a difference and be successful as they are now.

Henry: Well, what can they (Umoja) do... Get out in the community more... Visit colleges more, continue to definitely do college trips, not only with high schools but with colleges as well. So that way just in case a child who never heard of Umoja go to college and feel that they gonna be dropped because of funds, Umoja can have some sort of office in one of the colleges. So that way they can have access to some low-income students with... being financially stable. They can offer scholarships to students while in school who probably didn’t have access to in the beginning.

3. Community organizations must seek to employ and partner with local and returning African American males because students tend to gravitate to professional minority males. Establish more partnerships with the surrounding high school neighborhoods, within the college environment, and with college graduate career professionals was described as key amongst all the interviewed participants:

Barry: Just to have the option available to you. Whatever you want to do we’ll help you get there within reason. Like I don’t think they are
trying to help people become rappers and movie stars. Not that there’s anything wrong with that but, again, they accept their limitations... But I think they also think big; Umoja thinks big.

David: …because Umoja has always provided me with opportunities such as internships and things of that nature. I feel that they can continuously improve on those types of experiences, you know such as fellowships and internships while we’re in college for like summers, during our summer breaks, as well as fellowships when we graduate and get our degree, it would help us to develop more for career professionals.

4. Community organizations must invest resources in tracking student experiences and needs once they enter college. A constant updating of records is needed, given how students switch phone numbers, addresses and emails. The interviewed participants gave many suggestions such as Facebook and blogs (which the researcher knows Umoja already utilizes), Twitter, Instagram, mass texts, individual texts, even YouTube; anything that can help keep them in touch with Umoja:

David: I think Umoja can do a great job of allowing students who have desires to serve humanity in humanities fields and starting a fellowship where students can come back and help out Umoja and earn a little pay as well as gain professional experience. I think in the whole, the strengthening of the alumni ties and the alumni will increase ten-fold because you know we have a job, so to speak. We’ll be getting professional experience in a field that we ultimately want to be in, and we can help broaden the network capability – networking apparatus.

Frank: Yeah, anything they can improve on… college wise, career assistance wise. I think they should push it more, get them a room decorated with a bunch of different resources and tools and stuff, just give them more. I want the program to have more stuff I would say. I think that would be better if the program had more. So if they actually had the program working out of a building that the schools sponsored for them, like they bought them an actual Umoja building, something like that where these people can be reached out to on a different aspect, rather than just computers, small room... I want them to be
more publicized. I want people to actually know what Umoja is, you know.

Charles: In high school the one teacher that I could definitely say for one I tried to emulate, and number two I really looked up to him because I had him for all four years – his name was Mr. Scott Trener. He doesn’t work at Manley anymore. Last I checked he’s working at Pritzker or something like that; some school more towards the North Side. I know he’s still an educator now, but I really wish he was a teacher at Manley to help the kids that are going on now because I’m sure each generation is getting worse and worse and they need specific teachers like him that will really help those kids out as much as possible.

… there was another teacher, Mrs. Thayers. She was a guidance counselor quote unquote that was a sponsor for the National Honor Society and everybody loved her. She was always the one, I’m not sure if she still working at Manley but I know that after school and on weekends she was always there and always helping me out. I know I put plenty of gray hairs on her name. But she helped me out with that.

And even when the time came that I wasn’t able to or didn’t feel like applying, Carmen Mahone, and Lila Latz, Steve Drake and Ted Christians, they were some that, well I don’t know if any of them are there now but I know they were with at Umoja when I was there and had been there for years. They stayed on me.

David: High school I would have to say was Easter Young. And I love Easter with all my heart. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for her. And part of my… is probably because I love Easter so much, and all the work she did for me. I, ultimately, got into college because of Easter Young.

Who was that? I forgot her name. Well, one of the names was Ms. Renata Greer. She helped me navigate successfully. Primarily when I first got there, a lady Ms. Shelton, Yolana Shelton, helped me. She was like another Easter Young to me. She took me under her wings. She was more like a mother figure, and she helped teach me how to navigate through college and really held my hand for the first year since my college experience – which ultimately set me up for success.

Frank: So high school, we have Umoja staff. So Tiwanda Colson, Nicole Williams. Like I said the four names I won’t forget -- that was ……….(ummm) that was the devils school. I’ve never seen somebody pushing me like that.
Henry: I definitely say Umoja. Umoja stayed by my side on both levels. So, Umoja, man, Umoja did it all and all I can do is say thank you. Whenever I got the chance to do something for them such as this interview, I’m always open to do something for them. It’s the least I can do to in terms of giving back.

