

African American Males and Education:  
A Study of Successes and Failures

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the educational and social experiences of African American males reared in poverty. The focus of this study was on a particular low-income neighborhood in Columbus, Georgia. I was interested in this neighborhood because I, an African American male, lived there for 7 years. I researched and recorded the lives of eight African American males, including myself, who were raised in this low-income neighborhood. The study investigated our life experiences, with emphasis on those issues related to education and race. With the neighborhood context as the frame, emphasis was placed on understanding why some of my African American male peers succeeded in school and life, while others did not. The study involved conducting life history interviews, and the data collected were used to construct first-person narratives of each participant. The narratives were analyzed to determine themes within and across the life histories. The four principle themes were: personal success, fatherly support/relationship, fair treatment, and better lifestyle. I found that all of the African American male participants had aspirations and dreams. They yearned for quality relationships with their fathers. The participants spoke out vehemently against racism, desiring to be treated fairly. All of the participants wanted something better in life than what they experienced as children and teenagers in the projects, and they worked towards the fulfillment of that dream. Resilience was also a common characteristic and was discussed in detail.

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## PREFACE

I am an African American male who was born and raised in Columbus, Georgia. I have four older brothers, one of whom is now deceased. Each of us has different fathers. I have never seen my father in person, nor have I ever received any financial support from him. I happen to be the only one in my family to graduate from high school. No one in my home made it past the 11th grade except me. My mother struggled over the years to support us and make ends meet. I have lived in at least five different low-income areas of Columbus. My family was poor, and we constantly moved from place to place. By the time I was in the fourth grade, I had been at eight different elementary schools. One of the low-income neighborhoods, Elizabeth Canty, is particularly interesting to me. My family stayed 7 years in this neighborhood, the longest we ever stayed in one area. I have many memories from there. In fact, from time to time, my mind wanders back to scenes from this neighborhood. Often, when I am praying, my mind occasionally drifts back to Elizabeth Canty. Why? I do not know. I have talked several times with my wife concerning this. I have even driven back to the neighborhood several times, just to revisit the scenes in my memory. I have taken my children with me on two different occasions and pointed out various landmarks and their significance to me.

In trying to decide on a topic for my dissertation, I considered the issues that were dear to my heart: racism, at-risk youth, African Americans, and education. I went from topic to topic, but nothing seemed to stick. Then I thought about my old friends and colleagues from Elizabeth Canty. My family was not the only family that faced tough times there. Most of my male friends and their families, with whom I grew up, struggled also and were just as bad off financially, or even poorer than we were. All of my older

brothers and some of my friends struggled through school and dropped out, while other friends and colleagues managed to stay the course and graduate. I have seen some of the Black males from Elizabeth Canty develop a pattern of juvenile delinquent behavior and never recover from it. Some have served and are currently serving prison terms. Within my own family, I saw each of my older brothers, one by one, drop out of school. I often wondered why some African American males struggle in school and drop out, while others under similar circumstances stay in school and graduate. From this particular low-income neighborhood, there are examples of both successes and failures. Many of these Black males were fatherless or had minimal contact with their biological fathers. Some today are earning an honest living in the work force on various levels, while a few are serving prison terms, and some who served jail time are trying now to put the pieces of their lives back together.

Through this study, I attempted to provide further understanding of at-risk males and resilience. There is abundant literature on African American males, but I believe it is somewhat limited when it comes to the issue of resilience. In Elizabeth Canty alone, I believe there are many examples of resilience. It was my goal through this research endeavor to add to our current body of knowledge about African American males. Through in-depth, life history interviews, I investigated the lives of 8 African American males, including myself. Five of the participants graduated from high school, and 3 dropped out. Two of the participants are my older brothers. Only 1 of the participants had a father who was active in his life. Emphasis in the interviews was placed on education and race issues.

The first chapter introduces this study to the reader. The problem statement and problem context are both presented, along with the research questions and purpose of this study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on African American males as it relates to education and race issues. The third chapter discusses the methodology in detail. Chapter 4 introduces each participant in detail in the form of first-person narratives. Chapter 5 offers analysis of the data, linking the current body of knowledge to the findings in this study. Emerging themes are discussed in detail. Chapter 6 provides a concluding discussion and recommendations from the researcher.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank God for guiding me throughout my life, strengthening and encouraging me as I faced various challenges along the way. Looking back, I am convinced it was His presence beside me that enabled me to endure the hardships and overcome the odds. I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my wife, Pamela Seldon, for being so patient with me as I have spent countless hours working on this dissertation. Thank you for your encouragement and endurance. Likewise, I am grateful for my children: Tranisha, William, Darrell, and Adrienne. I am looking forward to redeeming the time with all of you for the hours I sacrificed for this research endeavor. Thank you for your patience.

Lastly, I am grateful for everyone who played a role in the conceptualization and completion of this research project. I am thankful for the help and guidance of Drs. Richard and Lorraine Schmertzling. Thank you for your dedication to excellence and sacrificing your time throughout each stage of this research. This indeed was a true learning experience. I am also appreciative for all of my dissertation committee members. Thank you for your hard work and dedication. To all of the participants in this research project, thank you for taking the time to talk to me and to share your life experiences. I have thoroughly enjoyed every moment of every conversation we had in reliving the experiences we once shared. May the Lord bless all of you and continue to guide you as dedicated fathers.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Vivian Seldon. You did your best in raising four good African American boys. You had a special and unique relationship with every one of your sons and related to each of us as such. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me along the way. You truly discerned something special and unique about me, and never once did you doubt my abilities. You were my cheerleader. I am sorry you did not live to see this day, but I know you are smiling right now. Your heart now beats within me continuously, and I will always cherish your genuine spirit of love.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### *The Problem*

Many African American male students experience difficulties in educational settings and in the larger society. There are numerous studies that have shown how drastic the achievement gap is between Whites and minorities in this country (Ballantine, 1997; Cooper, 1996; Holland, 1991; Hudley, 1992; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Reed, 1988; Smith, 2005). For example, in a study of 1,771 students conducted between 1981 and 1985 in the Wake County Public School System of Raleigh, North Carolina, Black males attained the lowest average academic achievement scores when compared to other ethnic groups (Holland, 1991). From grades 4 through 11, Black males represented more than 50% of the total number of students retained at each grade level (Holland, 1991). In comparison to other ethnic categories, Black males continue to lag behind in standardized test scores and promotion. An effort to address this achievement gap is at the heart of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). However, after 5 years of this legal mandate, this disparity remains from elementary school to high school (Nogeura & Wing, 2006). African American males are suspended and expelled more often than any other ethnic group and are also more likely to drop out of school (Garibaldi, 1992; Holland 1991; Kao & Tienda, 1998). According to Nelson (2008), a student drops out of school every 26 seconds, and unfortunately, Black male dropouts are included in this statistic.

In the public school arena, Black males are seemingly exhibiting behavior problems and drawing more attention to themselves than any other ethnic group, or they are being singled out unjustly:

Black males often adopt behaviors that make them complicit in their own failure. It is not just that they are more likely to be punished or placed in remedial classes; it is also that they are more likely to act out in the classroom and to avoid challenging themselves academically. (Noguera, 2001a, p. 56)

Black males are more likely to be referred to special education than any other ethnic group (Blacks Overrepresented in Special Education, 2007; DeVise, 2005; Kunjufu, 2002; Milofsky, 1974), or they are placed in classes that are not stimulating or challenging (Oakes, 1985; Pollard, 1993). DeVise noted that

But some black parents and others have accused school systems across the country of using special education, a federally subsidized program tailored for children with documented disabilities, as a dumping ground for disruptive black children. The Education Department found that, in 2003, although about 15 percent of all students ages 6 to 21 were black, they made up 20 percent of all special-education students and 34 percent of those labeled mentally retarded in that age range. (p. B04)

More often than not, Black males are stereotyped and labeled as deficient and delinquent and assumed to be slow and disinterested in learning (Gibbs, 1988a; Hudley, 1992; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999). In some schools, special education classes have become dumping grounds for difficult children (Bahr, Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 1991; Blacks Overrepresented in Special Education; DeVise; Kunjufu; Milofsky; Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999). Black students have a larger representation in special education classes than any other ethnic group (Blacks Overrepresented in Special Education, 2007). African American males are also more likely to be retained than any other ethnic group (Gibbs; Holland, 1991; Smith, 2005). Over 45% of Black males drop out of school each



year (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). As a whole, African American males, over the years, have come to be described by the five Ds according to Gibbs:

Black males are portrayed by the mass media in a limited number of roles, most of them deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional. This constant barrage of predominantly disturbing images inevitably contributes to the public's negative stereotypes of black men, particularly of those who are perceived as young, hostile, and impulsive. Even the presumably positive images of blacks as athletes and entertainers project them as animal-like or childlike in their aggressiveness, sensuality, "natural rhythm," and uninhibited expressiveness. Clearly, the message says: If they entertain you, enjoy them (at a safe distance); if they serve you, patronize them (and don't forget to leave a tip); if they threaten you, avoid them (don't ride on the subway). Thus, young black males are stereotyped by the five "d's": dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. (p. 2-3)

The picture is gloomy socially as well. African American males have been leading the nation in homicides as perpetrators since 1976 (*Homicide Trends in the U.S.*, 2007). According to Nelson (2008), someone is murdered every 30 minutes in America, and African Americans comprise 49% of the victims. Homicide is the leading cause of death for young adult African American males (Nelson). The African American prison population rose from 100,000 in 1980 to 1.4 million in 2002 (Kunjufu, 2002). According to West and William (2008), African American males led the country in prison sentences for 2007:

The 2007 sentenced [Black] male imprisonment rate (955 prisoners per 100, 000 U.S. residents) was almost 14 times that of the female imprisonment rate (69 per 100, 000). Black male offenders had the highest imprisonment rate (3, 138 prisoners per 100, 000 U.S. residents) of all racial groups, male or female. This was 6.5 times the imprisonment rate of white males and 2.5 times that of Hispanic males. (p. 4)

Similar trends have been noted for previous years (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Roper, 1991; Skolnick & Currie, 1994). There seemingly is a correlation between dropouts and crime, considering the high dropout rate for Black males. According to Nelson, 60% of Black males who drop out of school will be imprisoned. This is alarming considering that over

50% of Black males in inner city schools will drop out (Nelson). Over half of ex-cons in general become repeat offenders (Nelson), thus reducing the probability of some Black offenders to recover. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009), African American males led the country in the contraction of HIV/AIDS for 2007. AIDS is the number one cause of death for Black males ages 35 to 44 (Nelson). Concerning longevity, Blacks die on average 5 years earlier than Whites (Nelson).

In many cities across the United States, Black males are the least likely to be hired and the most likely to be unemployed of all ethnic groups (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Massey & Denton, 1993). Pager, Western, and Bonikowski (2008) conducted an experiment testing the effects of race and criminal background on employment. Teams of Black and White male job seekers in disguise applied for various entry level positions throughout New York City. The results exposed modern day employment discrimination against Black male applicants: “The findings suggest that a black applicant would have to search twice as long as an equally qualified white applicant before receiving a callback or job offer from an employer” (p. 20-21). Black and Hispanic children are less likely to grow up in two-parent homes than White children (Jeynes, 2003). Almost 60% of African American children are growing up in single-parent homes (Nelson, 2008). According to Spencer (1986), minority children growing up in the late 20th and early 21st century America often dwell and mature in high-risk settings characterized by systemic, structural barriers to individual effort and success. These barriers and obstacles include conditions within the family, neighborhood, schools and the interactions between these contexts and the larger social, economic, and political forces in American society (McLoyd, 1998).

It is not surprising that African American males have been labeled as an endangered species. The term was derived from the horrible statistics educationally and criminally, combined with their shrinking numbers in higher education and the employment sector (Gibbs, 1988a; Kunjufu, 2002). Such a label speaks to the urgency at hand and the necessity of finding answers to these disturbing trends. With attention to the complexity of data related to the aforementioned issues, changes can be made in the right areas in order to affect change in a dying population.

### *The Research Project*

This research project aimed to further understand the reasons for some of these disturbing trends in the lives of eight African American men and contribute to our current body of knowledge from an in-depth and unique perspective. I was raised in several low-income neighborhoods in Columbus, Georgia. This research project targeted one of these areas: Elizabeth Canty Apartments. I lived there for 7 years, from 1975 to 1982. I, along with many of my African American male peers, grew up on governmental assistance in a single parent home with no input from my biological father. We embodied all the variables associated with low socio-economic status (SES):

**Socioeconomic status (SES)** an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. When analyzing a family's SES, the household income earners' education and occupation are examined, as well as combined income, versus with an individual, when their own attributes are assessed. Socioeconomic status is typically broken into three categories, high SES, middle SES, and low SES to describe the three areas a family or an individual may fall into. When placing a family or individual into one of these categories any or all of the three variables (income, education, and occupation) can be assessed. (Wikipedia, first paragraph)

Upon moving to a different neighborhood in 1983, I lost contact with nearly every one of my Elizabeth Canty peers. Looking back over the years, I can remember what it

was like for me living in the projects and how it affected my self-esteem, the role race played in my educational experiences, and what factors contributed to my educational success. I decided to make these old friends and colleagues the focus of my dissertation. I interviewed seven Black men who grew up with me in Elizabeth Cauty Apartments. I included myself in this study as well, which made 8 participants in all. Two of the participants in this study are my older brothers. Three of the participants, including my two older brothers, dropped out of school. Only 2 participants had contact with their dads.

### *Research Goals*

The goal of this project was to provide further knowledge and understanding of the current body of research on African American males. In particular, I investigated the life experiences of two of my older brothers as well as other Black male colleagues who grew up with me in a low-income neighborhood. I was interested in their experiences related to education and race issues. I wanted to hear their stories about growing up in the projects and how it affected them in school and other areas. Some of them managed to do well in school while others struggled academically. Through this project, I aimed to research their educational and life experiences to determine why some graduated and others dropped out. I also wanted to know their perspectives on education and the barriers they encountered along the way. I compared their stories with my own personal account, and considered the available literature on the underachievement and plight of African American males. It is my desire that such knowledge gained will enable us to continue to make changes and adjustments in our educational system in order to more effectively educate African American males.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions that I attempted to answer through this project were related to education and race issues. What were the educational experiences and related life experiences of African American males growing up with me in Elizabeth Canty Apartments? I went to school alongside most of the men in this study. Although I lived in Elizabeth Canty for 7 years (1975 to 1982), most of the stories shared in this project were of events that occurred within the time span of 1975 to 1987. I was interested in knowing and understanding their experiences, their perceptions of education in Columbus, and how their perceptions compared to mine as well as experiences and perspectives reported in the literature. What were the barriers to their successes? There were obstacles in my life that I had to get past in order to reach the finish line of graduation. I know they had barriers as well. We played together often in the projects. I saw some of their struggles. I was interested in hearing about their perceived hindrances and obstacles firsthand. To what extent did race affect their educational outcomes? I remembered the race issues in my life at a particular majority White school as well as in society. Many of the participants were at the same schools I attended. I was interested in knowing their perspectives on particular incidents of which I was aware as well as others unbeknownst to me. How did the challenges of my life and the lives of my Black male peers relate to the challenges of African American males as described in the research literature? I wanted to hear from my old friends concerning their perspectives on challenges they faced. What factors contributed to some of the participants graduating from high school while others dropped out and, in some cases, were imprisoned? Although I had not kept in contact with most of these men, I assumed a certain number of them may have dropped

out of school. Understanding why could add to our current knowledge on dropouts and perhaps help us more effectively target such at-risk males. I did hear secondhand about the imprisonment of one of them. I wondered what factors contributed to his incarceration and what he thought could have kept him in school? Likewise, I knew some of them had graduated, and I wanted to understand what struggles they endured to make it as far as they did. Through this research project, I sought to answer such questions in an effort to better understand and add to our growing body of knowledge on the current dilemma facing not only our Black males in this country, but also those who have the responsibility to educate them.

### *Significance of Study*

Why is this study important? The literature presented so far paints a gloomy picture for African American males in this country. Most of the data that contribute to this picture are quantitative in nature. Such information is helpful, but this study went much further by investigating the lives of particular African American men who were poor, mostly fatherless, and raised in a very poor area of Columbus, Georgia; yet many of them endured harsh situations and made it over the top to graduate and go on to be successful in life. This project is, in part, a study of resilience in that it highlights Black men who against adversity, faced their challenges in life and succeeded. Even those who did not graduate from school have a story to tell. This study gives firsthand accounts of the challenges faced and overcome by the men who graduated. My research also gives firsthand accounts of what led several of the participants to drop out of school. It sheds light on race issues and other challenges that poor Black boys face in Columbus, Georgia. It was my goal through this research project to provide rich, descriptive data to enable us

to plumb beneath the statistical horrors to reveal the complexities of the life stories that give faces to the alarming numbers. It is hoped that the insights provided by these stories allow educators and other instructional leaders to make better decisions in our schools so that no children are left behind, especially African American males.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review section was designed to explore the various barriers to achievement and academic success facing African American males in society. This section is divided into seven areas of concern. The first two sections discuss structuralist and culturalist schools of thought concerning African American underachievement. *Teacher Issues* discusses the literature on problems teachers experience and display in relation to Black males in the classrooms. *Racism* investigates the literature on teacher bias and unfair treatment of African American males in the school systems. The section on *School Structure* discusses the structure of traditional schools and the problems that structure creates for minorities, African Americans in particular. *Resilience* investigates how some African American males manage to overcome the various obstacles to succeed in life. The last section, *Local Context*, discusses desegregation and racial tensions in Columbus, Georgia, and the Muscogee County School District as a whole.

Many studies have attempted to explain why African American males are failing in education and in life, as well as why our educational system is failing them. Many of these studies reflect two schools of thought, structuralist and culturalist, which explain the underachievement of minorities in opposing ways.

#### *Structuralist Perspective*

Structuralists believe that the environment shapes behavior (Massey & Denton, 1993; Noguera, 2001a). According to this theory, African American males are doing



poorly in academic settings due to the environmental constraints of poverty-stricken neighborhoods, low SES, fatherlessness, and unequally funded schools. Earls (1991) noted a number of risk factors, such as the lack of healthcare, inadequate nutrition and housing, exposure to drugs at young ages, and crime-ridden environments that could lead to at-risk behavior. Cooper (1996) argued that the lingering stratification of American society, which sorts people by race and class, conspires with the related harsh effects of tracking to impede minority achievement. Kozol (1991) and Cooper and Jordan (2005) addressed the effect of uncertified teachers and poorly funded schools on African American achievement. Kunjufu (1986) argued that schools with their biased policies and practices that deny Black males upward mobility are largely to blame for the destruction of African American males. He argued that such signs of school bias effects on Black males can be noticed as early as the fourth grade. Reducing the inequalities and injustices in society is the most effective way to change the behavior of deviant Black males, according to structuralists (Noguera, 2001b). Other authors have also argued that African American males do poorly academically due to environmental restraints and conditions, such as the lack of Black male teachers (Chmelynski, 2005; Holland, 1991), uncertified teachers (Gibbs, 1988a; Hammond, 1997), large, urban school enrollment (Jordan & Cooper, 2003), and tracking (Milofsky, 1974). Kunjufu (2002) linked the negative effects of tracking to the widening of the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks: “The reason why we have this wide disparity between 4th-grade and 10th-grade learning levels is because of the nine previous years during which tracking destroyed the students” (p. 10).

### *Culturalist Perspective*

Culturalists, on the other hand, believe that culture shapes one's behavior (Anderson, 1990; Noguera, 2001b). According to this theory, African American males are doing poorly academically because of how they are raised, how they think, the groups of people they associate with, and the low value they put on education (Noguera). Fordham (1996) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) noted that Black males tend to view academic achievement as *acting White*, and thus shun the idea of excelling in school for fear of being ridiculed and reprimanded by their Black peers. According to Ogbu (1983), it is difficult for Blacks to put value on education or follow school rules of behavior for achievement because of their lack of faith in the system.

Other authors share similar views. Hoberman (1997) noted that Black males place more value on athletics and music than academics as means of status and success due to their lack of confidence in the system. Osborne (1999a) and Steele (1992, 1997) argued that Black boys, as a self-protective strategy, reduce their identification with academics to avoid the embarrassment of giving the wrong answer out loud and confirming the negative group stereotype. Majors and Billson (1992) said that Black males adopt a *cool pose* as a coping strategy:

African American males learn early to project this façade of emotionlessness, fearlessness, and aloofness to counter the inner pain caused by the damaged pride, poor self-confidence, and fragile social competence that results from their existence as a member of a subjugated group. African American boys adopt a strategy for coping with their membership in a stigmatized group that is oppositional to identification with academics. (p. 558-559)

Osborne concluded that African American males fail to reach their full academic potential due to social, psychological, and cultural hurdles. According to culturalists,

interventions aimed at changing one's behavior can only be effective if they change one's culture, beliefs, and values (Anderson, 1990; Noguera, 2001b).

### *Teacher Issues*

In the large city schools attended by most Blacks, many of the teachers lack proper certification for the subject areas they teach (Hammond, 1997; Jordan & Cooper, 2003). As a result, many Black students in these areas are receiving a substandard education that results in low academic achievement (Hammond). Some authors think that a cultural disconnect exists, because historically most teachers of African American males were White females (Cooper & Jordan, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Holland, 1991; Howard, 1999; Monroe, 2005). African Americans comprise only 6% of the teaching force with only 1% being African American males (Kunjufu, 2002). Due to cultural differences in how Blacks and Whites are raised, it is difficult for White female teachers to relate effectively to Black males (Cooper & Jordan; Delpit; Kunjufu). Thus, cultural differences can become major hurdles in classrooms:

The "insensitive" teacher can't put herself into another's place or emphasize with another point of view. She may have only one Black student in her class, but because she has never experienced Black culture herself, she can't relate. One of the major reasons why many African American children do not seek advanced placement, honors, or gifted and talented classes is because African American children have major problems in those classes with insensitive teachers. (Kunjufu, p. 29)

Delpit commented on a Black principal in Alaska who observed a high volume of office referrals for Black students in White teachers' classrooms:

The teachers often send the children to the office for disobeying teacher directives. Their parents are frequently called in for conferences. The parents' response to the teacher is usually the same. "They do what I say; if you just tell them what to do, they'll do it. I tell them at home that they have to listen to what you say." (p. 35)

Hale (1986) noted differences in cultures and learning styles of Blacks and Whites. The bodily movements, rhythms, and charismatic behaviors of Blacks are different from those of Whites, and Hale suggested that instructional activities should cater to such cultural tendencies. Blacks tend to be turned off by mundane lessons that do not appeal to their kinesthetic needs (Hale). Further, as they engage Black children in lessons that are culturally appealing, teachers can connect across cultural boundaries: “Teachers who use rhythm in speech and engage in verbal interplay with Black children may connect culturally with those who interact rhythmically with their mothers at home” (p. 84).

### *Racism*

There is also evidence of racism in education. Bakari (2003) surveyed student teachers from predominantly White and Black public universities and predominantly White private universities. Results showed that the Black student teachers scored just as low on the Culturally Sensitive Subscale as others, but scored highest on the Willingness to Teach Blacks Subscale. In another study, 119 teachers were chosen to rate male students’ presentations, which they could see but not hear; the White male students were given higher ratings than the Black male students (Woodworth & Salzer, 1971). Results from a study conducted by Rong (1996) showed that White female teachers rated Black males lower than other groups on social behaviors. As Rist (1970) noted, teacher’s perceptions and behaviors towards their students can affect the students’ academic performance:

When a teacher bases her expectations of performance on the social status of the student and assumes that the higher the social status, the higher the potential of the child, those children of low social status suffer a stigmatization outside of their own choice or will. Yet there is a greater tragedy than being labeled as a slow learner, and that is being treated as one. The differential amounts of control-oriented behavior, the lack of interaction with the teacher, the ridicule from one’s

peers, and the caste aspects of being placed in lower reading groups all have implications for the future lifestyle and value of education for the child. (p. 448)

Hamovitch (1999) interviewed students in an after-school compensatory program on race and other issues in the school they attended:

Bram: Have you ever seen or heard of teachers being racist?

Lakeshia: Yes. A teacher I had last year is a math teacher, and he is good to call someone a nigger to their face. He don't care. He was about to call me one. I was like, "Call me one." I was like, "I don't care where I'm at." I was like, "I don't." I was like, "That's not right. You don't call me a nigger." He wouldn't want me to talk about his race so I was like, "Tell me. Say it right now." I don't care who he is. I would have fought him. I don't care. 'Cause he had no right to call me a nigger. (p. 67)

Though the example quoted above involved a Black female, the educational experiences of Black males tend to be a combination of low expectations, feelings of inferiority, and a sense of defeat in their academic pursuits (Cooper & Jordan, 2005).

Rubovits and Maehr (1973) noted that it is well documented that White teachers expect less of lower-class children than middle-class children. Teacher expectations do affect students' self-concept of ability and can predict future performance and motivation (Jussim, 1989). In a study of White teachers' interactions with Black and White gifted and non-gifted students, the Black students were given less attention, ignored more, praised less, and criticized more. The one Black gifted student was given the least attention, was the least praised, and the most criticized, even when compared to his non-gifted Black counterparts (Rubovits & Maehr). A number of authors (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Majors & Billson, 1992; Ogbu, 1978, 1983; Osborne, 1999a) agree that racism is a major factor in the underachievement of African American males in public schools. Ferguson (2003) concluded that there is reason to believe teachers prefer to teach White students and give them more plentiful and unambiguous support than Black students.

According to Richardson and Gerlach (1980), many Black males do not view the educational process as a means for economic success. They tend to view American society as a closed system in which they will be unable to participate regardless of their educational background: “Many Black dropouts believe that given the current social and economic barriers to mobility, education will be of little benefit to them. Thus, dropping out of school seems a realistic and sound decision” (p. 489).

The historic Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), was initially a vision of hope for minorities. Yet, most southern states ignored this law and found ways to stall the process years after the ruling.

The Negro had been deeply disappointed over the slow pace of school desegregation. He knew that in 1954 the highest court in the land had handed down a decree calling for desegregation of schools “with all deliberate speed.” He knew that this edict from the Supreme Court had been heeded with all deliberate delay. At the beginning of 1963, nine years after this historic decision, approximately nine percent of southern Negro students were attending integrated schools. If this pace were maintained, it would be the year 2054 before integration in southern schools would be a reality. (King, 1964, p. 18)

Even today, there is evidence that either some school districts have not fully implemented the federal mandate of 1954, or, even more problematically, they are moving backwards in the opposite direction (Hammond, 1997; Jordan & Cooper, 2003).

### *School Structure*

Some researchers of Black male disengagement and achievement gaps have put the blame on the organization of schools, including their curricula, the gender make-up of their faculty, and their tracking structures. Some scholars believe that American schools consistently deliver a Eurocentric curriculum, which in turn alienates African Americans and have campaigned for a culturally enriched curriculum that welcomes diversity in the classroom. As an example, Ladson-Billings (1994) wrote:

While it is recognized that African Americans make up a distinct *racial* group, the acknowledgement that this racial group has a distinct *culture* is still not recognized. It is presumed that African American children are exactly like white children but just need a little extra help. Rarely investigated are the possibilities of distinct cultural characteristics (requiring some specific attention) or the detrimental impact of systemic racism. Thus the reasons for their academic failure continue to be seen as wholly environmental and social. Poverty and lack of opportunity often are presented as the only plausible reasons for poor performance. (p. 9)

Ladson-Billings suggested that schools should employ culturally relevant pedagogy designed to use student cultural tenets in order to combat the negative effects of the dominant culture while encouraging academic excellence:

The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a “relevant black personality” that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture. Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (p. 17-18)

Delpit (1995) believes that in order to effectively educate minority students of color, those who share such culture should be at the forefront of curriculum development:

I am also suggesting that appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children’s best interest. (p. 45)

This is to ensure that minority students are able to identify with the instruction that generally has catered to White students. Delpit also suggested that children lacking the opportunity and skills for operating in the dominant culture of power should be given the rites of passage to enable them to be successful the real world:

The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. This means that success in institutions—schools, work-places, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power. Children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school than those from non-middle-class homes because the culture of the school is based on the

culture of the upper and middle classes—of those in power. The upper and middle classes send their children to school with all the accoutrements of the culture of power; children from other kinds of families operate within perfectly wonderful and viable cultures but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power. (p. 25)

According to Delpit, schools should be equipping students of color with the necessary skills for surviving and thriving in the real world where their culture is not dominant. The cultural heritage of students of color should be complimented and included in the curriculum (Delpit). Delpit stressed that students of color should not be stripped of their oral and linguistic styles, but instead should be taught the additional oral skills needed to operate successfully in the dominant culture of power:

What should teachers do about helping students acquire an additional oral form? First, they should recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is “wrong” or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family. On the other hand, it is equally important to understand that students who do not have access to the politically popular dialect form in this country, that is, Standard English, are less likely to succeed economically than their peers who do. How can both realities be embraced? Teachers need to support the language that students bring to school, provide them input from an additional code, and give them the opportunity to use the new code in a nonthreatening, real communicative context. (p. 53)

Irvine (1991) suggested that teachers of African American males should provide more variety of activities rather than the traditional mundane lessons that prohibit movement and active exploration:

Unfortunately, what researchers now understand about classroom teaching is that teachers actually use a very limited repertoire of pedagogical methods: they talk or monitor seat work. “Teacher talk” is usually lecturing, giving directions, or asking questions. The seat work is the infamous routine of students’ reading dittos and completing short answer or multiple-choice questions. The order of the day is to set contingencies in which there are minimal student movement, minimal student-to-student interaction, minimal student-to-teacher interaction, and minimal intimate affect. If this scenario is descriptive of the majority of our schools, then it seems fair to speculate that this dismal situation is intensified in schools that serve black children. In these schools, the overwhelming preoccupation seems to be with control—particularly controlling the physical



movement and anticipated and perceived aggression of black male children. (p. 91)

African American students thrive best in environments that allow movement, cooperative learning, sharing, and active exploration (Irvine).

Some scholars believe that the mostly-female teaching staff across the country presents a more feminine curriculum that does not cater to the masculine identity of

African American males:

One reason commonly mentioned for the disengagement, alienation, and poor academic performance of Black males is that they perceive most educational activities as feminine and irrelevant to their masculine identity and development. Furthermore, it is also believed that schools, specifically teachers, impose a feminine culture on males that induce oppositional behaviors. (Davis, 2005, p. 133)

Considering that most of the teaching force is female, it would be natural for such teachers to unconsciously deliver a more feminine style of instruction. Black males place a high value on masculinity (Majors & Billson, 1992), and they are apt to prove their manliness at any cost, even at the cost of their education in some instances. According to Noguera (2001b), African American males view schooling activities as feminine and unimportant to their masculine sense of identity. Holland (1991, 1992) found that teachers impose feminine standards for behavioral expectations that in turn create school disengagement attitudes and behaviors. Black males may find it difficult to relate to the female teachers, especially White female teachers: "It is not coincidental that friends most often share race, intelligence, social class, and education. White middle-class teachers and low-income black males are likely initially to hold negative impressions of each other" (Irvine, 1991, p. 54-55).

Tracking and ability grouping of Black males on the elementary level seems to have negative effects on their achievement as well (Davis, 2005; Kunjufu, 1986, 2002; Irvine, 1991). Ability grouping or tracking begins on the elementary level in the guise of such group names as Cardinal, Robins, and Blue Jays, with the groups ranging from high to low (Irvine). On the high school level, tracking is disguised in the form of diploma tracks: vocational, general, academic, and advanced (Irvine). Researchers' findings have shown that Blacks tend to be placed in the slowest groups on all levels of schooling and subsequently prevented from accessing higher level courses (Davis; Irvine). Irvine noted:

What is devastating about tracking is that in lower tracks the number of poor and black students is disproportionately high, the instruction is inferior and ineffective, and students suffer psychologically and emotionally. When tracking is combined with student characteristics of race and class, the result is predictable. Black and poor students are disproportionately enrolled in the lowest ability groups, a fact that leads to a phenomenon known as resegregation. Resegregation occurs when black students are either intentionally or inadvertently assigned to lower tracks, a practice that results in two schools in one building---one black and one white, "together but unequal." (p. 11-12)

### *Resilience*

In spite of the surmounting barriers set against African American males, some do defy circumstances and, through resilience, manage to bounce back and achieve. Rutter (1987) defined resilience as an individual's positive response to stressful and adverse circumstances. Resilience may be seen as a protective mechanism emerging from self-esteem and self-efficacy, or from family cohesion and the availability of external support systems designed to reinforce coping efforts (Braddock, 2005). In the biography by Suskind (1998), Cedric Jennings had to battle against peer pressure to be the average Black, inner city child in Washington, D.C, with no dreams or aspirations. Most of his

peers were underachievers and settled for mediocre academic performance. To overachieve or excel beyond the academic status quo would have resulted in ridicule and being targeted for violence by the students at Ballou High School (Suskind). Being raised by a single parent in a poor, drug- and violence-infested neighborhood made it even tougher for Cedric to remain focused; yet, Cedric endured the temptations and constant harassment and rejection by his peers, kept an A average, and managed to gain acceptance in the Ivy League at Brown University (Suskind). Even at Brown University, Cedric had to battle with his perceptions of Whites and learn to survive in a predominantly White school (Suskind). Support from mom, the pastor, and the church, along with self-motivation were the keys to Cedric's success (Suskind).

The autobiography by McCall (1994) described his childhood in a two-parent home in a Black, working-class neighborhood of Portsmouth, Virginia. This neighborhood, one of the largest Black areas in the southeast, became infested with gangs, drugs, and crime. Giving in to peer pressure, McCall participated in major criminal activities while in school. Along with his friends, he lost the value of education and did not consider school as the means to success; getting money on the streets was more realistic. Most of his friends dropped out, but he managed to stay in school while robbing stores and breaking into homes. McCall even managed to graduate, but soon thereafter served time for robbing a restaurant. The time spent in prison led to substantial reflection. After being released, he refocused and earned a degree from Norfolk State. Throughout his autobiography, McCall described his struggles with racism and anger towards Whites for the atrocities Blacks face in this country. Even with a respectable career as a journalist, he had to learn to survive in the world alongside Whites. Although

McCall got into trouble with the law, he often thought about his parents' high expectations; parental high expectations and support, self-motivation, and the prison experience enabled him to bounce back.

The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. documented numerous occasions of Black American resilience during the civil rights movement (King, 1964). Black men and women of all ages, through a well-orchestrated network of support, endured the hardships and racial and economic barriers to bring about change in Birmingham, Alabama (King). Although many African Americans succumbed to the psychological tactics of racism and stress of the status quo, some dared to challenge the system nonviolently, enduring the consequences of high-powered hoses, police dogs, jail time, and bodily injuries:

I shall never forget the phone call my brother placed to me in Atlanta that violent Saturday night. His home had just been destroyed. Several people had been injured at the motel. I listened as he described the erupting tumult and catastrophe in the streets of the city. Then in the background as he talked, I heard a swelling burst of beautiful song. Feet planted in the rubble of debris, threatened by criminal violence and hatred, followers of the movement were singing "We Shall Overcome." I marveled that in a moment of such tragedy the Negro could still express himself with hope and with faith. (p. 107)

Roderick (2005) investigated the early high school experiences of selected African American males in Chicago and categorized them into three groups: the Withdrawers, the Disengaged, and the Resilient. Although the resilient group looked much like the others, she named four themes that separated them from the others: The boys in the resilient group had strong family support; they took responsibility for their academic difficulty, and actively sought support; they pushed through the stereotypes to get the teachers to recognize them as individuals; and they developed alternative identities that allowed them to distinguish themselves from peers and resist peer pressure.

### *Local Context*

Much of my data on desegregation in the local area of Columbus, Georgia, came from the work of Virginia Causey, who is currently a professor at Columbus State University. I emailed her on November 8, 2008, and told her that I would like to include a short biography of her in my dissertation, since I cited one of her publications numerous times. She responded by emailing me this paragraph:

I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, and experienced desegregation there while in high school. The situation was almost totally chaotic. I began my teaching career in the Muscogee County School District in 1983 and experienced the lingering effects of desegregation. It became a natural subject for inquiry when I moved to a teaching position at Georgia State University in 1994. As a historian, I wanted to document the experiences of those who had gone through this revolutionary period in American education. I have taught at CSU since 2000, first in the College of Education and in the Department of History & Geography since 2004. I teach courses on the modern South, Georgia history, and the history of Columbus and the Chattahoochee Valley. (V. E. Causey, personal communication, November 15, 2008)

“As long as I am Governor, Negroes will not be admitted to White schools” (“Talmadge Defiant,” 1950, p. 19). These were the defiant words of Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge in 1950, typifying the racist spirit across the state. In particular, the city of Columbus has had its share of race issues educationally as well as socially. The historic case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) mandated an end to the dual education systems in the United States, where they were dominant in the South (Causey, 2001). As mentioned earlier, school systems around the country deliberately took their time to respond and make the required changes, including Columbus, Georgia, of the Muscogee County School District (MCSD) (Causey). The response of many governors and mayors was to defy the Supreme Court’s decree through various means, such as stalling the process, closing all public schools within their states, and passing state and

local legislation to overrule the verdict (Causey). In 1963, a letter from Assistant Secretary James M. Quigley of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare mandated that Columbus, Georgia desegregate the educational facilities serving the children of Fort Benning, Georgia, (Causey). This letter sparked a bitter 34-year battle over desegregation in Muscogee County (Causey). Two-hundred forty-two school systems around the country received this mandate forcing them into compliance with the 1954 court verdict (Causey). The initial response to this letter by Muscogee County Superintendent William Henry Shaw and the school board was to desegregate a grade level one year at a time, starting with the 12th grade (Causey). The Muscogee County school board created a freedom of choice plan, giving Black students the opportunity to transfer to any all-White school of their choice, starting with the 12th grade (Johnson, 1963). The first two Black students to integrate a public school in Muscogee County entered Baker High School on September 4, 1964, their senior years (Johnson, 1964a). Only a few Blacks responded to the freedom of choice plan (Causey). Many Blacks did not send their children to the White schools out of fear of what they might encounter:

Well, I and most of the people that I was associated with felt that if they thought that we were going to come to their schools, then they would give us some of the things that we really needed to say your school is equal. We were afraid to allow our children to go to the schools because of being mistreated. Even when they forced integration and said that you must go and your child must go to this school, we were still afraid. My children were sent to St. Mary's School, and they bombed that school. (Causey, 1997a)

Thus, the process of desegregation via freedom of choice in Muscogee County was slow (Causey, 2001).

In an effort to hasten the desegregation process, the NAACP filed a law suit, *Lockett v. Board of Education* (1965), on behalf of several Black students who claimed

that the district was offering an inferior educational system to Blacks in comparison to Whites (Causey, 1997b, 1997c; Johnson, 1964b). As one veteran teacher noted:

We got the old books. So Mr. Charleston [the principal] said, "We're going to get some new science books." And he called Brice Carson and said, "We want some new books. We've taken enough old books. I don't want any more old books." And they finally gave him new books. And so, after that we slowly kept getting newer and newer material. Because what had happened, they went under the federal guidelines. I guess, for Muscogee County trying to show that there was no need to integrate the schools because the schools were equal. They started giving us a little more and a little more and a little more. One of the reasons Carver had been built [was] because they had come up with the idea "separate but equal." They built us this new school, but they didn't give us any textbooks nor any furniture. We had all that old raggedy furniture in the school. Finally, they started trying to give us a little new furniture and new textbooks and little things like that. It was not adequate but it was better than what you had. That's why I was saying they weren't actually giving us equal things, but they were giving us more than we had. You didn't want to start rocking the boat and carrying on because they might stop that little bit. (Causey, 1997a, p. 3)

This battle lasted over three decades due to the inevitable clashes between the NAACP and Judge Robert Elliot, who was known for his separatist views and anti-civil rights legislation in the Georgia General Assembly (Causey, 2001). He was rated by a legal publication for lawyers as the worse judge in the Eleventh Circuit (Benham, 1983; McDuffie, 1947, 1948). In March of 1967, the Fifth Circuit Court verdict in *U.S. v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (1968) required school districts to create unitary systems and to integrate facilities (Causey). As a result, the MCSD Board integrated all grades through freedom of choice and placed a minimum of two minority-race teachers in each school during the 1967-1968 school year (Causey). Superintendent Shaw made his dislike and resistance to integrating the faculties known when he commented in the newspaper: "Ironically, we have come to the point where well qualified Negro teachers are very scarce" (Johnson, 1968, p. B1). His statement in the paper contradicted his testimony in the Lockett case, noting that Black teachers in Muscogee County averaged

more advanced degrees than the White teachers (Causey). In fact, Black teachers often completed advanced degrees from prestigious universities, such as Columbia University, New York University, and University of Chicago: “If a Black teacher sought a degree program not offered at one of the three Black state colleges, rather than desegregate the University of Georgia, the state paid the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition” (Causey, p. 405).

A teacher from an all-Black high school explained:

Causey: Tell me about the faculty at Carver, such as the experience of the teachers and the degrees that they held. Did Carver have a reputation as an academically good school?

Bass: Most of us had master’s degrees. We either had them or we were younger teachers and—that was one thing. Mr. Charleston always had a one-on-one meeting with every faculty member prior to rehiring each year. And when he would have that meeting, one of the first things he would ask you, after he asked you if were you interested in coming back, the next thing would be, “I want you to go forth and get your masters.” And we had large numbers of master’s degrees and Carver was considered a very academic school at that time...(Causey, 1997b, p. 2)

Another Black teacher at Carver commented on the same subject:

Causey: Did teachers have graduate degrees, generally?

Florence: A lot of them. Every one of them graduated from college. See, you could not teach if you did not have a degree and then [loudspeaker interrupts] you could not do it. But I tell you what they did. They had a survey in 1958 to find out who was qualified and who was not. And that’s when it started raising standards. We had the degrees. We had four years training. Some of those persons had not gone but one year or two. It came out then.

Causey: White teachers?

Florence: That’s right... (Causey, 1997c, p. 7)

In spite of the Muscogee County’s freedom of choice plan to integrate the system, by 1970, 15 schools remained all-Black and 12 were still all-White out of a total of 67



schools (Causey, 2001). Only 12.5% of 13,000 Black students attended formerly White schools, and fewer than 1% of White students attended formerly Black schools (Causey). The Supreme Court dealt a harsh blow to freedom of choice plans that did not produce unitary systems in the case of *Green v. New Kent County* (1968) (Causey). The district court ordered integration by use of student racial ratios and busing in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1969) (Causey). As a result, the MCSD was forced to make drastic changes. On January 5, 1970, the board transferred Black and White teachers to ensure the Black-White teacher ratios in each school was equal to the teacher ratios in the entire system (Johnson, 1970a, 1970b). On May 29, 1971, the Fifth Circuit Court ordered Muscogee County to do away with its dual system of education (Smith, 1971a). In June 1971, the MCSD Board designed an integration plan of 70% White and 30% Black in every school, equaling the Black-White student ratio for the county (Smith, 1971b). Teachers with seniority were supposedly given the choice of staying where they were or moving to another school, while novice teachers were reassigned by the board (Causey; Smith, 1971a). However, what was written in black and white and what was actually done were two different things. Though White teachers transferred to Black schools were almost always novices, Black teachers sent to White schools tended to be veterans with advanced degrees, supposedly hand-picked by White principals (Causey).

Wright: I was called to the office and told that I was going to Hardaway High School.

Causey: Now we talked about this before. The school board said that transfers would be made based on least seniority, and so is that what happened?

Wright: No. Now you want the facts as I know [them] and not hearsay. The fact was I knew I was a senior teacher, I knew I was department chairman. I had no fear of being transferred. So I was sitting up in my classroom as smug as a bug in a rug, and I'm called to the office, and the principal says, "Well ...

Causey: This is Mr. [Harry] Vernon by this time?

Wright: Yes. He says, “You’ve been selected to go to Hardaway.” And I said, “Why? Didn’t they say that your senior teachers were going to be left there?” And I said, “I’m not the oldest person here, Mr. Vernon, but I didn’t think they meant it like that. I thought they meant experience-wise.” He said, “Well, that’s what I thought too.” And then he said, “Let me show you the list of people.” And they had taken every last one of us. Four or five teachers who had enough time [toward retirement] quit. They just quit.

Causey: So four or five of these ones who were going to be transferred to White schools just chose to retire rather than go?

Wright: Yes. And then [two teachers] went to Columbus College, and the rest of us took the transfers because, you know, we were young. We had families and all that.

Causey: Didn’t have a choice?

Wright: Didn’t have a choice.

Causey: Now how do you understand that happened? How was it?

Wright: It is my understanding that the list of the Black teachers, their degrees and everything was given to the White principals, and the White principals went down the list and selected their teachers.

Causey: And so were the Black principals given the list of the faculty at Hardaway and Columbus High to choose from?

Wright: No, they were not given that. Mr. Vernon got the teachers that they sent him. Now on the administrator level, they exchanged the assistant principals. The assistant principal at our school went to Hardaway, and the assistant principal at Hardaway came to Carver, who was Mr. [Gordon] Stallings at the time. You remember Mr. [Clemon] DeRamus, don’t you? Mr. DeRamus went to Hardaway as assistant principal there. And then that’s as far as it went along those lines. The counselors stayed. The department chairman at all the schools stayed.

Causey: The White schools?

Wright: Yes, but the Black schools, they transferred counselors, they transferred department chairmen, lead-teachers—everybody—they transferred them.

Causey: So, what sort of teacher ended up coming to Carver?

Wright: The beginning teachers.

Causey: The last ones hired. (Causey, 1997a, p. 5-6)

Another veteran teacher from Carver High School commented on the same subject:

Causey: When you were transferred to Columbus High, how did you find out?

Florence: Well, we were called in one by one and the principal had to tell you in his office privately.

Causey: Mr. Charleston?

Florence: Yes. Privately. He would just read the school list off to you and tell you when to report. So nobody knew. So they had given him the assignments from downtown. Then he calls each teacher in. So they sent so many of us to Columbus High, so many went to Hardaway, so many went to Kendrick whatever. That's the way it was done.

Causey: How did you feel about that at the time?

Florence: I didn't feel too bad about it. It was just one of those things. It was just like, almost, what's going to happen to me? Am I going to be accepted or rejected? That would be by faculty members as well as administrators, as well as students, so it was a touch-and-go situation. And it was a lot of resentment at Columbus High because, see, I went to the cream.

Causey: And they had to transfer some of their teachers as well, but not as many to Carver.

Florence: No, not as many.

Causey: Carver lost seventy percent.

Florence: But see that's what happens, so you can see the politicking and watch what's happening then. What're you going to do? You're going to pick your very best and put them in your schools.

Causey: Although the school board said that people would be transferred that had the least seniority.

Florence: Yeah but then again, that's true. But when you look...come on.

Causey: I talked to Mr. [Harry] Vernon [principal of Carver in 1971]. He said that every department chair from here was transferred somewhere else.

Florence: But what happens though, see, they're picking your cream.

Causey: And so Carver ends up with a lot of young inexperienced teachers, both Black and White. But the Black teachers that go to Hardaway and Columbus High and Kendrick were veteran teachers, it seemed like.

Florence: Well, at least they had the experience, you see. And then being good teachers too, so you're building something there. (Causey, 1997c, p. 11-12)

The community was upset due to the massive shifting of students and teachers, and responded with various sporadic events such as disrupting board meetings, student walk-outs, signature petitions demanding the resignation of the superintendent, boycotts, and scattered incidents of school vandalism (Causey). A school fire at Baker High School destroyed the entire school auditorium (Battle, 1970; Causey, 2001; Dunn, 1971; Smith, 1971c, 1971d). In spite of the community's reaction to the unfolding legal and social events, Columbus never experienced the high-level turmoil happening elsewhere, such as Birmingham or New Orleans, nor did Columbus at the time experience a mass exodus of Whites either out of the city or into private schools (Causey; Johnson, 1964a). The reasoning was that regardless of what school a White student attended, the Black student attendance at any school would never exceed 30% (Causey; Smith, 1971b). That was something many Whites were willing to live with. Many business and civic leaders, including the mayor, sent their children to formerly Black schools, even though some parents, including two board members, chose private schools (Smith, 1971c). Another reason for most Whites remaining in the schools was the fact that there were no suburban schools in the district (Causey). However, a percentage of White parents exploited the hardship loophole in the desegregation plan and filed for transfers, stating that their children suffered from asthma and would suffer unduly in schools with no air conditioning (Causey). Many of the requests were for Hardaway High School, a formerly

all White college prep school on one level (Causey). In addition, Whites tended to flee schools where the Black representation exceeded 30% (Causey).

Some schools during the integration period in Muscogee County experienced violent confrontations between Black students and White students (Causey, 2001). A White student recalled:

All the Black students would line up on one side of the hall and all the White students would line up on the other side of the hall, just waiting for someone to make a wrong move so you could have a huge fight. (Causey, p. 422)

During the first year of desegregation, Joan Scott was reassigned to Carver High School, a formerly all-Black school (Causey, 2001). She commented on one of several incidents at the school:

Causey: When you think about that year, what stands out?

Scott: I would say just the upheaval that it seemed to cause in my life. And, you know, I remember one day I was out sick and my sister came in and she said, "Where is mother? Where is mother? And I'm like, "She is downstairs." And there had been a confrontation between she and some Black girls, and before the confrontation was over, there were no White people around. The security guard ... his gun had been taken away from him, and my sister and her friend were in their cars trying to get out of the parking lot. I mean, there were Blacks on top of their cars, jumping up and down, you know, with their faces pressed to the windows. And it was like they didn't want us there. And they were letting you know that. (Causey, 1997d, p. 5)

Joan Scott transferred the next year to Columbus High School, a formerly all-White school (Causey, 2001). She described another scary situation:

Causey: So you get to Columbus High as a sophomore.

Scott: Yes.

Causey: And how is it different? Or was it different?

Scott: It was different. It was completely different. It was more like you had your jocks and tough guys there, and you really didn't have confrontations between girls anymore. It was weird. But it was right after school had started, my friend

and I were walking around a corner towards the lunchroom, and these two big White guys said, "Get out of here. Get out of here now." And then it just started. I mean, there was just a riot. It was a fight. Several guys got cut really bad. You know, they had pipes hitting each other. I have never seen anything like it. It was horrible.

Causey: And were you able to get away?

Scott: Oh yeah. Yeah. We got away, but it was the scariest thing I've probably ever been through.

Causey: How many people were involved, do you think?

Scott: Gosh, I would say at least 30, if not 100. I mean, it was a lot of guys. It was all guys, you know, Blacks and Whites fighting. (Causey, 1997d, p. 10)

Baker High School, a formerly all-White school, experienced by far the most incidents of racial conflicts during the first year of desegregation:

Tension at Baker grew after forced desegregation. Students and teachers described individual fights that escalated into rioting where students used chains, belt buckles, hair rakes, sticks, stones, even trophies from the trophy case for weapons. A Black student said, "I don't think we really tried to kill anybody... but then we still might hit you in the head with a bottle. We knew you weren't going to die so we were going to hurt you real good." A White student described the building "shaking like an earthquake" as students poured into the hallways to join a melee. A white teacher with a second-floor classroom watched Black students enter the courtyard from one direction and Whites from the other. "It was like a military maneuver," he said. They would "meet out there. And they'd fight, fight, fight... I was just horrified." A White student on the second floor said it was "like watching the gladiators." Rioters took large garbage cans and threw them into the crowd, injuring many students. When an ambulance arrived in the midst of a riot to take away the injured, someone cut the hoses under the hood and disabled it. (Causey, 2001, p. 422-423)

The former Black schools were tremendously affected by the race ratio adjustments. Blacks essentially lost power and ownership of their neighborhood schools (Causey, 2001). As one veteran Black teacher noted:

I just feel like we had a certain racial pride for excelling that we lost in integration... I felt we could never more have the power of determining anything because we were so outnumbered... The Black students felt that the Whites were coming and taking over their school. (Causey, p. 414)

The Black schools lost some of their traditions as well, such as changing the school's alma mater to accommodate the White students, removing famous Black portraits from view, and modifying the choreography of traditional graduation marches (Causey, 2001). Formerly Black schools lost their veteran Black teachers (Causey, 1997a). Black and White students had to adjust to the Black and White teachers' teaching styles, while the Muscogee County school board offered no in-service training on teaching diverse learners:

Wright: The school district had not planned this properly. I think the school district was more or less concerned with "Let's get this over with before they cut off our federal funds and we lose this money, because we need this money." And that was the only thing that they were looking at. They were looking at it economically.

Causey: From the legal standpoint.

Wright: Yes. And legally. They were not concerned about the education of the children and how it was going to affect them. The Black teachers and the White teachers needed training on learning styles of children because the methods that they were using sometimes did not work on Black children, and some of the methods that we used sometimes did not work on White kids. For an example, they [White teachers] believed in giving a lot of worksheets and allowing kids to work independently. Well, because of the low reading abilities of many, many, Black students, we had to work individually with those kids. And sometimes you might be working with a group of three levels of children wherein the average White teacher would teach to one level. And those who could not get it, I mean they were just out there. And nine out of ten times, it was your Black kids. And if they are left vacant out there by themselves, they're going to cause discipline problems. So you can't teach this group over here, and [have] this group over here doing nothing because they're going to talk, and when they start to talk, you got a problem. Also for the average Black kid, if the teacher said you did so and so, and he said, "I didn't do that," they'd send him out for talking back. And the kid would say, "Well, I had the right to tell her I didn't do it." But then the White teacher would say that's a discipline problem, he's disrespectful. So the kids were frustrated, very frustrated. Some of that still goes on. A great deal of it still goes on.... (Causey, 1997a, p. 9)

Tawanna Peterson, a graduate of Baker High School during the early years of desegregation, commented on her experiences with White teachers during that period:

And then we had some teachers also that, I felt, because we were Black, they were a little defensive and they didn't really take the time that the Black teachers had taken with us, you know, previously, before the integration took place. I mean, some of them, we'd just go to class. Their main thing was just keeping you quiet, you know. "Read this paragraph or this from page so and so to so and so," whatever. That was basically all they were interested in, was keeping you quiet. (Causey, 1997e, p. 7)

A White Columbus teacher described her initial reaction to the sudden mixture of races in her classroom: "It was almost like joining the Peace Corps. Going to a place you've never been, living with people you've never dealt with, not understanding their culture, where they were coming from" (Causey, 2001, p. 415).

The worst damage was probably the dispersion of the veteran Black teachers. The way Black teachers were divided in Muscogee County made it inevitable that close teacher-student relationships among the Blacks would come to a screeching halt (Causey, 2001). As Causey noted, "Black students who may have felt psychologically 'threatened' as they went from the majority to the minority had few mentors left. Black teachers believed Black children 'lost out' without the academic and moral influence Black teachers traditionally had exercised" (p. 415). It was obvious that teaching strategies never changed to accommodate the Black students. A White teacher commented: "We were teaching at the same standard [as before desegregation] and we couldn't understand why these [Black] kids couldn't meet the criteria" (Causey, p. 419). Another White teacher explained:

I just didn't know how to reach them or to help them. And so there was a frustration with that that grew each year until in 1974 [when] I had an opportunity to go to a private school to teach where I could teach in the way that I felt comfortable. (Causey, p. 419)

The result for many Black students was poor grades, and some White teachers felt pressured to inflate the grades of Black students to avoid massive retentions (Causey).



Black students felt that many of the White teachers did not care whether they learned anything or not (Causey).

Ability grouping was common across the South, and Muscogee County was no stranger to this form of segregation within integrated schools. Minority students were well-represented in vocational tracks and special education, and under-represented in college prep classes (Causey, 2001). By the second year of desegregation, Muscogee County was tracking students in English and math classes (Causey). In 1974, it became the district's policy for grades 7 through 12 to group students on one of three levels according to reading achievement test scores, with the highest track being majority White and the lowest track being majority Black (Causey). Janice O. Burton, a Black graduate of Baker High during the early years of desegregation, noted:

Some of them didn't care. I had an English teacher that—I forgot his name—I just sat there basically. I don't think I learned anything. You know, just passed on to the next grade. Because he just didn't care, or it appeared that he didn't care because I don't know what I learned that year. The math teacher, I ended up going to remedial math. It didn't help. I mean, I see where she was trying to help me. But just to place me somewhere, you know. And that bothered me... Yes. I had a White teacher, math teacher, and I guess she felt that I could do better in another math class, you know. I don't remember who the other students were. They were the lower scale or whatever. But it just messed up things for me because I was doing so well in my history class making B's and A's. Then, when she changed it, my history grades lowered too. I don't know what happened. Maybe it was just a mental thing, you know, because here I am being placed in another lower level, and it just did something to me. (Causey, 1997f, p. 7, 14)

Cultural clashes, misunderstandings, and racial stereotypes were inevitable due to such a forced mixture of races:

Causey: During those first years when everybody feared that there was going to be conflict and violence, do you remember any conflict between teachers and students? Do you remember any examples of where a teacher's culture and student culture may have lead to misunderstandings?

Wright: Not really. If I had to say anything, I would say that there might have been a few White teachers who were afraid to discipline Black students. And I don't know on whose part it was. If a kid was so hostile that it frightened a teacher or the teacher just generally feared Black people. Now I don't think it's as prevalent now as it was during that particular time. But there were some White teachers who were just generally afraid of Black folk. I mean, I don't know if it was because they'd never been around Black people or what it was. I just didn't understand it. But then again as I start to look at it, the environment which they had come up in might be the problem. Because for the longest, I used to fear White people.

Causey: Really?

Wright: Because when I was a child growing up in South Georgia I had seen what the Klansman would do to Black people and I was just afraid. But, you know, over the years, and from the experiences that I've had, I realized that was just the mentality of the men in that particular area. But at that particular time because I left from that little town and went to Fort Valley which is another little town and never had any experience outside of it, never really got any experience until I started to travel around the state and then out of the state and then I had experiences with people. But I had lived on a farm in the country and down in Toombs County, Treutlan County, Emmanuel County, all down in there. And see that was Klan country. And it was terrible there. And so I could understand the fear that some people might have because until I outgrew the fear, it was very strong. (Causey, 1997a, p. 13-14)

One veteran teacher, Lula Bass, spoke of an incident between a White teacher and a Black student:

Bass: Another situation like that was a teacher who was working with me in my department, and a student had asked her for a case dime, and she—the student asked, wanted to put the dime in the vending machine because the student was going to do track practice after school, and she wanted to go to the vending machine. . . . So the student had a nickel and five pennies, but the machine wouldn't take the pennies so she needed a dime, and she asked for a case dime. And the teacher didn't understand, so the teacher laughed, and I came down the hall, and the teacher said to me, "Lula, do you know what a case dime is?" And I said yes. And when I did, the teacher got real silent and was hurt because she felt real embarrassed that she didn't know because she felt that, first of all, that she knew, and that here's the stupid kid is, what is the kid talking about? And then when I said I knew, then she said, "Well, what is it?" And I said "It's a dime, just a dime." [She asked,] "Why you call it case?" I said, "Well, we learned it from your culture." I said, "You taught us that if you put it all in one container, it's a case. So when you put all ten pennies in one piece here, that's a case dime." And she apologized to the child. She was real hurt, and the child thought she was

funny because she cried, and that was so humorous to the child. Here is this teacher crying about a simple thing like that. Ours didn't care. Then I gave the child the dime, and she said, "I'm sorry, I had a dime, but I didn't understand." (Causey, 1997b, p. 8-9)

Punishments during the earlier period of integration in Muscogee County often related to cultural behavior (Causey, 2001). A Black basketball coach recalled an incident involving an overreaction of a White teacher which resulted in a top athlete being transferred to another school (Causey, 2001). According to the coach, the Black student only entered the teacher's room to talk with a friend:

I saw a lot of Black kids, especially Black male kids, who perhaps were just being themselves in terms of their culture [and] may have been penalized because some of the White teachers felt a little threatened by their mannerisms or by some of the things they would do in a predominantly Black situation. (Causey, 2001, p. 426)

With Judge Elliott's approval, the school board made changes to the desegregation plan for 1972-1973, allowing kindergarten through 2nd-grade students to remain in their neighborhood schools and 12th-grade students to remain in their previously assigned schools (Causey, 2001). This led to 12 out of 50 elementary schools resegregating quickly with predominantly Black students (Hatcher, 1972). Braxton Nail, Superintendent Shaw's successor, softened the criteria for hardship transfers which led to even more resegregated schools (Causey). By 1982, the restructuring was clear. On the southside, all four high schools and 15 of the 19 elementary schools had predominantly Black students (Causey). The four high schools on the northside, along with 11 elementary and middle schools, retained White majorities, sometimes exceeding 70 percent (Causey). As mentioned earlier, Columbus did not sustain a massive exodus of Whites to another city. However, the county did sustain White flight of another nature: migration of Whites to the northern region of the county (Causey).

In May 1991, the NAACP revived the Lockett suit, claiming the school board intentionally ignored the 1971 desegregation mandate and allowed the race ratios in the schools to lapse (Benham, 1991). According to the NAACP, this period of board negligence lasted throughout the mid-seventies and eighties (Benham). However, once again, Judge Elliott dismissed the case since the original defendants had already graduated (Benham, 1992). The bitter battles of the NAACP and the courts would continue for 6 more years, with the final ruling of the courts in 1997 declaring unitary status for Muscogee County (Houston & Hyatt, 1997). Today, many Muscogee County schools remain racially identifiable. Most of the predominantly Black schools are located on the south side of the city, while the predominantly White schools are mostly further north.

A number of controversial events in the Columbus area have tainted the city's image and placed it in the national spotlight. On July 12, 1989, Muscogee County Superintendent Dr. Braxton Nail, who succeeded Superintendent Shaw, hanged himself in his backyard (Hyatt, 1989). Although there were no clear motives, close associates and police reports cite several possible motives: an investigation of the school system by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights; county disagreement over a plan which redrew school boundary lines; a possible school system audit to determine whether there were too many top level administrators; controversy over a student transfer plan; criticism of the system's Black-White student and teacher ratios; and concern over statutory rape and molestation charges against an elementary school band teacher in which the teacher was later found not guilty (Hyatt). Dr. Braxton Nail relaxed the hardship transfers back in 1974, which made it easier for Whites to return to their former

schools (Causey, 2001). Under his leadership, schools in Muscogee County quickly resegregated (Causey). It is possible that the very race issues he refused to address contributed to his later despondency and eventual suicide.

Another highly publicized incident was the unsolved, mysterious murder of Superintendent Dr. James A. Burns, Superintendent Nail's successor. He was killed by an intruder on October 19, 1992 (Hall & Zaffir, 1992). The assailant entered the superintendent's home with a key, went directly to the room where he and his wife were sleeping, and stabbed him in the back with a 6-inch hunting knife (Hall & Zaffir). Burns chased his assailant down the stairs, where he dropped to the floor bleeding to death (Hall & Zaffir). The investigators do not believe this was an attempted burglary because the intruder had a key, knew exactly where the superintendent was sleeping, and did not take any money or valuables (Hall & Zaffir). To this day, this murder has not been solved.

The late superintendent's sister, Caroline Burns Cody, commented:

One of the hard things for the family is to believe that it was a random act of violence when we know that superintendents re-examine and deal with the large issues, those issues in a community that have to do with power and politics. He went into a school system with some of the most unresolved problems in the country, really. It is a school system that for a long time was run in the interest of a network of adults, not necessarily responding to the needs of kids and what parents want for their kids. (Zaffiro, 1993, p. A9)

Prior to his death, Superintendent Burns had established a track record of making decisions and changes that were not readily accepted by school officials and the public (Zaffiro). He closed the historic Baker High School, changed the grading system on report cards, reassigned principals and teachers, and made other changes (Zaffiro). He was preparing to restructure the middle schools. A school board member had called for

his resignation, and a community petition drive expressing opposition was under way (Zaffiro).

The latest intensified incident in Columbus was the killing of a Black resident, Kenneth Walker, by a White police officer (Esters, Houston, Pirnie, Tan, & Williams, 2004). On the night of December 10, 2003, officers pulled a Yukon over to the southbound lane of Interstate 185 (Esters et al.). The officers were looking for an SUV from Miami with armed drug dealers. However, this identical vehicle contained four Black men of Columbus, unarmed and without possession of drugs (Esters et al.). The four men were ordered out of the vehicle and on the ground. One of the men in the vehicle later commented in an interview:

The way they had the guns in the faces, not saying anything ... you basically didn't know what to do, and you felt like if you even tried to turn your face from one side to the other, they'd shoot you. It was that scary. I felt like an animal. It seemed we were tried and convicted the moment the men were ordered to exit the vehicle. (p. A11)

Officers were screaming at the men to keep their hands where they could be seen. A moment later, three shots were fired from a submachine gun, two of them piercing the skull of Kenneth Walker (Esters et al.). There is uncertainty about exactly what Kenneth could have done to provoke one of the policemen to shoot him. The other three men on the ground could not see the episode between the officer and Kenneth, but they are certain he did not do anything to warrant two bullets to the head. The officer said that Kenneth would not cooperate and show his right hand:

He come out the vehicle, again was still holler'n for him to show us his hands, to get down on the ground, get down on the ground.... I don't know how many times that was said ... I was like it was a bombardment of it. We push the subject to the ground.... I was on his right side ... I put my left hand, on his back, shoulder, in that area and was try'n to push him to the ground, still holler'n for him to get down. He had, I know he had his right hand still up under him, I put

my, as he went down to the ground, he was kinda, not lay'n on his left side but the right side was lifted up ... a few inches.... and that's what I, the reason I was try'n to still get him on the ground...and I still couldn't see his right hand. As I pushed him down, the right hand appeared to be go'en inside his jacket. And at that time I thought he was go'en for a weapon ... it startled me, and I remember I was.... I didn't fall back but I kinda went back, like it was instinct to try to get separation, and ... the whole time I was push'n him down, I had my weapon pointed to this area ... right shoulder, lower, I mean upper back, right in that area. When I went back ... the round went off. I guess the muzzle was go'en ... coming forward as I went back and the round went off. (Glisson Interview Excerpts, 2004, p. A6)

However, in a second interview, he changed his explanation, saying he fired the shots as a result of losing his balance (Hyatt, 2004). The tape clearly shows that after Kenneth was shot in the head, 2 minutes elapsed before any officer tried to help him (Hyatt). The tape was not made public until 11 months after the shooting; in fact, no evidence was released to anyone during the 11-month investigation (Hyatt; Sledge, 2004). This was very frustrating to Kenneth's immediate family members as well as the Black community. Another source of frustration was the racial make-up of the jury: 13 Whites and 7 Blacks (Esters, 2004). This fatal shooting incident got the attention of several well-known activists, such as the Reverends Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. Jesse Jackson organized a march in Atlanta to bring this issue to the national forefront. Although it took 11 months to investigate the incident, it took only 41 minutes for the jury to deliberate (Esters & Hyatt, 2004). The Muscogee County grand jury failed to criminally indict the officer for the shooting (Esters & Hyatt). As a resident of Columbus at the time, I know the city of Columbus was scarred and severely divided by this event and the outcome of the trial.

It is in this context that I conducted my investigation of the lives of 8 African American males. These men were raised in poverty in various low-income areas of

Columbus, Georgia. For my study, I targeted one of these areas in particular: Elizabeth Canty Apartments. Elizabeth Canty is a low-income governmental housing area that was comprised mostly of elderly citizens and single parents living on governmental assistance during the time my family lived there. My family lived there for 7 years, from 1975 to 1982. However, the narratives presented in this study covered events from a greater time span, roughly 1975 to 1987.



## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

Issues concerning African American males have always been dear to my heart. I have pondered and thought deeply on my past experiences in the projects and how I managed to succeed educationally and in other areas. Over the years, I struggled to understand why some African American males reared in poverty still do well in school and in life while others under similar situations seem to go in the opposite direction. I initially considered developing a mentoring program and researching its educational and social effects on the mentees but later decided against it. My second choice entailed investigating the underachievement of African American males by researching the lives of Black males during three eras: segregation, the early phase of desegregation/integration, and after integration. I conducted three pilot interviews as well, but as I pondered the data, I realized that this study was not addressing my deepest concerns and interests. I really wanted to do something on a more personal level. As I considered issues with Black males in education and society, my mind kept going back to my upbringing in the projects and the experiences I shared with many of my friends who grew up there with me. I eventually narrowed my focus to resilience in one locale in order to investigate the life experiences of African American males. Thus, I decided to focus on resilience in the context of Elizabeth Canty Apartments, a low-income neighborhood in Columbus, Georgia, (See Appendix A for Conceptualization Memos and Appendix B for Conceptualization Emails. These entries documented my thought

processes as I conceptualized my dissertation topic.). Given the focus of my research interests and the research questions that followed, a qualitative design best accommodated this project. A quantitative design would not allow me to investigate why some of my friends dropped out of school while others managed to stay focused and graduate from high school. As I was trying to decide upon a research topic, I was also wrestling with the type of research I wanted to conduct. I had done very well in my doctoral quantitative class. I am a former math teacher, having taught various math subjects over the last 14 years. After taking the quantitative course, I was convinced that whatever research topic I chose, I would ask questions that could be answered using a quantitative design. Before I met Dr. Schmertzing, I heard the other doctoral students talking about the next research class we would be taking. They all said that it was totally different from quantitative and would involve a lot of writing. Their forecasts of the class made me all the more certain that I wanted to stick with a quantitative design. I was a math person, so descriptive writing was not appealing. In my mind, I had compartmentalized Dr. Schmertzing and his course as a hurdle I must get past.

I remember the first class discussion of qualitative research. As Dr. Schmertzing described it and expounded on the structure of qualitative research, my interest for this subject increased. I followed up on the assigned readings, and once I knew enough to begin to make comparisons and contrasts between the two research approaches, I began to rethink my dissertation design. I understood the limitations of quantitative work: It fails to provide in-depth explanations of phenomena. On the other hand, “The qualitative researchers’ goal is to better understand human behavior and experience” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 38). I liked the idea of researching at a much deeper level than numerical

generalizations allow. I am a very inquisitive and detailed person, but I am also a lifelong learner, and have always welcomed opportunities to learn new ways of doing things. I enjoyed the numerical aspect of quantitative research, but there was something about qualitative research that made a deep impression on me and piqued my interest. A qualitative research project would enable me to investigate how people think and interpret things around them (Merriam, 2002). I considered a mixed-methods design, but given my interest in life experiences, I settled on a qualitative approach.

Merriam (2002) described several characteristics of interpretive qualitative research designs. One is being able to understand the meaning people attach to their environment and events that have occurred therein. I find qualitative research attractive partly because it involves the participant talking and sharing. It is personalized as well, in that the researcher gets to know the participant, and the relationship tends to be on a deeper level than quantitative research would allow. Merriam also pointed out that qualitative researchers use words rather than numbers to describe. Although I first found this characteristic aspect of qualitative research unappealing, I have come to appreciate the value of rich description for interpreting human behavior, and I have enjoyed listening to people's stories and investigating people's interpretations of their lives.

After deciding the topic of my investigation, I determined how I would collect the data. To investigate the lives of a selection of African American males who lived in Elizabeth Canty apartments during the 7 years that I lived there, I needed to hear their stories concerning education and race in Columbus, Georgia. Life history interviews were the best way to collect the data, considering that I wanted to research the participants' lives. Atkinson (1998) noted:

A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another. (p. 8)

The study included 8 participants—myself and 7 others (See Appendix C for Valdosta State University’s Institutional Review Board approval and Appendix D for sample Informed Consent Form). As a way of increasing the consistency of data collection, I had someone else interview me. I felt a little uneasy constructing my own narrative, considering the other 7 participants did not follow such a format. I chose my wife to conduct my interview. She had experience with qualitative interviews and understood the design of the study. After reading my narrative, I went back and inserted more data where it was needed. My wife did not conduct a follow-up interview.

My interview was not the first one conducted. I waited until I had conducted two full interviews before I had my wife interview me. My reasoning was that I wanted to have the experience of crafting a couple of narratives before crafting my own. Regardless of the chronological order, my narrative did have an effect on how I structured the other seven narratives. I made my narrative as detailed as possible while sharing information based on a definite timeline. I wanted the other narratives to be constructed the same way. Although I completed two narratives prior to my own, I did go back and reread them to make sure that the data was presented in the best chronological format possible. Table 1 displays the chronological order of the initial participant interviews.

Table 1

*Chronological Order of Initial Interviews*

Participant	Date of Initial Interview
Patrick	September 1, 2007
Johnny	October 10, 2007
Darrell	November 24, 2007
Orlando	January 27, 2008
Victor	March 1, 2008
Randy	April 25, 2008
Jeremy	April 26, 2008
Jonathon	July 1, 2008

I shared photocopies of the 1978 Blanchard Elementary yearbook at the beginning of 5 interviews (6 participants attended Blanchard Elementary.). This served two purposes: to help the participants remember past incidents and stories, and to gain new leads for other prospective participants. Each participant told his life story, placing emphasis on educational and racial issues. The interviewees were able to emphasize other areas as they pleased: “A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one’s entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8). I shared old stories with each participant for two reasons: to recreate the bond I once had with each participant, and to help them remember certain incidents and, thereby, increase the amount of data collected. At times I interjected brief clarifying questions to

help the participants delve deeper into a particular subject. I attempted, as a former friend, to keep a distance during the interview so as to not hinder the flow of communication and to ensure that I took nothing for granted. Seidman (2006) discussed how friendships can negatively affect the interviewing process:

One of the less obvious ways is that the interviews and the participants who are friends usually assume that they understand each other. Instead of exploring assumptions and seeking clarity about events and experiences, they tend to assume that they know what is being said. The interviewer and the participant need to have enough distance from each other that they take nothing for granted. (p. 42)

I followed the approach of several authorities on qualitative interviewing as I gathered my research data (Atkinson, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994). I developed an interview guide (See Appendix E) for the purpose of keeping the interview focused (Seidman; Weiss).

An interview guide is a listing of areas to be covered in the interview along with, for each area, a listing of topics or questions that together will suggest lines of inquiry. The guide functions for the interviewer as a prompter might for an actor. If the interviewer is fully in control of the interview topics, the guide itself can remain unused. But if the interviewer begins to be uncertain about what questions might come next, or whether an area or a topic has been skipped, the guide is there to be consulted. (Weiss, p. 48)

The guide helped me to remember what kinds of questions to ask in case the interview became stagnant. On most occasions, I did not need to use it because the interviewees disclosed many details without prompting, but I did refer back to it at the end of the interviews to make sure that I had covered all of the major questions (Weiss). I also conducted a pilot interview with one of the participants in order to field-test a draft of the interview guide (Weiss), and made a few adjustments as a result. I struck a balance between relying on pre-written and spontaneous questions during the interviews. Each interview was unique and required questioning that was personally tailored to the

particular interviewee: “The questions most used in an in-depth interview follow from what the participant has said” (Seidman, p. 92).

I followed the three step process of Atkinson (1998) for the actual life story interviews:

A life story interview involves the three following steps: (a) *planning* (preinterview) —preparing for the interview, including understanding why a life story can be beneficial; (b) *doing the interview itself* (interview) —guiding a person through the telling of his or her life story while recording it on either audio or video tape; and (c) last, *transcribing and interpreting the interview* (postinterview) —leaving questions and comments by the interviewer, and other repetitions, out (only the words of the person telling the story remain so that it then becomes a flowing, connected narrative in the teller’s own words), giving the transcribed life story to the person to review and check over for any changes he or she might want to make in it, and responding to the life story in the form of a subjective reaction or substantive interpretation or analysis. (p. 26)

Each of the interviews was recorded with a digital recorder, copied to my computer to free space on the recorder for the next interview, and then later transcribed. I transcribed the interviews without removing certain repetitious words of the interviewee. For example, here is an excerpt from one of the participant’s interview:

I heard him say that to other Black kids as well. See at that time, I know they do it now, but Black kids would wear their hair braided for a week or two. And it kinda look unclean, you know. I thought that was what he talked about a lot too, you know. I thought that he was more hurtful than anything. Uh, I would say he was more on the Blacks to do the job, you know. I kinda felt like he felt that the White kids were doing what they were supposed to do, and he wanted to make sure that the Blacks was doing what they were supposed to do. I don’t know what his motives was. I don’t know if he felt embarrassed by us, or he just wanted us to do better, you know.

Repetitious phrases such as *you know* were left in the interview when transcribed. I decided to do this because I wanted the reader to experience each participant as personally and naturally as possible. Removing such phrases, in my opinion, would have removed some of the participant’s personality from his life story. I also left the

interviewee's grammar as spoken. Sometimes the subject-verb agreement was incorrect, but I typed it as I heard it. Again, I wanted the reader to experience each participant as closely and as naturally as possible. Occasionally, I had to add words in brackets to bring clarification. For example, here is another excerpt from an interview:

I didn't study. We were going to Richardson's Lounge and KNW [night clubs] on Thursday nights. If they had something going on Tuesdays, I went on Tuesdays. I would stay out 'til two or three in the morning. If I felt well enough, I got up and went or I stayed home. My mother didn't say too much about me staying out that late either.

The reader may not understand that Richardson's Lounge and KNW were night clubs. Occasionally, I had to add a word or two to keep the flow, but these insertions were never words that would change or alter the meaning of what was spoken in any way: "The transcription process consists essentially of leaving out your questions, using standard spelling, creating sentence and paragraph structure, leaving out extra things, adding missing things, and possibly reorganizing certain sections to keep common subject matter together" (Atkinson, p. 56). For example, the previous excerpt originally read like this:

I: Were you studying?

R: Didn't study.

I: Why not?

R: We were going to Richardson's Lounge and KNW. Thursday nights. If they had something going on Tuesdays, I went on Tuesdays. I would 'til two, three in the morning. If I felt well enough, I got up and went or I stayed home. My mother didn't say too much about me staying out that late either.

Each transcribed interview, after employing the editing techniques, would read as a first-person narrative. At this point, I followed up with phone interviews for clarification. These follow-up interviews varied in length, depending on the time I called, the nature of the questions asked, and the willingness of the participants themselves.



Some of the participants were much more forthcoming, while two or three needed significant prodding. Table 2 summarizes the information on the number and location of the interviews:

Table 2

*Participant Interviews/Locations*

Participant	# of Interviews	Location(s)
Jonathon	3	participant's home/phone
Patrick	4	participant's home/phone
Victor	3	interviewer's home/phone
Darrell	1	interviewer's home
Orlando	3	interviewer's home/phone
Johnny	4	participant's home/phone
Jeremy	3	participant's home/phone
Randy	3	interviewer's car/phone

Data gathered from the follow-up interviews were inserted into the narratives. After the narratives were complete, I returned each of them to the participants and asked that they proof-read them for any corrections, additions, or deletions. I mailed one to a participant, who lived in another city. Only 2 participants actually gave corrective feedback after reading them, and 2 participants just skimmed instead of reading the documents entirely. After I received all the necessary feedback, I added comments throughout the narratives to aid in the flow from one point to the next: "A commentary to

the life story, where the researcher provides either an introduction or explanatory, annotative notes to what has been said, can serve to draw even more attention to the text of the life story itself” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 72). I originally got the idea for inserting commentaries from Johnson-Bailey (2000). She inserted commentaries in her work primarily to aid in the flow of dialogue from one portion of an interview to the next. I also added an introduction to each narrative to set the tone for the reader. Note the sample excerpt from one of the narratives.

But why do the White kids get the better schools? My mom and sisters use to say how good Blanchard is and all the other White schools in comparison to J. D. Davis. The quality of the education, the physical buildings, you name it. They didn't want me going there anyway. Because of the condition of J. D. Davis and the academics, they wanted me in a better school academically and physically. They were very excited when I got bused to Blanchard. I knew Blanchard was a better school. Any school is better than J. D. Davis. It's no secret that White folks are better educated than Black folks. Because you know education mainly follows the money. The quality of it I may say. And who has the most money? The White people, because they stay in those neighborhoods that got better schools. And the minorities don't have a lot of money, so they stay in poor neighborhoods with poor schools. So, it's always going to be a problem in America, unless something happens.

*Johnny could have recognized the inequities in the educational system in Columbus at an early age but maintained a positive outlook anyway. His positive attitude towards Blanchard and other predominantly White schools may have been directly influenced by his mother. She recognized how inferior the Black schools were in comparison to the White schools. Her genuine concern for her children's education was also demonstrated here.*

The first paragraph is a portion of one of the participant's narrative. What follows is a commentary on the preceding paragraph. In each narrative, my comments followed selected paragraphs in single-spaced italicized format. I provided these commentaries to initiate personal dialogue, subjective interpretation, and pre-analysis of the data. More objective analysis of the data was used in the chapter on case analysis. I also placed an

introduction at the beginning of each narrative for the purpose of setting the tone for the narrative that would follow.

I incorporated three levels of data interpretation throughout my dissertation: personal interpretive, individual analysis, and comparative analysis (R. W. Schmertzling, personal communication, February, 27, 2009). The first level of data interpretation (personal interpretive) occurred in the commentaries of the eight narratives. Throughout various sections of the narratives, I initiated personal dialogue with the participants' data, presenting first-level analysis of how I interpreted what I was reading. My interpretation of the participants' narratives at this point was highly influenced by my past experiences with each of the participants and was somewhat speculative. At this point in my attempt to make sense of the participants' stories, much of my initial interpretation was largely subjective and not grounded in the literature or systematic, comparative analysis. However, I did provide literature support for some interpretive statements in the commentaries that I felt needed justification. The point was to allow an initial interpretive response that incorporated my personal experience [which came from the same context as the participants] and perspectives.

The second level of data interpretation (individual analysis) occurred in Chapter 5 for within-case analysis as I analyzed each participant individually. On this level I employed more analytical and investigative techniques in an effort to interpret each individual narrative holistically and to provide thorough character analysis of each participant. At this point, I relied less on subjective interpretation and speculation and looked for within-case coherence and connected my interpretation with the relevant literature. Within-case analysis results for each participant were presented in the same

format using five categorical headings [See Within-Case/Cross-Case Analysis in the Methodology section.].

Comparative analysis, my third level of interpretation, occurred in the cross-case analysis section of Chapter 5. On this level of interpretation of the narratives, I investigated and analyzed all eight narratives together in a comparative manner. I also re-examined my findings from within-case analysis, comparing similarities and searching for common threads, patterns, and emerging themes across all of the narratives. I relied heavily on qualitative methods of analysis (Atkinson, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994) for this level of analysis and much less on my own subjective and personal interpretation. In this last level, I attempted to thoroughly ground my results in the literature and did comparative analysis across cases (narratives).

### *Participants*

The 8 participants in this study, including me, grew up in Elizabeth Canty Apartments during my 7-year stay there, from 1975 to 1982. It was my intention to pre-qualify prospective participants, categorizing them as graduates or dropouts, and then select five from each of the two groups. However, participants were very difficult to find. I attempted to include incarcerated participants as well, and I gained IRB approval for this. I used the Georgia Corrections website to pinpoint the locations of several potential candidates, but I found it to be very difficult and time-consuming to obtain visitor access to the prisons and fulfill IRB prison guidelines at the same time. I then decided to interview only non-incarcerated participants. Other than my two brothers, I did not know the whereabouts of any of the other participants. Therefore, I ended up including every participant I managed to find. My final pool of participants was five graduates and three

dropouts. Two of the dropouts were two of my older brothers. Two participants offered suggestions which led to two other participants. I unexpectedly ran into one of the men in this study while shopping at Circuit City. From then on, I purposefully spent time at retail stores where men are known to go, in hopes of finding more potential candidates for this study. Tables 3 and 4 summarize basic data on the 8 participants during their public school years.

Table 3

*Participants' Educational/Household Status*

Participant	Educational Status	Household Status
Jonathon	dropped out	single parent
Patrick	dropped out	single parent
Victor	dropped out	single parent
Darrell	graduated	single parent
Orlando	graduated	single parent
Johnny	graduated	single parent
Jeremy	graduated	single parent
Randy	graduated	single parent

*Note.* Randy spent the majority of his childhood with his mother and the majority of his teenage years with his father.

Table 4

*Participants' Grade Retentions*

Participant	# of Retentions	Grade(s)
Jonathon	3	2nd, 7th, 9th
Patrick	1	9th
Victor	1	9th
Darrell	1	4th
Orlando	2	2nd, 12th
Johnny	0	n/a
Jeremy	1	2nd
Randy	1	2nd

All of the participants and teachers mentioned in this study were given fictitious names to protect their identities. However, the names of the schools mentioned in this study are real.

*Data Analysis*

After the initial interviews and follow-up interviews were transcribed, I coded and categorized various excerpts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994). I used a word processor with its font color option to give distinctive colors to each participant as I cut and pasted interview portions into various categories saved to the hard drive. Therefore, when I searched through a particular category, such as racism, I would easily recognize the excerpts from various participants by color. I also labeled each entry

by name and page number. I initially created 46 categories, but as I progressed, the list was reduced to 42 (See Appendix F). This process of reduction is referred to as local integration (Weiss).

I used several techniques in analyzing the data. According to Bogdan and Biklan (1998),

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. (p. 157)

I carefully examined the excerpts in each of the categories to discover and note the various patterns. This process alone allowed me to pinpoint several categories with numerous entries to carefully analyze and study, such as racism and goal setting. For each of these categories, I looked for patterns and connective threads among the participants: Like Seidman (2006), “I have marked individual passages, grouped these in categories, and then studied the categories for thematic connections within and among them” (p. 119). Concerning racism, I looked for similar as well as isolated incidents of racism among the participants. I also examined how the participants responded to racism.

Seidman gave examples of what he focuses on when studying transcripts:

What is of essential interest is embedded in each research topic and will arise from each transcript. Interviewers must affirm their own ability to recognize it. There are certain aspects of individual experience and social structure to which I respond when they appear. I am alert to conflict, both between people and within a person. I respond to hopes expressed and whether they are fulfilled or not. I am alert to language that indicates beginnings, middles, and ends of processes. I am sensitive to frustrations and resolutions, to indications of isolation and the more rare expressions of collegiality and community. Given the world in which we live, I am sensitive to the way issues of class, ethnicity, and gender play out in individual lives, and the way hierarchy and power affect people. (p. 118)

I carefully searched for and paid close attention to excerpts with emotional cues, repetitions, and expressions of feelings such as anger towards racism, disappointment, revenge, and fulfillment of goals and dreams for all of the categories and excerpts. I made notes within each of the categories of my findings (See Appendix F).

I also analyzed each individual's unedited transcript and edited transcript, the narrative. I chose to investigate both of them, considering that they each read differently in the sense of structure and layout. I approached each participant individually and holistically, looking for meaning and interpretation as a whole:

Furthermore, it should be clear that life stories should be read first and foremost as a whole. They are a story in progress, a work in progress, with many interesting and important parts, but the meaning of the story is in the whole not its parts. (Atkinson, 1998, p. 67)

The narratives were approached with an open mind: "The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). I again, treated the individual narratives and transcripts the same way I treated the categorical excerpts, looking for emphasis on emotions and other areas of importance.

With the life story approach, the interpretive emphasis is on accepting the life story itself as a text that has something to say to us about life and about one life in particular. The emphasis is also on identifying the connections, meanings, and patterns that exist in the story itself. Interpretation of the life story is a highly personal matter, even intuitive and emphatic at times, because each narrative is seen as at least somewhat unique. (Atkinson, p. 64)

#### *Validity and the Construction of Themes*

I used four domains for validity checks: internal consistency, external consistency, corroboration/member checking, and persuasion (Atkinson, 1998). Internal consistency refers to the absence of contradiction throughout the interview (Atkinson).



What is shared in one part of the interview should not contradict what is said in any other portion of the interview (Atkinson). As I studied the transcribed interviews, I looked for inconsistencies, noted where I saw them, and asked follow-up questions as necessary. Johnny, for example, said he did not like Marshall Junior High, but later in the interview said that he did. In a follow-up interview, I brought this to his attention. Orlando gave seemingly contradictory accounts of the sources for the clothes that appeared several times in his locker. He said at one point that they came from concerned teachers, and then later said they were provided by the basketball coach. When I later brought this discrepancy to his attention in a follow-up interview, Orlando said that he was unsure, but felt that the mysterious clothing more than likely came from teachers.

External consistency refers to conformity between what is said and what I already know about a participant (Atkinson, 1998). I personally knew every participant in this study. Therefore, I was able to compare and contrast my recollection of past events with the participants' stories and verify firsthand much of the data gathered. In this process of validity determination and interpretation, I carefully noted a comment by Atkinson:

In addition, one of the most important subjective interpretive approaches to a life story is simply to ask the question, if you previously know the storyteller, Does the story told fit with what I see or know about the person? (p. 71)

As I analyzed each story and subsequently each narrative, I asked myself if the story and narrative as a whole fit what I know about that participant. I used my foreknowledge of each participant to try to answer that question. It was easy for me to validate many of the stories presented in the narratives, especially those of my two brothers. For example, the account of the neighborhood racism with rocks thrown through our window was mentioned by me as well as my two brothers. I remember how both of them responded to

this same incident. As for the other 5 participants, I was already familiar with most of their stories pertaining to elementary and junior high school. For example, 5 of the 6 participants who attended Blanchard Elementary talked vividly of the constant *ribbing*, *janking*, and *jiving*. I was able to compare their accounts with what I remembered. If there were inconsistencies, I either brought them up during their initial interviews or during follow-up interviews.

Corroboration and member checking entails verifying accounts among the participants or with others, such as relatives, who would be familiar with events mentioned in the interviews (Atkinson, 1998). I did not have to corroborate many of the details my brothers mentioned in their interviews. However, Victor did mention that our mother dropped out of elementary school, while I remember my mother telling me that she dropped out in the 10th grade. I did ask two aunts, but no one is certain when she left school. I did corroborate told by the other 5 participants of certain events with which I was not familiar. For example, both Jonathon and Orlando shared incidents of teachers giving them undeserved grades just because they were athletes. In Jonathon's account, he specifically mentioned Orlando sitting behind him in a particular teacher's class. I was able to validate this easily with Orlando. Also, I corroborated specific participants' accounts of the racial events at Blanchard Elementary with the other participants who also attended that school. This corroboration was essential for validation and data collection in general. Also, 6 participants attended the same high school, and 5 of them were in the same grades and knew each other very well. If I was presented stories and accounts with which I was unfamiliar, I tried to corroborate their stories. There were times when the participants would speak of the same events. During follow-up

interviews, I asked questions to certain participants based on what another participant said. Therefore, my foreknowledge and corroboration of stories made it easy to validate much of the data.

As Atkinson (1998) noted, “Persuasion is an objective measure in which the life story seems reasonable and convincing to others” (p. 61). I attempted to read each narrative from an objective point of view to determine if it seemed convincing. Orlando’s account of the preferential treatment at Hardaway High, for example, initially sounded somewhat questionable. I attempted to corroborate this account with Jonathon and Jeremy, since all three played basketball at this school. Jonathon partially confirmed this account, even on the junior high level. Jonathon’s stories of selling drugs were believable to me only because I had heard of his earlier lifestyle through my brother Victor and a few others. Johnny’s account of drug addiction may seem superficial to some, but is believable to me only because he ran the streets with my brother Mark, who has lived a questionable lifestyle in the past. Based on my interactions with Johnny now, I know that he is a much different person today. Orlando’s bout with alcoholism was easily corroborated with Johnny because they were drinking buddies at one point. Therefore, Orlando’s story was believable to me.