Adam: I think having Umoja alumni like myself come back and speak to African American males about the ins and outs of college life, the academics, the social and even the financial aspect of it because college is not cheap. So getting them to understand that and helping them understand that there is more than just the academics. The social realm is important and that it is important for one to balance the level of fun one has versus doing his or her work.

I have close relationships with the staff at Umoja because they advised me and counseled me and helped me get to where I’m at now. So people like Marley Benton, Carl Simeon is another, and even former staff members Nicole Williams and Jacari Thompson.

5. Follow-up is specifically needed in the freshmen transition during which even successful African American males struggled intensely in their transition from an established support network to a college environment where they were largely disconnected from support structures. All interviewed participants again all spoke of the need for follow up and the desire for Umoja to have more college programs, not only for freshman but upperclassmen as well:

Charles: But I know a couple of years after we had graduated they had stopped the trips to the South – probably had become too costly. They had a trip to come down and everything like that. I really wish they would get back to that because I know if they did they would have called me to be a chaperone or whatever they had because we had chaperones and students who had graduated to show us around and you know be with us. But they need to do that and start that back up again.

David: Ultimately what I would like to see Umoja do in all honesty is go for more than the traditional standpoint of vocational training with students and look at the start of that thing, because in my personal experience Umoja didn't push career as far as like astronauts or things of that nature of higher… such as doctors and things of that nature
with our students. They wanted us to get out of high school… it's kind of like hey, if this is something you really want to do, you should take these types of classes and you should be this type of student. So ultimately when you get there, you're able to… really make, take advantage of some of the resources that are out there…

George: Now I would say they (Umoja) can improve in, I don’t know if they have classes for college development, but from my experience being in college, I wished that I had more preparation for it when I was in high school. Even though I went years after I graduated from high school, I still wish that I had just a little … because Manley used to be a career academy. You would go there if you wanted to be a cook or you wanted to get into construction. It wasn’t a college prep school. So, I got that Umoja had more classes like that of their own it would have been a better help.

Adam: And so I think that having that direct mentorship experience to come back will be important. And not just like one or two types of showings, but something that is, that is consistent, that is more than just me showing up to speak or hear them. On a career development level, just having these young people getting a sense of what they want to do in life and then providing the resources for that.

Frank: Like I say,… what would be good is if they can get students who have been a part of the Umoja program to actually start RSO, the registered school organization on those college campuses.

6. Community organizations should take advantage of college students returning home for the summer months, and employ them as mentors while they receive additional supports based upon their experiences in college. This is needed specifically during the first two years of college.

George: You know, I believe that if there were more males who came from the same place, like myself, like, hopefully when I get my bachelor’s degree, guys like that who decide to work for Umoja that have been through the trenches, that have come from where these students have come from. If you had more faculty members like that, especially for the males. Basically like a big brother type of thing to let you know that even though you have these obstacles you can still make it out, you still can be resilient and do what you have to do academic wise and social wise in order to get yourself ahead.
7. Beginning their junior year, an intense effort should be made to help students understand how to transition from undergraduate studies into career or graduate studies. This can be done through Skype or other forms of technology. James and Lewis (in press, 2014) study of highly educated African American males revealed the importance of mentors during collegiate years, which typically pushed students to post-graduate studies, and fostered critical networks that facilitated job placement. While all the interviewed participants spoke of the need for more programs, the maturation process of these individuals was evident by their practicality in all of them mentioning the financial realities of limited resources that organizations like Umoja face:

Edward: Keep doing what they (Umoja) do in high school and do more in college. I know money is tight but more mentoring for college students, a Big Brothers/Big Sisters type thing.

8. Given the limited resources that most community organizations operate with selecting some partner colleges and universities may allow for better vetting of student support services and campus environments.

Charles: But I do think they’re doing an admirable job and that they’re using a whole lot of different resources and exhausting all options that they can to help the children that they serve.

Conclusion

The present research sought greater understanding of and contributes additional insights into supporting the academic success of African American males in urban public high schools and in higher education. The findings of this research hopefully add valuable information about the community factors (family, church, schools and community organizations) that contribute to the development of resiliency among African
American males. Additionally, the research sought to provide a detailed account of the community wisdom (messages and methods) that informed resilience. Lastly, the transformative nature of resilience was explored in collegiate settings, where stresses and the contested nature of success pushed students to adopt and evolve newer forms of resilience. Ultimately, the researcher confidently concludes that promoting resilient African American males as the rule rather than the exception requires, Umoja or unity of mind, effort and spirit.
APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SURVEY
Demographic Information Survey

NAME: ___________________________________ DATE OF BIRTH: ______________________

ADDRESS: _______________________________ HOME PHONE #: ______________________

CELL NUMBER: __________________________ E-MAIL: ________________________________

MARITAL STATUS:  SINGLE  ENGAGED  MARRIED  DIVORCED  WIDOWED

PARENT STATUS:  ONE CHILD  TWO CHILDREN  THREE + CHILDREN  NO CHILDREN

TWO PARENT HOME (YOUR CURRENT HOUSEHOLD):  YES  NO

YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION: ________________________________

YEAR OF COLLEGE GRADUATION: ________________________________

COLLEGE ATTENDED: ________________________________________________

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE/UNIV. OR PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLEGE:  HBCU  PWC

COLLEGE MAJOR: ________________________________________________

DEGREE OBTAINED: ________________________________________________

DEGREE LEVEL ACHIEVED:  Associates  Bachelors  Masters  Doctorate

CURRENT OCCUPATION: ________________________________________________

LENGTH OF TIME AT CURRENT JOB: ________________________________

CURRENT SALARY RANGE:  $15,000 to $25,000  $26,000 to $35,000  $36,000 to $50,000

$51,000 to $70,000  $71,000 and up

PREVIOUS EMPLOYER: ________________________________________________

PREVIOUS POSITION: ________________________________________________

LENGTH OF TIME AT PREVIOUS JOB: ________________________________

HOW MANY SIBLINGS: ________________________________________________

YOUR SIBLING BIRTH ORDER: ________________________________________________

RAISED IN A TWO PARENT HOME:  YES  NO
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF SUPPORT
March 31, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to confirm Umoja Student Development Corporation’s (Umoja) support of and participation in the "Academic Achievement of African American Men" dissertation research study of Melvin Hargrett, a Doctoral Candidate at Loyola University of Chicago.

I have been provided the applicable documents and have personally discussed the project and the responsibility of Umoja Student Development Corporation with Mr. Hargrett. I understand the procedures and protocols and look forward to assisting in the completion of the project through connecting Mr. Hargrett with a sample of Umoja alumni who have completed college for him to survey and interview. I approve access to our alumni and approve for data to be released without the identifying information of the final participants.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact me at 773-483-0939 or christina@umojaorganization.org.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ted Unstars
Chief Executive Officer
APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FLYER
ATTENTION:

African American Male College Graduates

UMOJA ALUMS

ARE YOU SUCCESSFUL? WHY??

While literature is clear about the factors that contribute to African American males’ failure to achieve academically, few studies have explored those elements of resilience that lead to educational excellence. The purpose of this research study is to better understand why some African American males from urban neighborhoods with high crime indices and high unemployment rates are able to succeed scholastically both in high school and college while others in the same socio-economic environment are not. The findings of this research will aid in shaping better understanding around African American males in schools.

Please Contact: Melvin Hargrett, Doctoral Candidate
Phone: (312) 882-7345
MelvinHargrett@wowway.com
YOU CAN HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE!
Sunday, May 25, 2014
APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Dear Melvin Hargrett,

On Thursday, May 1, 2014 the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved your Initial application for the project titled "Recipe for Resilience: Factors Contributing to Urban African American Males' Post-Secondary Academic Achievement". Based on the information you provided, the IRB determined that:

- the risks to subjects are minimized through (i) the utilization of procedures consistent with sound research design and do not unnecessarily expose participants to risk, and (ii) whenever appropriate, the research utilizes procedures already being performed on the subjects for diagnostic or treatment purposes
- the risks to participants are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to participants, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result
- the selection of subjects is equitable
- informed consent be sought from each prospective subject or the subject's legally authorized representative, in accordance with, and to the extent required by §46.116
- informed consent be appropriately documented, in accordance with, and to the extent required by §46.117
- when appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of subjects
- when appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of data
- when some or all of the subjects are likely to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, such as children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons, additional safeguards have been included in the study to protect the rights and welfare of these subjects

Documented consent will be obtained from all subjects enrolled.

This review procedure, administered by the IRB, in no way absolves you, the researcher, from the obligation to adhere to all Federal, State, and local laws and the Loyola University Chicago policies. Immediately inform the IRB if you would like to change aspects of your approved project (please consult our website for specific instructions). You, the researcher, are respectfully reminded that the University’s ability to support its researchers in litigation is dependent upon conformity with continuing approval for their work.