#### *Within-Case/Cross-Case Analysis*

I then examined and analyzed my findings from each participant in light of the literature. I made detailed notes of all the individual traits for each participant that matched various concepts discussed in my literature section. These individual findings were discussed in detail in the results section. I decided that the best and most organized way for me to make sense of the individual findings was to collapse the 42 categories

(See Appendix F and Chapter V introduction) into a small number of major categories. I found that each one of the 42 categories could fit into one of five major categories: Inner Life, Social Life, Academic Life, Family Life, and Future Life. For example, any of the 42 categories involving school or education, such as teacher inspiration and low grades, could be collapsed into the major category of Academic Life. Each of the five major categories represented some aspect of a participant's life. I found this method of data organization to be easy and convenient for me as I conducted analysis across the narratives. For example, if I wanted to examine my findings on the participants' social characteristics, I referenced the section on Social Life for each of the 8 participants. If I needed more details, I simply referenced the specific participant's narrative.

After analyzing each narrative individually, I grouped all 8 participants together and repeated the analytical process for the entire group.

Researchers must ask themselves what they have learned from doing the interviews, studying the transcripts, marking and labeling them, crafting profiles, and organizing categories of excerpts. What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants they interviewed? How do they understand and explain these connections? What do they understand now that they did not understand before they began the interviews? What surprises have there been? What confirmations of previous instincts? How have the interviews been consistent with the literature? How inconsistent? How have they gone beyond? (Seidman, 2006, p. 128-129)

I began to look for common themes as I reexamined the five major categories for individual analysis, transcripts, and narratives. I looked carefully for developing patterns, common threads, and emerging themes. I asked myself various questions about each narrative and transcript to aid in the process of finding meaning: As Atkinson (1998) remarked, "We can ask ourselves, What does this life story bring to my life? What does it add to other lives? Is there a central theme or pattern to the story?" (p. 69-70). How are

the participants alike? What messages do I hear collectively? What are the participants' similarities? Having carefully examined the results of my analysis, I noted four overall themes for this study, in addition to other collective themes.

### *Subjectivity*

My personal definition of subjectivity is *me* showing up in my research (R. W. Schmertzing, personal communication, Fall 2004). Subjectivity comprises one's own emotions, feelings, and beliefs (Schmertzing; Peshkin, 1988). These personal qualities vary from person to person and are in full operation throughout the research process (Peshkin). Peshkin noted:

When researchers observe themselves in the focused way that I propose, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. (p. 17)

Such personal attributes are not to be ignored or controlled, but acknowledged and identified throughout the various phases of research (Peshkin). In an effort to clearly identify areas where subjectivity emerged during data collection, Peshkin noted six personal subjectivities in connection with his study of a working class high school in California: "The results of my subjectivity audit are contained in the following list (a) the Ethnic-Maintenance I; (b) the Community-Maintenance I; (c) the E-Pluribus-Unum I; (d) the Justice-Seeking I; (e) the Pedagogical-Meliorist I; and (f) the Nonresearch Human I" (p. 18). As a result of being fully aware of his subjectivities, he was able to recognize when and where he was being subjective in his research.

My personal connection with and knowledge of the participants in this study gave me an advantage when it came to rapport, but this personal connection could also be seen

as a disadvantage because of the issue of researcher bias and subjectivity. Atkinson (1998) noted that: “With a life story form of inquiry, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to leave out or ignore one’s own subjective experience or feeling in regard to the ‘data’ that are being collected” (p. 65). I compiled a list of my own subjective I’s, with the intent of identifying the personal areas in my life that might affect how this dissertation was designed, implemented, and written (Peshkin, 1988). I attempted to identify those instances when and where my feelings and personal beliefs intertwined with the various research processes, especially during data collection and interpretation of the data. These personal components were emotional and, in some cases, directly connected to my childhood years. As the interviews were conducted and data were collected, these sensitive areas were activated at times and such occurrences were noted and identified:

How did I know when my subjectivity was engaged? I looked for the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or wanted to avoid, and when I felt moved to act in roles beyond those necessary to fulfill my research needs. In short, I felt that to identify my subjectivity, I had to monitor myself to sense how I was feeling. (Peshkin, p. 18)

The following is a discussion of my subjective I’s and their impact on my research. It is essential that a qualitative researcher make his or her subjective perspectives as transparent as possible so that the reader of that research may assess the influence of those subjectivities.

*Racism I* represents that negative emotion that comes up in me every time I am aware of people being mistreated because of race. For example, I recall the mostly-White neighborhood that my family once lived in when I was about 8 years old. We were the only Black family living on that street, as far as I can recall. From my point of view, I thought everything was fine. However, on one particular night, a rock was thrown

through our living room window; a few days later, it happened again. During that same time period, I recall seeing at least seven White members of the neighborhood yelling and screaming at my mother and older brothers in our yard. Although I did not understand everything that was happening, I did know one thing: We were not wanted in that neighborhood. In the same way, I played with a White boy about my age almost every day who lived next door to me, but one day, he stopped coming over, and we never went over to his house again. For a long time, I never understood why. I am reasonably sure those experiences affected the way I viewed Whites throughout my younger years.

Both of my older brothers, Victor and Patrick, relived these experiences through their own eyes during the interviews. I listened carefully as they told their versions of these neighborhood incidents. I also interacted with them by describing the scenes as I remembered them, but only after they were allowed to tell their versions of these accounts without interruption. In all of the interviews, I sometimes shared my version of incidents the participants touched on. This served two purposes: to help ease any tension during the interviews, and to assist the participants in remembering certain details in order to maximize data collection. Listening to my brothers' stories of this particular neighborhood was emotional for me. They remembered certain details that I either failed to remember or never noticed due to my young age at the time. Patrick, my oldest brother, described these incidents from a protector's perspective. He was the oldest male in the house, and felt that it was his duty to protect our home. One could easily sense the anger in his voice as he described how he went about protecting the family during this troublesome time in our lives, and I could sense a little anger being aroused in me, too, as the memories surfaced while Patrick talked. My brother Victor, in contrast, is very

comedic, and his accounts of this neighborhood were funny at times. Patrick's account of these incidents aroused anger within me, while Victor's account aroused more laughter. I believe this difference can be attributed to the attitude of the storyteller and to how the stories were told. Patrick was personally offended by the neighbors in that neighborhood, and it showed as he remembered the details, while Victor placed more emphasis on our neighbors' behavior and conduct.

Six of the 8 participants, including me, attended a particular elementary school in which racial tensions and conflicts were common. I lived through these incidents, and in some cases participated alongside some of the participants. As each of these 5 participants told their stories, I listened carefully, asking probing questions when necessary. [Johnny did not share any stories of racism in particular. He did acknowledge that racism was present at both predominantly White schools he attended but did not pay attention to it.] My *Racism I* was stirred within me and wanted to express itself during these moments of the interviews. I asked the participants numerous reflective questions: "How did that make you feel?" "What was going through your mind at that moment?" "Why did you respond that way?" One participant in particular, Jonathon, was very angry as he relived those accounts in his mind. I interjected some details as they talked, but I waited for each participant to finish his accounts of this particular school before I shared what I remembered. I lived through these incidents along with these 5 participants, and they all acknowledged that. Therefore, I did not have a problem sharing and interacting with them during these interview segments. However, my *Racism I* did come into play here, which I point out in my italicized reflections within each narrative.



*Poverty I* represents my emotional response to minority children raised in low-income areas. I was always embarrassed and very emotional about my upbringing in poverty. Having to wear outdated, old, and dingy items made me the brunt of many jokes throughout my childhood years. Due to segregation mandates, I was often bused to middle- to upper-level White schools, which made me feel even worse. Those White kids seemingly had everything: clothes, school supplies, money, and dads. I never wanted my classmates, especially my White classmates, to know where I lived. This self-consciousness stayed with me throughout my public school years, even when we moved to a better neighborhood my ninth-grade year. Today, as an assistant principal, I continue to be sympathetic towards low-income students at my school.

Every participant in this study had to live with the harsh realities of poverty. I listened attentively as my two older brothers told their accounts of our family's instability, dire needs for the basic necessities, and grim accounts of how we learned to live without certain things. My *Poverty I* was stirred as I remembered many of these same incidents as my brothers described them. In addition to asking probing questions, I did from time to time interact with them by throwing in certain details to help them tell their stories fully, and I also laughed with them in response to some hilarious accounts. My added details did not undermine or negate their stories in any way; instead, they complemented them. Victor touched on this area of subjectivity in a very personal way as he described in detail how poverty led him eventually to drop out of school. He also described in detail his struggles with the burden of helping to take care of the family. In particular, Victor reminded me of the times when he sacrificed several paychecks to buy school clothes and supplies for me. I literally had a lump in my throat as he spoke of

these hard times. I began to feel a little guilt rise up within me, along with genuine love and sympathy. I felt guilty because I never told him “Thank You!” for what he did. In fact, I never knew what he was going through personally during those tough times until the interview. This interview with Victor was difficult for me in that it touched me in such a deep, sympathetic way. I could have cried during this interview, but I think I held my composure very well. The usual smiles helped me through this interview. At other times, I simply nodded in agreement as he talked. After the interview was completed, I told him how much I appreciated his unselfishness and genuine concern for our family. This interview certainly strengthened my bond with Victor.

The other 5 participants talked about their families’ struggles with poverty, and I could easily relate to their accounts. Many of them retold accounts of being ridiculed by their peers for not having proper clothing to wear. This certainly touched a nerve in me, considering how I was the brunt of many jokes and *jiving* during this same time. I laughed right along with these participants as they emphasized the funny aspects of their poverty-stricken childhood. There were other times when feelings of sadness and sympathy arose within me. One participant in particular, Orlando, gave dramatic details of how he struggled to attend school each day while having to wear dirty and raggedy clothes. My *Poverty I* was strongly aroused during my interview with Orlando. During these interview segments on poverty, sympathy was the prevailing emotion. Although I participated in these exchanges of stories with occasional laughter, added details, and moments of sadness, I kept a balance by knowing when to be silent and when to probe for more details.

*Christmas I* represents that deep-seated subconscious feeling that stemmed from my childhood years when I received nothing for Christmas. Christmas time was depressing to me simply because I saw all the other kids with gifts on that day, but I had nothing. This negative feeling is still with me to this day. In fact, I have mentioned to others on several occasions how I felt compelled to provide gifts for my children during the Christmas seasons. In a conversation with Victor, he commented that he buys many gifts for his children during Christmas in order to make up for what he could not have as a child. He was also, to some degree, emotionally affected during Christmas seasons as a child. I do recall us both gazing out the window at the other children on one Christmas morning, wishing we had toys like them.

The only interview that touched on this emotion was with Victor. The other 6 participants in this study either remember receiving toys on this special day of the year or were not affected by the lack of gifts. Victor recounted the Christmas days in which our family had no food or gifts. His biggest concern was food. Mine was the gifts. My *Christmas I* was very active during this segment of the interview. Victor and I played together often since we were close in age. We both looked toward each Christmas season with hope. Prior to this interview, I did not know he was more worried about us not having food on Christmas than by the lack of gifts. Feelings of sympathy and sorrow arose within me as he talked. Considering Victor's unselfishness and heroic sacrifices for me, I wanted him to have the best in life. I felt that he deserved it, but to hear him express his deepest feelings from our upbringing was disturbing to me. I attempted to give Victor as much talk time without interruption as possible and added my comments mostly after he was finished, resulting in more verbal exchanges on the subject of Christmas. As

always, Victor was funny in many of his comments about Christmas in our family. The laughter provided a good balance with the more emotional segments for this portion of the interview.

*Resilient I* represents my feelings of sympathy towards minorities who, in spite of their unpleasant situations, manage to succeed. Based on my upbringing, I should have followed the path of the status quo in my home: All three of my older brothers who were raised with me dropped out of school. My mother also dropped out. Almost no one in my family unit made it past the 11th grade, except me: The only exception is my brother Ron, who was raised by a different set of parents. Were we to make a prediction based on statistically derived variables, I should not be writing this research paper.

Every participant in this research project had a story to tell. Resilience was not just limited to education. It also included the will power to resist the temptations on the streets, the determination to correct past mistakes, and the grit to endure the grim realities of poverty to become somebody in life. There were 5 participants who managed to graduate from high school. It was as if there was a silent cheerleader in me that was rooting as the graduates told their stories. I managed to accommodate this emotion with occasional smiles and looks of genuine interest and concern. Because my family moved out of the projects prior to my freshman year, I did not share any personal ties to most of the participants' stories about the high school level and beyond. It was exciting to hear their stories about high school as well as the post-education era of their lives. My *Resilient I* was especially active in the interviews with Orlando and Johnny as they described their battles with addictions. I listened with intense interest because I was not aware of these episodes in their lives. Although Victor and Patrick dropped out, they

exhibited resilience in other areas to which I could still relate. Victor's accounts of his experiences before dropping out provoked emotional responses. I watched first-hand as my brother Patrick struggled to make it in the music business after dropping out of school. My inner *Resilient I* cheered as he described how he managed to stay focused on his goals in life. Jonathon described vividly his life as a drug dealer and his near-death experience. I rooted silently as he reflected on his past mistakes and vowed to live an honest life.

*Sibling Rivalry I* is my emotional response to sibling rivalry between Black males, especially when it involves the youngest child. My older brothers were sometimes jealous and other times angry with me in my younger years. My mother always babied me. I seemingly got most of her attention. At other times, my older brothers and I would argue and occasionally fight. As we matured, these ill feelings subsided and true brotherhood prevailed.

The interviews with my two brothers did not touch on sibling rivalry at all. Therefore, this area of subjectivity was not tapped by them. The only interview that touched me in this area was with Johnny. He and I both were the youngest in our households. At one point in his interview, he described vividly the strife with one of his older brothers. I could relate to the rejection he experienced from his brother. I shared and compared my experiences after Johnny described his accounts fully. My sharing sparked more discussion, leading to more data being collected.

*Low Self-Esteem I* represents my emotional response to African American males who struggle with low self-esteem. I battled with this mental condition throughout school, especially during my stay in the low-income areas of Columbus. I was

embarrassed by my economic status, and I believed that it had a serious effect on the way I viewed myself. My appearance was the subject of much *jiving*, *ribbing*, and *playing the dozens*. I find myself being very sympathetic towards students I encounter today who are outwardly dealing with the same issue.

Of the 8 participants in this study, 5 spoke vividly of the ridicule and rejection they experienced as it related to appearance. Out of these 5 participants, 3 were seriously affected by the *ribbing* and *jiving* of their peers, including myself. My *Low Self-Esteem I* was active with all 5 participants, but was especially strong with 2 of them. Emotions varied from sadness to mere laughter. We laughed as we gazed at the photos of ghetto kids in the 1978 Blanchard yearbook. [I used this yearbook as a starter for most of the interviews.] There were moments in which 2 participants [Orlando and Victor] were serious as they recounted the peer rejection and struggles to attend school another day to face the crowds. I connected personally with these accounts and was very sympathetic as I listened. At times, I joined in the laughter and added comments that aided in the flow of dialogue. Victor's vivid accounts were by far the most heart-wrenching for me. I sympathized the most with him because I felt he deserved a much better hand than what was dealt him. In the midst of all the peer ridicule and rejection, he was still concerned enough for his kid brother to make sure I had something to wear to school. It was at this point in my interview with Victor that I was the most emotional. I wanted to cry, but managed to smile anyway. I had a lump in my throat while I smiled. At other times, Victor would say something funny, at which we both would laugh. After the formal interview was completed, I had the opportunity to talk with Victor and discuss some things that I never had a chance to talk to him about. This was a perfect time to thank him

for all that he did for me when I was too immature to express gratitude. This discussion led to collecting additional data that otherwise would never have been retrieved.

*Christian I* corresponds to my born-again experience in December of 1987. This experience impacted me greatly and continues to influence me mentally, spiritually, socially, and in every other part of my life. Two participants [Orlando and Johnny] described similar experiences in their lives when all hope was seemingly gone. The silent cheerleader in me was rooting and cheering as I listened to their accounts of the events leading up to their born-again experiences. I did share my experiences with each of the 2 participants, resulting in more dialogue.

*Absentee Father I* is that feeling I experience when I hear of situations in which fathers have abandoned their children for whatever reasons. I was raised in a household of four boys with four different dads, and none of the fathers was active in our lives. Only Victor and Mark had limited contact with their fathers; Patrick and I never had any contact with our fathers. As a child, I would often question my mother concerning the whereabouts of my father. I remember several times pointing to certain men whom I resembled and asking my mother if either of them was my father. It angered me later in life that my dad deserted me. As with most other participants in this study, I believe that had my father been there for me, my life would have been different, but to what degree I cannot say.

There were several interviews in which my *Absentee Father I* surfaced often. Johnny was very critical of his dad not being there for him. In one segment in his interview, he described how he went about repairing the lost relationship with his father, but found that his father was for the most part unresponsive. That bothered me as he

talked, and I felt great sympathy for Johnny during that segment. Orlando talked about how he was embarrassed by his father, an alcoholic who was often drunk, when he was living in the house. Eventually, Orlando himself became an alcoholic, and his dad ceased being active in his life. I was somewhat emotional as he shared his story concerning this. Jonathon was critical of his father, who would buy him nice things but was not around to actually father him. He admitted that he needed his father's guidance and correction, but his dad was unavailable for such a task. I was sympathetic towards Jonathon, but very critical of his dad inwardly in my emotions and outwardly in my analysis. Out of the 8 participants interviewed, only one had a consistently active father in his life, and I was very attentive to the stories he shared.

During the analysis phase, I was careful not to jump to any conclusions with any data that merged with my subjective I's. As I analyzed the data, five areas of my subjectivity surfaced the most: *Racism I*, *Poverty I*, *Low Self-Esteem I*, *Absentee Father I*, and *Resilient I*. Every participant had stories to share concerning racism, poverty, battles with low self-esteem, and resilience. The corresponding subjectivities were very much alive in my mind and emotions as I struggled to understand the data and find meaning. Due to leading statements made by some of the participants, it would have been easy for me to quickly identify emerging themes and move on, but I carefully investigated each excerpt from each participant, and conducted cross-case comparisons. I asked myself questions that made me think twice about what I thought was emerging from the data. Am I assuming too much about the participants' experiences? Am I being too emotional with the data? Are the participants really saying this? Are there alternative perspectives to what I am seeing? Such questions helped me to form the right questions for follow-up



interviews: Tell me what you meant by this? Why did you make this statement? Am I right in assuming that....? The follow-up phone interviews during the analysis phase helped me to pinpoint emerging themes accurately while minimizing researcher subjectivity.

### *Limitations of this Study*

There are several limitations to this study. The participant selection process was not as purposeful as I had hoped. I included practically every participant I could convince to sit down and talk with me. It was very difficult finding potential candidates for this research project because I had lost contact with practically every participant other than my two brothers. It was difficult even to arrange the interviews with my brothers because of their jobs and family obligations. I had to search the phone book until I found a listing for Johnny. He then led me to Orlando. I just happened to run into Randy at a retail store where many men shop. He then led me to Jeremy. I located Jonathon's mother in the phone book and convinced her that my research endeavor was worth Jonathon's time. Whatever she said to him worked: He was the easiest participant to talk to and had the most to say when I interviewed him. I did pre-qualify each participant, gathering basic information over the phone and explaining as plainly as I could the purpose of the interview. I believe that I was my own worst enemy in that I turned many of the potential candidates off initially when I tried to explain why I was interested in having them tell me about their life experiences. Five other potential candidates never followed through with interviews, probably for this very reason. However, every single participant in this study expressed genuine gratitude at the end of each interview. Each commented in his own way that no one had ever shown so much interest in his life story.

There were obvious advantages in the fact that I already knew the participants prior to conducting this study. I had good rapport with each of them, which led to open and honest sharing of stories. Prior knowledge of the participants made it easy to validate and confirm many of the stories shared. However, there were disadvantages as well, which may have affected some aspects of data collection and analysis. The participants may not have shared all the details of certain stories because they believed that I remembered most of those details anyway. For example, there were several times when my brothers attempted to cut stories short when they realized that I remembered the accounts. I encouraged them to share the details anyway. I am not sure if my foreknowledge affected the interviews of the other 5 participants in this manner. I did laugh as they shared stories with which I was familiar, and I even added certain details at times. In the end, I felt that my input aided in the flow of communication and sharing of stories.

My foreknowledge of the participants may have affected my analysis of the data as well. It was very difficult for me to approach the interviews and subsequent data as an outsider. This familiarity could have caused me to overlook certain details while clinging too emotionally to others. My subjective I's intertwined with much of the data, which may have caused me to be somewhat biased at times when searching for patterns and themes. Racism, for example, was a strong subjective I, and it easily got my attention during the interviews and analysis. In the end, I hope that my efforts to detail my own perspectives and how they might affect my research provide the reader with a solid basis for judging the credibility of this work.

## Chapter IV

### THE NARRATIVES

#### Johnny the Optimist

*This participant was given the fictitious name Johnny. I interviewed him on October 10, 2007, at his apartment. I had not seen him since the last time he was at my mom's house visiting one of my older brothers, which was close to 20 years ago. He and I never kept in contact after my family moved out of the projects. He was a close friend of one of my older brothers, Mark. After we moved away, I never understood how they became friends, but after interviewing him, I now understand. Johnny and I met in the 3rd grade; at one point we were best friends. We played together often after school and all day much of the summer. Backyard football, basketball [a bicycle rim nailed to a tree], baseball [a stick and a tennis ball], and other make-shift games were the way we spent most of our time. I remembered Johnny as being well-rounded, happy and playful, and very competitive. Even as a child he was able to take the hand life dealt him and make the best of it.*

*We greeted each other with hugs, smiles, and laughter. He quickly introduced me to his wife and invited me in. Johnny looked well and was living in a very well kept apartment complex on the northern side of town. I asked Johnny to start the interview with basic information such as family structure, age, place of birth, and then move into details of early childhood life and elementary school.*

I was born in Fort Mitchell, Alabama. I'm the youngest of seven, and uh, we stayed in Fort Mitchell until I was five. Then I moved to Columbus, Georgia, in the projects of Elizabeth Canty. And uh, single parent and uh, with multiple dads. In the first school I went to, uh, I attended J. D. Davis Elementary. I was in the 1st grade. I really didn't like J. D. Davis. But Darrell, I was an excited, happy kid growing up in elementary school. I had high self-esteem. I loved myself. I loved what I was doing. And then some redistricting happened, then I was sent to Blanchard Elementary. It was a predominantly White school. I loved Blanchard Elementary. I learned a lot there and made a lot of friends there. My favorite teacher there was Ms. Adkins, a White lady. [She taught sixth-

*grade English.*] She really encouraged me to do well. I remember the two Black male teachers there, Mr. Simmons and Mr. Lambers. [*Mr. Lambers taught fifth- and sixth-grade math, and Mr. Simmons taught fifth- and sixth-grade science.*] They were like father figures to me. I felt a little more drawn to them because of my ethnic background.

*Johnny's outlook on life was totally opposite of my perspective, yet we shared very similar backgrounds. He said that he was an excited, happy kid and had high self-esteem. I believe that it was his outgoing personality, positive self-concept, positive attitude towards life, and high self-esteem that enabled him to blossom at the predominantly White schools. His positive attitude towards life enabled him to mix in well in this predominantly White environment, with his favorite teacher being a White female. I believe that there were only a few Black male students who had such relationships with the White female teachers at Blanchard. Considering the racially charged atmosphere, the negative views of Blacks and Whites toward the opposite race probably made it difficult for such Black student/White teacher relationships to thrive. Johnny seemingly was one of the exceptions. Johnny was also attracted to the two Black male teachers like many other young African American boys. The absence of a father was probably at the core of his attraction to positive Black males at this time. My Absentee Father I was active here as Johnny mentioned the two Black male teachers.*

I went to Blanchard from the third to the sixth grade. I loved Blanchard Elementary. [*This school had better facilities and he felt that this school challenged him more in comparison to J. D. Davis.*] Even though I was a Black kid, it didn't phase me. Never phased me. I still loved everybody. You know, I guess I didn't care about race at that time. You know, it didn't bother me. I thought racism was more at J. D. Davis, since it was an all-Black school. I thought I was being singled out, since I was sent to an all Black school like J. D. Davis. You understand what I'm saying? I was too young to understand everything that was happening back then, but why do all Blacks have to go to one school while all Whites went to another? I didn't like that. That is why I was so happy when I went to Blanchard, because I finally get to be around other people other than Blacks. I just thought that I could be around other people. I'm just as good as they

are. I always wanted to be around other people. I didn't just want to be around just Black people all the time.

*Johnny's comments of being Black and it not phasing him and wanting to be around other students besides Blacks are important. I believe that this mentality and perception of Whites played a major role in how he interacted with White students and teachers and how they received him. I believe his healthy perception of race served somewhat as a shield against the negative effects of racism and stereotypes at Blanchard and Hardaway. He said later in the interview that he ignored the racism. It was this perception and response to racism that probably enabled him to thrive at the predominantly White schools, having numerous White friends and good relationships with White teachers. He was a well-likable person and won the hearts of many, including White students and teachers. My Resilient I was a little active here as I was writing this section on Johnny's ability to thrive at Blanchard despite the atmosphere.*

But why do the White kids get the better schools? My mom and [older] sisters used to say how good Blanchard is and all the other White schools in comparison to J. D. Davis--the quality of the education, the physical buildings, you name it. They didn't want me going there anyway. Because of the condition of J. D. Davis and the academics, they wanted me in a better school academically and physically. *[At that time the physical buildings of J. D. Davis were in dire need of repair. He felt that he was not challenged enough at this school.]* They were very excited when I got bused to Blanchard. I knew Blanchard was a better school. Any school is better than J. D. Davis. It's no secret that White folks are better educated than Black folks. Because you know education mainly follows the money. The quality of it I may say. And who has the most money? The White people, because they stay in those neighborhoods that got better schools. And the minorities don't have a lot of money, so they stay in poor neighborhoods with poor schools. So, it's always going to be a problem in America, unless something happens.

*Johnny's latter comments points more so to a mature reflection of the past and most likely do not reflect his thoughts at the time. However, I do believe that his mother's mature recognition of the educational inequalities in Muscogee County influenced his views of Black schools at the time. His positive attitude towards Blanchard and other*

*predominantly White schools was directly influenced by his mother. She recognized how inferior the Black schools were in comparison to the White schools and communicated this effectively to her children. Her genuine concern for her children's education was also demonstrated here.*

Uh, you know during that time I was doing so well in school, you know. I really didn't think about not having my dad there. After elementary school I just put my dad on the back burner, because I had come to terms with that. And I just started making my life the best way I could. Still had good grades. My mom helped me stay focused. She would beat me. [*He laughed.*] Let me put it this way. My mother was as involved as she could be, considering she was a single parent with seven kids. She didn't play. We had to do well in school, or we got a whipping. We couldn't bring home any Ds or Fs, or it would be a whipping. So she was a great disciplinarian when it came to school. I knew better to bring home anything less than a C in that house. Because like I said, I was the youngest of seven and got multiple dads. We were very poor. And mom, she use to rule that household with an iron fist. And she meant that. She didn't have but a sixth-grade education. And she said that if we didn't get it, you know, she was going to make sure we get it. And I wanted to please my mom. But school just came natural to me. It wasn't hard for me. But I've got to give credit where credit is due. I had a good mom, really. She really instilled in me some good principles. I did my dirt, but don't get me wrong. I didn't do anything that required a felony charge or anything like that, 'cause I was too scared to do that. My mom had taught me better than to steal or rob or do anything, you know, big time stuff. You know what I'm saying?

*My poverty I and Absentee Father I were very active in this segment as he shared his feelings toward his inactive father and being raised in poverty. Johnny longed to get to know his dad, but even in his absence, Johnny's mother was a strong Black woman. She ran a tight ship and Johnny respected her for that. Single mothers raising boys alone is the norm in many impoverished environments (Nelson, 2008). I believe that such*

*conditions force Black mothers to take on tougher roles than they would if there were active fathers present. Once again, Johnny's mother had clear expectations for her children. Although she dropped out, she managed to set the standard for education. She had a strong influence on him early in life but would lose it later. At this stage, Johnny obeyed his mother's every command, but later he would outgrow his mother's strength and sternness.*

I attended Marshall Junior High for the seventh and eighth grades. I hated every minute I was at Marshall. It was predominantly Black. All I did was act a fool, class clown. I didn't learn anything but still made As. I didn't study for tests. I really didn't do too much there. I really didn't learn too much there. I really was disappointed at Marshall, because I had learned so much at Blanchard. I really didn't study for my tests there. I goofed around and felt like I wasted 2 years of my life there at Marshall. All I really did was act a fool and goofed around there. I really didn't have to study for tests there to make As. I even made the National Honor Society at Marshall. I made A's and B's there for both years. Didn't play any sports at Marshall. I don't think I was interested in women, in females that much. I was just crazy. I can just recall me and one of my friends running around acting silly and crazy all the time. I don't even recall doing any serious work there, and I was just free. I didn't have any worries there, really. I wasn't worried about school. I didn't do all my homework but still made all As. Blanchard had prepared me so well. The academics were very, very low at Marshall, and I hated that, because I wanted to be challenged. That's why I acted silly so much. I had a lot of time on my hand. I wasn't challenged. Just a lot of Black people. I just didn't like the fact that uh, just coming from Blanchard, kind of challenged academically.

*Again, Johnny is able to contrast the quality of education between Blanchard and Marshall. He has a negative attitude towards the two predominantly Black schools he attended, J.D. Davis and Marshall. He tends to have more favorable views of the two predominantly White schools he attended, Blanchard and Hardaway. I believe that this mentality also encouraged the wholesome relationships he had with White students and*

*teachers. His desire to be challenged academically is fueled by self-motivation. Boys in general bore easily and tend to act out in classes that are unstimulating and boring (Gurian, 2001). This would explain his behavior at Marshall.*

Then you come to an all Black school, they [teachers] don't care about your education. They didn't care about your education there. Either you got it or you don't. Some teachers give you the answers to the test before you take the test. They don't give you any challenging work, you know. And you had a lot of White teachers there too, so they really didn't challenge you. Oh man, there was a big difference. The teachers at Blanchard, they challenged you. They really gave you a hard time. But the White teachers at Marshall, now this is just my opinion, they taught what they had to teach. But it wasn't challenging. It was like you already knew this stuff, and they were just going through the motions. And they give you almost the test before you take the test. You know, because we had some people in our class that was just not there all the way. You know what I mean? They knew that, but I guess because the way the school was set up, they had to do that. I don't know. I don't know anything about the administration, but I'm like, "Come on guys. We can do better than this." I'm in there with these guys. You understand what I'm saying? They have to teach to everybody and cater to everybody. That's why I didn't like Marshall academically. There were slow kids at Blanchard too, but these guys didn't know anything. Most of them. A bunch of dumb guys. These were Black kids. I'm not trying to talk bad about them or nothing. They were not on their level I should say, probably because they came from an all Black elementary school. I don't know. I can't stand J. D. Davis. But you could see the difference in the education. I saw a big difference. When I went to Blanchard I was challenged, and the academic rigor at Hardaway High [*The predominantly White high school he attended*] was the same as



Blanchard. The academic rigor at J. D. Davis and Marshall was a joke. That's all I can say. And I'm being honest. It's a shame because mostly Blacks are in those schools.

*These statements provide evidence of self-motivation and desire for personal success. Johnny blossomed the most at the White schools. His comparison and contrast of the White teachers at Marshall to the White teachers at Blanchard is interesting. He criticized Black and White teachers at Marshall for delivering substandard lessons.*

I got bused to a predominantly White college preparatory school, Hardaway High. Now I loved HHS, all 4 of my high school years. Uh, my ninth-grade year went well. I was still making As and Bs until I was 14 years old, going on sophomore. I started smoking marijuana, started smoking cigarettes, and started drinking alcohol, going into my 10th-grade year. *[Johnny started hanging out more often with his cousin who also lived in Elizabeth Canty. He says that it was his cousin who introduced these activities to him. I attempted to locate him for an interview but could not find him.]* And everything started going down from there. My grades started going down. Everything started going down from there. And, uh, I started rebelling against my mom. Of course, I'm doing drugs. I was smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, going to clubs at that age. That's where I met a lot of my White friends. I use to get high with White boys. I messed with White girls there. I met a lot of White friends there. I felt accepted among them. I'm pretty sure racism was there. But I didn't pay any attention to it, if that makes any kind of sense. I'm pretty sure it was. But I really didn't pay any attention to it. It really didn't bother me, because I didn't see it at the time. Don't see it now. Don't bother me now. I hung out with who I wanted to hang out with. We *[he and his cousin]* use to go over their houses after school, get high, have parties, women. You name it. These White guys. It was the norm for me, so it doesn't matter with me.

*My Resilient I and Racism I were active here. My emotions were stirred as he described how he got side tracked with drugs and other distractions. Although he said he was not affected by the racism, I was yet stirred somewhat emotionally. Johnny's outgoing personality and blindness to racism won the hearts of many White students, White teachers, and even White girls. He said that he felt accepted among them. Why was he accepted among them? It was his personality and attitude towards them more than likely. Drugs, alcohol, and clubs will soon throw him completely off track. A strong Black mother was not enough to keep him focused on this level. In my opinion, he needed more than what his mother had to offer, possibly a strong father figure. When my two older brothers got beyond my mother's control, she had my uncle physically discipline them. Johnny said early in life that he did not want to do anything to hurt his mother, but he later proved otherwise. I attribute his behavior on this level to peer pressure. I call it the "burden of fitting in." I believe that this was Johnny's moment of temptation that would lead him astray for some years to come. What was his temptation? Primarily fitting in, along with all the activities involved with fitting in: sex, drugs, alcohol, and parties. I believe that Johnny became vulnerable the moment he stopped listening to his mother.*

My ninth-grade year, like I said, I was still doing well. It was at the end of my ninth-grade year I started really messing with girls and alcohol and marijuana, everything. I started rebelling against mom. When I started on my little drugs, alcohol, marijuana, she didn't want me to do that. So of course naturally, I was going to do it anyway, because that's what I wanted to do. So she use to try to make me stop and all of that. She would put me on punishment. Stuff like that and make life miserable for me as best she can. But I didn't obey too much of anything that she said. Use to disobey her rules, break restrictions, go when she said not to go. And that caused us to get in a lot of fights, not physical, but uh, she wanted to put me out on the street because of that. She never did, though she threatened a lot of times. I think she would have. In fact, I had to go and live with friends a couple of times, because things got so heated in there. But after a while, she came to terms with that. After she saw that I was not going to change no matter what she did, she became more lenient with me, in terms of drinking and smoking. I believe she just came to accept it, because she saw that was what I was going to do no matter what she did. That type of rebellion, not fighting or beating her down or anything.

Naturally, everything just started going down for me, because that was not my main focus at that time. My main focus was having fun the wrong way: women, drugs, alcohol. Not having fun the innocent way like in junior high. My academic life suffered, not to the point where I could not rebound. I just couldn't make A's and B's. I made C's and D's, And uh, I pulled it up my senior year. My 11th- and 12th-grade year I pulled it up, because I had to graduate.

*My Resilient I was active in this segment as I was rooting for him emotionally as he described how everything began to go downhill. Johnny's mother could only do so much. At one point she seemingly gave in. I asked Johnny why he got so distracted. He blamed himself, saying that he just allowed himself to be distracted. It looks like a classic case of peer pressure to me, the "burden of fitting in." I recall a time period when I began coming in very late at night while I was in high school, in an effort to fit in. My mother would yell and cuss, but she eventually gave in just like Johnny's mom. Johnny was almost at the point of no return, yet he managed to keep the finish line in view. This is evidence of his ability to stay focused even in the most vulnerable times. He never lost sight of graduating. His statements here are supportive of his desire for personal success.*

I would say my 10th-grade year, I really didn't do anything. I was really a bum my 10th-grade year. Yeah, I was a bum. Didn't do anything, just having fun. Grades, I slacked off on my grades. I had a lot of girlfriends, that's all I wanted to do: drink, smoke, girlfriends, clubs. But my 11th-grade year, mom came down real hard on me. About midway in my 11th-grade year, I started turning around a little bit, a lot I should say, because I knew graduation was coming up. I wanted to graduate. I always wanted to do good in school, and I liked school. I liked being at school. I liked going to school. I know that sounds odd, but I really did. I enjoyed high school. My high school years were the best school years of my life. So that's what really kept me in school. Not only did my mom wanted me to graduate, I really wanted to. My mom and self-motivation were the two keys for me staying in school. So I started turning around. My grades started picking up. I graduated on time. Not with the best GPA. I could have. I came out with a C, which

I really didn't like, because I goofed off. Because I know I could have. But I still drank. I smoked, but not as much my 11th- and 12th-grade year. But I dranked a lot more than I smoked during these 2 years. [*One of his drinking buddies was Orlando, another participant in this study.*] My grades suffered, I didn't care. I was heavily smoking, doing marijuana and drugs, going to clubs.

*My resilient I was active here as he described the events leading up to graduation. Johnny's mother never gave up on him. He credits his mother and himself for completing public school. This is supportive of his thrive for personal success. Johnny's statement, "I didn't care," contradicted previous statements of enjoying school and wanting to excel academically. On one hand he wanted to do well in school, and on the other hand, he was pulled in the direction of the social life of drugs, partying and sex. Although he never mentioned being pressured to avoid acting White, this tug of war could very well be indicative of just that or simply the "burden of fitting in." When I asked him why he went in this direction, he responded by saying that he just allowed himself to be pulled in that direction. I recall the peer pressure on me to fit in during my eighth-grade year and last year in Elizabeth Canty. A term that we used often was "momma's boy," which was an offensive term meaning that one is scared of girls, inexperienced, and is a punk. I was pressured to have sex just to have bragging rights and to alleviate the pressure of being ridiculed and singled out. I believe Johnny is succumbing to similar pressure at this point. He wants to fit in, and doing drugs, having sex, and partying were the common things that Black boys in our neighborhood [Elizabeth Canty] were into during this time period.*

Darrell, let me be honest with you. When I was at Hardaway, for some reason, most of my White faculty loved me. I can just remember nothing but good stuff. Both Blanchard and Hardaway. And I'm gonna be honest with you. Most of my White faculty, they just reached out to me. They encouraged me. I can recall a White male English teacher. He played a vital part in my life. He told me not to be a dancer, but I could be somebody. I told him I wanted to be a dancer, and he told me no. I could make something of myself. And so he really inspired me to be the best I can be in life. He really didn't want me to be a dancer, because he saw the work I did in his class. He saw the potential in me, to be the best I could be in life, rather than just settling for something that would

not utilize all of my talents. I can remember this White female teacher. She was very so much so instrumental in me graduating from Hardaway, because she called my mom and showed that she cared. She was White. But she sat me down and told me I was going the wrong way. So, White teachers really impacted my life a whole lot, from elementary to high school. They really played a great role in my life. I'll never forget that. I remember a White male teacher in high school who would stop me in the hallway and ask how I was doing and give me words of encouragement. I had advanced classes all the way through. I told you I was a smart little boy, but I just did my bad dirt. They saw that in me. They saw the potential in me. And they reached out at me. And they tried to pull it out of me, and they did a good job. And uh, I respect them for that.

*Johnny's relationships with his White teachers seemingly are on the same level as the White students. Randy in his narrative described Hardaway as a similar family atmosphere as Marshall but for the advantage of White students. Johnny seemingly tapped into this teacher/student closeness. How? I think it has a lot to do with his personality, attitude and perception towards Whites, and attitude towards school. He was very likeable, open to White friendships, and easy to teach since he loved school. Why Johnny and not any of the other 5 participants who attended Hardaway? The other 5 participants had negative race experiences that hindered and perhaps prevented such bonding, not to mention their individual personalities.*

My older brother was at Hardaway in the 12th grade during this period in my life. [Johnny was in the 10th.] And uh, he was in his own little world. My brother and I were never real close. He was always jealous of me, because I was the baby. Just jealous anyway, so we never had a good relationship. My mom had to make him do things with me. She had to make him play with me. She had to make him take me places. So we never had a good relationship anyway. So he really didn't do anything for me like a big brother should have. But I still love my brother. And he went into the Army right after he graduated. So, I was still in the 10th grade, 11th grade when he went into the Army. And

he was gone for at least 10 to 12 years. We really didn't have too much interaction after that. He went off and got married, you know, went over seas and living the Army life for a while. So, really I didn't have a big brother. I didn't have a big brother when he was there in the house, so he really didn't spend time with me. He was gone with your brother Victor all the time. [*Victor and Johnny's brother were best friends.*] But you know, I'm not bitter or anything. I'm just being factual here. [*He laughed.*] You know, and then when he graduated, he was gone. To be honest with you Darrell, he didn't care what I did, as long as it was not him. I don't think he ever tried drugs. I don't think he did. There were no indications that he did. I was a user myself, and I could spot one a mile away. He didn't show any signs. My mother would try to get him to talk some sense in me. She would literally have to almost be to the point of whipping him to get him to do that. And when she threatened him long enough, he would take out the time to say something to me. He would say, "What you're doing is not right. You need to do this, you need to do that." He just basically tried to deter me from the path I was going down. But I didn't respect him. It went in one ear and out the other, because I didn't respect him for the simple fact that I knew momma had to make him spend some time with me. I knew he didn't care about me. He was just doing that to avoid the belt. [*He laughed.*] That's how I looked at that. That's why I didn't respect him. I always welcomed the close relationship with my older brother next to me. I wanted that very much so. But he didn't want to give it to me. That hurt me very deeply by the way, absolutely, because I loved my brother. He didn't want to have anything to do with his little brother and always shunning me. Not wanting to do anything like a big brother should. I always had to beg and go to mom and make him do things for me. He didn't want to do it out of his heart. Even his girl friends

had to make him do things for me and with me, because they saw that I kind of looked up to him. And he always would reject me most of the time.

*My Sibling Rivalry I and Absentee Father I were very active during this segment. I identified easily with his childish battles with his older brother. I was also the youngest and experienced sibling rivalries with my older brothers, especially Victor. I was not aware that Johnny and his brother had no relationship. The three of us used to play marbles together and many other games. To this day, the two of them still do not have a healthy relationship. Johnny was looking for that absentee father relationship in his older brother. This was evidence of his desire to connect with his father. It is possible that his older brother could have been the key to turning Johnny's life around had he taken time to build a healthy relationship with his baby brother. Johnny was wide open for his attention and would probably have listened to him faster than his mother.*

*[He immediately started to tell more stories of his bad habits after graduation leading up to a climactic point.]* I was hanging out with Mark your brother. We used to hang out and stuff like that. We had a lot of fun. But I started rebelling against my mom and uh, everything. I led a life that took me down the wrong path. During that time of drugs and alcohol, I engaged in a lot of women and night clubs. I fathered four sons out of wedlock. Four fine sons I might add. I also got into trouble with the law during that time. I can recall getting arrested for criminal trespassing. That was my first time getting arrested. I got drunk on some Budweisers, me and the boys. Uh, and we decided to go swimming. The swimming pool was open during the day but closed at night. But it was late at night, and we were drunk. And we wanted to have some fun, so we decided to go swimming in the public pool. And so it was four of us. And uh, we were swimming, and all of a sudden I just heard policemen driving up real fast, everybody running, jumping the fence. Myself, I go under the 8 feet, trying to hide. *[He laughed.]* Needless to say, they come and arrest me and got me out of there. That was my first record. Got out of there on bail for \$80. Not to mention abandonment by the law and child support, simple battery. You know, just little misdemeanors. Uh, then I, after graduating high school, I

went off to the Marine Corps for a while. I went in there for about a year and 10 or 11 months, and got out right before the first desert storm. I was stationed in Camp Lagoon. I was an infantry man. I was doing drugs while in the Marines, and it got me in trouble. Plus, I had to pay child support, and they were bugging me back here.

*My Resilient I was active during this segment as he continued to describe how his life spiraled downward. Johnny followed the paths of many other misguided Black males from Elizabeth Canty: get high, party, and make babies. He later commented that he pursued this path because he had no good examples to follow. He attributed his behavior to the absence of a father figure. His enlistment into the Marines is supportive of goal setting and desire for a better life.*

So with all of that, I went UA, unauthorized absence. I came home one weekend, and I tried *crack*. We were going to Richardson Lounge, and the guys I was hanging with said, "There is a new drug they got out. We should try that." We all went to this house and tried it. [*My brother Mark was with him.*] And I tried it, because it was a new drug. And I didn't know anything about *crack*, you know. It wasn't until after I tried it that I was educated on that drug. But it was too late. I was already addicted. They say it only takes one time. Had I known the facts about *crack* before I tried it, I probably would never have done it. But following the crowd, you know, I thought it was okay. But I hit that rock. [*This is slang for doing crack.*] I hit that one time, that's all it takes. I wanted more and more and more. So I was on that drug for about a good year, and it caused me to lose weight. I was unemployed. All I wanted to do was just get my next fix. It caused me to do some things that I really regret to my mom, sisters. Steal just to get a hit. Do whatever I needed to do. And I stayed like that for about a year with crack cocaine. That is no joke. That really messed me up for a while. I uh, was in the Marine Corps but did not go back during that time. I knew I was going to be in trouble if I went back. I was strung out. I was strung out, living from house to house. Didn't care about my appearance



or anything. I was a crack addict for almost a year. I uh, eventually got locked up. They caught me for about 6 months in a military prison. And uh, I got a dishonorable discharge for that. That really helped me clean up. I did it cold turkey, doing a lot of prayer. Had a lot of Bible reading. And uh, God helped me. Because when I got out, I went around some of the same people, the same folks when I got out. They were still doing the same things: marijuana, crack, you name it. And I went around the same folks, lighting up and everything. I was smelling it, passing it to me, "Want to hit it? No thank you!" I knew right then Darrell I was cured. I didn't want it. I smelled it. You know how you smell the stuff and you want it. I smell it. I was around it. And I said, "No!" How powerful that stuff is, and I said, "No!" I knew right then that God had cleaned me up. I was finished. That's how I got out of it. If I could say no to that, I knew I was through with it. It was God, man. It was God. He had His hand on me throughout my sinful life.