Please notify the IRB of completion of this research and/or departure from the Loyola University Chicago by submitting a Project Closure Report using the CAP system. In all correspondence with the IRB regarding this project, please refer to IRB project number #1383 or IRB application number #2391.
The IRB approval granted for this project expires on 5/1/2015 12:00:00 AM

If you have any questions regarding this approval, the IRB, or the Loyola University Chicago Human Subject Protection Program, please phone the Assistant Director for Research Compliance at (773) 508-2689 or email the IRB at irb@luc.edu.

Best wishes for your research,

Raymond H. Dye, Jr., Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board
RESILIENCY AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' FAMILY

1) Describe Strengths and Weaknesses in your family, extended family, community and church (if any)?

2) What role did your family have in the community? In church? How did your family participate in the life of your community & church?

3) Do you have any close relationships with; a) Community members? B) Church members? Who are they and describe relationship.

URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

4) What was your experience as an African American in high school? college?, church?, community?, and in your career? Compare and contrast your experience as an African American when compared to other racial groups?

5) Do you still have residual goals, hopes or dreams unrealized from either high school?, College? Or career?

6) Describe, how you achieved excellence in an environment that has so many social problems? Do you feel you have achieved excellence?

SUPPORT STRUCTURES (ROLE MODELS/MENTORS)

7) What school staff member was most influential to your success; a) In high school? b) In college? c) At home? d) In church? e) In the community? Why?

8) What vocation did you aspire to when you graduated high school? When you graduated college? Why was that important at each milestone?

9) How did you manage to avoid serious trouble? At home? In high school? In the community? In college? Why do you think a lot of your peers did not?

RESILIENCY

We Define Resilience As: (fortitude/strength/courage/grit/determination/staying power/stamina)

10) What have you experienced in terms of academic resilience? Resilience as an African-American from a neighborhood with low income and high crime?

11) What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of resiliency?
12) Have you had to overcome obstacles and what are they? At home? In elementary school? In high school? In college? In the community? In your career?

REGARDING UMOJA

13) Why do you think Umoja Student Development Corporation (Umoja) is doing well in urban public high school?

14) How do you think Umoja can improve? In high school? In college? In career?

15) Why do you think your relationship with Umoja helped you succeed despite significant social and scholastic stressors?

16) What additional supports can Umoja provide to improve the lives of urban African American males, particularly in the college matriculation and career development level?
APPENDIX F

IRB RECRUITMENT LETTER
Dear potential participant,

I am conducting a study of how urban African American males succeed in college despite facing social, economic, and educational obstacles entitled: Recipe for Resilience: Factors Contributing to Urban African American Males’ Post-Secondary Academic Achievement. I would like to share the stories of twelve resilient students and the elements that contributed to their success. The findings of this research may contribute to a better understanding of how k-12 schools and colleges can improve outcomes for African American males from urban communities. This study is being conducted by Melvin Hargrett, a doctoral candidate at Loyola University Chicago, and is being supervised by his faculty advisor Dr. Marlon C. James.

The purpose of this study is three-fold:
1. How do African American males who graduated either two or four year colleges and participated in Umoja as high school students, successfully negotiate the academic and social rigors of the collegiate environment?
2. How do these African American male graduates persist despite challenges in both home and collegiate environments?
3. How do support structures and networks of African American male students’ home communities and college campus contribute to their successful completion of college?

Your potential involvement includes:
1. You will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview for about one hour.
2. You will be asked to take part in a follow-up interview (phone, email, or in person) for 30 minutes.

Your Federal Rights includes:
1. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw participation at anytime during any of the two points of participation explained above with no penalty. Your participation and/or withdrawal from the study will not negatively impact you. During the interview you may decline to answer any of the interview questions or stop the interview at anytime without penalty.
2. Information shared during interviews is confidential (not made public in a manner that will allow you to be identified). All data collected will be anonymous (your name will not be linked to data). Quotations from the interviews may be used in research articles, dissertations and presentations but will not include your name or identifiers linked with quotes.
3. With your written permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into text for analysis. The audio files will not have your name written on them nor stated within during the interview. These audio files will be converted to text files, stored on a secured in an office safe, and the original audio files deleted a week after the conversion.
4. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. However, you are asked to refrain from disclosing what you share during your interviews with others because it reduces your confidentiality and anonymity.
5. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689. If you have any questions regarding
this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact Melvin Hargrett at melvinhargrett@wowway.com.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Melvin Hargrett
APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Dear potential participant,

I am conducting a study of how urban African American males succeed in college despite facing social, economic, and educational obstacles entitled: Recipe for Resilience: Factors Contributing to Urban African American Males’ Post-Secondary Academic Achievement. I would like to interview some staff members of Umoja to better understand your experiences and programming offered to students. The findings of this research may contribute to a better understanding of how k-12 schools, community organizations, and colleges can improve outcomes for African American males from urban communities. This study is being conducted by Melvin Hargrett, a doctoral candidate at Loyola University Chicago, and is being supervised by his faculty advisor Dr. Marlon C. James.