*I believe that Johnny's promiscuous lifestyle opened the door for more trouble. I remember the time period when he became addicted to crack. I specifically asked if my brother Mark was with him. My wrist watch came up missing during this time. Mark was known to take things and never return them. Ironically, we never knew Mark was on crack. Johnny credits his encounter with God as the means of escape from crack's vicious addiction. My Christian I was active in this segment as he credited God for his cure of crack addiction. My Resilient I was also active here as he described how he broke free from crack.*

But I just recently upgraded that to an honorable discharge. I had to go all the way to Washington about 2 years ago. I had to show that I have been making improvements in my civilian life. I went before a board and everything. I had to talk to nothing but colonels and had to tell them how my life has changed and everything. It took 10 years for that. So you might as well do the right thing first. So I got out of the Marine Corps about 2 years roughly. Then I went to work on different jobs. My main job I had was a welder. Then I met another fiancé and we had our son, and we had planned to get

married. Before we got married, I hurt my back on the job. Got injured on the job and got fired because they did not want to take care of me. So I didn't have workmen compensation or any benefits like that. And it took me two attorneys to get these benefits so I could have the surgery done, spinal fusion. All of that took about a year to get any benefits in, so I could get back on track and get a job. So I was without money for a whole year. My house was in financial disaster. My fiancé took my son and stepdaughter and left me in the apartment by myself. Man, I was so suicidal at that time. I didn't wanna live. I contemplated on taking my life.

And uh, but it was during that time that I cried out to God. And literally, I gave all my problems and my heart to God that night. It was a hot summer night I will never forget, 1996. And I was 26 years old then. I gave my heart to God, and I felt a peace like I never felt before. I share this with you, because I know I heard God's voice that night. He called me by my name. He said, "Johnny if you work for me, I'll take care of you." And I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He said it again, "Johnny if you work for me, I'll take care of you." Then he immediately led me to a scripture I'll never forget: "But seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." And I knew God was calling me into ministry right then. He was speaking to my affliction. I didn't have anything, but I needed everything. So that right there let me know that God was gonna take care of me. And I've been working for God ever since. After that, I went back home and had the surgery and had to go back home to my mom. Had my surgery, and she had to take care of me for about 6 months.

*My Christian I and resilient I were very active during this segment. These events attest to Johnny's resilience. He bounced back from drug and alcohol abuse, even the contemplation of suicide. I was silently rooting for him as he described his encounter with God. I had no proof of his deliverance from crack or encounter with God other than*

*his seemingly changed lifestyle. I knew he was hanging out with Mark, but did not know the details. My family was aware of Mark smoking marijuana. Johnny's life seems to be more positive now.*

In the fall of 1996, I enrolled at Columbus State University [CSU] and majored in business administration. I got my BS in business administration with a major in management and marketing. I loved CSU. In fact I think that is one of the best schools in this area. I learned a lot at CSU. That's where I met my lovely wife. She was majoring in early childhood education. She is working on her PhD. We've been married now going on 8 years. We don't have any kids. We agreed that we were going to finish our doctorates first. And then, we're gonna have two children. Then I graduated from CSU and went straight to Troy and got my masters from Troy in business management. During the time at CSU, I was assistant pastor at New Revival Baptist Church, and I was superintendent of Sunday school. I was licensed into ministry. Then I went to Troy after that. Then I left Troy and went to Beacon University [BU] and got a Master of Arts and Master of Divinity and a Doctorate. And that was my Bible training. And it was revealed to me why God had me get all of the degrees I got. At Beacon, I was Director of Admissions and Recruitment first. And then I got promoted to dean of recruitment and admissions. And it required me to use all of my business and marketing skills as well as my Bible skills, because I taught at BU. Everything came into a full picture why God had me at a secular university and Christian university as well. Uh, so I got my doctorate on June 1, 2007. You attended that. I appreciated that. But also it occurred to me why God used business and Bible. He has now opened a door for me to plant a multiracial church in Columbus. That's what I'm working on now. I'm consumed with that. I spend all my time and energy with that. I'm starting it from scratch. So I just finished a church planting

plan, which is just like a business plan. I'm putting every piece of degree I've earned right now in it.

*There was an article in our local newspaper that spotlighted Johnny in the religious section. It centered on his life and his desire to build a multi-racial church in the city. What he told the reporter was basically a summary of what he shared with me in detail concerning his life. There were no conflicts in the two stories. My Resilient I and Christian I were very active here. His completion of several degrees is supportive of his goal setting skills and desire for personal success and a better life. It is amazing to see how Johnny's life turned around for him. He has always been very optimistic and positive. Out of grim defeat came the dawning of a new day. I think it is very difficult for anyone to recover from such mistakes. His ability to make friends with all races probably influenced his decision to start a multi-racial church.*

As far as a Black man growing up, uh let me back up, back track a little bit. I was the youngest, the baby. I was a little spoiled. I was a brat baby. There were seven children: three boys and four girls. The oldest boy and girl did not graduate, because they had to get jobs to help my mother. So they did not have the opportunity to finish school. Most of us had different dads. Uh, I didn't have a father figure. None of us really had a father figure. I use to ask my mother questions about my daddy. "What is he doing? Why he doesn't come to see me? Why he doesn't talk to me?" And she'd have answers for all of that. She told me the truth, and I understood why. And I just left it at that. There was no one to really teach me how to be a man. Of course, I wanted to be around my dad. But when I got older, I think it was after the sixth grade, when I really understood why things were the way they were. And I kind of like came to accept it. I remember even as a teenager, I wanted his guidance. It didn't bother me as much then, because I had a lot of friends. When I was younger, I really did want to be around my dad. So I grew up without that knowledge, with no one to guide me. And that played a major role in how I turned out, in terms of drugs and alcohol, women, and getting children out of wedlock. And not being a responsible man, father, or anything like that. 'Cause no one was there to

model that out for me, so I'm thinking everybody else doing it. [*He laughed.*] So, I guess this is the right thing to do in the projects. That's the life of the projects. Everybody else is having babies and getting drunk and high. I guess that's all you see and all you do if you don't have a model. And so that's how I grew up without a father figure. But my mom did the best she could. I'm not taking anything away from my mom. I love her dearly. She did the best she could with what she had. That's all she could do. She could not teach me how to be a man, because she was not a man. We were always a loving family, Darrell, but we fought like cats and dogs. You got a lot of people in the household and a lot of joking going on. I was a little brat and mischievous. I got on their nerves, but as far as any hatred or anything like that, it was just sibling rivalry. But we loved each other afterwards. [*He laughed.*]

*My Poverty I, Absentee Father I, and Sibling Rivalry I were very active during this segment. I emotionally identified with his poverty and desire to see his dad. Early in life, Johnny was longing to connect with his father. Unfortunately, he had to learn to live with the grim reality that his dad was not going to be active in his life. The phrase "so I'm thinking everybody else doing it" is another way of saying that he succumbed to peer pressure. Just because everybody is doing it does not mean one has to do it. I believe he was under pressure to fit in. None of us wanted to be labeled a punk or momma's boy. Johnny had to prove his manhood.*

My dad is still living. He's in his 60s. I try to keep in contact with him occasionally, maybe during the holidays or special days like *Father's Day*. I asked him to go out with me to eat, just to try to repair the relationship. But he said he did not like eating out. He's receptive towards me, but we don't have a relationship. Never did have a relationship. He has not made any effort to be a part of my life. It hurts me so much, because everything I learned, I did not learn from my dad. I learned what I learned on the streets, until I met God. I learned from the Word of God, as far as being a man, father, and husband. It just hurts me that I can't show my sons that their granddad, we have a

relationship. I will not do my kids that way. To spend time with them, to get involved with their schooling, which I am. To have a relationship with them, which I do. My relationships with my kids are much better than my relationship with my dad. One of the reasons I am like I am is because I didn't have a dad to guide, teach me, and direct me like he should have done. I let my kids know that they can come talk to me about anything. I give them guidance and direction. That's what I do for my kids. My oldest boy is 18. The next one is 16 and plays football and makes AB honor roll. Junior just turned 15. My youngest is in middle school and the best left-handed pitcher I ever seen.

*My Absentee Father I and Christian I were very active during this segment. I emotionally identified with Johnny in his quest to connect with his dad. His statements support his desire for fatherly support. I believe that the key to breaking this vicious cycle of absentee fatherhood is in Johnny's statement: "I will not do my kids that way." There is a level of resentment in Johnny's voice as he talked about how he will do things differently from his dad. As in my case, some Black families have to start from scratch in rebuilding family traditions that stretch across generations. As in a relay race, if the baton was dropped when attempting to pass it along, the next runner has to pick it up and continue running.*

#### Jeremy The Promising Athlete

*This participant was given the fictitious name Jeremy. I interviewed him on April 26, 2008, at his home. I was able to make contact with Jeremy through Randy, his best friend. In fact, both were best men in each other's weddings. It was hard securing this interview with Jeremy, due to his work schedule. Ironically, I ended up interviewing him and Randy on the same weekend. At one point in my interview with Jeremy in his home, Randy stopped by to see the old Blanchard yearbook photos from 1978. I used these photocopies in most of the interviews as a way to spark interest in the interview, a mode of data collection, and possibly to create leads to recruit more participants.*

*I do not recall much about Jeremy at all. When referencing the 1978 Blanchard yearbook, I noticed that he and I were in the same homeroom. My memory of him in elementary school is vague, but based on the accounts in this interview, he was present and somewhere not far from me at both schools, Blanchard and Marshall. He and Randy both lived in the front area of Elizabeth Canty, so I do not recall ever playing with him in the neighborhood. I am pretty sure we crossed paths from time to time, but nothing stands out. Based on what he said in this interview, I can somewhat understand why I don't remember him in the projects.*

*Jeremy greeted me at his door with a smile and a hug. He looked well. We sat down at his dinner table, and I quickly showed him the photocopies of the 1978 Blanchard yearbook. We laughed for a while at the various photos. To begin the*

*interview, I asked Jeremy to start the interview with basic information such as family structure, age, place of birth, and then move into details of early childhood life and elementary school.*

I am Jeremy and I am 39 years old. I am originally from Tampa, FL. I moved to Columbus in the third grade. In the first and second grade, I was in Florida. I was living in a descent neighborhood with a yard and trees. But my mom and dad didn't jive too well. My mom left dad and we moved to Georgia. It was four children, with me being the oldest. All boys. The first place we lived was with my aunt across from Elizabeth Canty. Then shortly there after, we moved to Elizabeth Canty. I was in the third grade. As a matter of fact, I had to repeat the third grade. The first school I attended was Gentry Elementary. Gentry was more like Blanchard Elementary. It was more so White kids than Black kids. You know as a Black kid growing up, you notice that right off. But the school was actually more like the school I went to in Florida, as far as the school almost being made up like a high school. But still in Georgia, school was a little different. There numbers were greater as far as Whites over Blacks. I was somewhat use to it, but I could tell there was a difference. The way the White kids interacted with you. For example, in Georgia they look at you kind of funny. And you are like, "What's going on with that?" I kind of felt like the odd man among them. I got this reaction more so from the students. The teachers pretty much treated me fairly, unless it came down to fighting. Then you would see that they would treat the Black kids differently. A good example was my first day at Gentry Elementary. I remember I had this run in with this big White kid who suppose to be the class bully. We were playing this baseball game. And it was my turn at bat, because he already had a turn. Of course I am the new kid. So he comes to me and pushes me. He just wanted to take my turn. So I busted him in the nose. The way it went

down was that it was my fault and I shouldn't have did it. But the way I felt was that he instigated everything. I'm the new kid and new kids get picked on. And if you let them pick on you, then it's going to happen all the time.

*Two subjective I's came into play here: Absentee Father I and Racism I. I sympathized with Jeremy as his father left the picture when his parents separated. I also had sympathy for him as he expressed his dislike for the inequities in the system as well as being treated as an outsider initially by students and some teachers. This early, negative experience with race at Gentry conditioned Jeremy for the numerous racist conflicts at Blanchard and was probably the beginning of his quest for fair treatment. Some researchers have noted that kids at a young age do understand racism (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Gentry Elementary seemed similar to Blanchard in demographics and racist tendencies. Like 4 other participants of this study, he repeats an early grade. This could create a pattern down the road if he does not get focused and get the necessary support.*

And from there I went to Morningside Elementary. To me this school was balanced in terms of Blacks and Whites. There were still more White kids, but it was more balanced. I felt that the teachers were fair. From there I went to Blanchard Elementary, living in Elizabeth Canty. The first thing I remember about Blanchard was the long trip on the bus. There were definitely some racial tensions at Blanchard. I'll never forget this White guy named Seth. This White guy was known for saying, *nigger*. But on this particular day I walked in the restroom and two or three Black guys has Seth's head in the toilet. If I remember correctly, the boys got suspended for that. When I walked in on that and saw what was happening, I didn't want any part of that. So I walked back out. But out in PE, I wanted to get physical with this guy. Because you know in recess, you could do some things you can't do in the classroom. Another incident I remember real well was when one of the Black male teachers Mr. Lambers had us out there playing tag football. And for some reason, the Black boys were on one side and the White boys were on the other side. And I don't know who did it first. But it quickly became tackle football. And, I'll put it this way. The song, *Reach Out and Touch*



*Someone*, a lot of folks got touched. [*He laughed.*] There was a tendency for the games to turn into Whites vs. Blacks during PE. Sometimes we were allowed to group and team up as we pleased. And a lot of times the Whites kids instigated it. I think it was a tendency for the Blacks to get punished more than the Whites. I know at one time I got into a fight with a White guy, and I was the one who got sent home and not him. But we both were fighting. I don't remember how it got started. My mom came up there to the school and somehow we found out that the other kid did not get sent home. That was a big uproar. I got sent home for the rest of that week. Overall, I always felt that I could get along with anybody, as long as you don't cross those proverbial lines.

*My subjective I of racism was very much alive during this interview segment. He mentioned Morningside Elementary. I, along with Victor and others from Elizabeth Canty, attended Morningside for a short period of time. I remember mostly Whites there, and it was somewhere on the northern side of Columbus just as Gentry and Blanchard. No one had anything negative to say about this school. Why were there no recognizable incidents of racism there? I am not sure, but the atmosphere for Blacks seemed to have been more pleasant than at Blanchard. Blanchard seems to be worst than Gentry according to Jeremy's account. I remember Seth vividly. He had a very negative attitude toward Blacks and had a way of making things happen in PE. Recess was always the battlefield. Looking back, I tend to wonder where the adults were during all of this. We never should have been allowed to pick teams by race. Once again, Jeremy was sent home and not the White kid he was fighting. These negative experiences with race collectively formed the foundation for his desire for fair treatment.*

There was definitely a difference between the White teachers and the Black teachers. For example, the White teachers were all niceness, all smiles. But the Black teachers were more like, "Look, this is what you need to do to get through life." The niceness was alright, but I preferred, "This is what you need!" The two male Black teachers would tell you this right in your face. You kind of looked up to this. You couldn't wait to get to school to see Mr. Lambers. I grew up without a father and so these guys stood out to me. What I remember about the White teachers was them being too

nice. I would rather for them to have been a little more straight forward. If you were having trouble in one of the Black male teachers' class, they would let you know, "Hey look. You're not doing what you can do." As far as the White teachers, they were like, "Whatever." If you didn't get it, you didn't get it. I don't feel that the White teachers were trying as hard as the Black teachers were. My grades were pretty good when I first got there. Then they started slipping a little bit as I got older. I had some Fs on my report card.

*It is interesting how he compared and contrasted the two types of teachers. Jeremy was accustomed to direct commands from his mother, and related more to the styles of the Black teachers. He appreciated their candidness. He says later in the interview that his mother was very candid and straightforward when dealing with him. Jeremy's criticism of his White female teachers may be directly linked to his experiences at home. This is indicative of a cultural disconnect between Jeremy and his White female teachers. Once again, I see another Black male gravitating towards the two Black male teachers. He said that he could not wait to get to school to see Mr. Lambers. He mentioned how the Black teachers would pull him aside and be straightforward with him in an effort to help him. The statement "Look, this is what you need to do to get through life" seems indicative of the Black male teachers helping us learn how to operate in the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1995, p. 25). As gatekeepers, they learned how to successfully operate in this culture and were now trying to pass it on to us. My Absentee Father I came into play here as he mentioned why the two Black male teachers stood out to him. We wanted fathers, and these two male teachers were about as close as we were going to get. He admits that his grades got worse as he got older. This was the case for most of the participants in this study. Some research supports this finding that, as Black males progress through the various grade levels, their grades tend to decline (Osborne, 1999b).*

Being at a middle to upper White school did have an effect on me. You're there at this school wearing stuff that a lot of times you didn't want to wear. And you get to this school and see what they're wearing. You feel almost ashamed of what you have on. And a lot of times they always had money. And you go to school and you ain't got nothing. These guys had dollars in elementary. You know, a Black kid coming from the projects, that's big. I wore blue jeans and those wide collar shirts. My mom had four children with me being the oldest. She did the best she could. She worked, but she still was receiving

governmental assistance. I had no contact with my dad. I'll never forget. I had this blue jacket. And I liked the blue jacket. I got to school and the kids started calling it pleather. I thought it was leather. I was like, "Pleather! Alright." You know, kids are kids. Kids can be cruel. But it was mostly the Black kids picking on me. I kind of didn't feel comfortable being there at Blanchard. And not so much because of the White kids. But somewhat because of the Black kids also. Back then my morals starting feeling in I guess. [*He is referring to feeling more sympathetic towards others who are mistreated.*] A lot of times they wanted to jump on some White guys, and honestly, the White guys did nothing wrong. They didn't say anything or do anything. A lot of times the Black guys wanted to fight them maybe because of what happened before. You know, at lunch, throw food at White boys. And I'm sitting there like, "Why? They haven't done anything."

*My Poverty I and Low Self-Esteem I were very much alive as he described his embarrassment for the clothes he had to wear. Jeremy, like several others in this study, was intimidated by the environment at Blanchard. He never realized the extent of his economic conditions until he was exposed to a whole new world. Before I ever conducted an interview, I thought I was the only one who felt embarrassed with my appearance. Jeremy provided a more balanced perspective when he mentioned that the Black boys were not totally innocent in this. The hostility of these few Black boys probably fed into the general stereotype of African American males: violent, confrontational, and headstrong. One of my friends from the projects, whom I could not reach for this study, unfortunately was in this category for sure. He was more like a Black version of Seth. Jeremy was indirectly referring to him. Ironically, he also said that most of the conflicts during recess were instigated by White boys.*

From there I went to Marshall Junior High. Marshall was kind of fun. I played sports, football, basketball, track. I was around more Blacks and felt more comfortable. I think I learned a little bit more at Marshall than at Blanchard, because I felt more at ease. I felt more accepted because of Black people being mostly there. The majority of the Blacks there were from the projects. My grades were mostly Cs and Bs with a few Ds.

But I kept my grades up. I almost got into a fight because of my speech. At Marshall, I took a speech class to help me with my stutter. You may have forgotten, but I use to stutter a lot. A lot of times kids would pick on me because of that. Kids are cruel. And here you are trying your best to talk to them. [*He mimics how the children would make fun of him.*] And I wasn't hearing that anymore.

*The phrases "felt more comfortable.... I learned a little bit more at Marshall ... I felt more at ease.... I felt more accepted...." are interesting. Based on these statements, I believe that Jeremy was so on the defensive at Blanchard, that he could not relax enough to learn effectively. It could have been the continuous confrontations with Whites that kept him on the edge. Of the 6 participants who attended Blanchard, four made comments of relief having left Blanchard. I know there are some Blacks who argue in favor of segregation. It could be the collective identity and sense of brotherhood that many Blacks experience when they attend predominantly Black schools. In the absence of racism, such an atmosphere breeds warmth and acceptance, which may have been just what Jeremy and the other three participants were describing as they reflected on their Blanchard experiences. Notice here that Jeremy says he kept his grades up. I think he may have been becoming a little more focused and cognizant of his approaching graduation date as he will soon enter high school.*

After Marshall Junior High, I went to Hardaway High School. Actually I thought it would be bigger than what it was. White kids again. It kind of reminded me of Blanchard but on a larger scale now. Now, we would see cars parked and thought the teachers were driving them. But no, it was the students driving them. We were like, "Wait a minute. This kid is in high school and driving a Mercedes." This is a different ball game now. This is something totally different. And a lot of times you would hear them say, "Hear come the Black kids," because we use to come and eat breakfast in the morning in the cafeteria. The White kids would stand by the entrance and watch us go in. Apparently, they ate at home in the morning. They'd be outside the cafeteria as we were coming in. And a lot of times you'd hear smart remarks. "Here they come. Here they come again. So what, they don't eat at home?" It definitely bothered me. I felt that they

were trying to belittle the Black people. I felt that there were some White people there that thought that they were better than us. A lot of times we felt that they didn't want you there. And you felt that, "I didn't want to be here in the first place. They bused us here!" I got along with everybody there. I was a very tall student, and most of the White kids were shorter than me. So I didn't have any problems. So I was not intimidated.

*My Racism I and Poverty I were very active during this account. This segment reminded me of Blanchard. If Jeremy did not know any better, he would have thought he was back at Blanchard again. Again, I see Jeremy noticing the material goods of the White students: At Blanchard it was dollars, but at Hardaway it was expensive cars. The statement "White kids again." is interesting. You can hear the frustration in his comments of being bused across town to a school he did not want to attend and did not feel welcomed. "They bused us here" revealed Jeremy's frustration of not being in control. He did not ask to be there and had no choice in the matter. He wanted to attend Carver High School, which was predominantly Black. This is another reason why some Blacks favor segregation: to avoid being bused into unpleasant situations.*

My grades my ninth-grade year could have been better. My mother was concerned. It's not so much as what she did as what she said. She said, "Look, you know I have three behind you. It's your life." I'm one of those kids that felt more embarrassed if I made her look bad. A lot of times guys would come, trying to get me to hang out with them, but I would tell them no and stay home and watch TV. I felt that if I turned my attention to watching TV, I wouldn't go and get into trouble. The worst thing I wanted to do was break my mother's heart and do something stupid in the streets. I was like, "Forget the fights, forget the police." That was not my issue. My biggest issue was mom. When I was young, I thought differently than most kids my age. I had to accept the fact that mom has four boys in the can [*slang for Elizabeth Canty*], and I'm the oldest. There were some boys I didn't hang with because I saw what they were doing. I saw them robbing, fighting all the time, going to jail. You'd hear stories about people mommas

coming to get you out of jail. I didn't want momma to have to do that for me, definitely not in high school.

*My Resilient I and Absentee Father I came into play here. I sympathized with Jeremy as he described how he avoided the streets to stay focused and to live up to his mother's expectations. I could relate to his situation: I did not want to hurt my mother either, and Johnny also expressed similar feelings. As I read this passage, I could sense the element of temptation and fear as Jeremy resisted the opportunities to be pulled into the troublesome street life. He was caught right in the middle of this tug of war: On one side was his mother, and on the other side were his friends. His mother's pull was stronger. This was not the case for Johnny in his interview. I tend to wonder what was the difference between Jeremy's mother and Johnny's mother? Both were tough, but I believe the difference lied not in the mothers but the sons. Both were somewhat fearful of their mothers in their younger days, but Jeremy consistently listened to his mother. Johnny eventually turned a deaf ear to his mother's advice. What were the end results? Jeremy made it through adolescence without being sidetracked while Johnny opened the door for dangerous addictions. I see a pattern here as I tend to believe that every Black male reared in poverty will eventually face serious temptations that could lead to self-destruction in various forms. Jeremy's example demonstrated the power and influence of a consistent, positive voice in the life of a Black male. However, Jeremy and Johnny have both shown that it is not enough to have access to a positive figure: One has to be willing to listen to that positive voice as well. Here was a perfect example of the candidness of Jeremy's mother. He was accustomed to being addressed this way and preferred his teachers do the same. His mother's straightforward methods of parenting and communication were effective enough to influence Jeremy's selection of friends and decisions during adolescence.*

My mom would always, out of the blue, hit you with something. She would hit you with something that would blow your mind. She would say things that would go over your head. You wouldn't know what she mean until you grow older. For example, when I was in the third grade, I was sitting down watching TV. She came out of nowhere and said, "Every woman don't want a good man!" I remember that to this day. I was wondering what she was talking about at the time. As I got older I understood. You see it all the time. A guy would jump on a woman, beat her down, and take her money. And she's back with him again. She was looking at me as trying to be a good man, but she was trying to let me know ahead of time that not every woman will appreciate that. So I

was looking at things in a more mature manner early on. My mom never had another man in the house living with us. I was sort of the man of the house under her. She ran the show, but I was like the man of the house. Until I got in my junior and senior year in high school, there was one man that came over every so often. But no man ever spent the night in our house, except one, my uncle. And that was only because he was too drunk to drive home that night. She never put a lot of responsibility on me. She would say this and say that and let me follow up on what was said. She would say, "You're the oldest and I've got the other three to deal with." So I understood what that meant. Basically, I had to act right and not go out there and get into trouble. She told me more than once, that if I go to jail, she would see me when I got out. It was my mother that kept me focused. I must give her the credit on that. She would tell me about the things she went through in dealing with Blacks and Whites and the racial tensions back then. Stuff like finding guys hung in trees that she went to school with. Stories like this Black guy she knew who looked at a White girl, flirting with her. The next day they found that boy hung in a tree. And she was saying that, "You have an opportunity to go to school. You get to go and learn and have the opportunity to better yourself." There were a lot of guys I grew up with that I said, "I will not be like him." It was more my mom than me, because I have said that if I be like him, that would break my mom's heart. Not disappointing my mother was at the heart of this drive to stay focused. I did have a little contact with my dad over the phone, but not a whole lot. It didn't mean a whole lot to me at the time, because I was mad. I felt like he should have been there. He should have been more of a man. I think that with a man in the house, there are things you could learn better from a man than a female, because there is only so much she can tell you as a female.

*My resilient I and Absentee Father I were active during this segment as Jeremy described how he avoided certain individuals and his disappointment with his dad not being there for him. Once again, his mother's candidness got his attention. The statement "I will not be like him" was fueled by his mother's powerful influence. I believe she purposefully communicated this way to him, as this method was effective. I believe the stories from the civil rights era were very effective in helping him to put his life in perspective. I used to question my mother often about daily living during the 60s. I believe that Jeremy sympathized with his mother's predicament and respected her efforts to provide for him and the others. This in turn fueled his anger towards his father. It is evident here that he wanted his father's support and guidance. As an outward recognition and respect for his mother, Jeremy willingly took on the role of surrogate father to his younger brothers.*

I played basketball all through high school. In fact, I played varsity my ninth grade year. My teachers did somewhat treat me differently because I played sports. Sometimes you might be in the hall talking and having a good time. And then I try to get to class, but the problem is that my class is way down the hall. You can't make it in time. I try to run down there. The principal would stop me and talk to me. "So Jeremy, how well you think we gonna do tonight?" I know I am late for sure. He would tell me to tell the teacher he was talking to me. Get to class and tell the teacher the principal was talking to me. Everything was fine. As for my teachers, every now and then when my grades started to slip, they would pull me aside and tell me, "Jeremy look, you need to pull your grades up. When you have extra time, come see me and we'll work on this." I felt that I was getting a little preferential treatment as an athlete. I was a little more popular because of sports. People would know my name, and I wouldn't even know their names. There was a big difference before and after I started playing. You could see the difference. I remember this incident in which there were some Black and White guys in the bathroom. They were football players, and they were a lot bigger than us. And I guess they called it a freshman initiation, where they'd hit you in the arm and in the chest real hard. And one of them grabbed me, but I said, "No. I ain't going down like that. I'm a freshman but I



ain't going down like that." Then there was a football player, a big boy that walked in there. This guy held the record in our school system for bench pressing. He walked in and said, "Hey, hey, hey, wait a minute. A freshman right? Yeah. You play basketball don't you? Yeah. Let him go. He okay, he okay." [*We laughed.*] I didn't have to worry about nobody from that point on. Now my grades were okay, but I could have done better had I applied myself. My freshman year, I discovered women. [*He laughed.*] You know, the girls in my freshman class looked like seniors. Some of the girls in the senior class looked like grown women. After some of the games, we have parties. [*He was on the same team with Orlando. Both of them made the varsity team as freshman.*] I was talking to a girl that I know for a fact, if I didn't play basketball, she wouldn't have given me the time of day. In fact, my sophomore year, my girlfriend was a senior. I knew what it was.

*I am sure that Jeremy attended a few parties that Orlando, Jonathon, and Johnny attended, but I do not see Jeremy being seriously sidetracked as the others. I believe this was Jeremy's moment of temptation. What was his temptation? All of the amenities that came with his sudden stardom: girls, parties, and popularity. His grades suffered but that was about it. There are no indications that he did drugs or abused alcohol, although there is reason to believe he was offered these at the parties. Jeremy had self-control and was focused. Why? He listened to his mother. Jeremy, in addition to Orlando and Jonathon, says that some of his teachers gave him preferential treatment because he was an athlete. It is hard to accurately determine why his teachers extended a helping hand to him. Was it because they really cared or was it because he was a star athlete? Based on his narrative, I tend to believe Jeremy's teachers were genuinely concerned about him. Maintaining average grades during his athletic star status was evidence of goal setting and the ability to stay focused on the most important things. His grades declined, but he never went under completely. Johnny and Jeremy both described incidents in which teachers at Hardaway extended a helping hand to them. Why not Orlando, Jonathon, or Victor? The three of them seriously struggled academically. This could be a case of "Help those who are able to be helped." When I read the narratives of Jonathon, Victor, and Orlando, I tend to believe that their teachers at Hardaway gave up on them.*

My 10th-grade year uh, I had fun. My grades again, could have been better. But it started being like, "Hey, I'm an athlete now." I was making Cs and Ds. I may have made an F or two. In fact, it was in English. I just couldn't do it in English. I had to go to

summer school my freshman year because of that subject. My 11th-grade year was fine. I applied myself a little bit more this time, because of that question, “What are you gonna do when you graduate?” I got a little more focused my junior year. My goal was to graduate. I was making more Bs and Cs and less Ds going into my senior year. I messed up in English again my junior year.

*My Resilient I was active during this segment. Jeremy could have easily lost focus completely with all the distractions that came with the star status. I was silently rooting for him as he shared his story. Jeremy demonstrated evidence of being able to refocus on what was most important. This again is evidence of goal setting. His struggles with English may have been somewhat of a cultural issue. Orlando also struggled with English and had to attend summer school twice for this subject. The statement “What are you gonna do when you graduate?” kept him focused and was indicative of his desire for personal success. When I read this passage, I can sense an element of fear as was my case as I approached the finish line of graduation. Fear, in cases such as this, is good and can serve as an agent of focus and discipline.*

My senior year was a blast, but it went too fast. In fact, I went to three proms. I went to a prom my freshman year. I didn't go my sophomore year. I went again my junior and senior year. I was just thinking about graduation, just getting out. I played ball and my grades were pretty much Cs and Bs. In retrospect, I look back and say, “I could have done much better.” I just didn't have the drive to do better than what I did. That's why I said if I had a father figure, I would have done better. I did enough to make sure I passed. I, along with the other starting senior on the team, were two of the best in the city of Columbus. At the time, I was thinking that there is no reason we shouldn't go to college. We were the combination. I played every position on the court except center. I never came out the game unless I got into foul trouble. No scouts ever came to see me. At Hardaway High, you had the football team, baseball team, and basketball team. Football got most of the attention. The next year after I graduated, they started sending scouts down to Columbus for basketball prospects. We had plenty of guys who could play at

various schools in Columbus. My senior year, I was still thinking I had a good shot at a scholarship. I look back on that and I think that's where I messed up at. For example, during the tournament, there were two names in the paper for our school. So I'm thinking I should have some kind of scholarship. *[At this point, Randy walks in to see the old pictures from the 1978 Blanchard yearbook.]* I remember the coach at Marshall Junior High coming out to my house talking to my mother, telling her that I had good potential. I did use to dream of going to college to play and make it into the NBA. I was starting to visualize that in my 11th-grade year. My mom use to play basketball. She never came to see me play until my senior year. She came during the Christmas tournament, and that meant a lot to me.

*My Resilient I and Absentee Father I were active during this segment. He envisioned an ideal father figure as one who would have constantly stayed on him in school and pushed him to do his best. A lot of times hindsight is 20/20. We assume that life would have been better if.... I think that this hindsight is partially related to how the participants in this study viewed the two Black male teachers at Blanchard. They kept us in line while we were at Blanchard, and we assumed that fathers in our homes would have done the same. Jeremy was a dreamer and had goals in life as evident in his statements.*

But I forgot that I did have one coach who was interested in me. It was a junior college in Tennessee. He called the house and told me who he was. He offered me a scholarship. I stayed there for one year. I fell out on the court during a game. I woke up in the hospital. Massive chest pains. They ran some tests but found nothing. I went back to practice and started having massive chest pains again. I thought that was it for me. The doctor advised that I didn't play ball anymore. But then it started hitting me in my sleep. I would wake up in the middle of the night, can't breathe and chest hurting. So that was it. So I came back to Columbus and tried to attend Columbus College. The coach there told me to try out for the basketball team. He would give me a full scholarship if I made the

team. But I had to get back in school first. I didn't have the money. My mother tried, but she couldn't handle the cost along with all the other bills. So that was it. I couldn't do it. I am now married with two children.

*My Resilient I was active as he described his struggle with a mysterious health condition while continuously pursuing his goal. I was very sympathetic towards him as I learned of this unfortunate setback. Jeremy currently works for a construction company that takes him on the road and out of town often.*

### Orlando the Ball Player

*The participant was given the fictitious name Orlando. I interviewed him at my kitchen table on January 27, 2008. I offered several times to meet at his house or a neutral location, but he insisted on coming over to my home instead. The last time I saw Orlando was at a basketball game in 1983. He was playing for Hardaway High. He and I have known each other since the fifth grade. What I remember most about Orlando is his exceptional athletic skills, especially his basketball talent. He is the one project kid that I always felt would make it big in the NBA. He was exceptional. I attended Spencer High and would hear other students talk about Orlando at Hardaway High. He was that good. At one point, we were best friends. He, Johnny, and I played together often after school and all day many times during the summer. Unfortunately, Orlando and I got into a fight over something stupid, which drove a wedge between us for years to come. In fact, when I initially made contact with him concerning this research project, he immediately confessed that he always wanted to apologize but did not have the nerves. I told him likewise. We both had too much pride to tell each other "Sorry!"*

*When he knocked on my door, we both greeted each other with a hug and lots of laughter. I asked him to start the interview with basic information such as family structure, age, place of birth, and then move into details of early childhood life and elementary school.*

My name is Orlando and I was born in 1968. I am 39. I went to Carver Elementary. I have three brothers and two sisters. I am the youngest male in the house. I have a younger sister. I went to Carver Elementary from kindergarten to second grade. It was predominantly Black, maybe one White in the entire school. It was over there by Carver High School, but they closed it down. There were two Black male teachers and one White. The rest were Black females. I do not remember the names of the Black male teachers but I do remember the name of the White female teacher. [*He mentioned her*

*name.*] She was a nice lady. I remember one Christmas the Black male principal came in wearing a Santa suit. And everybody just fell on the floor laughing, because they had never seen a Black Santa Claus. And we just never saw it. We told him, “We aint never seen a Black Santa Claus.” And uh, he said, “Well, Santa is Black.” I remember him saying that. I remember everybody just dying laughing.

At Carver Elementary, I felt that the White teachers were actually nicer than the Black teachers. They uh, treated you differently. I really do feel that way. It was just one White teacher, and she was very nice. It was kind of like she felt sorry for Black kids. She was very nice to everyone, opposed to the Black teachers. I had three Black female teachers in all. The Black teachers never showed any kindness. They just treated everybody by the book. “You gonna get this and you gonna get this right,” you know. It was never like, “I’m gonna help you do this.” The White teacher showed more kindness toward helping you understand what you had to do. She was very patient. I’ll never forget her. In fact, she the only one I actually do remember by name, you know.

*There are good and bad teachers of all races. Orlando felt that the one White teacher at his school was more apt to help him than the Black female teachers. She is the only teacher at this school that he remembered by name, so she really left a good impression on him. Why? As I read Orlando’s narrative, a pattern developed. He does not like mean teachers. He prefers teachers who are patient, kind, and sympathetic as well. Most of these types of teachers in his life were White, and he remembered every one of them. These Black teachers described here reminded me of the Black teachers at Blanchard.*

I was living in East Wynnton apartments on Roosevelt Drive when I attended Carver Elementary School. It was a rough neighborhood. It was a Black neighborhood and low-income. But at the time we didn’t know it was low-income, ‘cause, you know, didn’t nobody have anything. No one ever knew we were poor. No one ever talked about each other clothes because didn’t nobody ever have anything. I was living in this

neighborhood when I went to Carver Elementary. Carver was closing, so they moved everybody to Reese Road Elementary.

*My Poverty I was active in this segment. Until Orlando was bused to a White school, he never was aware of his poverty. I was surprised to hear that nobody jived on anyone because of his or her appearance while Orlando was living in this neighborhood. Jiving and ribbing are common verbal games among Blacks (Majors & Billson, 1992).*

I went to Reese Road Elementary from third to the fourth grades. I went from an all Black school to an all White school. And uh, the only Blacks in my class was me and a Black girl. It was like 2 Blacks to every 30 Whites in each class. It was rough going from an all Black to an all White school. It was really hard, 'cause you kind of shied away from everybody, 'cause you talked differently, walked differently. You kind of kept to yourself, 'cause you didn't feel connected with them. I hated that time, I really did. The only friends I had were the kids who rode the bus with me, not White friends. Just kids that rode the bus back home. I didn't make any friends because when we went to PE, the Black kids played basketball and football, and the White kids pretty much played kickball. You uh, just never socialized. It was no big thang. Nobody was mad at each other. They gave us choices, whatever you wanted to do. If you wanted to play basketball, you played basketball, unless if you wanted to go over there to play kickball. But no White kid ever came over to us to play basketball. I guess it just wasn't their sport. It wasn't no big thang, you know.

*My Racism I and Low Self-Esteem I were alive at this point although Orlando never mentioned any incidents of such at this point. I sympathized with his feelings of isolation at this school. It is situations like these that some Blacks hated during integration. In the Columbus area, it was mostly Blacks who were bused to other schools. It was the social connectedness of Black schools that was lost after desegregation (Causey, 2001; Irvine, 1991). Black students felt displaced as they were bused into these unfamiliar and unwelcoming environments. As with Blanchard, recess at this school was segregated by choice, but there were no outward race wars. I tend to wonder why the adults did not do more in integrating the recess activities.*

Reese Road was different from Carver, you know. Like I'm saying, I never experienced being around White people at that time. It was new to me. And uh, it was new to them to. They looked at me and the other [Black] girl like almost as if we were mascots. A matter of fact, one girl told me she had never seen a Black person before other than on TV. She had never seen a Black person. At that time *Roots* had come on TV. I knew nothing about racism until I saw that movie. And it changed my whole look on everything. I remember those White kids were calling me "Boy." It wasn't no big thang to me until I saw that movie. I said, "Whoa! That's why they call me boy." They would say, "Hey come here boy! You want a piece of candy?" It wasn't out of hatred. It just that they used that word. Maybe they heard somebody else say it. "Hey boy!" It was like people say, "Hey man! Hey boy!" It was no big deal before I saw *Roots*. I remember going to school and all those Black kids on the bus. They said, "We aint gonna take nothing." I remember pure rage after we all saw that movie. I was in the third grade. We were talking hatred, you know. "I can't believe they did that." We talked about that movie all the way to school. And it was like a big thang, you know. I never forget. *Roots* was a big thang back then. I started out with a little hatred, but after a while, it blew over. You know, once I stopped thinking about the movie.... I was never one to carry any hatred. None of the White kids ever said anything about the movie. I don't think they even saw the movie.

*My Racism I was very much alive at this point. It brought back memories of seeing that series on television. I remember watching Roots on television with my mother. I asked a lot of questions but was still confused for some reason. I do remember some conversations at Blanchard Elementary among the Black kids about the movie. The White students at Reese Road were more passive and less interrogating than the White students at Blanchard. Orlando gives us an honest glimpse of how children from the two races initially responded during integration. This segment is supportive of Orlando's desire for fair treatment.*

I remember a Black female teacher I had at Reese Road. [*He mentioned her name.*] Me and this other girl were the only Black kids in there, but she never showed us any favoritism. It was like we were regular kids, you know. She didn't treat us any different, you know. She didn't make no special effort to help me. I know she saw that we didn't wear the clothes everybody wore, but she just treated us just like any other kids, you know. She showed favoritism to the smart kids. She had this system where if you did good, she'd give you cars and cakes. She'd do anything to reward you for doing good. But other than that, she never showed any favoritism. She was more into it than the Black teachers at Carver. She was really into helping people. Like I said, she never showed any favoritism towards me and the Black girl. What I mean by that, she never came over to help us. She saw that we were behind, but she never made any attempt to help us. She just started giving us zeros and Fs. You know, she let us go like that. The Whites didn't seem to need much help like me and the Black girl did. They didn't seem to need the help that we did. I still don't understand why she didn't make the effort to help us. She saw the grades we're making like everybody else. But she kept on with her lesson.

*My Poverty I was active during this segment as I was emotionally touched as he talked about his poverty. I believe the statement "She was more into it than the Black teachers at Carver." meant that this teacher was more active and included more activities in the lessons than the Black teachers at Carver. It is interesting that Orlando assumed that this Black teacher would have easily identified with his economic conditions but instead showed no remorse. It was obvious he and the Black girl were not on the same academic level as the White students. This is the second negative incident he had with a Black teacher. According to Orlando, she never sought to remediate them since they were falling far behind the other classmates. He is somewhat contradictory in that at one point he said that this teacher was really into helping people but later said that she never helped him.*



My grades were horrifying, 'cause I never studied at home. Once I got home, it was all about playing ball, you know. I was just barely passing, sometimes with Ds and Fs. Just enough to get to the next grade. I did good at Carver Elementary. It was a big difference in going from Carver Elementary to Reese Road Elementary. At Carver, there were mostly Black teachers. At Reese Road, there were mostly White. I don't remember any Black male teachers at Reese Road, just one Black lady. I think they cared more about the grades at Reese Road, that you did good at Reese Road, as opposed to Carver, where they let you kind of get away with everything. At Carver, you really didn't learn too much. They didn't teach you anything. It was all about discipline, acting right, behaving right, no cussing, no fighting. That kind of thang at Carver. I mean they never taught us nothing. But when you go to a school like Reese Road, now all of a sudden you got to learn your time tables and different math problems. I was way behind. A lot of stuff they were saying I was amazed. I had no idea what they were talking about. It was like being in a different world, you know. I repeated the 3rd grade, because I didn't know anything. They gave me Fs, and I repeated it.

*The academic rigor of Reese Road Elementary was much tougher than Carver. It is not uncommon for Black boys to repeat an early grade, but it seems that Orlando was not effectively prepared for the faster pace of Reese Road. In his contrast of the teachers at the two schools, he noted that academics were stressed more at the White school while discipline was stressed more at the Black school. He said earlier that the one White teacher at Carver was more patient and sympathetic than the Black teachers there. It could be that these Black teachers at Carver felt that their ways of handling the Black students were the most effective ways to educate them. These Black teachers at Carver remind me of the Black teachers at Blanchard: candid, straightforward, and serious. Carver Elementary had a very large percentage of low-income Blacks. I tend to believe that much of a typical day would have been spent on discipline. Why was the one White female teacher at Carver different from the other teachers besides skin color? I believe the difference was cultural, as teachers' teaching styles are influenced by their cultural backgrounds (Delpit, 1995; Kunjufu, 2002). Black parents tend to be more candid in how they deal with their children (Delpit). This could possibly explain the differences in teaching styles according to race.*

When I went to the fifth grade, we moved to Elizabeth Canty. I attended Blanchard Elementary School in the fifth and sixth grade. It was more White than Black. It was more like 20 White to 5 Black. It was pretty much like Reese Road Elementary. There were two Black male teachers there. I can't forget them, because one of them was tough, Mr. Simmons. You know, he was very strict. He wanted Blacks to do well. And I thought he went about it the wrong way. He would often times grab you, grab you around the neck. He would say, "Boy you can't do that! We at this White people school, you can't act like that. And I want you to do better." You would have tears coming from your eyes the way he would handle you, kinda rough with you. We were just horseplaying and running around. You know how kids can be, kinda wild like. Some of the White kids were doing it too, but he did nothing to the White kids. I guess he just didn't want us to be that way. I don't really know what his motives was. He was kinda hard on Black kids. He was into being physical with you. I just thought he could have got his point across by sitting us down talking to us. You know, I would hear him say to a kid, "Nappy Head." "Boy you need to comb your hair. You need to put on some better clothes. Put on deodorant! Wear some clean pants!" I thought that was more hurtful than anything. I heard him say that to other Black kids as well. See at that time, I know they do it now, but Black kids would wear their hair braided for a week or two. And it kinda look unclean, you know. I thought that was what he talked about a lot too, you know. I thought that he was more hurtful than anything. Uh, I would say he was more on the Blacks to do the job, you know. I kinda felt like he felt that the White kids were doing what they were supposed to do, and he wanted to make sure that the Blacks was doing what they were

supposed to do. I don't know what his motives was. I don't know if he felt embarrassed by us, or he just wanted us to do better, you know.

*My Poverty I and Absentee Father I were active during this segment. I felt sorry for Orlando as he quoted the statements made to him and others. I was also thinking about the impact the two Black teachers had on the Black students, especially the boys. Orlando had a frail emotional frame probably due to his personality, economic status, and appearance. He was critical of other teachers who were straightforward instead of encouraging. I do not remember this teacher ever physically handling a White student. That is why I use to say that he was afraid to do this to White students, because he was afraid of their dads. I believe that some students appreciated his candidness while others were offended by it. It depends on who you ask. The participants in this study who attended Blanchard Elementary had various opinions concerning these two male teachers. Statements such as "Boy you can't do that." are indicative of these two Black male teachers acting somewhat as gatekeepers, showing us how to operate in a predominantly White environment (Delpit, 1995). Mr. Simmons' comments may have been harsh and degrading to some, but the statement "I want you to do better" proves that he cared.*

I loved the other Black male teacher, Mr. Lambers. I thought he was tough, but he was fair to everybody. He wanted you to get the lesson, and I heard him tell people that, "I love you and I want you to do good." You know, he was much different from Mr. Simmons. He would actually tell you he love you. He want to help you. I heard him say that to everybody, Black and White. I know he use to pick you up by your pants and paddle you, but I don't think he ever did it in anger. I was paddled by him. He did it mostly in PE. I don't remember him paddling any White kids. I remember my English teacher, Ms. Adkins. *[I showed him old Blanchard yearbook photographs of former teachers and students.]* She was very nice and funny. She never showed any racism towards me or anybody that I know of. I remember the White male assistant principal. He was a real cool guy. He walked around laughing and playing with the kids. He was a pretty nice guy. I was sent to the office for playing around. I remember one time me and my friend *[Johnny, a participant in this study]* drew some fake mustaches on our faces,

and they sent us to the office for that. I wasn't sent to the office that often. I was kind of quiet. I didn't do too much.

*Orlando favored the nicer of the two Black males and recalls a very likeable White female teacher and White male assistant principal. Both Black male teachers would physically discipline the Black students. Why did he prefer Mr. Lambers over Mr. Simmons? He said that Mr. Lambers would tell students he loved them. I believe that Orlando wanted sympathy more than anything from his teachers. As with all children and their unique physical and emotional frames, some are needier emotionally than others, as in Orlando's case. His disposition could be tied directly to his economic conditions. Again, he recalls White teachers who treated him nice.*

Uh, I didn't really socialize with the White kids too much. It was just the Black kids who rode the bus, you know. I remember a White guy I hung out with a little. [*He mentioned his name.*] And that was pretty much it. I did just enough to pass. It was always a D, F, or C pretty much. I did all my life a D, F, or C, just enough to get by. My mother really didn't pay my grades too much attention. My mother never paid any attention to my grades at all. She didn't even know whether I was doing good or bad. I was signing my report card at that time. So she didn't know.

*I believe that Orlando shied away from the upper class White students out of intimidation. He commented earlier about being bused to Reese Road, saying that he did not befriend the Whites because he basically did not fit in. Distancing oneself is not necessarily a sign of intimidation, but I believe it is in this case. As a parent, I tend to believe that his grades would have been better had his mother been more involved academically.*

I only liked going to school when I had decent clothes. But when I had to wear the same clothes, I didn't really care for going. It was embarrassing to wear dirty clothes, feet coming out your shoes. It was embarrassing. Kids made fun of me, mostly the Black kids. And it wasn't out of hatred or anything. You didn't have nothing, they didn't have nothing. And we were laughing at each other, you know. Especially when I had to wear a pair buddies. [*Buddies is slang for cheap sneakers. The name brand sneakers at this time*

were Converse All Stars, Pro Keds, and Trax. During this interview, Orlando reminded me of the red and black buddies I wore to school.] My momma bought me some buddies. I like to cried, you know. That's all I had. I enjoyed going to Carver, but not Reese Road. I liked Blanchard. But a lot of the kids that road the bus didn't have much either. So it wasn't too bad. So from that standpoint, it wasn't that bad. But when I did have clothes, I enjoyed it.

*My Poverty I and Low Self-Esteem I were very active here. I had similar experiences and could relate whole-heartedly. Victor and I also hated going to school for this reason. His statements here led me to believe that he shied away from the White students out of intimidation based mostly on his appearance. However, he did mention in his reflections of Reese Road that he was distant also because he talked differently. Later in the interview he mentioned that when he got to Marshall, he no later had to talk a certain way. Therefore, Orlando could have also been intimidated at Blanchard because of cultural differences as well. He did not have a problem being around the other poor Blacks. It seems that his self-esteem was low while he attended the two predominantly White elementary schools. The statement "I liked to cried" shows that his emotional well-being was directly tied into his physical appearance. His poverty or his perception of his poverty affected his academic performance, because he did not even want to attend school when his appearance attracted the negative attention.*

At Carver, I never knew I was poor because nobody had anything. See the whole time you didn't really know, 'cause nobody else had anything. At Blanchard and Reese Road I realized it when you see other kids with nice clothes. And you realized you were lacking then. From the way you talk and the way you dressed, and hair style. Everything was different. From your speech, you talked different, you know. You kind of talked with a ghetto accent when you come to school. You were different. As long as I was at Carver Elementary, everything was fine. At Blanchard, it didn't too much bother you because a lot of kids came from your neighborhood.

*My Poverty I and Low Self-Esteem I were very active in this segment. He never knew he was poor until being placed among the upper class White students. The statement "You kind of talked with a ghetto accent." is interesting as it seems that he assumed that such speech was incorrect. Who told him he was using incorrect grammar? I believe that*

*Orlando's analysis of himself and other ghetto children at the time was directly tied to his perception of Whites. Based on his narrative, he seemed to have developed an inferiority complex around the Whites, or may have already had it but such experiences made it worse. His only consolation was that he was not alone: Orlando was in good company at Blanchard because of the numerous children bused from the projects. Ironically, he never criticized the way he talked until he was bused to a totally different environment. Instead of handling this move with a more healthy perspective, he and probably many others began to look at themselves in a negative manner.*

I attended Marshall Junior High for seventh and eighth grade. It was pretty much like Carver Elementary. It was like I got back to where I wanted to be, you know. Everybody was the same. Everybody had pretty much the same thing, as far as clothes and how they looked and how they talked. I was just back, you know. It was fun for me. At Marshall, you felt that you could be yourself. You didn't have to try to talk proper and try to act a certain way. Just pretty much be yourself, you know. And I enjoyed Marshall. And uh, the thing about my grades, they came up. I did good at Marshall. I don't know if the teachers weren't teaching anything, or they were just letting you get by, in which I do feel that now. But my grades came up then. Marshall was a breeze. But I do feel that being at Blanchard did help me at Marshall. It really did, because they did teach me something at Blanchard. The two Black male teachers, they did teach me something, you know. Whether you liked them or not, they were good teachers. Blanchard had the better education. Once I got to Marshall, the stuff they were teaching me was a lower level. It was like I was still in the fifth and sixth grade, even though I was in the seventh. They taught the same thing in junior high as elementary. I didn't learn anything new at Marshall.

*His statement about talking and acting a certain way confirms my belief that he was intimidated, even to the point of trying to conform to the culture of the White environment. Several other participants expressed similar relief in leaving Blanchard and returning back to a more familiar environment. It is interesting that he admitted that the White schools offered better instruction but he still preferred the Black schools. His*

*emotional state and mental well-being were more at stake here. He questioned the truthfulness of his grades at Marshall. Was he really doing better, or was the curricula just easier? The question I would ask is, "Was it beneficial in the end for Orlando to be bused to the White schools?" In my opinion as an educator, I would say yes because he struggled academically and obviously benefitted academically. He even admitted later in the interview that he would have failed completely at Hardaway had he not attended the predominantly White elementary schools. As a parent, I would have been concerned with him attending the predominantly White schools, only because of his emotional well-being.*

There were quite a few White teachers at Marshall, I remember. I can think of five of them right off. But it was mostly Black. I had several Black male teachers. I played basketball at Marshall. I know for a fact the White teachers just gave me grades. I know I wasn't making As and Bs, but that was what they were giving me. A lot of them were into sports. Coach Green [*White male basketball coach*] had a lot of friends in school, a lot of White friends, and they gave me grades. The Black teachers gave me grades too. That's why I say I really didn't learn anything. I played sports and they gave me grades. I know I wasn't making As and Bs, but that's what I had on my report card. They didn't give me grades at Reese Road and Blanchard. Like I said, I barely did pass. I think they went pretty much by the books at the White schools. They did things the way they should have been done. If you made an F, you got an F. If you did no work, you got an F. But you see, at Carver and Marshall they were like, "Well if you do this right here..." You know, they'd write the answer then, "Okay, now you write the answer. Okay, you got it. You did good." [*He laughed.*] I had a White coach I looked up to. I liked the kind of person he was. He drove nice cars, and he talked *Black*. He was a real cool guy. I was able to relate to him. Sports was the common denominator. We talked sports all the time.

*I tend to wonder what was really going on at our Black schools. Jonathon confirmed Orlando's statement of teachers giving grades at Marshall, and Johnny was also very*

*critical of the teachers. I personally did not notice any difference in the quality of education between Blanchard and Marshall, nor did Randy or Jeremy. Orlando connected with his White coach probably because his coach knew how to connect with Black boys. Orlando said that he talked Black, which opened the door for effective and wholesome communication between them. It is interesting that Orlando could talk with this White male and not feel intimidated or pressured to talk a certain kind of way but felt uncomfortable talking to Whites at Blanchard. This White coach connected culturally with Orlando and probably many other Black male athletes at Marshall. This guy never stood out to me probably because I did not play basketball and did not have as much contact with him as the athletes. His comments about how the White schools operated by the books and did not give undeserved grades are about to change at Hardaway.*

For high school, I attended Hardaway High. It was about 75% White to 25% Black. It was hard in the beginning, until they figured out I knew how to play basketball. See when school started in the ninth grade, nobody knew you. And then I only played basketball. Then when basketball season rolled around, everybody knew who I was. But before then, it was hard. See at that time you had two very popular athletes, John and Perry, and everybody knew them. They were famous throughout Columbus. And when they found out I could play basketball, I was hanging out with the big guys. In the ninth grade, I tried out for the varsity team and made it. I was on the bench. I was good, and they knew I had potential to be good. But I didn't get to play. I played varsity a lot my 10th-grade year.

Hardaway was similar to Blanchard, but there were Black kids at Hardaway that were well off. Some Blacks came from Elizabeth Canty, but others came from better areas like Mt. Vernon. It was something different. It really was. I mean, "How do I approach this guy? He thinks he got it going on." [*He is referring to a well-off Black student. This was a shock to Orlando. His fame won friends of this nature as well.*] It was something different, you know. It was something I had to get use to, really. I did have friends like them. I kinda fit in because I was popular, you know. But before I started



playing basketball, nobody said anything to me. I didn't have White friends before I played basketball, but I did afterward. If you popular, people want to hang with you. I went from not having a girl saying anything to me to having three girlfriends. It's just like a football player having one of the prettiest girls in the school. You know it's because of sports. Everybody wants to be with somebody who is popular. It kinda messed me up to, 'cause I was hanging with the older kids. I was drinking and partying and going to clubs my 10th- and 11th-grade years. [*One of his drinking buddies was Johnny, a participant in this study.*] The teachers who were into sports, they gave me grades. I didn't do good in the classes of teachers who were not into sports. That's the truth. I had no Black teachers, only White my ninth-grade year. I wasn't doing well my first semester freshman year. Matter of fact, I was failing. In fact, I ended up failing the ninth grade and had to go to summer school pretty much for the first semester. I did so bad they couldn't pass me. I had the same teachers for the entire year. But when I started playing basketball, my grades got better in some classes. I was not getting tutoring or staying after school for help or studying harder. Nothing like that. Actually I got worse, because I started drinking. But my grades got better. I started hanging with the older crowds, wanting to be popular and started drinking. I started drinking beer with those two popular athletes, John and Perry. They were seniors.

*My Resilient I was active in this segment. I was silently rooting for Orlando to pull through this as he shared his story. I attempted to corroborate these events of teachers giving him grades by mentioning this to Jonathon and Jeremy, since they were basketball players as well. They could not say for sure that it happened. Although Jonathon said that he received preferential treatment from the teachers at Marshall, he did not say this for his teachers at Hardaway. I think that Orlando's account here is believable. His teachers may have just felt sorry for him and thought that was the best way to help him. Orlando's life was about to spiral out of control. He basically had no guidance from his parents as both father and mother were alcoholics. Orlando viewed basketball as a means for upward mobility. That is why he played for Marshall and Hardaway, in hopes*

*of eventually playing in the NBA. I always thought that he would make it that far because he was talented. I was attending Spencer High at the time and heard students at my school talking about Orlando's talent. Here is the moment of temptation for Orlando, and because he lacks the discipline and a consistent, positive figure in his life, he bit the bait and was hooked viciously on alcohol for several years to come.*

I had the big head my 10th-grade year. My basketball game suffered. I never was the same after my ninth-grade year. I was never as good as I was. I started drinking and partying and thinking I was somebody. Before, I played basketball everyday. But once I got popular, I thought I was the man, you know. It went to my head. I started going out. My first time having sex. It changed my life. I said I wanted to do this everyday you know, my 10th-grade year. I had different friends. I started hanging out with grown women. As for school, they were giving me grades. As long as I was playing basketball, they were giving me everything I wanted. As a matter of fact, they were giving me clothes. They were giving me shoes. They were giving me everything. They saw what I was wearing. The teachers started giving me clothes. The coaches started giving me clothes. I was wearing brand new shoes to school. Never paid for anything. I'd come in and have clothes in my locker. Other guys, they knew the combination. They would get the other guys to put them in my locker. I'm not sure where the clothes came from. I'm not sure, but I know it was the teachers who were doing it. No one ever put a name to it.

Every game these people would be at the games, cheering and giving me advice. So I'm pretty sure it was them who was giving me clothes and doing things, 'cause after the game, we'll talk. Before the game, we would talk. I mean these are teachers. It was mostly White female teachers giving me grades and clothes. And they would come to every game. I mean, I don't know their involvement in sports was. They just like sports. Every game they'd be there. Like I said, I guess they just wanted me to do well, because

they realized how good I was playing basketball. But I was never as good as I could have been. They thought they were helping me. I think it was just that I was popular, and they just wanted to take care of me. I think they really wanted to take care of me. Actually, they were hurting me, 'cause I wasn't learning anything. I was showing up and not doing anything. I would come to class and pretty much do what I want, talk to anybody I want, and I was pretty much writing my name on stuff. Good thing I did learn how to read. Coming from Blanchard and Reese Road, they really taught me how to read. I would have been messed up coming out of high school not knowing how to read. My 10th-grade year, I was making Cs. They were giving me Cs. Just enough to pass, 'cause they know I wasn't doing the work. I was a good ball player.

*My Poverty I was active here as he mentioned the clothes mysteriously appearing in his locker. My Resilient I was also activated as he described how he became so distracted with the amenities of stardom: popularity, girls, parties, and alcohol. Jeremy played basketball with Orlando and faced similar temptations on this level, but why did it turn out differently for him? Jeremy had a mother who was straightforward with advice and he listened to her. Orlando basically had no one to listen to. His mother was there, but based on his narrative, she did not take on an active role as a watchful parent. Johnny also faced very similar temptations on this level, as him and Orlando abused alcohol and hung out together on some occasions. However, Johnny stopped listening to his watchful mother. Were the teachers doing the right thing? As an educator myself, I tend to think not. Orlando admitted that he was not learning anything. As an educator, I am quick to say that he was there to get an education, not to entertain. Based on Orlando's narrative, he never mentioned any of his high school teachers pulling him aside and trying to get him remediated as was the case for Johnny and Jeremy. I would not object to the teachers giving him clothes and other material things just as long as they were trying just as hard to remediate him academically as well. The teachers may have thought they were helping him, but in my opinion as well as Orlando's, they were hurting him.*

My 11th-grade year was rough. I really got into drinking. Me and my friend [Johnny] got into drinking heavily my 11th-grade year. We were showing up to school drunk. We were getting on the bus getting into arguments with the bus driver, because we had drunk so much beer. Just drinking and saying stupid stuff. I never got into trouble at

school for this. The only person to say something to me was my counselor. He called me into his office and told me, “After you drink, eat a lemon so people can’t smell it.” I remember that. It was a Black guy. He never told me to stop drinking. When he called me into his office, I thought I was going to get in trouble. I was just passing, Ds and Cs. Looking back, I don’t know how I passed, ‘cause I didn’t do the work. Every now and then I would have a couple of teachers who didn’t know anything about sports and didn’t know who I was. And you know, I would make an F. I did go to summer school my 11th-grade year. I had different teachers from my 10th-grade year. Two out the six teachers were giving me grades. I was getting worse and worse with my game. I wasn’t as good, drinking and being with different girls. See I was good, because I played everyday. I’d play 5 to 6 hours a day. I was now doing it whenever I could. I was cutting back on practicing each year. I didn’t study. We were going to Richardson’s Lounge and KNW [night clubs] on Thursday nights. If they had something going on Tuesdays, I went on Tuesdays. I would stay out ‘til two or three in the morning. If I felt well enough, I got up and went [to school] or I stayed home. My mother didn’t say too much about me staying out that late either.

*As an educator, I am disappointed in the counselor’s response to Orlando. My Resilient I was very active here as I was silently rooting for him to snap out of it somehow. At this point, dad is no where to be found and mom was evidently not intervening. It was obvious that Orlando and Johnny were drinking: You could smell it on their breath. It is interesting again that Johnny and Jeremy mentioned that several of their teachers tried to intervene, but why not Orlando? Was it because his grades were so bad that the teachers felt that it was no hope for him academically and just helped him meet the academic requirements so he could continue to play basketball? Orlando never mentioned that any of his tried to contact his mother. His mother seemingly never contacted the teachers about her son’s progress, leaving his academic fate totally in the hands of his teachers.*

Ooh, my senior year. It was drinking, partying. Not only that, I started showing other people how to drink and party and go out with different girls. I was big time. I was

actually hooking other guys up with girls, having sex, drinking, and partying. As a matter of fact, not only guys from my school, but guys from other schools. They looked up to me. I use to hear them, “Man, we’re with Otis Porter.” We’d go to different clubs, drinking and partying, you know. These were younger guys and guys my same age. It was basketball that made it all happen. Everybody wanted to hang out with me, and I led them in the direction of partying. Wherever the party was, I’d say, “Hey, let’s go there.” And they followed. I graduated. But I had no business graduating. Put it that way. I shouldn’t have graduated. It was people caring about me. They thought that was the best way to help me. Just give me grades. I’m pretty sure my coach had a lot to do with it. He was a good man in the school, and everybody knew him. I don’t think he directly influenced the teachers. See at the time, they came out with, “No Pass, No Play.” If you didn’t have the grades, you couldn’t play. And I thought that really was one of the things that did help me, ‘cause they wasn’t gonna let me play if I didn’t have the grades. And they pretty much didn’t want the coach to be disappointed and not have a good winning season. We went to state my 11th- and 12th-grade year. We were that good. Even though I was getting worse, we were that good. My average was down every year. I would put up 20 to 30 points a game. I couldn’t do it my senior year. I just couldn’t do it and be the same guy I was my ninth-grade year. The things I was doing caught up with me. I still felt I was better than everyone.

I think my teachers just cared that I played sports. They didn’t care about me as a person. They still gave me things my 12th-grade year. The coach actually gave me shoes. They were basketball shoes, so that was the excuse. But he was giving me shoes just to wear around. I was wearing his shoes to school, you know. Everybody else had to wear

theirs in the game, you know. I had a pair for the games, and I had a pair to wear to school. The teachers maybe would give me a pair pants or shirt once a month. I think they cared that I played sports. If I didn't play sports, I don't think they would have cared. I think they were just into sports. These people who gave me things were at the games everyday. They would even show up for practice just to say, "Hey," then they'd leave. They would speak to the coach and the team. I think the coach had influence over what the teachers were doing for me. I don't think he knew they were giving me grades. I mean, I don't think he cared either though. Like I said, I got away with too much. And I know those two popular athletes did [*John and Perry*], 'cause I use to hang with them. I know they weren't that smart to be passing. I never seen them with books. One of them use to walk the halls with his hands in his pockets. So I know something was going on there. I figured if they did it [*not think about their academics and still get by*] and was good at sports, I figured I could do it to. But they both ended up getting scholarships. I was never offered a scholarship. I think it had to do with grades. They knew it wasn't gonna go much further. They knew it. One coach talked to me about it, but he knew I wasn't going no where. He said that a couple of people want to come see you play tonight. A couple scouts, you know. Like I said, at that time I was gone. I would show up to games drunk. Not drunk, but having been drinking. I got into harder alcohol, liquor. I dreamed of making it to college and the NBA, but I couldn't think straight. I was gone. I couldn't think straight at all. Now people on the street, people I would play basketball with, they saw me, how I could play. "Man, you going on to play college ball?" I use to hear it from everywhere. "Man I know you gonna go play for this school here." But when

I got in the 12th grade, alcohol destroyed me. I knew I just had to have a drink. I knew I couldn't do anything without drinking.

*Orlando went from being a follower to leader of his social club. He went from being easily intimidated and just a face in the crowd to now a bold, popular star on and off the courts. He is somewhat contradictory here. I brought this to his attention during the interview and in a follow-up interview over the phone. He originally said that he thought the teachers were trying to help him but later said that they did not care about him personally, but just wanted him to play basketball. In his own analysis, he felt that neither the teachers nor the coach really cared about him as a person. I tend to somewhat agree based on the information presented in this interview. Even Jonathon [a participant in this study] said in his interview that they did not care about you if you did not play sports. What was the difference between Johnny [a participant] and Orlando? One was academically inclined but non-athletic while the other was an athlete but going nowhere academically. The teachers were more inclined to help Johnny than Orlando. It seemed as though Orlando's teachers gave up on him academically because there was no evidence that anyone pulled him aside to offer extra help or to talk to him in hopes of getting him back on track. Even Jeremy, a star basketball player, said that some of his teachers pulled him aside to offer extra help. But why not Orlando? How does one explain the clothes mysteriously appearing in his locker? I tend to believe that the clothes were genuine acts of kindness, considering that Orlando was poor and very needy. However, where were the remediation and intensive academic interventions? As an assistant principal, I would have expected more from his teachers.*

I was glad when graduation was over. I could stop hiding. I really wanted it to end, you know. I really didn't want to go to school anymore. I didn't want to play basketball anymore. I was drinking. I was gone. Right after I graduated, I remember getting with an old friend who bought me a quart of beer. He graduated a year before I did. I ended up staying back is what happened. I graduated in '88. I repeated the 12th grade. I didn't play the second 12th-grade year. I couldn't play. That was the rule. During that year, nobody gave me anything. And the only reason I passed was because I knew the material the previous year. I ended up doing it again. The coach still spoke to me, but it was no conversation. The teachers spoke to me, but it was nothing special. As long as I was playing basketball, they supported me. It was over with. It was over. I did have to graduate on my own. But see, I had seen the material before, so that helped. It was pride

that kept me from dropping out. I didn't want people to see me quit school. I went too far. I didn't want people to say, "He went all the way to the 11th, 12th grade and quit." It was just what people would say. All I needed was two or three credits. I wasn't gonna quit then, although my momma would have let me quit. But it was basketball that kept me going all the way thru my 12th-grade year. I wanted to play basketball. If I never was on the basketball team, I would have quit. I know I would.

*My Resilient I and Low Self-Esteem I were very much alive here. I was silently rooting for him to snap out of it. Orlando originally played basketball at a young age and in school because he dreamed of playing in the NBA. This is indicative of goal setting and desire for personal success although he was giving up on his dream. His refusal to quit school is also somewhat indicative of his desire for personal success. Based on Orlando's account, it surely seemed as though the teachers and basketball coach were only interested in being entertained. Why did the clothes stop appearing? Resiliency and determination were displayed here as he came back his last year to complete the requirements for graduation. This had to be innate for there were no external stimuli for motivation at this point. The lack of a positive support network of some sort made room for a dangerous addiction that ruined his chances for a scholarship. Basketball kept him in school as he admits.*

After I graduated, I was out of it. I ended up joining the Marines. That did not work out at all. I ended up getting into a lot of drinking, and I ended up staying in for about a year and a half. I went UA [*unauthorized absence*]. See the reason that happened was because me and one of my friends [*Johnny*] were drinking. And we'd go over this recruiter house, and he would give us money to buy beer. And he kind of talked us into joining the Marines. I forget how that happened, but I do remember he would give us a lot of money, and we'd go buy beer. And he ended up recruiting us to go in. I left [*the Marines*] because I didn't want to do what they told me to do. I was drinking. I'd be in formation and I'd be out of it. They knew it. I mean, I showed everybody that I was doing it. They didn't try to help me. They just wanted to get rid of me. So I got out and ended up going back home and not working for maybe a year and a half. I would work side



jobs. You know, I was really messed up. I was still drinking. I seen this man [*He mentions the name of a televangelist.*] on TV. I started watching him everyday. He really helped me. It showed me the way to Jesus Christ. It really did man, it changed my whole life. I realized I didn't have to drink anymore. I was still drinking. But I saw myself in a new light. I knew I didn't have to drink anymore. My life depends on drinking. I had to have a drink. Before I went on a job interview or talk to a girl, I had to have a drink. And like I said, I watched this man everyday, and he helped me change my life. So now I am employed with the school system [mail carrier]. I am married with five kids. My wife had two before we met.

*My Resilient I, Low Self-Esteem I, and Christian I were very active in this segment. I felt intense sorrow as Orlando shared these incidents in which I had no foreknowledge of prior to the interview. Through all of the turmoil, he enlisted in the Marines, which demonstrated his desire for personal success and a better life. I was somewhat spiritually charged as he described the events leading up to him connecting with God. Resiliency was displayed as he made a turn-around for the better and is currently working and raising a family.*

I enjoyed my childhood. I really did. We had a lot of fun you know. There was a lot of love in the house. You know, as far as education, we never took it seriously. My mother never paid any attention to my grades. Sometimes, I would even sign her name on my report card. She never came to any basketball games. But as far as love, we had plenty of love in the house. You have a mother, and she'd take care of six kids. And your brothers and sisters, they really cared about you and wanted to make sure you were alright. They wouldn't let nobody bother you. It was just so much love, you know. Christmas time we didn't have much, but we had each other, you know. I enjoyed Christmas time, 'cause we got to get out. It was like big family in that area. It was like, if somebody didn't have nothing, and somebody did, we'd all get together and play with

each other's toys, you know. Nobody ever looked down on anybody. We didn't get much for Christmas, but like I said, a lot of kids in the neighborhood might have something. As soon as they got tired of it, you got on it, bike or football or what have you, you know.

*My Poverty I and Christmas I were very active here. I was emotional as he described how Christmas was in his home. His statement, "as far as education, we never took it seriously," had serious implications. That explained why there were no parental interventions. I am personally surprised Orlando did not drop out of school. If there was so much love and concern in his household, then why was it so easy for him to become so viciously attached to alcohol? One reason is because both parents and two other siblings were alcoholics. Based on his narrative, I believe Orlando was conditioned for alcohol abuse. It is very difficult for anyone to bounce back from such an addiction with no support. This is indicative of resiliency, personally as well as educationally.*

My mother and dad were together until we moved to Elizabeth Canty. He did a lot of drinking. He came around maybe once a month in Elizabeth Canty. Dropped in. He had a lot of influence on me in elementary school. During the early years of elementary school, he was there everyday. I was living with him at the time at East Wynton, not in Elizabeth Canty. I had a positive relationship with him at the time. It was good to have a dad. He left my fifth-grade year and would come around once a month. I was ashamed of him, because he was always drunk. He was not supporting me financially. He never came to a basketball game, but he heard about it. He died about 10 years ago. I think he drunk himself to death. See uh, growing up and how my daddy was, I wanted to be totally different from him. I didn't want my kids to see me drunk. You know it is a hurting thing to see my daddy drunk. It really was. I loved him, but I had to be ashamed of him at the same time. It was a hurt feeling, you know. My friends would come over and I'm thinking, "My dad's drunk. He's gonna say something crazy," you know. And I don't want my children to see me that way. It helped me that I did see him that way, 'cause you know, I don't want to be nothing like him, you know. I loved the man, but I was ashamed

of him. When he wasn't drinking, he was alright. He helped me to understand that when a dad is there, a child will be different. If he was there, I don't think I would have started drinking, 'cause he was kind of strict. But once he left, that was it. My mother was drinking too, so she didn't try to talk to me about it. Two of my sisters got into drinking too. My oldest brother had moved out and my other older brother was in and out of jail. So I never saw too much of him. I did look up to my older brother as a role model. He was a basketball star too. He went to Tennessee for a while, then he ended up joining the Army. He's been there ever since. I used to watch him as he played. We would play sports together sometimes. My other brother was not into sports. I kind of looked up to the NBA players on TV, like Magic Johnson and Larry Byrd. Also, the two athletes I hung out with in high school. So when they said, "Let's go drink and party," I did it. [*He is referring to John and Perry, the two popular athletes at Hardaway who seemingly did not carry any books around. They had a big influence on Orlando.*]

*My Absentee Father I was very active in this segment as Orlando shared his feelings concerning his dad. His longing for genuine fatherly support are evident in his statements. Orlando thought that had his dad remained active in his life, he would not have become addicted to alcohol. His perception of an active dad was someone who would have restrained him and kept him from the dangerous pitfalls. I remember this particular older brother he mentioned. I played basketball occasionally with him and Orlando. I remember him giving Orlando serious tips that helped him better himself as a player. Orlando's outcome could possibly have been different had this brother remained active in his life. In my opinion, he was the perfect role model for him. He even managed to attend college for a while, which was unheard of in Orlando's home. Orlando's other idols were NBA players which in turn kept his dream alive throughout high school. This is supportive of his desire for a better life and personal success. It is interesting that the very thing he hated about his dad was the very thing that conquered him.*

## Patrick the Talented Singer

*This participant was given the fictitious name Patrick. I interviewed him in his home on September 1, 2007. He is my oldest brother. I had every intention of interviewing my oldest brother at an opportune time. I spent a weekend with him in Atlanta. I took my youngest son with me so he could keep my older brother's two children preoccupied to minimize the distractions. But I ended up talking to him late Saturday night. He spent much of the time riding us around and preparing for his wife's relatives to come over the next day. He was tired, and at times, jumps in and out of scenes in his memory. It was very difficult getting him to make time for this interview. No one has ever talked to him about his life, so he is somewhat interested.*

*What I remember most about Patrick is his awesome singing ability. He would compete in city wide talent shows back in the seventies and eighties and would win a lot of money. He would give me and Victor \$20 a piece sometimes. Patrick was always trying to make it in the music business. Patrick has always been a clean guy. Even now, he is very attentive to cleanliness and details. His car is very clean. His grass is the greenest on the street, and he is constantly cleaning the house. He still remains a very clean cut guy to this day. Much of his emphasis is on having a nice ride: rims, sound system, etc. He has mentioned in the past his desire to have a detail shop. I also remember how he would take the fatherly role in the house, being the oldest. I remember him beating me down once when I was talking back to my mother on a particular occasion. I remember him taking out the time to give me and Victor a short talk about sex when I was in junior high. I told him to start the interview with basic information such as family structure, age, place of birth, and then move into details of early childhood life and elementary school.*

Uh, I am 47 years old and born January 31, 1960, in Columbus, GA. Uh, as a child coming up I remember, uh staying with my mother, her sister, in a yellow house on a dirt road in Columbus, GA. We stayed with our other cousins, one of my aunts and her kids. And uh, we were doing pretty good in that situation, because that was where I remember eating a big bowl of beans and cornbread. I don't remember a whole lot of meats, but a lot of beans and cornbread. But uh, you know, we were poor, but we had clothes. But there were sometimes I remember playing as a child that we couldn't wear our school shoes after we got out of school. I remember walking barefoot, and uh, so we wouldn't wear our shoes out, feeling the hot rocks, the hot gravel on the dirt roads. And uh, never thought much about it as a child, you know, that we didn't have shoes to play in

when we got home. But now that I look back, I can see and now I can think about it. But at the time I couldn't see. I never really thought about it until this day. But anyway, the next thing I remember is my mom and her sister got into it. [*They had an argument.*] I remember them arguing all the time. I remember incidents of them arguing, my mother and uncle and aunt getting into it. Much drama even then. And uh, I remember getting a whipping, you know, for doing something bad. Also as a child, I discovered that I could sing. And I was writing songs even as a child. Uh, probably 'round about the first time I discovered I could sing and write songs, might have been about eight or nine when I started composing songs. The refrigerator was turned over, and I guess that was my way of expressing myself through songs. [*We evidently had an old refrigerator that was turned over on its side. He used it as a table.*] And I uh, remember one cousin that came down from Ohio. And he saw me back there singing and saw that I had a gift and told my mom that she needs to send me to art school or something, because he noticed then that there was something in me. But she didn't have the money to send me to art school or what have you, and uh, I never went to art school. [*He also had good drawing skills.*] But also coming up and going to school, people knowing that I could sing. One time we had to do a commercial in class, and uh, mine's was really great, because I wrote the commercial and song it. And it was the best one in the whole class, and everybody just went wild over it, because it was so good the way I had it. It was like a jingle about McDonald's or something. Uh, I must have been, at that time, I must have been in maybe like the ninth grade. Something like that. But often people in school knew I had this gift, and so I got into the talent show thing.

But, not trying to skip a whole lot, we moved. And the next thing I think I remember, we moved either with my grandmother for a while, after my mother and aunt moved out of that house. I think we moved down there with grandmother for a while in her apartment. I remember sleeping on the floor, waking up at night scared because I was the only one up, looking around in the dark and whatever. And you know, eventually we moved to uh, Alpine. [*This was a low income area of Columbus.*] We moved over to Alpine and stayed back in the back of those apartments. That place wasn't all bad. Kids gonna be kids. Look back at it, we had some kids, bad kids get to fighting and stuff. I never really was one to start a fight. And I guess I was learning then, because I wasn't a fighter. But uh, but anyway, stayed there for a while. And I think I remember moving from there to Baker Village. [*This was another low income area, similar to Elizabeth Cauty.*] And my momma and her other sister stayed together. And we stayed there for quite a while too. Uh, it was another set of apartments. Well you were so young you probably wouldn't remember it. But coming up in the bad neighborhoods, really, I never really looked at that as affecting me. But when I think now how I had friends in school and when I would tell them where I stayed, I never thought they would look down on me. I really didn't think all that much about it, but people knew you stayed in the projects. They thought you were a certain kind of way, what have you. I came, and lived, but it didn't become a part of me. And uh, this is a perfect example of having a mindset. You know I went to school. And even though I wasn't smart in school, uh I guess I didn't like being there as well. So much stuff was going around in my head. [*He laughed.*] Boy I just couldn't wait to just get out of there. And uh, I never wanted to be a crook or thug. That just never was me, and in my heart and bones, I felt my day was coming when I was

going to be more than what my circumstances were. And that was with me, and I knew I had self-worth. Either you are born with it, or you get it anyway. Later on they learn it. But I know I was born with it, and I was going to be something. And still today that drive is in me to look like something and act like something, to be something, and become something. That's still in me. But uh, I look at how I came up, seeing the things in the projects, the guys that was drinking on the corner when I'd go back and forth to the store. And that they were saying, "That's that old boy that can sang right there." [*He laughed.*] They use to just look at me. I never did hang out and nobody ever tried to jump on me. I'd just walk up to the store, walk on back. They just looked at me like I was an outsider, I guess. But I definitely looked differently than they did. Even at that age, I kept myself looking good. I had a perm in my hair to keep my hair straight. And uh, I wanted to look like a star. I wanted to get out of there [*Elizabeth Canty*], so I knew what I wanted to do.

*My Poverty I and Resilient I were very active in this segment. I remembered all of the places Patrick mentioned except the yellow house. We were poor indeed and very unstable, moving from place to place. I often hear my brothers talk of this house, but I was too young to remember it. Patrick always looked like a million bucks. He wore ties, kept his hair groomed, and walked like he was going somewhere in life. Patrick took pride in carrying himself a certain way, although he lived in the projects. Most people would look at him and not know he lived in a bad area of town. He had every opportunity to venture off onto the wrong pathway but he obviously resisted the temptations. He was a dreamer and envisioned something better than what his present circumstances offered him. His statements are supportive of his desire for personal success and a better life. He struggled in school, which probably led to such a disliking for education. Early on, I believe he removed education from his equation for personal success.*

But anyway uh, and now that I think about it too, you know what's really funny though? I never really thought about the projects, and the friends, the fact that I didn't have a lot of friends that came to visit me. But I thought about this one girl I met. And uh, that must have bothered her too, that I stayed in the projects. I never thought about this before. Man I waited for her to come. And I knew that she really did like me. I was so

happy and I cared a lot about her. And I remember she did come and she waited downstairs. I thought that she was so pretty. She smelt so good. And I never thought about that. And she was a *Jehovah's Witness* too. And uh, what's funny is that I didn't think about her thinking that I stayed in the projects. I didn't think about nothing like that, because I knew me. She had met me at school and never would have thought I stayed in the projects with how I dressed and carried myself. So anyway, she did come on over, and I remember it was something about me kissing her or holding her hands. And a brother in the *Kingdom Hall* was talking to us about holding a woman's hand and pertaining to sex and that kind of stuff. But anyway, we wined up leaving each other alone. And then I met this other girl. [*He mentioned her name. I remember meeting her.*] I believe the same thing happened with this girl as well. I remember when we met her, I was with a close friend of mine. My friend knew her brother. While I was talking with my friend, there were these girls out there talking. And I looked at her. I thought she was really cute. And I asked about her. And eventually me and her got to talking. And I am telling you that she was for me. She was a sweet girl. Beautiful skin. And we did sneak off and do some things. Anyway, I believed her mother found out that I was living in the projects. I think they told her to leave me alone. I was real pissed about that. I remember her coming over to the house to see me. She would come see me and I would drive down there to see her. I can't remember everything, but I can remember seeing her one last time.

*Although he kind of ventured off track here, his point here in this segment was twofold: He had such a healthy perspective of himself that he was not embarrassed of where he lived and unfortunately, he suffered rejection because of where he lived. His statement of being "real pissed" shows his attitude toward people who judge him by his environment. He made this comment earlier: "I came, and lived, but it didn't become a part of me." Indeed, Patrick was in the projects, but the projects were not in him. For me personally, I*



*was embarrassed of where I lived, but Patrick was a dreamer and made the best of his living conditions. As far as I can remember, he always looked like a million bucks. Girls never knew he was reared in poverty until they visited our neighborhood.*

[*I got him back on track at this point.*] I attended Cusseta Road Elementary. I remember a Black elementary school. It might have been some White kids in there but very few. Seem like I remember all Blacks. There were some White teachers. I do remember that. One of my teachers at Cusseta Road Elementary was Ms. Thomas. I thought she was a cute teacher. As a child, I can't say I remember any racism. I lived right there next to the neighborhood where I went to school at. As a child, I don't remember going downtown hanging out or anything like that, because we were poor and didn't have much. So I was in a Black world in a clustered situation. They didn't require me to go all over the city [*desegregation and busing*] because my mother didn't have no car no way. You know what I'm saying? So just in what I was seeing or whatever, was only Black on Black dealings or situations. I don't even remember any racial prejudice from any teacher. I can't say that I do, but I don't remember any particular. [*He yawned.*] I just remember that somewhere we had to move. I went through a lot. And the moving around had affected me a lot. [*Our family was constantly on the move. This statement meant that we had to start over at new schools each time we relocated.*] I remember going to school. I was the new kid in school. I didn't know nobody. I was really shy. I remember that. Not even going in the lunchroom to eat. I just stand outside. I was just shy, man. You know it's so funny to think about that now. I guess in some ways all kids are kind of like that when they come to a school. Most of them are. It's bad when kids are like that. All they need is for someone to say, "Hey man, how you doing?"

*My Poverty I was active here as he mentioned how our family was constantly on the move. We moved around a lot because my mother may have gotten behind on rent*

*payments. My mother struggled with the little she received every month from the government. This constant moving affected Patrick socially and I believe academically as well. The gaps in his educational experiences may have contributed to his lack of comprehension for certain subjects which in turn developed into a disliking for school altogether. As with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the need to belong and be loved has to be met in order for effective high-level learning to take place (Woolfolk, 2001). As a new kid at this strange school, he felt like an outsider to the point that he would not even eat lunch. Patrick was troubled for sure because there was no guarantee food would be available when he came home. He was shy and it took a long time for him to settle in at the new school. By the time he was comfortable, we moved again. His statement "I just remember that somewhere we had to move." summed it up.*

Now in elementary school, uh, I remember I guess being in what you would call a slow class. I was slower than other kids. It had to be something like that. Well you know, I was slower than other kids. So they had me in this class with uh, I can't think right now, but it was not one of those special ed classes. It was a class for the kids that were a little slower. They put you in this classroom where you had to pick up things. You know when I look back at it, Darrell there were a lot of things, uh figures and stuff and numbers, and I think that stuff at that time were just slow to me. I don't know what it might have been or whatever. But uh, I went to this job recently, and uh, I hate when you do this interview, and they give you this sheet of paper to see what you can do with your hands. And I felt in my heart that I must have got at least an 80 on it. You know, subtraction and multiplication. You know throughout life, you do use some of this stuff. When you're in school, and they tell you it will pop up, and it have. And it does. And uh, but some kids, their parents have groomed them from an early age of working with numbers, and we didn't have that. Our momma was working. If you didn't get it, you just didn't get it. And uh, I don't think I stayed in that class throughout school, but I do remember it in elementary school at Cusseta Road. And the rest of the time, I was in regular classes. And whatever time at that age, I don't know. Something was going on. It had to be like the

fifth, sixth, or seventh. I only remember it for just like one year. And then I went on to the eighth and ninth grade. In the ninth grade I think I stayed back one time or something.

*Patrick's struggles academically did eventually develop into a disliking for school. With a single mother who had no strong convictions for a good education, Patrick was destined to dropout. I think he may have been placed in a slower class due to tracking.*

I went to Southern Junior High. I can't recall any teacher being racist or anything. Being at Southern, that was when I really started chasing girls more and more. [*He laughed.*] Tried to play a little sports. Here again, I tried to really get into my maleness thing. I started to plat my hair, and started, you know, to take more time out to prepare myself for school. Because now I know that about 15 to 16 years old, you do too become more aware of girls and everything and everything else around you. So, at this time too. [*He yawned.*] I do remember taking more time out to keep myself clean. I had to walk to school, all the way from over by Far Road and Cherry Hills. That was a good little ways to walk to school. [*He laughed.*] I would plat my hair, and comb it into an afro before I get out the door. And I get all the way, hoping my hair won't shrink down. By the time I'd look in the bathroom, my hair had shrunked down. "Ah man!" But eventually they came out with the *Blow Out Kit*. Boy it was on like popcorn. [*He laughed.*] No more plats. It wouldn't make it straight like a perm. But it was almost like a *Geri Curl*. The girls use to say my hair looked so good. I remember when I saw this boy, Benny. He was the first person I seen who had a Geri Curl in his hair. And you talking about something to see. Everybody went wild. I remember that. [*He laughed.*] That Geri Curl was something else boy. Seem like I was noticing girls a lot more, and they are appealing, and I started trying to make sure I kept my looks together. I always was singing. When we stayed over in ,uh Alpine, I use to practice at home on the stereo, Michael Jackson and

whoever else. The Stylistics, *Betcha My Golly Wow*. I use to get in there before ya'll got there. I remember being their by myself for a while, 'cause ya'll got out of school later than I did. That's what happened. I'd be in there singing, and my voice was getting good. And I remember even when we stayed on Vivian Lane, I remember going in there singing. My idols were probably singers. I wanted to be like whoever I saw on TV. Dance like whoever. And when I realized I could sing, they wanted to hear me. I felt good I had this gift that they wanted to see. I remember stuff like that when people wanted to hear me sing.

*My Resilient I was active here as Patrick was beginning to perfect his gift. It was this talent of singing that kept him dreaming of making it big in the music business. This also had a way of keeping him off the streets and focused on his goals in life. While other kids his age were outside being physically active, Patrick was busy perfecting his talent of singing.*

I didn't like school, man. I was trying to get up out of there. Only thing I remember about school was going there looking to see what girls were there, some crap like that. But other than that, school was just hard to me, in junior high and then when I got into high school. First of all, Baker High School was where I started high school. Then within a year, we had moved, and then I went to Jordan High. We were living in Baker Village when I went to Baker High, predominantly Black. Uh, I remember there were some White guys in my class. Back at that time, they were smoking marijuana too. I called myself trying to smoke a little herb, a little dizzy and stuff. And I got to acting crazy when I did it. I remember that so plain, off Victory Drive where we stayed. Smoking herb up in there, pulling my clothes down, acting stupid. It's no telling what all was in that stuff, man. I went through that little phase, that crap. And uh, somebody said, "Take this little pill, and you'll feel good." I took the pill, and didn't feel nothing, man. I

went through the phase of trying to smoke cigarettes. All it did was made me dizzy and cough. But as a teenager coming up, I got shifted no one particular way. [*He gets up, because he is tired and sleepy.*]

*My resilient I was active here as he described how he ventured off, experimenting with various drugs. I was silently rooting for him to refocus. I believe that this was his moment of temptation, just as with most of the other participants. Based on Patrick's recollection of this time period, I am surprised that he never got hooked on any particular drug. He succumbed momentarily to the temptations of various drugs, including strange pills but managed to slip pass unharmed. This was certainly not the case for Orlando, Johnny, and Jonathon. As his brother, I have never known him to smoke, drink, or do any drugs. His disliking for school was increasing at this point. The idea of finishing school was becoming dimmer and dimmer, but he still exhibited resilience in other areas.*

Eventually, I was going to Hardaway High. I don't even remember my last day in school. What made me drop out is that I just got to the point I just said the heck with it. I must have got a job or something. I was working somewhere. I must have started working at the Doctor's Hospital or something. I knew I needed to go back, but I just kept on working and working. I think once I started making some money and because being poor all the time, school was obsolete for me. School seemed like something that was in my way. It was somewhere I had to go to spend 8 hours a day, when I could be somewhere doing something else. That's the way I looked at it. I didn't feel that education was important to me, because it wasn't stressed a whole lot in the home.

*My Poverty I was active here as he mentioned poverty as a reason he dropped out. Education was somehow a barrier to Patrick. He struggled in school while desiring to get ahead in life. In Patrick's mind, his paycheck from his job met his immediate needs, something that school was failing to do. Patrick failed to see how education could benefit him in the long run. Education was not stressed in our home. Dropping out was inevitable for him. Patrick dreamed of being a superstar performer, and education was not a prerequisite for such a career. How did he come to perceive education as a barrier instead of an asset? I believe it was a mixture of struggles in the classroom, lack of education stressed in the home, lack of a positive figure giving direction, poverty, and the type of talent he had. Being a singer does not require education, and Patrick knew it. If making records required a diploma, I believe Patrick would have thought twice about dropping out. Patrick needed someone to help him put education and his future in the*

*right perspective. With his part-time job providing immediate income, he quickly realized how much more he could make during school hours.*

I wasn't even thinking 'bout no daddy while growing up. [*He laughed.*] I didn't even question, you know. We had my momma, my grandmomma, my aunt. I didn't think about no daddy or what a daddy looked like. [*He laughed.*] I mean, I didn't really think about none of that stuff like a daddy until later on in life. And I know it had affected me even when dealing with my own kids. Because you gotta learn how to love some where, in order to give love. A lot of times we only give what we can, we only give what we've been given. You know what I'm saying? And what I mean by that is a person that's been treated cold all his life and all of a sudden somebody expect him to be warm-hearted and all that junk, he can't just turn around and do that. Unless you are a real good actor, you only give what's been stored in you. But I had love from my grandmother, I had love from my mommy, I had love from my aunts and whatever. And you know, sometimes it is the kindness of strangers too, but I just look back over my life and it was an ordeal that was not always pleasant or what have you. It had its challenges in there, but as a child, you took and went on, because at this time you're in it.

*My Absentee Father I was very active in this segment. As a child, he was not concerned that his dad was not around because he had support from immediate and extended family members. However, he said that he thought about it later on in life. I believe that sooner or later every abandoned Black male will question the whereabouts of his missing father. When fathers are not present in the homes to model the process for the sons, how do they [sons] learn to be fathers? Patrick alluded to this in this passage. As an unmentored father himself, he had to start from scratch in learning to father his own children as with most of the participants of this study.*

Anyway, just to sum it up, I never had no problem with no White folks other than over in Elizabeth Canty. When they uh came, somebody knocked on the door, I remember. A police officer came in. He just wanted to take a look around. He walked in

my momma apartment, and I was back in the back with my pajamas on. They came in there and looked around. And all of a sudden, they came back through the door with four to six police officers. Took me down, momma in there saying, "What ya'll doing with my son?" Threw handcuffs on me, took me down to the Columbus jail, and had me handcuffed. Had me down there for three whole days. Later on that night, brought me in this darn room and was trying to get me. I felt like they were trying to frame me. They wanted me to say something that this man had said to this woman over the phone. And I guess she had recorded it or something. I felt like in my heart if I had said what they wanted me to say, they would have take that same recording and put it on her answer machine. And if I would have said it...but I would not say it. I said, "I'm not saying that." "We just want you to say these words here that, I'm coming to see you," or whatever it was. I can't remember exactly what it was. And all I remember telling them is, "I'm not saying that man. I don't know what ya'll trying to do, trying to frame me or whatever. I'm not saying that. I told you I'm not the person ya'll looking for. I don't know who did what, but I'm not that person you're looking for." And uh, later on they took me back to my cell, and uh, the other detective came to my cell. They had me on line up. And later on the detective came to my cell talking about they positively identified me as the person. And I was going to get the electric chair, some crap like that. Man, I don't know why he did that, low down dirty. I was just a child. And I'm crying, mad, frustrated. I was in that jail, had never been in jail before. Two other guys were in there. *[He laughed.]* I took my fists and I balled my fists up. And I said, "Anybody touch me, I'm beating them down." I was going to fight like I never fought nobody before. I laid down and went to sleep with my fists balled up. I was going to whip somebody's ass 'til I

saw blood, because I was scared. I didn't know what these two men [*in the cell with him*] were capable of doing. But all I knew is that I was a big boy and I was strong, and I was coming out of there alive, one way or the other. [*We laughed.*] But I remember people saying all kind of stuff about jail and stuff. And I was gonna make sure it wasn't going to happen to me. I was a man and was gonna stay a man. I was about 19 or 20 at the time, I guess.

*My Racism I and Resilient I were very active here. I remember this scene of the cops rushing to the back room of our apartment. In my mind, I thought they held him for much longer than what Patrick said. I was probably in the fourth grade when this happened, so because of the drama, it seemed much longer than three days. To see my mother break down when they took him away was difficult for me as a young boy. I remember him describing this scene in detail. He said that he began to cry and the officers started laughing, then told him that he can go home. I do not have a problem with them questioning my brother out of suspicion, but it was the way they handled him. Had Patrick repeated what they were trying to get him to say, his life may have turned out differently.*

[*He is about to give two scenarios of how the police came about suspecting him as the murderer. He did not give any concrete details. He is only speculating, so I did not seek more clarity here.*] The reason I say that is because I was hanging out at clubs. Met this school teacher down at the club, and she got to liking me. But this was when I had moved in with this older guy named Mr. James. When I started working at the hospital, his wife had died, and he had an extra room. We got along alright, but man, I met this lady. What was going on, he messed around and came home, and I was with this gal. He was like, "Look, you can't be bringing these women up in my house." [*He laughed.*] Boy I was on a roll. Buckwild! I called her, and told her that I enjoyed us dancing together. And then she didn't call me for two weeks. And then she called me out the blue. I said, "Where you been, why didn't you call me? What's been going on? I'm at such and such place." And she came right on. Sat down and broke down, and told me she was hurt. And



that's why she couldn't call me right away. This is how I think something happened to make them think I could have been this person. Here I was, a young black man living in the projects. I had good looks, clean cut, knew how to dress, never wore no blue jeans in my life at this stage. And uh, the cab driver, forgot his name, picked me up in the projects. I'm dressed with a tie on to throw him off that I'm going to see ol' girl. Get over there, he drop me off. "I know where I picked this little nigga up in the projects. I'm dropping him off over here in the north side, next to the expressway, from the projects. What is he doing?" [*He is just imagining what the cab driver was saying about him. This is all speculative. The murder victim was a White female on the north side of town. We never found out who suggested that my brother could have committed the murder. Either way, the city police got their lead from some source.*] I got a briefcase with me. I had been studying with the Witnesses at the time too. So I had got me a brief case, and I was like, "Let me take this with me too to throw him off like I'm selling something." I would do that from time to time and go over there and spend some time with ol' girl and leave. He'd come back and pick me up. At the same time, she didn't want my mother to know, because she was like seven years older than me. She was like 27, and I was like 20. And uh, man I had this experience with an older woman.

And at the same time I was working with this disc jockey. We were working down in Lumpkin, Georgia, some other places that I can't even recall. I met this girl and uh, wind up getting with her and she thought she was pregnant. She was a sweet girl too. She was pregnant with my baby. I'm telling you, I was going to stick with her. We probably would have got married, and my life would have been a totally different picture. It's amazing with life how with one little slight turn, and you get going that way. And

another little turn, and you can get going that way. Even now, I'm glad we are doing this to give me a chance to look back at what has happened in my life. Then, the cab driver picks me up in the ghetto and drops me off, and he don't know what's going on. So later on when this happened [*the murder mentioned earlier*], somebody believed that they started asking cab drivers have they seen anything while they been riding or whatever. Then the thing was that my momma said, "That darn cab driver may have told them he had been dropping you off in some part of town." I ain't been carrying no flowers or nothing like that. [*The cops were seemingly looking for a man that drove a flower truck.*] And then the other thing too was that uh, one of the girl's brothers was a detective in the Columbus, Georgia, police department. Somebody told me that they do believe he had something to do with me being framed. With this detective's sister being pregnant, he was upset that this rascal has come down here and got my sister pregnant. "Hell, I'm gonna get his ass. I'm gonna do something to him" or whatever. [*Again, he is just imagining what this detective is saying about him. This is just speculative.*] I really do think he had something to do with it. That stayed with me man. I was messed up behind them bars. I got out, they let me out man. I came back to the Kingdom Hall. And I'd be sitting in there and start shaking like that. [*He demonstrated.*] I've just been traumatized, scared out of my whits. And I'm telling you Darrell, that I had accepted my death in that jail. And I told them, "If ya'll kill me, you killing the wrong person." Columbus, Georgia! I learned from that day, I wanted to get the hell out of Columbus. [*He laughed.*] I wanted to catch whatever skates I could catch, skateboard whatever, and get the heck up out of Columbus, Georgia. And I'm telling you I had to get away. And uh, that's it. You know my life turned out to be pretty good. You know I went on from there.

*This experience of being temporarily held behind bars for something Patrick did not do left him traumatized and very distrustful of the Columbus police department. He felt that he was not treated fairly and could not risk being in another similar situation. Much of his reflections of being arrested were speculative: We never knew who gave Patrick's name to the investigators. Much of my opinions of this incident were influenced by my mother. I constantly listened as she expressed her distrust for the police department while Patrick was detained. Being so young at the time, I believe that this experience added to my negative perception of Whites.*

Another racist incident was when we lived off of Buena Vista Road in that White neighborhood. Oh yeah, I remember when that stuff happened. Throwing rocks through our windows, I was really pissed off. I stayed outside each night for I don't know for how long. But I had me some drink bottles ready to tear somebody head off. I was sitting in the dark behind the house. I was going to protect my family. I was like, "Ain't nobody gonna keep doing this." If I had seen anybody getting out their car coming, I was going to wear their head out. I meant exactly what I said too. It was pretty much an all White neighborhood. Uh, just prejudice, all I could see. They didn't want to live with Blacks on their street.

*My Racism I and Absentee Father I were very active here. I remember these incidents vividly, but I forgot about Patrick's role during these events. Patrick told this story from a "man of the house" perspective: "I was going to protect my family." He was our protector alongside my mother. That is why my Absentee Father I was activated. My brother Victor told the same story from another point of view, filling in more details such as our cousins hiding out in the back of the house. They happened to chase a blue car down the street which ended the rock throwing incidents. This segment is supportive of Patrick's desire for fair treatment.*

I remember man, Christmas was some happy times. That was one time we really had a lot of joy and a lot of toys. I remember we would get a *Show N Tell*. I loved that *Show N Tell*. A *Show N Tell* had a stereo, a record player thing on the top. And you stick these things in the slots, and songs would come up with each picture. Ooh, I must have been in the fifth or sixth grade. That was my other way for me to listen to music. I played

my *Show N Tell* 'til it blew up. [*He laughed.*] That's too why I have a lot of love for Aunt Pat, because they did whatever they had to do. Wherever this stuff came from, they made sure we had a good Christmas as kids. I remember that. She could have been sent to jail for some of the stuff I heard, but we all did something. But she really made sure we had a Christmas.

*My Christmas I was active in this segment. Based on his timeline, I was probably not born at this time. This time period was when we were living in an old yellow house. My mother and one of her sisters were living in that house together. Based on Patrick's account, the Christmas toys were more than likely stolen or obtained illegally. This yellow house was significant to me because my aunt Pat told me that my dad would come by there to see my mother. They had house parties there often, and he had attended some of them.*

I remember coming up as a child, in my heart I knew one day I would have some things, wife, kids, a nice home. I didn't think about no cars and this and that. But I knew I wanted to accomplish something and be somebody. And that drive driving me wouldn't let me falter. And school, it didn't worry me that I didn't finish school. I just knew I was gonna do what I had to do. I guess I felt like James Brown did. Jail was not going to hold him down, and school was not going to hold me down. I was gonna do what I had to do. And here I am today, but I still haven't got some of the things I want, but it's not over with me yet though. But anyway uh, it's all good. I'm here. I'm still gonna pursue music. And uh like I said, any child coming up in the ghetto, sometimes those kids are very creative because they have, if you've been given nothing, to work a little harder than others to achieve something. If you got everything already bestowed on you at life, you probably won't have anything to contribute to mankind or life or whatever. Just look at the rich kids that got everything. All they do is drive around getting drunk, doing crazy stuff, and they on TV. It's crazy.

*My Resilient I was active here as he talked about his dreams and goals in life. This was indicative of Patrick's desire for personal success and a better life. His view of school was interesting: "...school was not going to hold me down." Somewhere along the way, he began to view school as an obstacle rather than an opportunity. Patrick was a dreamer. People who heard him sing from a very young age saw destiny in his eyes. He had a vision of success that contradicted what his present circumstances said. Patrick was no different than the average Black male raised in poverty. He wanted to be something in life, and as he discovered his gift for singing, he began planning his future to make it big in the music business. Unfortunately, he did not do well in school. Most subjects were hard for him, and he struggled with even the basic subjects. Because of his deficiencies, poverty, and lack of emphasis on education in his home, he developed an awkward view of school as a hindrance and hurdle. He could not see how education could help him fulfill his dream of being a singer. Therefore, Patrick removed this obstacle by quitting school. He never regretted this decision. He continues to practice his singing abilities and write songs.*

#### Randy the Penny Pincher

*This participant was given the fictitious name Randy. I interviewed him on April 25, 2008. I just happened to run into him one day a year ago in Circuit City. We hugged each other and laughed and talked for about ten minutes. The last time we saw each other was back in 1982 at Marshall Junior High. I happened to conduct a pre-interview with him on the spot in Circuit City and decided later to include him in the study. It was very difficult getting an interview with him. Our schedules were conflicting, but I finally nailed it. We met up in the parking lot of a naval museum. When I called him, he was already in that area and decided to do the interview with me at the last minute. I actually interviewed him in my car.*

*Ironically, I do not remember much about Randy, although we went to the same elementary and junior high schools and lived in the same neighborhood. He lived in the front area of Elizabeth Canty, while I resided in the back portion. Thus, we never really played together in the neighborhood. I remember playing with him maybe once. After I interviewed him, we both understood why. My memory of him in school is very vague, although I knew him and considered him a friend. To begin the interview, I told him to start the interview with basic information such as family structure, age, place of birth, and then move into details of early childhood life and elementary school.*

My name is Randy and I am 39 years old. I was born and raised in Columbus, GA. I have no brothers. I got five sisters. I am the oldest. I was raised predominantly by both parents, but different households. As far as I can remember, I was living off Cusseta road first, right off of 20th Avenue across the street from Elizabeth Canty. Right there by the railroad tracks. I lived there from birth to about five or six. I was living with mom and

dad at the time. My dad left around the fourth or fifth grade. We were raised in poverty. I really didn't have no choice. I've been in the projects. We were on food stamps. Uh, the old food stamps. [*We laughed as we talked about how the original food stamps looked, along with the plastic coins.*] Clothing was provided, but there were times where things got hard and you might have to get creative. Plenty of times you had to come home and take off your school clothes: "Take off your school clothes before you go out to play!" You know, I don't hear that now. There were times in one week you might have to wear the same pair of blue jeans, because momma didn't consider them dirty. Even though you wore 'em, their not stinky or dirty, so you had to wear them. You know, she tried to save every penny she had, pinching here and pinching there. I wasn't picked on for what I wore, but we all were what you called joking and *playing the dozens*. We all got that. Nobody was immune to that. It was just an everyday thing, trying to have fun.

*My Poverty I was active in this segment as he shared stories of how his family dealt with poverty. I find it interesting that he was never picked on for his appearance, but he admitted that he was targeted. This activity was not common with Whites as much as it was with Blacks. Every participant in this study who shared stories of jiving and playing the dozens said that it was mostly the Black students who were participating in it.*

I started off going to J. D. Davis Elementary. It was predominantly Black. I guess you could consider it as a neighborhood school. It wasn't far from school. Uh, I use to walk to school. If I remember growing up, a lot of times I'd walk by myself or with others, you know. A lot of times there was a train with several tracks we had to cross. And you always had to watch out and be on your Ps and Qs. It sometimes [*the train*] is coming and going. And sometimes where the train has stopped, it has the railroad tracks blocked. The path you would use to get across would be blocked for miles. You could either walk all the way to the end of it, go under it, or across it. And a lot of times

students would take the chance of going under it or above it. And it could have caused death or could have caused injury. But to my knowledge I never witnessed anyone get hurt. But I know there was a lot of close calls. When the train takes off, it snaps, you know. You could either get caught under it or on it, because there is no warning. There is no warning like a horn or anything. You just taking your chances. And this happened going to school and coming home.

*Marshall and J. D. Davis are right next to each other, and many students from the projects and surrounding areas had to cross the tracks to get to school. I remember the fear of not knowing when the train would snap as I was crossing it. People wondered why the city took so long to build an overpass for pedestrians. Students from these low income areas have been crossing these tracks for years. An overpass was finally built in the late 80s.*

Now J. D. Davis, I was going to school you know, trying to learn as much as you can and trying to stay out of trouble, which is almost impossible. Back in those days you got in fights and little arguments and stuff like that. But nobody was really as harsh enough to bring weapons to school or knives or stuff of that nature. And drugs weren't as predominant as they is now. You know, students were a little bit more controllable. We listened to the adults, although we still did things we not suppose to. It's not like it is now, where there is no guidance...not necessarily no guidance but, uh, no fear is in them. I got into trouble. I got suspended before. I been sent to the principal's office on different occasions, but not enough to be kicked out of the school system. But maybe sent away from school for several days, but not that bad. Just doing what kids do, eating candy and talking in the classroom. Stuff like that.

*Randy's somewhat aggressive behavior continued throughout his entire school life. From what I remembered, I would not have considered him violent or aggressive, just competitive.*

I believe the education at J. D. Davis Elementary was a little substandard, due to the way things are controlled in the city, you know. As far as money uh, the way it trickles down to the books, you know. It's not up to par on the other side of town. As far as racism, I can't say it wasn't any, but I just can't recall any. It was a little bit, you know. I don't remember much about the teachers, but I had a mixture of Black and White teachers. I would say that I was a C student, occasional Bs. I did just enough to pass. When I got out of school, not that I didn't have anybody there to stay on me, but when I got out, books was just there to me. I didn't plan on going to college or anything like that back then.

*I believe he may have been speaking from an adult standpoint when he compared J. D. Davis to other schools. Randy had no aspirations for college, which may account for his mediocre efforts and behavior.*

After J. D. Davis, in the third grade, I got bused to Blanchard Elementary. At that time we moved over to Elizabeth Canty and got bused from the basketball court right in the middle of the projects. My mom and dad were still together at the time. I was at Blanchard from the third to the sixth grade. My grades were about the same as they were at J. D. Davis Elementary, Cs with some Bs. Blanchard was a different cultural experience. There were more White students. All the Black kids I knew got bused to the White schools. [*This was a tendency for Black kids to be bused more often than the White students (Causey, 2001).*] I had to get up a little earlier to catch the bus. It was like a 30 minute drive, but it seemed so far away. It was a little bit on a higher level. So uh, more things were expected of you. I remember you had assigned projects and people had to bring that stuff to school. I remember the classroom, the teachers. [*He mentioned the two Black male teachers. I mentioned several teachers as well.*] There were times in which



you'd run into some cultural differences. I remember once a kid must have had a birthday or something, and the parents were able to come participate and bring the child extra things. [*This would not have been a big deal for the average child, but this was big for us at the time. I could not have imagined my mother celebrating my birthday at school.*] Another incident was when I was growing up. My parents were Jehovah's Witnesses. And me and my sister were a standout, you know. Not an outcast, but it felt that way. You know, a lot of things were going on back then, like you couldn't say the pledge, participate in Christmas parties, birthday parties, so on and so on. So it kind of put you out there by yourself on top of everything else that was going on. You know, coming into a school predominantly White... On the other end of that spectrum the racism part of that was, uh, I remember growing up in that neighborhood, being around your friend Johnny [*a participant in this study*] and using the *N* word as a social word. To another Black person it didn't really mean anything. But I used it one time with one of the other kids, a White kid. I said it to him not meaning any harm with it. But they corrected me and said, "That's not me, I'm not that." And that makes you think. I still think about that to this day and that happened almost 25 years ago. I said it to him in a cool way, but he corrected me and said, "I'm not a nigger." Now as for the teachers [*racism*], uh, it's hard to say. I know I did, but I can't remember it. It's been so long. It was nothing like it was about to be a riot, but it was probably something small.

*Blanchard was a culture shock to the Black students. Randy admitted that the pace of Blanchard was on a much higher level than J. D. Davis. For the first time, he was required to do a project. White parents were actively involved in their children's education. Two cultures clashed the moment Black students were bused to this White school. It was interesting how quickly the White student corrected Randy when he called him a nigger. Students at Blanchard, White and Black, understood the negative ramifications of that word. Ironically, in the Black culture, it had a non-offensive meaning when used in the right context among Blacks: friend, acquaintance, homeboy. I*

*think that we all were shocked at how active the White parents were at this school. If a Black parent was present, it was assumed that the child was either sick or in trouble.*

When I first got to Blanchard Elementary, one of the first things that stood out was money. When you around them [*the White students*], you notice some things right off the bat, you know. They got the latest stuff. They got this, they got that. It wasn't like this at J. D. Davis Elementary. When they come to school, they got all their paper, pads, pencils, erasers, glue, you know. We come to school, we limited. You know what I'm saying? And we only got half of that if we lucky. They had lunch money for one thing. We didn't. I never had lunch money. We had it only for the exception of the first week, because we had to have it. And I think momma use to give me like 15 to 20 cents a day for lunch. And I think sometimes she would give me \$5 to last the whole 2 weeks. Besides that, like I said, money stood out right away. I think it kind of affected my self esteem in a positive way. You don't want to go through this with your kids. You wanna grow up and have something and be somebody. You know the bad side of it, because you're going through it now. So you don't want to go backwards. You wanna go forward. Things I thought I wasn't going to do, I had to do in order to better myself. Um, I think every kid want to fit in. I just started seeing the light a little bit. You wanna have something. When you grow up, you wanna have something. You wanna be something. And you don't wanna be pretty much struggling.

*My Poverty I was activated here as he compared the financial statuses of the White and Black students. We were shocked at the money some of these students brought to school as well as all of the school supplies most of them possessed. I believe this aspect of the cultural clash was intimidating to many Black students. It was intimidating when you were constantly reminded of your family's financial condition every time you came to school. Although I believe Randy was partially speaking as an adult for the latter portion of the paragraph, his statements were still supportive of his desire for personal success and a better life.*

I remember the two Black male teachers. They were good role models. First of all, I remember Mr. Lambers as being a big, strong Black man. Not necessarily controlling, but demanding. Uh, got his point across, was equally fair to everybody. He didn't discriminate against no kid, whether Black or White. He was a strong Black man and wanted everybody to succeed and be something grown up. And I remember a lot of times in the classroom and in PE, I remember he use to do this thing called the Indian crawl or something. I remember he use to walk around pushing you to try harder. [*We both laughed about how he use to pull you up by the belt loop when you did not do the push ups correctly.*] I remember he use to always say, "No such animal!" I know Mr. Simmons taught science. They were equally as important as role models, but they were different in their own way. Uh, Mr. Simmons use to be a little bit more energized. He always walked around the room. He didn't treat anybody differently, but he was a little bit more blunt with things. He was more blunt towards the Black students, treating them more of his own for guidance. He wanted you to not get into trouble, you know. He tried to pretty much guide, because he know our path in life would be a little harder. You know what I'm saying? He would talk to you straight up. I can't remember any of the words, but I do remember his actions.

*My Absentee Father I was active in this segment. Every one of the 6 participants who attended Blanchard had something to say about these two Black male teachers. Our opinions differed in terms of whether they were fair to everybody or used excessive force towards the Black students. Either way, we needed them and gravitated to them. They were the closest some of us came to decent father figures. Randy commented that Mr. Simmons "knew our path in life would be a little harder." Therefore, he may have been a little tougher with us in an effort to get through to us. We were childish and immature just as the White students, but he and Mr. Lambers communicated to us the urgency and seriousness of our conditions in life. Unfortunately, some of us were too busy noticing the partiality of their dealings with the two races. As Jonathon noted in his interview, the White kids were sent to the office, but the Black kids were jacked up in the air. Randy did not recall such partial incidents.*

My mom and dad were still together during this time. Education was not necessarily stressed in the home. It was talked about. I wasn't necessarily pushed. [*This could also help explain why Randy's grades were just average.*] When I think of pushed, you have someone showing you how to do it and not just telling you how to do it. They're sitting there going over the homework with you. If I didn't go to them with an issue or a problem, or how to spell this or how to write this, then there was nothing to talk about. I mean, you was expected to do it, but it wasn't like no guidance or help to show you how to do it, because my momma had to work, and my dad was either gone or whatever the case might be. Now, like I said, it wasn't a sit down, like a study period with parents showing you how to do it or this and that. You kind of had to figure it out on your own. That was the ball game.

I did get into trouble at Blanchard. Every school I've been to I've been to the principal's office. Fights with Black kids and White kids. You know, just horse-playing and then it leads to other stuff. Sometimes they did contact my parents, and sometimes they didn't. See, a lot of times back then it was controlled in house. The principal was allowed to give you a couple of licks. And a lot times, uh, I know when I got to junior high school, they'd give you an option. Either get a paddling or get suspended. And I knew what my momma was going to do to me if I got suspended. They weren't going to do half of what my momma was gonna do. So my option was always to take the paddling all the time. [*He laughed.*]

*Randy said that education was not stressed at home, even when both parents were still together. Couple this fact with no desire to continue education after graduation and the probability of acting out in school is likely as in Randy's case. He said that he had been in fights at every school he attended. I tend to wonder why he never ventured off liked some of the other participants in this study, considering his potential for trouble.*

*However, I believe the answer lies in this statement: "And I knew what my momma was going to do to me if I got suspended." Randy's parents were stern. Even when he lived with his dad, he commented on the sternness of his father. Education was not stressed, but he was still expected to go to school. Also, he was constantly under the watchful eyes of his grandfather, so Randy was only going to drift so far off track before being sternly corrected.*

Mom and dad getting a divorce affected me greatly. I guess my mom and dad split on the fidelity thing. Uh, infidelity. And once that happened, they separated. Um, my dad still came around to see us. But there was always a confrontation in front of us. And the last pain my mom was going through, she took it out on us with whippings, discipline, not going outside, and so on and so on. They separated around like the fourth grade. It was still going on up to like the seventh grade, but the less and less it got, the older you got. But the remnants were there all the way up to like the 10th grade probably. My dad stayed close by. We stayed in Elizabeth Canty. He stayed up the road. It was in walking distance. It was sad that we had to go stay with our dad on the weekends and come back home on the weekends to play with our friends, because we couldn't play with them during the week. Momma had kept us in the house. And when she did let us come outside, uh, it always had to be in our general area. [*This is one of the reasons me and him did not play together in the neighborhood.*] We stayed in the front by the store, and everybody had to go to the store. So we saw everybody. It was just one of those things, man. It did affect my grades. You know, you start slacking on things a little bit. After you start realizing you growing up, and realize that this is how life is. You had to accept it and drive on. It didn't affect like going to school everyday, because momma wasn't going to have that. It affected me in the grade area a little bit.

*The difference in the parental split in Randy's home versus other participants in this study was that his dad never left the picture. Divorce is always difficult for children, but it is even worse when the split is lop-sided and one of the parents, mostly the dad*

*seemingly, cease being active in the children's lives. The divorce did have an emotional effect on Randy, thus creating a ripple effect academically. Randy's mother was stern as he mentioned how they had to go to their father's house in order to play with friends in other areas other than their front yard.*

After I left Blanchard Elementary, I went to Marshall Junior High. It was predominantly Black. I had a ball of a time my seventh-grade year. First time just really having fun, and the school atmosphere was the first time like a high school feeling. You had pep rallies, dances, and talent shows. I remember some of my friends participating, one doing the *Morris Day* thing and another doing the *Michael Jackson* thing. [*He mentioned several names.*] I remembered all of that in the school auditorium. I enjoyed it. My teachers were just the same as any other teachers I came across, expected things from you. You can't pull the wool over their eyes. They expected you to do homework too, Black and White teachers. I saw no difference in how they treated students. I didn't notice any difference in the education of Blanchard and Marshall, because the teachers were up to par. They uh, taught well. They was fair. You had good teacher to student ratios. I wasn't an A/B student, but I made my fair amount of Bs.

I remember there was a coach. He was a White guy, tall and slim. I remember there was this Black lady who was a substitute. She use to come down in the projects a lot. She was kind of muscular and use to pinch the mess out ya in the classroom. I had a good experience at Marshall. That was where you began to open up and experience things. I spent all of my seventh-grade and half of my eighth-grade year there. They were good years. I think I fitted in more there than at Blanchard because it was more culturally accepting, because all the kids were predominantly Black. And these were the same people you would see if you went to the store or the mall. You know, you see all these

people all the time. It was more of a family and not a school, more of a family or distant cousin type thing. You know what I'm saying? It was more natural.

*Although Randy was not as critical of the racist atmosphere at Blanchard as other participants, his comments revealed his true feelings. He said it was "more culturally accepting," meaning he felt out of place at Blanchard. He described the atmosphere at Marshall as "more of a family and not a school." Randy enjoyed being around his own race and not having to deal with the cultural clashes. Such an inviting atmosphere contributed to his positive view of his teachers more than likely. Three other participants expressed similar sighs of relief having left Blanchard, returning to a predominantly Black school. In the end was it worth busing these Black students across town to such environments? He mentioned being able to "open up and experience things." So Blanchard never offered opportunities to experience new things? Of course it did, but it could have been that most of the Black students were not comfortable enough to enjoy such experiences. I believe that Johnny was one of the few exceptions.*

My mom moved out of Elizabeth Canty. We moved over by the Baker Village area. We moved into a house and I went to Eddie Junior High for the rest of my eighth-grade year. It seemed like a step up, but it really wasn't. It wasn't the glamorous life or anything. It was just a house. Across the street was Baker Village. [*This was a low income area similar to Elizabeth Canty.*] So a lot of my friends I went to school with stayed in the housing area or the nearby projects. My momma was working. My mom started seeing somebody. My dad started seeing somebody. She had like a boyfriend living with us. I guess he ended up being like a stepdad or whatever. I won't consider him like a dad or nothing like that. He was more like, he was there. The school [*Eddie Junior High*] was like half and half in terms of Black and White, because you had the projects there, and the Oakland Park area back then was mostly White. That was my first experience of seeing almost equal at a school. I got there like at half way through my eighth-grade year. It was short, brief. I went there, uh, I would say for a good four months. Nothing really stands out there other than the student ratios of Black to White being about equal.

My first high school I went to was Baker High, while living in the same house. My whole freshman year. I remember Baker not having a lot of funding like Hardaway or some of the others. I remember they had to let the windows up in the summer time to try to catch a breeze. It's so hot, like ninety degrees in the classroom. I remember sweating on the paper while I am trying to do the class work. *[He demonstrated. I graduated from this school. It was so hot that a student from the school wrote a letter to the newspaper complaining about it. She also made an argument for the school to be renovated based on the more pleasant conditions of the White schools. It would be another three years before the school board decided to renovate the school.]* It had its share of fun. Of course, back then we made things happen. But when it comes to equal funding of schools, Baker and Carver were on the same aspects, same level of improper funding. I went to Carver too, and it didn't have air conditioning. *[All of the predominately White schools were air conditioned at the time.]* It was the same concept. Baker was predominantly Black. No racism. Because the projects were right there next to the school, the mentality of some of the students weren't good. Some dropped out. It was like, "I'm here, but I am not going to do my best. I'm just gonna do what I have to, to get by."

My mom was a strict type of person. Anything would escalate to a butt whipping. If you knocked a glass of water over and it stained the carpet, it was a butt whipping. You know, and it just got to the point where I was getting older, getting bigger than her and so on and so on. I was getting tired of accepting it and taking it. So this incident happened. Me, my momma, and sister were in there watching TV. I remember, my momma, she may have said it but...you know when you're watching something. And she left out and said she was going to the store and coming back and told me to stir the food on the stove



every now and then, I guess. Of course, you got caught up in the story of the TV program and forgot about it. When she came home, it was burned. She winded up whipping everybody. She started whipping the youngest and then the one next to me in age. By the time she got to me, I was gone. I was headed to my dad's house. She was calling for me to come back, but I just had enough. And every since then, I had been staying with my daddy. I think it was the summer of my ninth-grade year. I've been with him every since then. My daddy said that I didn't have to go back unless I wanted to. Momma wanted me to come back and live with her, but I weren't willing to go. And he said I didn't have to go, so I stayed.

While staying with dad, I was bused to Hardaway, since I lived with dad right up the street from Elizabeth Canty. I went there for my 10th through the 12th grade. Hardaway High was different. A little bit on the upscale, I may say. Uh, a little more fancier. Uh, I started to notice some of the kids were driving their vehicles to school and paid for. You know, it reminded me of Blanchard, simply because of the numbers. It was predominantly White, and their parents had money. You know what I'm saying? So naturally that is going to make things not necessarily easier but better for them. I do recall some racism. I remember one time in PE, we were playing volley ball. And uh, I got into it with another student. I hit the ball. And you know how when you play, you try to keep hitting the ball? And some of the students probably couldn't hit the ball or wasn't hitting the ball. And the ball, once it hits the floor, it's pretty much dead. So we tried to keep it going, and I guess I kind of got in this guy's lane. And he said something. But because I am just being me, I kept playing and trying to hit the ball. I got ready to hit the ball, and it was coming down right at the tip of my fingers. And he came up and pushed me in my

back. And when he pushed me, he pushed me so hard. See, I was already leaning backwards. I almost tumbled forward, and I somehow had to break myself to keep from falling. And it made me so mad that he done me like that. And when I got up, I immediately went to him, and we got into it. It was a White student by the way. The coach took us to the office and we got suspended. And the guy said he said some bad things. He said the *N* word and stuff like that. There were some other incidents, but I can't recall them.

*My Racism I was active here. I was the only participant who never attended Hardaway. One way I attempted to verify the racial incident was to compare participants' accounts. Jeremy, one of the other participants, described incidents of racism he encountered at this school. Johnny admitted that racism existed at Hardaway but ignored it. According to Randy, Hardaway was just like Blanchard; the students were from upper class families and had money and material things. Randy at this point in his life is now living with his dad. Was that a bad move for him? Not at all. I believe that it was a better move for him. Randy running out the house when his mother attempted to whip him showed that he was getting too big for his mother to handle. His dad and granddad were now directly parenting him, which turned out to be very effective.*

The White teachers were expecting more from the White students, simply because, I don't know if some of them knew their parents. You know, they had that one on one relationship with them. You know it was like the Marshall thing. It was a neighborhood school, and pretty much everybody who stayed in that neighborhood went to that school. So it was the same way at Hardaway. It was more acceptable for the teachers to talk to their parents. So they [*the White students*] know to come to school and perform. Whereas we the Black students, were not necessarily expected to do more. But you didn't get pushed as much. We noticed all the presidents of this and the president of that were always White.

*My Racism I was active in this segment. Hardaway was originally all White prior to integration, so Black student attendance was the exception. I don't believe that every White teacher there changed their ways over night. All of the student leadership positions*

*being held by White students as well as Whites being held to higher expectations were indicative of Hardaway's old culture slow to embrace change. It is interesting how he described the atmosphere at Hardaway as a family atmosphere like Marshall was for Blacks.*

I was a B/C student. My dad was making sure I stayed on track. He was the type of person where he would say it one time. If he has to repeat himself, you know you're in trouble. So you knew what was expected of you and what weren't expected of you. Uh, if you got off track, you know you're gonna get dealt with. He wasn't once again one of the parents that sat there and made sure your homework was done or went over your homework with you. You know at that time it was expected. He just made sure I stayed on track, went to school, and the things I needed were provided. Uh, there were a couple of times I got off the track and he would sit me down and try to talk to me and this and that. I remember one time I was getting a little crazy. I think it was a prom I was going to. And uh, during that time my grandmother had passed. And so we had family from out of town and it was the same week of the prom. And they ended up staying to go to my graduation. I was over my aunt house and she gave me a couple of those alcoholic drinks. And I remember my dad saying, "Hey, you don't need to be drinking that while trying to go out." So, he kind of like stepped in when he needed to.

*Randy's dad had a stronger influence on his life than his mother seemingly. He gives most of the credit to his dad for keeping him straight. He was observant enough to realize the importance and value of fatherly support. This passage gives us a glimpse of fatherly interaction and supervision in an effort to keep the Black male child on target. Such experiences were missing in the lives of the other 7 participants. What if Jonathon, Johnny, and Orlando had similar father figures? Would their lives have turned out differently? What about for the other participants? I cannot make that determination for sure, but I tend to believe that our lives would have been more positively enhanced.*

I had my granddaddy there. My granddaddy was a role model. I always looked up to those two, and they made sure you stayed on track. I have been in the military for

20 years. He was ex-military. He was the reason I went into the military. My daddy influenced me by keeping me on track along the way. My daddy, like I said, he was on disability. He worked early on his life, but later on his disability kept him where he can't work. But he was always there. He always made sure things were what they were supposed to be. My granddad was a backup for my dad. He was ex-military and prompt, so things had to be done this way. Your bed had to be done a certain way. If it wasn't, it ain't right. So that structure I was already getting was reinforced. You know I rebelled, I didn't like it. But in the long run, it sticks like glue. Like I tell my son, I'm hard on him. You gotta be. You know what I'm saying? If not, they will easily get into trouble. [*He is married with two children. His mom and dad are still living.*]

*Randy got a double dose of fatherly supervision and guidance, something the other 7 participants did not have. I believe this is the model for restoration in the Black communities: men raising sons and sons passing it on to their sons. Even his dad's dad played a role in the process. Randy now is passing what he experienced from the two men in his life on to his son.*

Also, there was a movie that they showed us in junior high about these people who were on drugs. It showed this lady shaking and foaming at the mouth. It scared me enough to know that drugs weren't for me. It made me think about what would happen to me if I went down that same path. You know, if I tell somebody today that I never smoked a cigarette or done this or that, they would look at me strange, because I made it up in my mind that I was not going to do those things. I didn't care how strong they say it was or whatever, I didn't want none of that. And it's sad because I have five sisters, and although I have not seen them, they all tell me that they do it. It's sad.

*My Resilient I was active here. Randy could have ventured off on a path of drugs, but I believe the chances were very slim. He had a good foundation of positive male support and guidance. As I mentioned temptations in the commentaries of the other narratives, what was Randy's temptation to drift off of his course? Based on his narrative, there*

*were no recognizable moments in his life in which he almost went over the edge. He fought at school from time to time but that was about it. Why was he never close to straying away? I believe it was the double dose of fatherly supervision that kept him on course. Resilience was clearly displayed here as he managed to survive the impoverished conditions, graduated from high school, and went on to start a military career. This is supportive of his desire for personal success and a better life.*

I consider myself to be a hard worker, a go-getter, always looking for ways to make money, but not the illegal ways of selling drugs or anything like that. You know, raking yards, stuff like that. And I always saved my money. If I made \$5 that week, I probably would spend \$.50 of it. And just held on to it. Pretty much up to this point, I'm still the same way. It was instinct. I would take an old peanut butter or jelly jar about that big, [*He demonstrated with his hands.*] and fill them up with pennies, nickels, and dimes. And once they got too big, I would transfer it to dollars and hid it throughout the house. So one time when we got ready to move out of Elizabeth Canty to the house out there by Baker Village, I couldn't get home in time, and momma found my money under the rug. I still remember that to this day. And uh, she didn't give my money back. You know what I'm saying. She used it on something else. It was about 15 to 30 something dollars. I was a little kid.

I got a story man. It's heart-breaking. It affects me to this day, but it don't affect me like it did back then. I was working, going to school. When I got out of school, I use to walk to work. I was going to Hardaway High. I use to work at the Western Sizzlin and Quincy's on Macon Road. At the time I was working at Quincy's. I would walk from Hardaway to work and work 6 hours a day. I had to walk home and get ready for school the next day. Get on the bus and go right back to Hardaway. I saved my money for about 2 to 3 years. Minimum wage at that time was \$3.35. I'm saving practically every penny I get. I would save half or more of each paycheck. I wanted a car. My mom and dad

actually split. My mom had somebody and my dad had somebody. This lady, which was my daddy's girlfriend, he ended up having a baby by her. Uh, sometimes she'd get mad, and sometimes she wasn't even mad, and just leave. See my dad likes to fish, and to this day, that's all he do is fish. And man he come home and she ain't no where around. She was gone and didn't tell him nothing. And this went on Darrell for about 50 something times. And he just kept accepting her back. So I'm working and stuff like that. I'm like, I am a kid so I just go along with it. You ain't got no say so in the matter back then. After a while I got so much money. I'm starting to get up in the thousands with my savings. I had about \$2000 saved in my account off of minimum wage now. She would leave and go live with other people, being sluttish and stuff. My daddy was one of the nicest men in the world. He would always accept her back no matter what. And uh, like I said, I had money in my account so I had to put more money in the account. My mom was away, and I was under 18. So I needed an adult to be over it. She was driving [*dad's girlfriend*], so I said, "Let's stop by the bank." She had access to it, but that wasn't the point. She was needed to get the account established because I needed an adult. And uh, man she got me, for everything except for about 10 to 12 dollars.

He still accepted her back, man. And he knew what I was saving my money for. She took the money and went and lived over there off of Forest Road. She moved over there with her boyfriend. My momma heard about it and wanted to jump on her. I'm mad. I wanted to jump on her, crying and stuff. It was heart-wrenching, man. It ate me up. And uh, after everything was said and done, my dad took her back. She had a little green Maverick. And my daddy made this stipulation for her to give me the car. I ended up still getting me a car, but it wasn't the car I wanted. Her car was raggedy and old and not what

I wanted. But I worked with it. You know what I'm saying? I traded it in for a Mustang. She just threw all my plans off. But it didn't stop me. I'm bitter but only to a certain extent. To this day, she still do stuff. He's not together with her now, but he still communicates with her, because of the child they had together. See that's what I bought my school clothes with, from the seventh grade on up. When you got a goal and a mission, you can't let nothing stop you.

*At a very early age, Randy exhibited goal setting skills. In the midst of poverty and dire needs, he was disciplined enough to save his money for the future. This is indicative of his desire for personal success and a better life.*

### Victor the Comedian

*This participant was given the fictitious name Victor. I interviewed him on March 1, 2008, in my home. He insisted on coming to my home, considering the distractions at his house. I had four older brothers. One of them was raised by another set of parents and is now deceased. Victor is two years older than me. What I remember about Victor is that he would always do and say things to make others laugh. He has always been a likeable person. I always said that he would make a great comedian. Victor was also a kind-hearted person. He had no problem sharing with others. Not too many children his age would earn some money and use it to buy food for the family.*

*However, Victor had one major challenge, poverty. He had inadequate clothing most of the time, and his peers capitalized on that when they wanted to make fun of someone. He tells much of his life story from the standpoint of poverty. That is what he remembers most about his childhood. Because Victor is my brother, we keep in contact from time to time, but it was difficult getting him to sit down and talk with me. He can be very busy. When we sat down at my kitchen table, I told him to start as far back as he can and tell me about his life, with emphasis on education and social issues.*

I was born on July 13, 1965, in Butler, Georgia. I am the fourth child of five boys. As far as I can think, the first house we lived in was the yellow house in Cedar Hills. It was my mother and one of my aunts. It was two families in that house. There were hard times and struggling. We did not have anything. Some kids had things, but we didn't. I remember, I think we had plenty to eat, because there was two families in the household. Both of them were working. I do remember having some contact with my dad. [*The only*

*other child that had contact with his biological dad was my brother Mark.]* I can't remember the details, but I do remember my grandmother, because I was born in Butler, Georgia. I attended Cusseta Road Elementary. It was a mixed school, probably the year '68 or '69. I had one White teacher, but I don't remember much about her. After we moved out of the yellow house, we moved to Alpine apartments, and I was in the first grade or second grade. I still attended Cusseta Road Elementary. Alpine was like a project neighborhood, low-income, all Black. At that time, I don't remember having any contact with my dad. What I do remember about Alpine is that when we moved out on our own, we were really struggling. We didn't have anything, nothing to eat, lights off and on, hardly no furniture. Um, my mother worked at Fort Benning as a KP. She did the best she could. It was four boys in the house. We later moved to Baker Village with another aunt. I was attending Muscogee Elementary. I only remember going there for only about a week. I don't know why I was there only for a short time. I think we moved, or something came up. I think I been to almost every elementary school there is around here. But Baker Village was a rough project area, low-income. A lot of kids would pick on you and bully you. We were struggling but not that bad, because we were on Welfare at the time. We then moved to a house on Northstar Drive. This was not a low-income neighborhood. Mother went back to work at Fort Benning. My mother got a better job. I think she made supervisor. Plus, her house note was nothing but \$75 a month back then. I remember her telling me that. I was attending Dawson Elementary at the time. I had no problem at Dawson. I can't remember anything bad at that school. It was a mixed school. I had a Black teacher. I remember the mole on her face. [*He laughed.*] She treated all the kids the same, because I remember we had two little bad White kids in there. They did



some of everything. [*He laughed.*] I was making As, Bs, and Cs. The higher I went, the worse my report card got. I remember all Blacks in our neighborhood at Northstar. After school we all played ball, kickball, ride the bikes, play with the dogs.

*My Poverty I and Absentee Father I were very active here as Victor described our family's poverty and his minimum contact with his father. I remember Victor going to see his dad on several occasions, so I thought. I wanted to go, but I had to accept the fact that he was not my dad. Patrick and Victor contradicted each other in their reflections of the yellow house: Patrick said we were doing fine in that house, but Victor said we struggled. Victor's entire narrative was told from the perspective of poverty. I believe that Victor's early struggles with poverty paved the way for low self-esteem later in life. This is somewhat supported by his statement: "The higher I went, the worse my report card got." The reason his grades got worse was because the verbal attacks on him due to his appearance increased, resulting in an increasing negative perception of school.*

We later moved to the neighborhood over by Eastway Elementary, off of Buena Vista Road. It was a White neighborhood. That was the first time I realized racism and racial stuff. We attended Eastway Elementary. It was mostly White. I don't remember much about this school, because we were really struggling at that time. I didn't hardly have any clothes. I didn't have but like two outfits for the whole year. It affected my self-esteem and grades, because kids would pick on you and stuff like that. And you just don't have the get up about yourself, when you have no clothes to wear, no shoes, and nothing like that. I felt that way from Eastway Elementary up to high school. It affected my grades, because how could you concentrate, when kids picking at you and make you feel like I don't know what? It was mostly Black kids picking at me. I don't recall any Whites picking on me. I really don't remember anything about the teachers. In the neighborhood by Eastway Elementary, there was this White guy who would drive by and throw rocks in our windows every night or every other night. [*I do not think it happened this often.*] I think it was our next door neighbor, him and his friend. Now you and I use to play with this White boy on the other side of our house. This boy [*the boy he thinks was throwing*

*the rocks*] was on the other side. I remember, because him and one of our older brothers got into it. [He is referring to our older brother Mark.] I remember them being in our yard calling us names. [*We laughed as he mimicked one of them. He is very comedic.*] They were cussing too. Their parents were in it too, but they didn't say much. Their parents would be out in their yards during these arguments. I remember my momma telling one parent not to walk back on our yard, and that's when they really got into it. I do remember the last time it happened. We had our friends and cousins hide out in the woods. They all hid in the bushes and waited until that car came back. They had guns and all that stuff. I don't remember them catching the person, but they chased them down the street and [*they*] got away. Whoever it was, they were in some blue car. But it never happened again. The boy we use to play with in our yard stopped coming over after they all got into it. I guess his parents told him don't come over their house anymore. Remember, Mark got into it with his older brother at his house. They use to go over there to shoot pool. They were playing fine until one of them called Mark a *nigger*. Next thing you know, the boy was flying across his pool table. [*He laughed.*] He beat him up in his own house.

*My Poverty I, Racism I, and Resilient I were very active in this segment. I sympathized with Victor as he described his reaction to the constant ribbing, and I was silently rooting for him to overcome it as he talked. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs come into play here. Basic needs such as clothing and belongingness have to be met before optimum learning can take place (Woolfolk, 2001). Victor's self-esteem began to deteriorate from this point on. His view of school was also affected due to the constant ribbing and jiving. I believe his desire for a better life was activated here and would intensify as he got older and progressed through each grade level. Although the racism was already present before we moved to this area, I tend to wonder if Mark's actions intensified the incidents in this neighborhood. Mark had a way of stirring up things as he was very mischievous. I wondered why our playmate next door ceased to play with us. I wish an adult or older brother would have helped me to internalize what was happening around me because I developed an unhealthy view of Whites after we left this neighborhood. I believe that*

*every member of family had developed negative views of Whites at this point if not earlier.*

We then moved to Cherry Hills. I think I went to Matthews Elementary. Cherry Hills was a mixed neighborhood. We were struggling over there too. We used to get clothes and stuff out of the dumpsters. I remember getting a shirt out of the dumpster and this little White boy said, "That's my shirt, because it's missing a button." [*We laughed as he mimicked the boy.*] Our mother was working at the time, and her boyfriend was helping her too. We didn't have that much food. I remember you [*referring to me*] use to come outside eating peanut butter on a spoon. The German lady that stayed next to us fixed you and I a sandwich. I remember we use to crawl in the sewers. We could have gotten killed. We had to cross over this plank, and you couldn't tell whether the thing was stable or not, nor how deep the water was below it. But you could hear the water. I don't recall experiencing any racism in this neighborhood. I don't recall much about Matthews Elementary. It was mostly White with a handful of Blacks. I hardly had any clothes to wear to school. I just felt bad about going. I remember one of my teachers. She was mean. I think she was a little racist too. It was the way she treated me and the Black kids. You could tell the difference. But I was too young at the time to realize what was going on.

*My Poverty I, Racism I, and Low Self-Esteem I were active here. I do not remember retrieving clothes from the dumpster, but I remember vividly crawling through the sewers. Victor's self-esteem was damaged and decreasing by the year. I wonder if his attitude towards attending school would have been different if all the students were just as poor as him. It was the embarrassment of his appearance that really got the best of him. It got so bad that he did not want to go to school. Orlando and I felt the same way at Blanchard. He did not give details about the supposedly racist teacher, but he evidently recognized her biased ways.*

I think we moved over there off Vivian Lane next. This was mostly a White neighborhood. This was not a project area. We were really struggling again. We had to stay with our grandmother a lot, because we didn't have anything to eat. Our grandmother stayed in a project low-income area [*Baker Village*]. We attended Tillanhurst Elementary. What I remember about this school was that it was mean, very mean. I remember one time in the classroom everyone was saying that they left their homework. So when it was my turn, I said I forgot mine too. After I said it, the principal grabbed me and took me home. That's when he saw my older two brothers [*Mark and Patrick*] at home with their friends. He called my momma and told her that a bunch of teenagers are at your house when they are supposed to be at school. Him and my momma got into it. I had all White teachers with the wooden floors. [*He laughed.*] The school was mostly White. Nothing really stands out to me other than that principal being racist. I was too young to understand it at the time. He seemed to always just pick at the Black kids. It's like, when the White kids were sent to him, he didn't paddle them. But he paddled the Blacks. My grades at this school were Cs and Ds.

*My Poverty I and Racism I were active in this segment. I recall sitting in the office on the first day I attended this school and seeing this principal paddling a Black boy. The screams terrified me. I was afraid of this man. My mother hated him for whatever reason, and they would have words with each other from time to time. Victor's comments about this school's unfair treatment of Blacks were supportive of his desire for fair treatment. Victor's grades seemed to be getting worse, which were the by-product of his low self-esteem. I do recall having to stay with my grandmother from time to time.*

I think we moved to over there by the Boys' Club. That was a Black neighborhood. I went to Winterfield Elementary in the fifth grade. That was a good school. Everybody loved that school. It was mixed. It was good, because the principal use to help us out and call our mom. My momma use to love that school. I never heard

anything bad about that school. My grades at this school were Bs and Cs. I had a lot of hand-me-downs, but I had clothes. That was the same case at Tillanhurst Elementary. I can't recall any of the teachers, but I don't remember anything bad. We were struggling, but not as bad. I remember it was hot, because we could not afford fans.

*What was different with this principal at Winterfield versus the principal at Tillanhurst? Both principals called my mother for various reasons, but Winterfield's principal had a different attitude. Notice Victor's grades got a little better at this school. He commented that he had more clothes during this time period, although they were still hand-me-downs. His confidence and self-esteem were higher as a result.*

Now I remember. We moved to Elizabeth Cauty next. This was a project area and all Black. The Atlanta child murders were taking place with Wayne Williams, and the stocking strangler murders in Columbus. *[Actually, the stocking strangler murders in Columbus preceded the Atlanta child murders by 2 to 3 years.]* There was a lot of killing going on there in this neighborhood too. The guy was killed over there off the dirt road in the bushes. He got chopped in the neck with that large knife. The killer tried to cut his head off. We went to see all that blood on the ground. *[I was with Victor, because we played in this area at least once a week.]* There was this lady who fought all the time. She and this other lady were fighting with broken bottles at the liquor store. Her whole head and face was covered in blood two different times. *[She was a scary sight to behold. I saw her in my nightmares several times.]* It was a lot of mess happening in this neighborhood: shooting, stabbing. Remember one of our neighbors hit this dude in the head with a hammer. He came up to our apartment with blood all over his head. My momma told him to leave. He had blood on our porch. Then he went back and laid down. He was bleeding so bad. *[He was the boyfriend of a female tenant that lived under us.]* There was blood all over that pillow. And then there was another old dude dead on the

dirt road. You probably don't remember that crazy man across the street who shot his wife in the butt. And remember the guy who shot and killed his wife in the backseat of the car down the hill. Blood was running out the car. They just caught him some years ago. A whole bunch of killings going on.

We struggled a lot during this time, because our mother was not working at all. We were on Welfare until you were 18. I was just wishing I could get a job, because we were struggling so much. I remember I use to go and help clean those bricks when they were tearing down those houses. I would make about \$20 and take it home and give it to my momma, so we could have something to eat. And then I got old enough to work for the summer jobs program. I use to buy my school clothes and your school clothes. How you think you got some clothes and stuff? Our two older brothers weren't giving us nothing, but I bought our clothes, and I did it every year. I think it was when I was 14 or 15 then. And I know I did it for 4 or 5 years. We had nothing even for Christmas. I didn't care, just as long as we ate. Our momma use to get us those hand-me-down cars with tires missing, and all the kids use to pick at us. [*We laughed.*] We didn't get nothing, but they had stuff. We use to wonder how all these kids around us got stuff, but we didn't. I remember we use to try to make us skateboards out of those old skates. It bothered me a little, but I was more concerned about us eating. I know we couldn't afford nothing. We had nothing. As long as we had Christmas dinner, that was it. I remember the two right shoes I had to wear. [*We laughed. These were literally two shoes for the right foot.*] I use to wear them in the summer time. I remember we use to go over this guy's house and get old hand-me-down stuff. We didn't have no shoes or stuff to wear outside.

*My Poverty I, Christmas I, Resilient I, and Low Self-Esteem I were very active in this segment. Victor's desire for a better life was obvious by his statements of wanting to earn*

*money to help buy food for the home and clothes for me and him. His goal setting abilities were displayed here. It was particularly disturbing for me to hear him express his feelings during Christmas seasons. Patrick stated that he remembered Christmas as happy times, but that was before my mother depended solely on governmental assistance. I am grateful for Victor's sacrifices for me and I was cheering silently in my mind for things to get better for him. I have always felt that Victor deserved to have a wonderful life.*

I went to Morningside Elementary while staying in Elizabeth Canty. What I remember about this school was the big planes going across in the sky. That's why they closed it down. It was a mostly White school. I got along well with the White students there. I went to both Arnold and Eddy Junior High. I was bused to Arnold first. It was mostly White kids there. I was alright at this school. I remember having enough clothes to wear. The teachers were alright. The first Black male teacher I had was at Eddy Junior High. He was alright, pretty cool, you know. My grades were still the same, more like B, C, D. But they were getting lower and lower.

*Victor was living in Elizabeth Canty but never attended Marshall Junior High. A couple of years later, I guess the school board decided to send students in our area to the neighborhood junior high school. I do not recall any White students ever being bused to Marshall, as it has been mostly Black students bused to White schools (Causey, 2001). Even today, it is majority Black and Title I indeed.*

I remember when they [*the police*] came and took my oldest brother Patrick out of the house. We were all sitting around in the back and somebody knocked on the door. A police came in and showed my momma a picture of a Black guy and said that somebody told him that this guy lived in our apartment. So my momma let him look around the apartment to show him that he [*the man in the photograph*] did not live with us. [*Where was the search warrant?*] The man [*the officer*] went back out and he came back with like six other police. They went straight to the back where Patrick was and arrested him and took him out in his pajamas. They kept him for like 6 days. [*Patrick said they kept*

*him for 3 days.] I remember my momma crying saying, “That damn White bastard [the officer who initially searched our home] lied to me. I gotta get my child out of jail.” It was hard on her. I was scared when they walked all up in our apartment, but I knew whatever they got him for, he didn’t do it. I think they were looking for someone who raped somebody. [Patrick says that they were looking for a Black man who supposedly murdered a White woman on the north side of Columbus. I shared with Victor the information I received from Patrick.]*

I went to Hardaway High School while we were still living in Elizabeth Canty apartments. It was bad my ninth-grade year. I didn’t have any clothes. I had nothing to wear, no shoes, no clothes, about only two pair pants and shirts. But there was somebody doing worst than me. There was this one kid in our neighborhood who wore the same outfit everyday. That’s all he had. Hardaway had more Whites than Blacks. I don’t remember much about my ninth-grade teachers. I remember one of my ninth-grade teachers. She told me, “Boy, you ain’t gonna be nothing. You ain’t gonna be nothing when you get big.” I told her, “I can’t help that. My mother ain’t working. We ain’t got nothing.” She would look at me and shake her head and say, “You need to do something about these grades.” I heard she stays right around the corner from me now. I don’t know if she died or what. I surely would like to see her. [*Victor is still angry with this teacher for condemning him to defeat under such circumstances.*] When a teacher tells you something like that, it sticks to your head, because she is a teacher. “You ain’t gonna have nothing!” She would look at me and laugh at me. She was a Black teacher. My White ninth-grade teachers didn’t care about you. Didn’t care what you did. Either you do it or you don’t, so what. Both the Black and White teachers had the same attitude. If I



was teaching now and I saw a kid come to school with nothing, you know they're struggling and ain't got nothing, wearing the same clothes and everything, you shouldn't pick at him. I would help him with something. I know you could probably give him different clothes or hand-me-downs or something. But when I was going to school, they [*the teachers*] were like, "So!" and would pick at you too. That's what I was telling my daughter when she came home from school one time. She told me that this girl didn't hardly have any clothes and was wearing junk. Now the kids were laughing at her and picking on her. I said, "Did you laugh at her or say anything? If I ever hear you laughing at a kid who don't have anything that goes to your school or whatever, whatever you wore to school that day, shoes and all, you are going to take it off and give it to her. And you are going to give her some more clothes too. You will never do that, because I struggled like that." The teachers at Hardaway didn't care. You can't go to school and try to study and you looking poor and raggedy, and some of those teachers knew it and still would make you stand in front of the class with raggedy shoes on, just so that the kids can laugh at you. [*In Victor's mind, some of his teachers' motives in calling him to the front were to embarrass him.*] You know how they tell you to stand up and go to the front and you already embarrassed. "Ooh, look at his shoes and look at this." [*He laughed.*] The teachers did me like that. This was all through high school, 10th and 11th grade too. My 10th-grade year, it was the same thing, because the clothes I would buy through the summer job program would only last for so long. I could only buy so much, because I was just making maybe \$120 a week. I didn't know how to shop for clothes. They got to last a whole year. Most of the money I would make, I gave to our momma. And I told her

that once we get to the last two checks, I would buy you summer school clothes and me some. And that was it.

*My Poverty I, Resilient I, and Low Self-Esteem I were very active in this segment. Victor's self-esteem was at an all time low at this point. I sympathized with him wholeheartedly and was pushing silently for him to make it through the turmoil. I believe it was very difficult for Victor to concentrate on school work. Ribbing and jiving is no fun when you are the brunt of the jokes all the time as was Victor. His statements of frustration with the school, peers, and teachers were supportive of his desire for fair treatment and a better life. His ability to set goals and achieve them was demonstrated here as he longed for the day he could work and help make a difference. The comments of the Black teacher were heart-wrenching even for me to hear. As an administrator and former teacher, I would never condone any educator degrading a student in such a manner. Victor needed help but seemingly never was offered any. Jeremy and Johnny attended this school and probably had some of the same teachers as Victor. Why were they offered help and not Victor or Orlando? It could possibly be that the teachers gave up on Orlando and Victor, assuming there was no use. Both were seriously struggling academically and seemingly going no where in sight. Johnny and Jeremy seemingly demonstrated more potential. Looking back, Patrick also attended this school. The 3 participants who dropped out of school [Patrick, Victor, and Jonathon] were attending Hardaway when they decided to quit.*

My grades were bad in high school. I was flunking then. I don't know, I just didn't care no more. I ended up repeating the ninth grade, because I missed too many days. I got tired of kids picking at me and stuff. I wore buddies [*slang for cheap sneakers*] in high school. I remember when our momma finally got us some *Pro Keds*. [*These were popular sneakers at that time.*] Boy, I wore them even when they had holes in them. I had to. You can't go to school and focus and do homework and stuff raggedy and kids picking at you and stuff, and doing this and that. I remember some of my 10th-grade teachers. [*He mentioned their names.*] I remember one student told me one time....he talked about me so bad. This was my last year and stuff. He told me, "If I was you, I'd go ahead and shoot myself and kill myself. Man I'll end that." I remember I use to think about that, and it stuck in my head. That was in my 10th-grade year. He use to pick at me so much, because I didn't have nothing. Yeah, I still remember that to this

day. [*He mentioned several students.*] All of these kids that use to pick at me are doing worse than me right now. Alcoholics, drugs, I have seen them all, some in jail. They ain't got nothing. And I say, "Uh huh!" I ran into one of them the other day. I remember this guy had jumped on me one time for no reason in the locker room, when I was at Eddy or Arnold Junior High. The coach saw him and lit him up. You know, I didn't have nothing, and they'd pick at me. And I ran into him at a store. He didn't know who I was. But I saw him drunk and tore up. Those suicidal thoughts [*referring back to the kid who told him to kill himself*] bothered me every other day, while I had to get up and go to school. I never talked to my mother or anybody about this. I stayed to myself. I never said anything to anybody about this. I just lived with it. Every time you go to school and see a kid with new stuff on, "I got this. My momma bought me this." And I come to school with these *superfly* clothes on, bell bottoms, doubleknits in high school. [*He laughed.*] And that stuff went out. [*Meaning that the styles changed.*] My self-esteem at this time was real low in school. I didn't have no clothes, no shoes, no nothing.

*At this point, Victor has given up. He hated getting up for school; he had nothing to look forward to except more embarrassment. His grades suffered, and his teachers offered no help. I had a lump in my throat as he talked during this segment. My Low Self-Esteem I was the most active here than in any other part of the interview. My Resilient I was very active here as I was silently rooting for Victor to endure although I already knew how it would end. I was hanging on every word he spoke at this point.*

It really got worse my 11th-grade year, clothes and stuff. I was working the summer jobs, but I only had one or two outfits that year. That's when I got tired, and tired, and tired of it. They waited for me to come to school just to pick at me. I use to try to be the first one to get to class and stuff. Even some of my buddies from Elizabeth Canty would *jank* on me. [*He is referring to Johnny's brother.*] Me and him were buddy buddy, you know. He had got him a job after school, working at a fast food restaurant. He

would buy him some new clothes and have this and that, and I was still struggling, didn't have nothing. He use to *jank* on me and pick on me and tried to jump on me in ROTC. That's why I took ROTC, so that I could wear the uniform. But the problem with that was I couldn't afford the shoes. I wore the ROTC uniform with church shoes on, stacks. [*He laughed.*] All the kids would say, "I don't know what kind of shoes you're wearing!" The other guys would have on those shoes that look like glass. They were so shiny. And look at my shoes. Then later on I got kicked out of ROTC, because I couldn't buy those shoes. So I had to go. But he [*Johnny's brother*] tried to jump me. But I beat him up at school, and I left it alone. [*Victor was angry at this point.*] I was flunking like I don't know what, my 11th-grade year, Ds and Fs. Like I said, these teachers see my report card looking like this. You know they got like special classes. I'd be willing to go in one of those to help my grades and stuff. But they didn't care. They look at me like a little raggedy kid or something. They didn't care. As long as I had been at that school, they never asked for no extra class or special ed, or anything like that. Black and White teachers both the same. They didn't care at all. [*Unfortunately, mom never tried to get him help either.*] I never completed my 11th-grade year. I was struggling, hard times, no money. And I just got fed up with it. So I just dropped out and started working. I didn't start working right then. By the time I dropped out, that was when we moved out of Elizabeth Canty and moved to Camelia Apartments. [*This neighborhood was a little better than the projects.*] I started working with a construction company. I dropped out, because I had no help, no clothes, no nothing. Just poor as I don't know what. I got tired of kids picking at me.

*My Poverty I, Resilient I, and Low Self-Esteem I were very active here. I was very emotional as Victor shared his feelings. I almost came to tears at this point but managed to keep a straight face. As an educator, I feel it is unacceptable for any teacher to ignore students who are failing and fail to enact the proper support network necessary for*

*helping at-risk students. Victor, angry and frustrated with the school, peers, teachers, and economic condition, inevitably dropped out. Victor was another Black male failed by the system in my opinion as an educator. There were no indications that he was a problem student. I believe there was no excuse for Hardaway failing to act on Victor's behalf. Victor's frustrations expressed here were an indication of his longing for fair treatment. He quit school and got a job because he wanted something better than what his circumstances offered him. Victor getting a job in an effort to help the family was indicative of his quest for personal success and a better lifestyle.*

If things would have been different, clothes, having more money, I would have stayed in school. I know I would have. Then you wouldn't have to worry about those kids picking at you. They'd jump on you, because you raggedy. *[We laughed.]* What kind of mess is that? You get beat up, because you're raggedy and can't afford no clothes. My mother never said anything about my grades. She didn't understand any of that. She was struggling. She didn't make it pass the sixth grade or something like that. *[I remember her telling me that she dropped out in the 10th grade when she was pregnant with Patrick.]* She sort of like knew I would drop out. She just said, "Alright, whatever." That's when we moved and I said, "I gotta get a job. I can't go to school with no clothes and stuff. I ain't got but one pair pants." When we moved and I got the job with the construction company, she was still struggling like I don't know what. She was still receiving Welfare checks until you *[referring to me]* turned 18. So I dropped out and got a job. That's why you didn't have to drop out. Once I got a job, I took care of everybody. I would buy me clothes, and buy you clothes. And when you went to college, I would send you money. How you think you went to college and all that? I bought the TV for your room and a whole bunch of stuff. That money was coming out my pocket. *[If this is true, then mom led me to believe that she was providing those things. I must admit, I had a lump in my throat even as I transcribed this interview. Victor just wanted to get his education like everyone else, but not with all the drama.]* I always said that once I get a

job, I will make sure that no one will have to go through what I did. When I got a job, I said I would keep it as long as I could. As a dad now, I tell my children to be thankful for what you have, because your daddy didn't have anything. You need to appreciate all this stuff you got. Just like now, I try to get them all the stuff I couldn't have as a kid. But a lot of this stuff, I wish I had as a kid. Some of the stuff I buy, I buy for me and my son. [He laughed.] Looking back, I never really thought about my dad. He obviously never thought about me. I remember seeing him only once. [I thought he saw him more than once.] I always said, "I will never do my kids like that."

*My Resilient I and Absentee Father I were active in this segment. Victor said in a follow up interview that he would have gone into the military had he graduated. This is supportive of goal setting and his longing for personal success and a better life. Considering Victor's upbringing and circumstances, he could have ventured off into a life of rebellion on the streets, but he never went in that direction at all. He never smoked, drank alcohol, or abused any drugs. I mentioned temptations in the commentaries of the other participants' narratives, but what was Victor's temptation? There were no major temptations in his life to do anything self-destructive or that could lead him astray other than giving up and quitting school. Victor was a good child by all accounts. My mother loved him and always said that the Lord was going to bless him. However, Victor faced the cruel tests of verbal assaults through vicious ribbing and jiving. He had two choices: either endure the stress or quit school. With no emotional support from a consistent, positive adult, Victor decided to give in and quit school. Resilience was demonstrated in his life, although he did not graduate from high school. My mother had five boys by five different men. Each man shirked his responsibilities, making life more challenging for another fatherless Black boy. However, the key to breaking this cycle was summed up in Victor's statement: "I will never do my kids like that."*

#### Jonathon the Hustler

*This participant was given the fictitious name, Jonathon. I was so surprised that I managed to nail an interview with him. I heard that he was behind bars by way of his mother. When I was attempting to locate Jonathon, I thought about looking his mother up in the phone book and calling her. I did just that, and she informed me at the time that they had Jonathon locked up. As I continued conducting interviews with the other participants, I heard through Victor that Jonathon had been stopping by his house off and on for about 3 weeks. So I knew he was out. I called his mother and left my phone number for him to call me. He called me the next day and I scheduled an interview time with him at his house.*

*When I got to his house, we greeted each other with a hand shake, hug, and laughs. The last time I saw Jonathon was about 3 years ago. He frequently stops by Victor's house. We all played together in Elizabeth Canty, but he and Victor were close buddies. He and I are the same age. After I reiterated what I was doing, I showed him the copies of the 1978 Blanchard yearbook. We laughed at the pictures of course. As he searched through the pictures, he pointed out a White student that he fought often at Blanchard Elementary. He was also searching for Seth's picture, the other White student he had conflicts with. I told him to start as far back as he can remember, and tell me his life story, with emphasis on education and social issues.*

My name is Jonathon and I was born in Columbus, Georgia, and raised in Elizabeth Canty. I came up, uh...well I had a father, but he wasn't there with me. My mom and my grandma, they pretty much raised me, but my father did take care of me. He did provide for me, but just not having that father figure around was, you know, kind of difficult. Even though I overcame that, uh, it's good to have a father figure around at all times. That makes a big difference in raising a child, especially a boy, a son. When I grew up in the can, uh Elizabeth Canty, I attended J. D. Davis Elementary. I didn't have any problems with any of the teachers, but I did have problems with a couple of students there. It was just a lot of what you would call back in the day, bullies. And me being me, I didn't like bullies. I didn't let them take advantage of me. I got into some fights, but I never got suspended. I made it through that school. I did go to the school over there on Brown Avenue, Wynnton Elementary, after I left J. D. Davis. I was in the second grade. Both schools were predominantly Black. There were a few White teachers there, but it was mostly Black. As far as I remember, the teachers treated everybody the same. I repeated the second grade. I repeated the second grade because of my attitude and not doing what I was supposed to do. I wasn't really focused. [*This type of behavior would follow him throughout school.*] They were contacting my mother, telling her what was

going on. My momma came wit' it [*She responded with appropriate discipline.*]. Mom came wit' it, but I still ended up repeating. It was too late. My grades were not up to par.

*My Absentee Father I was active as he talked about his father's irresponsibility in not being in his life. His dad bought him all the things I wish I had as a child: nice clothes, toys, and gadgets. As a child, Jonathon seemed to have it all, but as he states, his dad never was really in his life. His dad and mother were separated and never got back together. His statements are supportive of his longing for fatherly guidance. Jonathon's scenario was somewhat opposite Randy's in that he got a double dose of motherly affection, being raised by his mother and grandmother. His misbehavior started early in elementary school, as he was apt to entertain others by ribbing and playing the dozens. He was a very active kid in the classroom. He repeated the second grade, which would start a trend of retentions. Notice his mother responded swiftly with physical punishment when the teachers complained of his misbehavior, but later on her authority would not be enough to contain Jonathon.*

Then left there and went to Blanchard Elementary, a school way over on the other side of town. I went there for the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. For a school such as J. D. Davis that was walking distance, I can't understand how they shipped us from Elizabeth Cauty to a school that was out passed the airport. It [*the bus*] took us to some road that I didn't know how to get there. If I got lost, I wouldn't know my way home. Didn't know nobody, pretty much a White community. Now I had quite a few problems there. Some students...we actually had some students during my third, fourth, and fifth year that was racist. And being that they were so young and knew how to call a person a *nigger*, it kind of surprised me as I got older. I stayed into it mostly with a couple of White students, Mark and Seth. Uh, I never got suspended, but I stayed in the office for fighting some of the White students. I got paddlings, even when I was at Wynnton Elementary. I got paddlings in my hand and on my rear end. I had one teacher at Blanchard in the fifth grade by the name of Ms. Mills, and for some reason I don't think that lady really did like me. And you know my daddy was a successful business man, and he took care of me.

[*His dad owned two clothing stores downtown.*] I asked for a leather jacket for Christmas.



And uh, the leather jacket was 100% genuine lamb. I never forget, it was a brown leather jacket with a hood. And uh, I remember Ms. Mills asking me how did I get that jacket. And I told her my dad bought it for me for Christmas. And she asked me, “Who is your dad?” And I told her who he was and what store he owned and this and that. And uh, one day my jacket came up missing out of Ms. Mills’ class. And I went home and told my mom that somebody had stole my jacket. My dad said that jacket cost \$144. And so I forgot all about the jacket after I told them about it. I happened to find the jacket on the table in Ms. Mills’ class after I had searched every classroom I was assigned to and even outside between class periods. I never took my jacket outside, because my daddy told me to keep up with it. I knew that if I lost it, I would get in trouble. And one day I just walked back in Ms. Mills’ class and there it was, just laying back there on the table in plain sight. I said to myself, “I don’t remember this jacket being there. Now I looked in every classroom for it.” I took my jacket home and told my mom I found my jacket. I got the impression that Ms. Mills took my jacket to find out if it was stolen or not. I never asked her about it. She just had that look towards me. It was just something about her. She just didn’t like me.

*My Racism I was active during this segment. I sympathized with him concerning his comments about busing and racism at Blanchard. It was mostly the Black students bused across town. Why not send the White students from Blanchard to J. D. Davis or any White students to J.D. Davis? That never happened. There were benefits to us being bused across town, but it created problems for us: We were in another world and many times did not feel welcomed. These young White students at Blanchard obviously learned the N word from somebody. Jonathon’s teacher did not believe that a kid from the ghetto could afford such a jacket. Her outward stereotypical behavior was a good example of the culture and atmosphere at Blanchard. His dad’s financial status was not the norm for a Black boy bused from the projects, so I do not believe that the teacher believed Jonathon’s explanation. The question “Who is your dad?” summed up the teacher’s disbelief. I believe that Jonathon’s desire for material things along with his father’s ability to provide them ended up hurting him later in life.*

Also, Ms. Adkins, she wasn't as bad as Ms. Mills, but you could tell that she really didn't want to be bothered with you. She mostly concentrated on the White students. I remember Ms. Mills said in class one day that we don't pay attention. And she actually pointed a student out and said, "Now I can talk and I have to make sure that ya'll pay attention. But such and such over there, he can be over there drawing and I don't have to say nothing to him about paying attention. I know he can draw and listen at the same time. But the rest of ya'll can't do that." That was a White kid she was talking about. In other words, she was trying to say that we were slow. And there were two White students, one by the name of Mark, me and him stayed into it. We fought just about every day. It was his racial slurs, like *nigger*, and I was poor and all this and that. By them being out there at this school by Weems Road, you could tell that they were from middle class or even higher class homes. And they kind of looked down on us because we were shipped from the other side of town, the southside. Here I am staying in a project off Cusseta Road, which is probably about 10 miles or more from the [neighborhood] school. I have a school within walking distance [J. D. Davis]. They put us out there, and we had to go through those trials and tribulations. [*The trials he is referring to were the constant racial conflicts, as well as the subtle maltreatment of Black students by some of the White teachers.*] It was just a big mess. I was so glad to get away from that school. I didn't know what to do.

*My Racism I was active in this segment. His comment about Ms. Adkins is interesting because she was one of Johnny's favorite teachers at Blanchard. Jonathon said that she did not want to be bothered with you. Why did she favor Johnny over Jonathon? How could Johnny have a wonderful relationship with such a teacher, being Black? I believe the answer lied mostly in their attitudes. Johnny was very outgoing, likeable, and easy to teach. Jonathon was outgoing, irritating at times, and difficult to teach. In terms of developing wholesome relationships with White teachers, Jonathon did not have a chance. Blacks bused to Blanchard were at a major disadvantage for sure. Many of us*

*were intimidated just by the economic status of the surrounding area alone, not to mention the location of the school, the racial slurs of some students, and biasness of some teachers. Four out of the six participants who attended Blanchard expressed a sigh of relief after leaving the school. Although the school's curricula may have been better than J. D. Davis [the neighborhood elementary school], most of the participants left the school with somewhat negative views towards Whites in general.*

It was very uncomfortable coming from an all Black school to this White school, being around these White students who actually had racial slurs towards you. You don't really think about it then because you're young, but when you get older and think about it...and sometimes when you think about how they [*the school system*] had you way out there by a bunch of White folks and here we were poor and these kids are middle class. You know they pretty much had everything. They just kind of looked down on us. They kind of gave us that *turn up your nose* look. It was like five or six different White boys that I had run-ins with. Most of the fights would happen during PE. Fights, fights, fights. Seth was one of them. It was always the Blacks vs. the Whites during games, and we felt like we had a point to prove with them. And the main game we wanted to play was football. [*He laughed.*] And we didn't play touch football. If they wanted to play touch, it was still tackle. And whatever happened after then, we were ready for it, because we didn't really want to be there anyway. We were tired of going through that, the racial slurs, the way they were looking at us, the way they handled us, the way they were talking to us, you know. We wanted to play football, the Blacks against the Whites. It was mostly the White boys initiating it. Now we did have one boy who mostly had the grudge against them. And he was kind of like revving us up to do these things.

*My Racism I was active in this segment. Most of the confrontations took place during PE, the time in which students need to be supervised the most. Based on my experiences as an administrator, teachers cluster together, conversing with each other during PE instead of watching the students. This had to be the case during PE at Blanchard because all the action involving race took place on the field. We were free to form teams based on race*

*and play tackle football. We were trying to hurt each other. Fights and verbal confrontations took place during this time. Where were the adults? I recall Mr. Lambers supervising the exercise routines most of the time, but there were times when he was not in charge. Jonathon and Jeremy both said that the White students were initiating the tackle football. Jonathon and Jeremy also alluded to a particular Black male student who would rev up a commotion during recess. I attempted to locate him for an interview but was unsuccessful. Based on Jonathon's statements, he would not be in favor of integration. Jonathon's statements were indicative of his longing for fair treatment.*

My grades wasn't good and they wasn't bad. Probably like Bs and Cs. My mother would always stress education all the time. She would always tell me that school was very important, that I should always try to keep my grades up. You know she did graduate from school, and she would try to lead me that way to. She stayed on me about my grades. If I had a messed up report card, I couldn't even come outside. [*I played with him often but cannot ever remember him not being able to come outside.*] That lasted all the way 'til I got in high school. She then realized that it wasn't gonna do me no good. She was on me while I was in high school but she saw that it wasn't gonna do me no good.

*Jonathon was very headstrong and eventually wore out his mother and outgrew her strength. By the time he made it to high school, Jonathon had become numb to his mother's advice. I believe he needed more than what his mother and grandmother had to offer.*

I remember the two Black male teachers, Mr. Simmons and Mr. Lambers. They were more concerned about us than the White teachers, about getting our education. They would even get mad when they saw the things we did. When I say we made them mad, it was not in a bad way but a good way. They wanted to see us prosper and not go through some of the things the Black community is going through now. They wanted us to get that education and get out there and get those white collar jobs and stuff like that. They were so on you constantly. If you did something they didn't like, they wouldn't do it in

front of everybody, but they would pull you to the side and talk to you. “Now you know you need to tighten up, man. You know when you get a certain age and gotta provide for your family, you ain’t gonna be able to do that digging ditches.” Mr. Lambers and Mr. Simmons would do that. They would do that for a lot of Black students. Mr. Simmons would grab you by the back of your pants and pull you up out the chair. [*We laughed.*] He did this to just the Black students. I never saw him do it to a White student. A Black kid would get this if they were talking in class. The White kids did it too, playing with each other and everything. He wouldn’t put his hands on the Whites. He would just tell them to stop. But for us, in the air! [*We laugh. I felt, at the time, he was scared of the White students’ dads, since we didn’t have any.*] Mr. Lambers would do the same thing. [*I don’t recall Mr. Lambers doing this, but if he did it during PE, he more than likely did it in the classroom as well.*] If he caught you doing something you ain’t suppose to do, in the air! I never saw him do this to a White kid, even though they were guilty of the same things. Instead, they got sent to the office. [*We all saw them doing the same things we were jacked up for doing.*] I got jacked up quite a few times. It was much better to be sent to the office. Nobody wants to be handled like a ragdoll, especially when they are not your parents. I always did have an attitude that, “If you’re not my mom and dad, you ain’t got no business putting your hands on me!” Even when I was young. My dad...I’m 40 years old now, and my dad only whipped me one time out of my 40 years. One time. And he was the only grown man who put his hands on me and was allowed to do it. The rest of ‘em weren’t allowed to do it, but they did it. My dad didn’t have that much input in my life at this point. He was there for me. He took care of me, but as far as spending quality time with me, uh coming to the school to check on me, helping me with my homework

and stuff like that, he was never there. The only time I would ever see my dad was when he came to see my mom, around the holidays.

*My Absentee Father I was active here as he described two Black male teachers as well as his own father. All 6 participants who attended Blanchard all agree that these two teachers were very influential in our lives. They had our best interests at heart when they corrected us. They knew what to say to us to get our attention, being Black themselves and understanding our culture and struggles we face in this country. They were in essence gatekeepers, giving us the rites of passage in this culture of power dominated by Whites (Delpit, 1995). Their corrections were culturally infused: "...you ain't gonna be able to do that digging ditches." Digging ditches were the types of blue collar jobs many minorities have held over the years, so he gave a scenario that we could readily identify with. However, the unfair treatment towards the Black students angered us to a degree. In my mind at that time, I thought they were powerless to the White students because they had active dads in their homes. We did not have that, so in my mind there was nothing restraining them from jacking us in the air. I know they meant well, but it was the morals of it, considering the racist atmosphere. Did such behavior from these male teachers justify the White students looking down on us? I believe it did. In their minds perhaps, "Their own teachers handle them roughly." As Jonathon pointed out, his dad was never around, other than on the holidays. As a parent of Black boys, I tend to believe that a positive figure stronger than his mother was needed, someone Jonathon would listen to.*

After Blanchard, I went to Marshall Junior High for the seventh and eighth grades. I felt a whole lot better leaving Blanchard going to Marshall, because I was around a whole lot of people I could relate to. I was around a lot of students who was raised up like we was raised up. I felt a whole lot better. I repeated the seventh grade. For the seventh grade...I just failed. That was nobody's fault but mine. I wasn't doing nothing. I didn't wanna do no homework. I didn't wanna do no classwork. I didn't wanna do none of that. My mom's reaction was the same. She stayed on me about that. Uh, the next year when I went back to the seventh grade, uh...the only reason that I think I passed then was because they saw the potential I had as an athlete. You know I played football and basketball. I couldn't be retained in the seventh grade no more or I couldn't play. When I went into the eighth grade...you know they already had that spring football camp. And I went out for spring football, which was while I was still in the seventh

grade. They saw the potential that I had on the field. So I went on to the eighth grade, and I went on to play football. [*He is insinuating that he was promoted only because of sports.*] I'm gonna put it like this. If you play sports, and you winning those games and bringing home those championship trophies and stuff like that, they love you. They love you, and I know that for a fact. You know we won a championship game that year in basketball. And you know I didn't really do nothing that year. [*He laughed.*] We weren't that bad in football, but I just quit that because I didn't like to lose. We dominated basketball, and the teachers were just straight crazy about us. I remember one of the teachers. I didn't do nothing in her class, period. In fact there were two teachers. Orlando was sitting right behind me in one of those classes. For one of the teachers, we didn't do nothing in his class. [*Orlando said that the teachers at Marshall were giving him undeserved grades because of basketball.*] I remember a teacher was up there filling out the report cards. And for some reason I felt that she was on my report card, and I looked at her. And she looked at me and I turned my head. She gave me that look like, "I ain't gonna do that to him." And when I got my report card, I got a grade that I shouldn't have had, 'cause I didn't do nothing in her class. I had two teachers like that.

*My Resilient I was somewhat active here as Jonathon described his attitude toward schoolwork. He has repeated two grades at this point, which increased the likelihood of him dropping out of school. I was silently cheering for him to snap out of it as he shared his story. His mother at this point could not control him, for spankings at this age no longer were effective. As a parent, I believe he needed more than what his mother was able to deliver. The giving grades scenario is believable considering that Orlando was in one of his classes and he made similar comments. What message were the teachers communicating to these two students and possibly others? Your grades are not as important as your athletic performance. As an educator, I have observed that many Black boys overall tend to put more effort into improving their game than their grades, so to send such a message as this exacerbates the problem of underachievement.*

I didn't see any racism with the teachers, but with the assistant principal, yeah. He looked like *Grizzly Adams*. [*He laughed.*] Ah man, he couldn't stand me. I don't know what it was, but he didn't like me for some reason. He accused me of stealing my own jacket one time. And he threatened to suspend me, and I went off. I told him, "Naw, naw, I'm tired of this. Y'all ain't gonna keep doing this here. My daddy will be up here in a few minutes. I'm fixing to go call my daddy, and he will be up here in a few minutes. I betcha you won't do that in front of my daddy." Man, that man whipped me like I was his own child. He paddled me constantly. [*We laughed.*] I got to the point where I said, "You ain't gonna do that no more." He was gonna suspend me for 5 days for stealing my own jacket. Man, I went off the grid. I called my dad, but he didn't come up. I think my mom talked him out of it. You see, my dad has a real bad attitude. My dad didn't like to talk. If he coming, he coming for something. Straight to the point. My mom knew that, so that's why she told him not to do it. 'Cause that jacket was my jacket, and he accused me of stealing my jacket.

*Here is possibly another incident of stereotypical behavior by an educator. This principal probably did not believe Jonathon's account of how he got the jacket. This jacket, just the like the one he had at Blanchard, was probably expensive considering that his dad owned two clothing stores and Jonathon got whatever he wanted from them. Also, this administrator would not have made a big deal as such over a cheap jacket. Based on this account, Jonathon's behavior in school was continuing and probably getting worse. I am inclined to believe that his mother needed help from his dad, but he was unavailable. I believe this is obvious from the dad not coming to the school, although Jonathon gave an alternative explanation. Dad provided the material things but nothing else.*

When we won that championship game at Marshall, our basketball coach took us up there to Carver High School to scrimmage their junior varsity team. Their junior varsity was sophomores and juniors. We were eighth graders, and we ran them out their own gym. And that coach begged us to get our parents to transfer us to Carver High. [*We*



*laughed. This school was probably the best place for Jonathon, considering that it was predominantly Black.]* We wanted to go to Carver: me, Orlando, Jeremy, and some others. He wanted us up there so bad. We told him if he could come pick us up, we'd be glad to go. But we never did go. We ended up going to Hardaway High School. I hate that school to this day. Now I'm gonna tell you how Hardaway is. Hardaway is a racist school. Up there, if you don't play any sports, they don't really care nothing 'bout you. I went in playing freshman football, and everything was all good. Uh, I repeated the ninth grade. During the summer when I had found out I repeated the ninth grade, I hurt my ankle at the YMCA. They started the summer football camp right before school started. The position I was playing, defensive end, I knew I wasn't going to be able to perform with a bad ankle. What I did, I didn't go during the summer. I waited until school started. I walked up to the coach, and I told him that I'm ready. I told him why I didn't come out for the summer. I told him that I was ready now, ready to run that ball in that defensive end position. I was playing that position, and I was good at that position. He told me just like this here, "We don't need you. You didn't come out for the summer, so we don't need you." So I said, "Okay. Bet." I went on 'bout my business. I said I would go out next year. Now basketball was my favorite sport. They had a meeting after school for basketball tryouts that same year. The coach told me, "We don't need you. You didn't play football, you ain't gonna play basketball." Hardaway was like that. If you didn't play football, they didn't allow you to play basketball. [*That is not totally true. Orlando and Jeremy played basketball only.*] Football was their sport. I actually went through that. This school was worse than Blanchard.

*Jonathon never mentioned anything about teachers at Hardaway giving him undeserved grades. What was the difference between him and Orlando? Both boys failed the ninth*

*grade. The difference could have been in their attitudes and behavior. Jonathon was a major behavior problem in class; Orlando was not. Some teachers may have been willing to give a well mannered student like Orlando grades so he could continue playing but not a student like Jonathon who was rebellious and disobedient. I am not sure why the coach was so hard on Jonathon because he was a good athlete, and they could have used his skills. Maybe the coach was familiar with Jonathon's classroom behavior.*

I didn't experience any racism with the White students. I actually had a couple of White friends. I hung around them. I was invited to their houses. Their parents use to give us rides home. I had the problems with the teachers. They just had the attitude that they were just there for a check. I stayed into it with this one teacher, and she kept me in the office all the time. And, I had this issue with the assistant principal there. He drunk liquor everyday. He kept a bottle of *Jack Daniels* in his drawer, because I saw it. Everybody else knew it. [*I asked Orlando about this claim, and he said that he heard others talking about it but never saw anything himself.*] He didn't care nothing about you. It got to the point that my mom got tired of it. And she said, "You know what? I tell you what. I'm gonna take my son out of this school. This man was drinking, and he'd walk all up in your face like he wanted to fight you. You could smell the liquor. He'd walk up in your face like he wanted to fight you. I remember one day I had to go to his office, and I was carrying my books, jacket, and all this stuff. You know, the stuff was sliding out my hands. So when I went into his office, I put my stuff down to sit down, and he told me, "Don't put your stuff down. Did I tell you to put your stuff down?" When he told me that, I slammed it down for real. He said, "Pick it up." I said, "I ain't picking up nothing." So I sat down. And then, after he saw that I wasn't gonna take no more, that's when he kind of backed up off me.

I was sent to the office on that day for talking in class. I was a class clown anyway. I *janked* on people a lot. They would just tell me to get out. They would contact

my momma and tell her that, “He’s a real smart student. He’s a real good listener. He’s got plenty of sense. He’s a good reader. He’s just don’t wanna do nothing but sit up in class and talk about folks.” And that’s mostly what I got sent to the office for. I repeated the ninth grade because of my grades. I would say the teachers were more so at fault. Here they was teaching something that I really didn’t understand. And when I asked for help, they were getting an attitude about it. I would ask for help all the time. And you know sooner or later you get tired and just say, “Forget it.” Other students in the class were asking for help. I’m gonna put it like this here. I think they kind of picked out the ones they wanted to help. Of course, the White students and the middle class Black students. My sisters went to Hardaway too. They went after I left. They had problems with this school. In fact, they would call me and tell me to come up to the school. They had problems with students and teachers. Teachers and students were picking on them. I guess it was because my daddy was very successful. It was jealousy towards my sisters.

*Jonathon’s teachers attempted to correct his behavior as they made contact with his mother. Even what he quoted the teachers as saying to his mother was appropriate on the teachers’ behalf. Jonathon himself admitted that he misbehaved. This behavior can be traced all the way back to elementary school. Jonathon was what I call a Master Jankster: He played the dozens very well. He was the main one at Blanchard that made me feel bad about my own appearance. Were the teachers wrong in ignoring him and not giving him the attention he needed? As an administrator and former math teacher, I have dealt with numerous cases like this one: A student is a major discipline problem, and the teachers have grown weary in dealing with the student. Based on the evidence, I believe his teachers were ignoring him at this point, after having exhausted other measures to keep him in line. There was still no excuse for refusing to help him when he asked for help. Eventually they probably just threw him off on the administrators to handle. Would Jonathon have been more prone to behave had the teachers been more willing to help him? More than likely, probably not as he has exhibited this behavior throughout his school years. It is hard to determine what came first, the teachers not helping him or his irritating behavior? I am not quick to assume his teachers were just out right refusing to teach him for no apparent reason as the accounts of Johnny and Jeremy at this school would have contradicted this belief. I find it interesting the two types of students Jonathon said were getting the teachers’ help: White students and middle class Black students.*

My grades for the second time in the ninth grade was my fault. When that coach told me I couldn't play basketball because I didn't play football, I said I was going to get out of that school. I was trying to get into Carver High. At the time I was trying to get a scholarship. My goal since junior high was to be a professional basketball or football player. It didn't matter, one of the two. I knew it was going to be hard for me to get a transfer. So I just wanted them to kick me out of that school. So the only way I could get them to do that was to act up, get in some kind of trouble where they would get tired of me and want me away from the school. So basically that's what I started doing. They got tired of me eventually. They called my mom. They had been calling her several times, and she say she was tired of it anyway. She felt like they was picking on me. And so she came up there and had a conference. And she said, "Well, I tell you what. I'm just gonna take him out this school." So, they expelled me. Uh, after I left this school, I told my mom that I really wanted to get into Carver High and pursue a scholarship for football or basketball. I played defensive end and tailback. There were some issues about me getting back and forth to school, because of that hardship transfer. And there were some problems with that because of where I stayed at. There was no buses going to Carver and going through my neighborhood. If I still was going to do that, then that means I would have to walk to school everyday, and my mom didn't like that idea. Didn't have no transportation, and you know my mom couldn't drive. My dad had the transportation, but he wasn't the type that was going to come pick me up every morning. So, I ended up quitting. All my dreams just flew out the window.

*It was interesting that Jonathon admitted to acting out on purpose to get expelled while his mother was thinking the school was singling out her son for whatever reason. His mother had no idea that her son was behind most of the chaos at school. Why was*

*alternative school not an option for Jonathon? Jonathon had goals of playing professional sports, which was supportive of his desire for personal success and a better life.*

Uh, I went and got a job. It wasn't paying a whole lot. Minimum wage back then was \$3.35. Man, you work 40 hours, your check be like \$150, which was still good for me, because I was still staying with my mom and didn't have no kids. You know, I just wanted something better. Later on, I moved to North Carolina. My aunt came down to visit my cousins, and I went back up there with them. You can ride down the street up there, and they'd have signs posted, *Now Hiring*. The first place I stopped at was a Mexican restaurant. My cousin was working there, so he pretty much got me in the door. Man, I tell you I loved that job. It paid more money. Even on the days I didn't have to go in, I'd call and ask to come in. That's how much I loved that job. My uncle was about to get me on where he was, making \$11 an hour for this food delivery company. But my grandmother passed, and I didn't want to leave my mother here in Columbus all by herself. So I moved back here to Columbus. Same thing over again, trying to find a good job but couldn't find one. When I first got back, the first job I had was at McDonald's. It was alright, but I really didn't like it. [*At this point he was honestly trying to do the right thing.*] Of course, I started clubbing, going to the night clubs. And when I seen these guys with these nice things, I was wondering, "Where are these guys working at with all these nice things? I need to try to find out where they working at." So I was moving around, looking around, trying to figure out where they were working at. I could never figure it out. Then finally I figured it out. They were selling drugs. I said, "Okay, so that's where it's at." [*It is the glamour of this business that draws in so many naïve Black males.*] So, I started selling drugs myself, which was the worse mistake I ever made in my life. Some

of the guys that I knew and knew me I approached them and told them that I wanted to work. And I started from the bottom and went to the top. The bottom was street level, standing on the corner and stuff like that. I went from standing on a corner to sitting behind a desk. In other words, I was like a boss. I built my reputation up, and the people I was working with had saw that they could trust me. But I'm not the kind of person who take stuff from nobody, because I know the repercussions in that business.

*Jonathon obviously wanted to better himself because he said so himself, but minimum wage could not satisfy his desire for material things. As a parent, I think it was a grave mistake for Jonathon's dad to supply the material goods with no strings attached. He could have used his son's education and behavior as leverage. His dad could have also prepared his son to manage the stores he owned. This was Jonathon's time to be tempted to drift off course like several other participants of this study. What was his temptation? To sell drugs to make a fast living. He had two choices: live with his mistakes and work the minimum wage jobs or sell drugs and make a lot of money fast. Based on his narrative, I believe Jonathon's decision to sell drugs could have been avoided had more been done in the earlier stages of his life.*

I went to jail in '90 and got out in '91. They caught me. That was when I was at the street level. They caught me in a spot, and I had some drugs down in my drawers. And the officer felt it. And I did 6 months with 2.5 years probation. So they let me out when I went to court. Okay, I got out trying to find another job. I was working with Woodrow Decorations, trying to do the right thing. It just wasn't working, just wasn't working. By this time, you understand, I got kids, my son you just met, and another one on the way. You haven't met her. She is staying with her mom. My job just wasn't working out. I went back to my old ways. And this time I started off again on the street level. Then in '98 I caught a sale case with somebody. Somebody came to me wired up, and I sold it to them. And they had me on audio making the transaction. They had my voice and everything on the audio tape, making the transaction. So they charged me with the sale of cocaine and the possession of cocaine with the intent to sell. So I ended up

serving 5 years and 2 years on probation. I still had a conscience while I was selling it, because my kids had the top of the line things while I would see kids who were in need. These kids were the very children of the adults I was selling drugs to. So I felt bad about that. They always say your worse enemies is your own folks. That is so damn true. I had \$98,000 in savings when I went to jail in '98. I ain't got a dime of it now. One of my kinfolks took all of it while I was locked up. I trusted him. I got out, went back to work at this chicken plant. I was doing good. I loved this job. You know how far this chicken plant is from here. I stayed there for a whole year. I even took a vacation and came back to work and everything. It was just that ride everyday, man. In order to be at work at 6:30 in the morning, I had to leave the house at 5:15. That's how far we had to travel. And uh, sometimes I was so tired when I got home, that I couldn't even take a shower. I was smelling like raw chicken, raw chicken. [*We laughed.*] I'm so tired, and the only thing I could do to keep my bed from smelling like raw chicken was to take my work clothes off and just to lay something across the bed and then lay on it. I actually had to take me a nap before I could take me a shower. I was scared that if I got in that hot water, I would pass out or something and hit my head.

I did that for a year, and I talked with one of my friends. And he gave me a job, an even bigger package. Now, I ain't street level no more. I'm kind of like supplying, you know. Been doing that for a minute. [*Slang for a period of time.*] And of course, I got jammed up again. I'm out on bond now, a federal bond in which they really don't have nothing. They held me for 6 months without bail. My lawyer is fighting the case for me, and he's doing a real good job. They came in there and tore my house up, but they could never find anything. They found nothing. The doorbell ringed. They sat the box on the

porch. I picked the box up and brought it in the house. For some reason, something told me to look back out the door, and I looked out the door and here they come. And I hollered, "Oh shit, that's the police!" Now they got me charged with trafficking cocaine. Let me remind you I never seen it. My lawyer asked them in a preliminary hearing, "Did my client see what was in the box?" The officer said, "No." "Did my client open the box?" The officer said, "No." They got me charged with something I never seen and never touched. Now, come to find out that it wasn't even no cocaine in the box. They took the cocaine to the police station and brought me an empty box. So how can you charge me with possession and trafficking? The police told me that they took the cocaine to the station, 'cause I didn't know what was in the box. I told them that I wasn't talking, because I had a right to remain silent and was not talking without a lawyer. I signed the form and everything, but they used my girlfriend against me. See they know I ain't gonna talk, but there are guys who'll start rolling on everybody. I don't do that. You don't fuck up somebody else 'cause you fucked up. See they are dirty. They told me that they had evidence on her [*his girlfriend who is now his wife*] and was going to arrest her, unless I gave them a statement. See here are the papers saying that my statement that I gave them was invalid, because I did not give it voluntarily. [*I saw the documents which did seemingly support his claims.*] I remember on Memorial Day that they did not come for the trash. I had our trash out along with everybody else's on the street, but mine's was the only one picked up. My lawyer told me that he bet they are searching my trash for something to use against me in court. I order stuff through *Ebay* and off the Internet all the time. And it's dropped by FedEx. You see these Jordan flip flops and Jordan shorts. All that come out of *Ebay* and is delivered by FedEx or UPS. I never saw what was in the



box. I don't know to this day what was in the box. And that's what my lawyer is fighting against right now.

*I just happened to see Jonathon at Victor's house a few weeks after this interview. He told me that the charges against him were dropped. Evidently, there was not enough evidence against him.*

But the thing that I want to say to the students that's listening to this is, if you getting your education... please, please, if you could see how I'm living now. You wouldn't want to go through this. You wouldn't wanna take your children through this. I got four kids and three grandchildren that depend on me. And right now, I can't do nothing for them, because of my situation. And it hurts. It hurts. It took me three times to see this. And which I got on my knees and prayed about it, because I grew up in the church. I know that God is real, you know. And uh, I do believe in Him. And uh, I have left the situation in His hands. And uh, I'm gonna let Him take care of it. And like I'm saying, I don't care what the circumstances is, 'cause nobody said this ride would be easy in life. If you can, try your best, try your best. I'm talking 'bout do everything you can not to resort to drugs as part of your life. 'Cause it with tear you down, it will tear your family down, and not only your family, but the people out their on the streets that really do care about you. It will tear them down too. I was a nice good-hearted person, and I took care of my neighbors. You know, I had a bunch of elderly people living over there staying around me, where I was staying at recently. They are praying for me. When I made bond, they were so glad to see me. People in the church, evangelists, they was walking up to me and giving me hugs. Saying how so glad they were to see me. They were so glad to see me out and said that they were going to continue to pray for me. "We're not judging you, because we know you're not a bad person. We all make

mistakes.” They gave me a little inspiration. If you’re getting your education, man, you’re doing the best thing you can do. Get you education. Get you a white collar job, and show these people that you not going to let this stop you. Because it’s rough. I’m telling you, I’m living it right now. It is rough. If I could start all over again, I would, but I can’t. I think about that everyday. If I only did this. If I only did this. If I only did that. But it’s too late now. I can’t start over. But of course you know, I did get my GED, but by me having this record, I still can’t do what I wanna do. They look at my record as, “You’re a bad person.” Like they ain’t never made no mistakes in their life. Everybody is subject to make a change. But if you won’t give a person a chance to make his change, he will resort to other measures. And I’m not gonna do that no more. I’m not gonna do that no more. Like I told my wife, I’d rather be staying in a shack out in the woods, wind, air, heat ‘bout to rip that sucker apart, than to be in jail. ‘Cause jail is for nobody. I have a cousin who has to serve 36 years. He was a multi millionaire with six different homes, some in California. I can’t say too much, but he was the ATL kingpin. Now look at him. What can he do with all that stuff now? His life is gone.

*My Resilient I was active here through much of this segment of the interview. If only he had this mindset earlier in life. How does one get our Black boys to heed this message before it is too late? Hindsight is 20/20, but every Black male does not go this route in life. Out of the 8 participants in this study, only one sold drugs. Two of the participants had serious addictions that they eventually overcame, but even those two never sold drugs to make a living. With the exception of one, these participants were willing to make a living the legal way no matter what. Based on his narrative and what I know personally, Jonathon wanted it easy in life and was not willing to stick it out on a regular job. His dad spoiled him with nice things unconditionally and Jonathon was not willing to work a low paying job to continue enjoying them. Jonathon has always had nice things such as cars, several at a time while selling drugs. Even now, he has an immaculate Lincoln and at least two other cars.*

I got a pre-trial coming up in which my lawyer is contesting that, because they violated my fourth amendment of my constitution rights. [As mentioned earlier, the

*charges have been dropped.*] And he uh, is contesting that right now. He's working on that right now. That's something they cannot do. Uh, I prayed about it, and put it in God's hands. And I'm gonna tell you something else for students who may be listening to or reading this conversation. Before you have children, if you have not already had children, make sure you are financially stable to have them children. Because to watch a child suffer is not a good thing. That really tears me down. And I'm watching my children suffer for the mistakes that I made in the past. I can't really do for them like I use to. Uh, if I have to leave, who gonna take care of them? 'Cause I don't care if you find the best babysitter. Ain't nobody gonna treat your children like you do. Nobody. And uh, but I also want to stress this and this is very, very, important. The main thing is, if you gonna have a family in life and gonna be successful, you got to have God in your life. God got to be the head of everything that you do. He should be number one. Him being number one, your family being second, and your job being third. If you got Him number one, you ain't got to worry about your family, 'cause he gonna make sure that your family is taken care of. He gonna watch over your family. If He is the head of your life, He gonna make sure that your finances are taken care of, so that you can take care of your family. It's a win win situation with Him in your life. You can't go wrong. That's something that I'm trying to do right now. I know people are saying, "You just trying to do that now because you in trouble, this and that." Naw, it ain't that, because I grew up like that. God has always been with me. There have been situations I have been in that I didn't know how I was going to get out of. But I know now that I'm grown how I got out of it. God had His hand around me the whole time, because there is a purpose for my life. I just ain't figured out what that purpose is, but I'm gonna figure it out. And when I

figure it out, I'm gonna do it. I'm blessed. And what I've seen in being out there in them streets, I am blessed. I've been in situations where I didn't know how I was gonna get out of it. And I'm gonna tell you, prayer changes things. You might not believe it, but prayer changes things. The reason I know that is because my momma and grandma stayed on their knees constantly for me. And I believe that is the reason I'm still here today.

*My Christian I was activated here as he described how God protected him.*

I have been robbed at gunpoint, tied with duct tape. Didn't know if I was gonna make it out of there. I went to purchase something from somebody, and come to find out that the guy I was helping out, sat me up and turned his back on me. Sat me up to be robbed. I walked in the room and a dude jumped out from behind the door. One jumped out and came out of the bathroom. I'm staring down the barrel of a 45. They told me to get on the ground. They duct taped me and put a sheet over my head. They told me I better not say a word. They said, "Where the money at?" I said, "I left the money in the car." He said, "Ah man, you messed up. You shouldn't have did that. What car is yours?" I said, "The white Lincoln. The keys are in my pocket." "So where the money?" I said, "It's in the console." "If the money ain't in the console, I hate to say it, but you got to go buddy." Then he said, "If I find out that you sat my man up, I'm gonna have to do you anyway." I said, "Who? Man I ain't sat nobody up. I ain't no snitch. That's the last thing I'll do." He said, "Well, if you ain't did it, then you ain't got nothing to worry about." I said, "Man, I ain't sat nobody up. I'm not gonna worry about that there. If you do that there, that's just something you wanna do anyway. 'Cause I ain't sat nobody up. You just using that as an excuse." Then he said, "Don't talk so loud. Don't keep running your mouth now." So they got the money. And uh, the guy that sat me up, he knew I was a

good guy. And he must have told them not to harm me, because before they left, they cut all the lights off. They cut my duct tape loose from around my feet, and they cut all the lights off and left me in the house. And so I waited for a few minutes, then I got up. Took the duct tape off my feet and hands. I pulled the pillow case off my head, and I had to feel my way around the house to turn the lights on. And I just sat down and said, "Ah man!" But right then and there I knew who had did it. But I had a little retaliation in my mind. But I thought about it. Even when I was doing wrong, I always thought about it. I said, "I ain't even gonna sweat it. I'm gonna let God deal with it." 'Cause that's one thing about it. If you doing right or wrong, if you a child of God, He's gonna take care of you and fight all your battles. I saw the guy that sat me up one time again. Before I said what I said about leaving it to God, I saw him one time. And I had my pistol with me. And I came this close to walking up to him and blowing his brains out. But the only reason I didn't do it was because there was too many people standing around. So that was basically the end of that. I never seen him since. That was about a year ago.

*My Resilient I was active here as he shared this story. I was sitting on the edge of my seat silently rooting for him to escape. A life on the streets makes too many of our Black boys vulnerable to all sorts of dangers such as this. Yet, even this situation was not enough to make Jonathon snap out of it. I believe that as Jonathon's narrative has shown, it is the fast and easy money in this lifestyle that persuades our Black boys. I believe that Jonathon worked hard for his money, but was not willing to do it the right way. In the drug business, one stands the chance of making a lot of money fast. He commented earlier that he had accumulated \$98,000 in savings. That is believable considering how much money his cousin made and not to mention all the nice things Jonathon accumulated. Victor told me how often he would tell Jonathon to stop selling drugs and get a regular job, but Jonathon would reach in his pocket and display wads of cash with a grin.*

I'm through. I'm out. I'm like Lil' Flip, game over. I'm 40 years old. I'm grown. That's another thing I wanna say too. We as Black men need to grow up. Quit watching that mess on TV. Of course them guys getting money, but you got to look at... they legal.

They making money because they got talent. They just throw that stuff in there 'bout this, that, and other. They go home to their wife and kids, and you say, "I gotta get like that right there. So I'm gonna go do what they was talking about." They ain't did none of that. They just selling records. They just selling records. Studio gangsters. Studio gangsters.

Most of the racism I been dealing with was with the police department and a little bit in the community. As you see, we on this side of town. And if you see where they have moved everything at, because they know that Black people don't have transportation to get out there. [*Many businesses have moved on the north side of town, including the mall.*] They moved the mall. You know we had a mall right here. They ran us out from over there to build a library for the college students. [*This is a public library.*] Columbus State has a library, so why would you build a library right there. Just money wasted, just so they can get rid of us. And the mall they got now, you can tell they really don't want us out there. That's why I don't go out there. I try my best...that's my last resort to go anywhere on the north side of town. I'd rather order it off the Internet before I go uptown. And I got good credit. I can go up there and get whatever I want. But before I do, I'll wait and try to find somebody else to deal with. Maybe a Black owned business, than to give them my money. Because they don't want us up there. They laugh and hee hee haw in our face and call you DAN. My cousin was recently fired from Atmos Energy. And he told me that one of the White guys on the job called him DAN. Do you know what DAN mean? If you ever hear a White person call you DAN, he is calling you a *Dumb Ass Nigga*. That's what it stands for. He's got a lawyer and say the NAACP is working with him right now on that. 'Cause he say there was a lot of racism at Atmos Energy.

*There has been a northern flight of Whites and businesses in Columbus. The city is in the process of luring more businesses back on the southern side of the city. The schools on the south side are mostly populated by Black students. There seems to be a growing consensus among the Blacks that everything is being moved towards the north on purpose. Even real estate cost more as one moves towards the north side of town.*

The White police officers use the Black cops like puppets on a string. Look at the Kenneth Walker case. The man was shot in the head with an MP5. It's like taking a stick of dynamite and putting it in a watermelon. And that man got acquitted on all them charges. There were no drugs in the truck. Even if he had cocaine in his system, does that give you the right to blow his brains out? And right now if you pull a Black officer over and ask him, "What do you think about the Kenneth Walker case?" I betcha they'd say, "I ain't got nothing to say about it." They so scared of losing their job, they scared to speak on it. When they did the little march, I marched with 'em, being the kind of man that I am and considering that my dad helped desegregate this city. He got dragged out by his feet and water hosed down and everything. And I pretty much got the same blood pumping through my heart now. When we marched, the whole time we were yelling, "No Justice, No Peace." But, it was a peaceful march to me. We didn't do nothing. And I was ready for whatever. I was ready to take it back to the 60s. Let's start launching things into some of these White businesses. Let them know we ain't gonna take this. You know what I'm saying? If we go to jail, we go to jail, but we ain't gonna take this. Not here. [*He obviously misunderstood the purpose of the march. They were not intending to engage the city with violence, although many of them were angry.*] I had a guy called down from Detroit and said, "Man, what's wrong with ya'll down there? Ya'll let that kind of stuff go on?" I said, "Man, it ain't me. I can't do it by myself. Man, they scared. The White people down here got us scared. Got them scared, 'cause I ain't scared to do anything.

Because they scared to sleep in that county jail.” But sometimes you got to do something man to get your point across. The Bible even tells you that, “There is a time for peace and a time for war.” And I felt that there was a time for war right there. And Jesse Jackson came down there and gave that *boogie woogie* speech. Ain’t seen him no more. And then I’ll tell you why the crowd dispersed. Because they saw all the police standing around. “There go the police. There go the police. I got to go!” Man, I tell you the truth, it was just a waste of my time. I did all that walking for nothing. If I knew that was going to happen, I would have stayed at home. I’m thinking we were going to go down there and pop something off to get our point across. [*He laughed.*] You got to look at, man that could have been me, you, your brother, your son. Them guys had just left the mall, because I just left the mall too. And what happen was the reason I wasn’t behind them is because they got on the highway to go to Macon Road. I went towards Hilton Avenue. That’s the only reason I wasn’t behind them. When I saw that on the news, I said, “I was just following them guys.” I didn’t know who they was, but I remember that truck. They was leaving the mall, ‘cause I left the mall right behind them. Man, you don’t sell drugs, and you don’t see what they [*the police*] do. These are some dirty ass cops in this city. Columbus don’t care anything about you. Don’t you know that everybody who is locked up ain’t guilty? And that’s a fact. Carlton Gary did not do that [*referring to the Columbus Stocking Strangler Murders*]. You know who did it? Remember the weather man who use to throw the chalk in the air? His son did it [*referring to Kris Gingell*]. [*Many Blacks in this city believes that the weather man’s son committed those murders.*] That mayor and the police chief are racist, man.



I want to say this too. Me and your brother Victor were fishing over there by the Riverwalk, and these two White guys were walking with their two young daughters. Me, being the type of person that I was, street minded, I saw straight through it. Two White guys walking with their daughters at night on the Riverwalk. Nine times out of ten times, they up to something illegal. They discussing something that they don't want nobody to hear. No phone conversation, no none of that. But this is the thing I want to say. I remember this plain as day, just like I am sitting here speaking to you. While we were standing there fishing, the girls said, "Daddy, look at them two niggers down there fishing." Them girls couldn't have been no more than 7 or 8 years old. I asked Victor or whoever I was fishing with, "Man, you heard that shit?" He said, "Yeah I heard it." And he just looked at 'em. And of course, the daddy told them, "Shhh, be quiet." So that tells me that right now, some of the White folks are still raising their children up to call us *niggers*. That was right after your mom passed, like '97. When I was in elementary school and you called me a *nigger*, I got in your grill. [*He laughed.*]

*Jonathon's aggressive reaction to racism was indicative of his longing for fair treatment.*

Whites sit and look at this TV just like we sit and look at it. When they sit and look at these guys on these videos, they thinking that's how we really live. But like I said, that's entertainment for them. You know what I'm saying? That's their job. When they get finish with what they doing, they go home and make that money. That's why we shouldn't let that have an effect on us, but they probably saying, "That's all them Black folks think about, this, that, and other, robbing folks." That's probably why they treat us the way they treat us. My son is an example right now. They picked on my son so much, they wouldn't even let him back in school. They didn't even want him at school, 'cause

he basically had the same attitude that I got, that I had when I was in school. [*Jonathon's son was placed in alternative school and eventually expelled from that facility as well.*]

And he wasn't going to even allow it. He's in there right now, and he will tell you. He wasn't going to allow it. He said, "Naw man, ya'll ain't gonna handle me like this here."

I actually went up there to the school one day. They suspended my son for a pair of tennis shoes. The reason why they suspended him for the shoes, is because they were a pair of *Reeboks*. And the *Reeboks* had a red stripe on 'em. And they said, "He can't wear them shoes because that was a gang color." Man, that pissed me off so bad, I went up there and said, "If that the case, this counselor right here got on a red shirt and you think a gang member is going to give a fuck about him because he is a counselor? They don't care who it is. If you got they colors on and you not suppose to have them on, they gonna do away with it off. So if you gonna suspend my son about a pair of shoes with one little thin red stripe on that you can barely see..." They suspended him about a belt buckle, shoes. How many times did they suspend you at that school? "I ain't been to school but for a week the whole time I was up there." [*His son replied.*] He was at Rose Hill, Marshall.

Shit, I like to went to jail when I went to Rose Hill. [*Rose Hill is an alternative school for the Muscogee County District.*] I cussed them out. And they went and got the police, and I said, "What he suppose to do?" The police wasn't but this big. [*He demonstrated.*] I said, "What he suppose to do? I'll take that police and break his damn neck." Because it was starting to piss me off. They were picking on my son, and I got tired of it. My frame of mind had went into a violent mode, which I knew it wasn't going to do me no good. I'm just sick and tired of it. That's why I say something needs to be done about this. Whoever, stand up. Maybe I need to start it off, but I don't know about

how to go about starting it. That's the reason why I was kind of asking you. [*He feels that I need to be the one to speak out against the injustices Blacks have to endure in Columbus.*] I tell you what, whoever starts it off, I guarantee I will be there, right beside them supporting them the best way I can. Just like Martin Luther King was standing up at those places outside, preaching or whatever, had his little members standing beside him. I'll be right there besides whoever. If it's you or somebody, I'll be right there with my suit on and my thing written out to add my two cents in. Because it just got to stop, man. It's got to stop, especially with this Columbus police department and these schools. It's got to stop. During the school months in this city, especially in this neighborhood, the majority of these kids don't even go to school. Because the children are sick and tired of putting up with the teachers. [*I recall reading an article in the local newspaper concerning the number of elementary school kids in our area that have been expelled.*] And you got teachers, who are having sex with these young students, female students, and I know one. He's a coach at one of the schools 'round here. He's having sex with these young girls at this school. I had a friend to tell me that he walked in and caught him. He walked in and caught him! You know the shop areas, like the industrial arts or woodwork shop, he caught him right there in that area. And I know who he is talking about. I know exactly who he is talking about. My son know him. [*He turns to his son to verify this, and his son laughs in agreement because he attended that school at the time.*]

Of course, this is a racist town, you know that. You know that for yourself. This is a racist town. Like I was telling you the other day, if you can, get up out of here. I have a brother through my dad that you haven't met. He is a police officer in this city, and he says he is about sick of it. He did work for the sheriff department. He left the sheriff

department because a couple of White sheriff deputies jumped on a Black inmate in the Muscogee County jail, he told me. And they wanted my brother to fill out a statement where it would make them look good but the inmate look bad. He told them he wasn't going to do that and he resigned. He then went to the Columbus police department. He did tell me that because I asked him why did he quit and he told me. It's just a job, and he's not out to set nobody up. He's not riding around messing with folks and picking at 'em. He said, "Brother, if I lock you up, it's because you already put yourself in jail."

If you got money, you can buy your way out of a case in Columbus. I got caught with possession of fire arms by convicted felon back in '94. I bought my way out of it. Possession of firearms by convicted felon carries a mandatory 1 to 5 years. That means you got to go to jail. No if, ands, butts about it. I came out with a 1-year probation, 1-year supervised, and a \$250 fine. I'm gonna tell you like this. Me and a couple of other guys were up on Lake Oliver fishing one night. It was about two in the morning. And you know what surrounds Lake Oliver, Green Island Hills. You know who stay in Green Island Hills [*rich people, mostly Whites*]. A small, one engine airplane comes in real low, swoops down behind this tree line, and swoops right back up. Now it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out. Watch *Miami Vice*, the old *Miami Vice*. When the plane leaves after it swoops down behind this tree line, it swoops back up. A boat came out from around the corner going up river. Okay now, you already know what kinds of people stay in Green Island Hills. So what you think that was? And I witnessed it, me and two other guys. 'Cause when I saw it, I said, "Man, ya'll seen that bull shit right there? Ya'll know what that is. If ya'll don't know what that is, ya'll ain't got no kind of sense." I know for a fact that had to be a drop. That had to be a drop. What was that plane doing

so low to the water at that time of the night? It's a lot of crookedness in Columbus, Georgia. I will tell this here too. It's some car dealerships around here that do it. I will tell you something else too. There was this college party up in Green Island Hills. Now, they knew about this party. The Metro Narcotics Task Force knew about this party. But you know who went to this party? It was no White officers. It was a Black officer. It was one of the high ranking Black officers of this city at the time. He was next to the high, high ranking officer of this city, which was a White guy. This high, high ranking officer did not go up there. But the high ranking Black officer went up there. The next time I saw him, you know what he was doing? Patrolling the Riverwalk. He got in trouble for going up there messing with them White folks at this party. And I could tell you who it was, but I won't call names. Me being a street person, I know what's going on in these streets. I could tell you a whole lot more.

I have four children with another one on the way. I am married, and she is 19. I am teaching her how to be a woman. She knows that no boy her age can do for her what I have done for her. You saw that big flat screen TV in there? She bought that for me. My 18-year-old boy is staying with us, because he was about to be on the streets with no place to stay. I told her about his situation and she said that he could stay with us. If he was going to be on the streets, then I was going to be on the streets. I couldn't see me living in a house and my own child is on the streets. You know my daddy wasn't in my life. He'd buy me things and come around like during the holidays. I always had nice stuff, but buying your kid nice stuff and not spending time with him don't mean nothing. You gotta spend time with him. And I mean quality time with him.

*Jonathon said a lot of things that I did not bother to corroborate simply because a lot of this information was beyond the scope of this study. It does help me understand his*

*mentality towards social and race issues. My Absentee Father I was active here. Jonathon's statements concerning his dad were indicative of his longing for fatherly guidance. His dad supported him financially and materially, but not relationally. He recognized the limitations of his father's influence on his life as well as the consequences as such.*

### Darrell the Underdog

*My name is Darrell Seldon, and I am the researcher and doctoral student for this dissertation. I am including my own narrative in this research project. As an adult, I have been interested in topics concerning African American males since I started teaching at a Title I school in 1991. As an educator, I noticed the educational challenges among young Black males: numerous suspensions and retentions, high representation in special education classes, and low performance on standardized tests and in core subject areas. African American males who were reared in poverty and in low income areas suffered the greatest impact. These issues are dear to me because I was one of them, having been raised in poverty in some of the worst areas of Columbus, GA. As an educator, I struggle to find real solutions to these problems that plague African Americans, males in particular.*

*As a doctoral student at VSU, I pondered for months, trying to make a decision on a dissertation topic. I originally was determined to extend my previous research topic of boys in alternative school settings into a dissertation research project, but I knew deep in my heart that I would not be fulfilled with such a topic. Whatever I was going to do, I had to be a part of it and it had to be a part of me. After much soul searching, I found my focus. Why not research the lives of Black males I grew up with in the projects of Columbus, GA. I always wanted to know how it fared with many of my old friends and associates who were raised in poverty and had to endure racism and other issues, while struggling to make the best of what life had to offer them. I would be killing two birds with one stone: completing my dissertation and renewing old friendships in the process.*

*As a way of insuring validity throughout the entire phase of data collection, I decided not to craft my own narrative but have someone interview me instead. I chose to have my wife conduct the interview. She has experience with qualitative interviews to some degree. She completed a research project [Hairstyles in the Workplace] for an Anthropology class in which she utilized qualitative methods to gather data. My wife interviewed me on November 24, 2007 at our kitchen table. Before she interviewed me, I had her to read the transcripts of my interview with Johnny, along with the interview guide. I also discussed with her in great detail the purpose of the interview as well as this dissertation as a whole.*

I was born December 29, 1967, in Columbus, Georgia. I am 41 years old. I was raised with three older brothers. A 4th older brother was raised by another set of parents. I was raised by my mother only. I did not have a father active in my life. I do have a few pictures of him, but that's it. From what my mother told me, he hung around for several

months after I was born, then he left. According to her account, he told her that he would kill her if she reported him. I guess he was referring to her attempt to get him to pay child support. What I do remember about him is that he was in the military. One of the pictures I have of him is a military photo. My mother told me that she knew he was married at the time she was pregnant with me. In fact, he even showed me off to his wife. My mother told me that his wife could not have kids. Maybe that's why I came on the scene. But what's the point in having a child if you're not going to help raise him or even see him from time to time? My household was like any other Black family. There were fights with my brothers and fights between my brothers as well. Sibling rivalry was common at times in my family. However, being the youngest, my mother did at times show favoritism. If she brought a treat home from work, I would always be the first in line to get it. This would eventually breed jealousy in various ways between me and two of my brothers. My mother babied me, and she would treat me that way for much of my upbringing.

*It seemed as if my mother saw destiny in my eyes. It was as if she knew I would do something special one day in life. Her preferential treatment seemingly lasted for years. I often questioned my mother of the whereabouts of my father. I believe that every abandoned child wants to know the truth, and my mother never held any information from any of us. I questioned her about a lot of things because I wanted to know.*

Very early in life I do recall my mother having a job at Fort Benning, GA. She worked in the cafeteria. We were very unstable as a family, moving from place to place. But looking back, I believe those were probably the best times financially for us. But at one point, my mother no longer worked a regular job. She had an accident on her job at Fort Benning where she fell down some stairs. She evidently was injured, because she never worked again. From that point on, we were raised on government assistance. With

four hungry boys, that government check and food stamps only went so far. I remember my excitement at the beginning of each month. I knew I'd get to go to the grocery store for the monthly shopping. We'd come back with seven to eight boxes of cereal and they'd be gone within one week literally. She'd seemingly do the best she could in spending the stamps on food items that would last the whole month, like a box of whole chickens. I remember eating so many different meals with chicken as the main course: chicken salad, fried chicken, baked chicken, and chicken and rice mixed together. The hardest times for us were at the last week of each month. Most of the food would be gone. I do recall one of my aunts helping out from time to time with food donations.

*It was during these times that the grim realities of poverty began to settle in. With the lack of finances to buy the basic necessities such as school clothes and supplies, peer rejection and ridicule increased and the value of education for my brothers decreased. It was during these times that my Poverty I was probably developing in me.*

I attended numerous elementary schools in Columbus. This instability was due primarily to my family's poverty and level of income. My mother struggled to feed and clothe four hungry, growing boys. Sometimes she did not have enough money to pay the rent. Sometimes we were evicted, while other times my mother found cheaper places to stay. By the time I was in the fourth grade, I had attended eight different elementary schools: Cusseta Road, Muscogee, Dawson, Tillanhurst, Winterfield, Eastway, Morningside, and Blanchard. I attended at least two of these schools due to desegregation and busing. For example, I do recall attending two different schools while living in the same area. In fact, I was bused to two predominantly White schools while living in the same low-income area. My first elementary school was Cusseta Road Elementary. I think I attended this school from kindergarten to the first grade. I don't recall much about this school. I know it was a predominantly Black school. At that time, my family had lived in



two low-income areas near the school. Considering the neighborhoods that provided the children for the school, it would have been considered a Title I school. As far as I can recall, I don't remember any racial issues involving teachers or students at this school. The only teachers I recall were White. So it seems like the faculty was integrated. The year was probably 1972 or 1973. I do remember my mother helping me get ready for school on a particular day, and she could not find the hair pick to comb my hair. I remember distinctly how she used a fork to pick out my hair. I also remember the low income apartments we were staying in at the time I was attending this school. This apartment was so infested with rats that I remember seeing one jump across my face as I was about to walk up the stairs. I was too young to understand the ramifications of poverty at that time. I don't believe it affected me or bothered me at all at this stage of my life.

*I know that this instability of moving from school to school affected my performance in school. Being the new kid at a school was never comfortable for me. I was shy and had a hard time making new friends. There is always that pressure for the new kid to make friends.*

We eventually moved into a rental house in a decent neighborhood. My mother was still working a steady job on the military base. I was in the 1st grade at Dawson Elementary. Considering the types of homes surrounding this school, it was more than likely not Title I, if that term existed then. I don't recall having any Black teachers or male teachers at all. Nor do I recall any racial incidents or anything peculiar about this school. What I do recall is my two older brothers coming home with a lot of candy from time to time. They were stealing it from a local store nearby. My second oldest brother was chased home one time by the store owner and a cop. I cannot recall what came out of this incident.

*It was here that my Sibling Rivalry I developed the most. I remember my mother coming home at this residence with gigantic cookies and other goodies. Most of the time she would only have one item, but she always gave it to me. Mark and especially Victor would be upset. Other things she did in my favor made them just as mad. My two oldest brothers, Patrick and Mark, were getting out of hand at this time, and my mother needed help keeping them under control. I remember my uncle beating both of them with a long leather belt on several occasions. I later talked with Patrick in a follow-up interview concerning these incidents. He said that he and Mark were out of control and our mother asked Jake, her brother, to whip them when necessary. With four growing boys and no dependable fathers around, my mother needed all the help she could get, and she was wise enough to recognize it. None of us in my home ever had to serve any jail time for criminal activity. I believe those whippings were effective.*

We eventually moved to a low-income project area called Baker Village. I attended Muscogee Elementary during my second-grade year. This school would have been considered a Title I school, considering the surrounding areas. My mother and one of my aunts were living together in an apartment. This was a crowded situation because my mother alone had four boys. My aunt had three children at the time. The apartment only had one bathroom and several rooms upstairs. I do recall the fear of going to school for some reason. I was not a very social person, and being around crowds of people did at times bother me. I was shy and that made it worse since I was the new kid, but eventually I got accustomed to the routine. Again, I do not recall any incidents of racism during this time frame. I remember one of my teachers. She was Black.

*Again, it was the constant moving from school to school that was the primary catalyst for the fear I had of attending this school and a few others. I do not recall any other incidents that would have led to this fear. My oldest brother, Patrick, commented in his interview about how our family's instability affected him in school. This instability resulting in my social fears could have contributed to the development of my Low Self-Esteem I.*

We eventually moved to another rental house in a decent neighborhood. I do not think my mother still had her steady job at this time. I attended Eastway Elementary during part of my third-grade year. I do not recall anything about this school at all.

However, I do recall the neighborhood in detail. This was a predominantly White neighborhood, and as time went by, several White families made it clear that we were not welcomed there. Everything seemed to be fine from my point of view. Victor [*one of my brothers*] and I played constantly with a White friend who lived right next door to us. Sometimes he'd play in our yard. Sometimes we'd play in his yard. However, one night while my family was relaxing in the living room area, a rock came through the living room window. We had no idea who did it, but my mother and older brothers were sure it was a White person who did it. I remember us coming out in our front yard. My mother was yelling and cussing out loud, but she did know who to direct her words to in particular. Then it happened again on another night. A rock came flying through the living room window. Again, we were in our front yard yelling and cussing at no one in particular. I don't remember all the details, but I do remember eventually there was a major confrontation in our front yard with my family and some White kids and maybe a few young adults. This was all a culmination of the rock incidents. I remember my mother talking to a policeman during the latest incident. I heard him tell her that the best thing for us to do was to move. This was the first time I really began to internalize race issues. I couldn't understand why Blacks and Whites couldn't get along. Neither did I understand why the White kid next door no longer played with us.

*This is where I began to look at Whites in a negative manner and probably where my Racism I developed. At this point, I probably assumed all Whites hated Blacks. I could not understand why the kid next door no longer came over. It would have been nice if someone pulled me to the side and explained what was going on. I could have processed these events in a healthier manner. Yet, I was pretty much left to myself to make sense of these events, which took several years later to fully comprehend.*

We eventually moved to Elizabeth Canty apartments, a low income project neighborhood. I stayed in apartment 805-C for 7 years, the longest we'd ever stayed in

one spot. At this time, my mother no longer worked a steady job. We received government assistance until I was 18 years old. I attended Morningside Elementary in the 3rd grade, as a result of busing and desegregation. [*J. D. Davis was in walking distance, but I was never sent to that school.*] It was a predominantly White school. I do not recall much of anything at this school. I do know that some of the kids in my neighborhood were also sent there. At the beginning of my fourth-grade year, I was bused to Blanchard Elementary. Again, this was a predominantly White school. I could immediately tell the difference between the Blacks and Whites. We seemingly did not have much, but those White kids seemed to have everything. They dressed nicer and had dads, something that I know most of us did not have. I became a class clown for some reason. I never got into major trouble most of the time. I just spent a lot of time making the White kids laugh. It got to a point where that was expected of me. My teachers didn't seem to take me seriously either. I seemed to be just another kid in the class.

*It was at this stage in my life that issues with self-esteem and poverty really came into play. It was during my attendance at Blanchard Elementary and my residence in Elizabeth Canty that my Poverty I, Low Self-Esteem I, Absentee Father I, and Christmas I were beginning to develop. Blanchard Elementary was where I began to compare and contrast the two races in a more reflective manner. Seeing all the nice things the White kids had really made me think less of myself. For the first time, I began to notice the role dads played in a child's life. Some of the fathers of the White students were actively involved in their children's education. I was accustomed to seeing mothers at school, but seeing dads at school was different. I often would question my mother during this time period about the whereabouts of my dad. Seeing active dads at this new school made me wonder about my dad from time to time. In my mind I figured that life for me would be better if a dad was present. I perceived dads as having money. Such inquiry about my missing father was supportive of my desire for fatherly support. I also began to notice how the teachers responded to the White students versus the Black students. I remember a White female English teacher I had my first time in the fourth grade. I was now in another English teacher's class, and we were at lunch. I was sitting with a bunch of White students at a table. This particular teacher stopped and spoke to every single student except for me. I waited and waited for her to recognize me, but she did not. I was a little upset. I know I acted out in her class from time to time but so did some of the White students she spoke to. She was one of the teachers who never took me seriously.*

There were several incidents that I do remember my first year in the fourth grade. I, along with several of my friends, had an altercation with a group of White boys during recess. There was supposed to be a major fight. Evidently we must have had words with each other prior to the fight, but I do not recall the details. However, on this particular day, my friends and the White boys exchanged words during recess. I almost got into a fight with one of them. They called us *niggers* and we called them *crackers*. There was another incident when I, along with my particular friends, colored our papers black. We wrote a message on the back of them which stated, "We're Black, not White." We ended up getting a paddling for that. The head principal was attempting to get one of the Black male teachers [*Mr. Lambers*] to paddle us, but she didn't want to disturb him while he was teaching. I was glad she did not get him. I heard he paddled very hard. She eventually paddled us. But I recall her looking at me saying, "And I thought you were a nice boy." That bothered me for a while. I felt like I let her down, although I never really knew her, and I was shocked she even noticed me in the crowd. I remember distinctly having a conversation with my friends about how the White kids were treated versus the Black kids. I remember us saying that the teachers were scared to discipline the White kids because they were afraid of their dads. That year I missed a lot of days from school. I had stomach aches often, and when I didn't want to go to school, I didn't go. Whenever I told my mother I had a stomach ache, she allowed me to stay home. I do recall faking it on some days. I think I missed 29 days that year. My grades were Ds and Fs, but I don't recall being chastised by my mother at all because of my grades. I remember getting my report card in the mail during the summer that followed. It said that I was being retained. A tear came to my eye. I do recall the school telling my mother that if she provided

doctor's excuses for the days I missed, I would be promoted, but she never followed through.

*These incidents marked my first physical confrontation involving race issues. I believe that my response to racism was indicative of my desire for fair treatment. I hated how the Whites in that racist neighborhood treated my family. I hated how that group of White boys at this school treated the project kids. The principal's comment showed that I really was not a bad kid. My frail disposition was evident in how I responded to her words as well as the school's decision to retain me. My view of Whites was becoming more and more negative. It was also during this time that the movie "Roots" was shown on television. I did not understand the real meaning of the movie, but I knew that I was experiencing some of that hatred at my elementary school.*

I felt a little embarrassed that I had to repeat the fourth grade, but this caused me to reflect a little on my behavior the previous year. I seemingly settled in with the new group, but I can recall incidents of me still clowning around. However, on one particular day, a student who remembered me from the previous year was running an errand for her teacher. She walked past me and I said, "Hello!" She looked at me and said, "You flunked!" She then proceeded to walk away. That incident would probably have not bothered the typical Black male, but it shook me up mentally and emotionally. It really made me reflect on my behavior and more