The purpose of this study is three-fold:
1. How do African American males who graduated either two or four year colleges and participated in Umoja as high school students, successfully negotiate the academic and social rigors of the collegiate environment?
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Your potential involvement includes:
1. You will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview for about one hour.
2. You will be asked to take part in a follow-up interview (phone, email, or in person) for 30 minutes.

Your Federal Rights includes:
1. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, taking part in the study is not a job requirement. You may withdraw participation at anytime during any of the two points of participation explained above with no negative impact on your employment status with Umoja. Your participation and/or withdrawal from the study will not negatively impact you or your employment status. During the interview you may decline to answer any of the interview questions or stop the interview at anytime without penalty.
2. Information shared during interviews is confidential (not made public in a manner that will allow you to be identified). All data collected will be anonymous (your name will not be linked to data). Quotations from the interviews may be used in research articles, dissertations and presentations but will not include your name or identifiers linked with quotes.
3. With your written permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into text for analysis. The audio files will not have your name written on them nor stated within during the interview. These audio files will be converted to text files, stored on a secured in an office safe, and the original audio files deleted a week after the conversion.
4. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. However, you are asked to refrain from disclosing what you share during your interviews with others because it reduces your confidentiality and anonymity.
5. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact Melvin Hargrett at melvinhargrett@wowway.com.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Melvin Hargrett
APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT SIGNATURE PAGE
I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study *Recipe for Resilience: Factors Contributing to Urban African American Males’ Post-Secondary Academic Achievement* conducted by Melvin Hargrett at Loyola University Chicago.

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in any dissertation and/or publication to come from this research with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689 or Dr. Marlon C. James the faculty advisor for the research at mjames7@luc.edu.

I will retain a copy of my signed consent form for my records.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in this study?
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis and/or publication that comes of this research.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

Participant Name: __________________________________ (Please print)

Participant Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

**Consent Form (Keep this signed copy for your records)**
REFERENCE LIST


Center of the Study of Social Policy. (2012). Developing a protective factors framework for youth in care. Webinar; the National Research Center for Permanency and Family Connections (p. 33).


Lynn, M. (2002). What’s race got to do with it? Critical race theory’s conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 7-22.


VITA

Melvin Thomas Hargrett is the son of Helen Hargrett-Gaines (Tampa, Florida) and Thomas Hargrett (deceased). He was born in Chicago, Illinois on October 6, 1959. He currently resides in Historic South Pullman with his wife Valerie. He is the father of two married adult sons and has eight grandchildren.

Melvin Hargrett attended several Chicago public elementary schools (with the exception of one year at South elementary school in North Chicago, Illinois). After spending his freshman year at Austin High School, he transferred to and graduated from Prosser Vocational High School, majoring in graphic design/commercial art in 1977. He again attended several different schools while in college until ultimately transferring into and graduating from Bradley University (Peoria, Illinois) in 1982, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts degree.

Melvin Hargrett has worked in the field of law enforcement for almost 30 years, beginning his career as a Cook County Sheriff’s Correctional Officer in 1985, then becoming a Chicago Police officer in 1986. He rose through the ranks to become a plainclothes tactical officer, youth officer, detective, arson investigator, hostage negotiator, F.B.I. Task Force/U.S. Department of Justice Special Deputy – U.S. Marshal, and his current position of Explosives Technician I with the Chicago Police Bomb Squad. In 1999 he returned to school and graduated in 2001 with a Master of Science in Human Service Administration from Spertus College. He formerly served as social action
chairman of his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Iota Graduate Chapter, former executive board member of the Umoja Student Development Corporation, and currently serves as assistant director of the We-Care Role Model mentoring program.
The Dissertation submitted by Melvin Thomas Hargrett has been read and approved by the following committee:

Marlon James, Ph.D., Director
Assistant Professor, Urban Education and
Associate Director, Center for Urban School Partnerships
Texas A&M University

Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D.
Chief Academic Officer
Young Women’s Leadership Charter School of Chicago

Anita Thomas Ph.D.
Associate Dean, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago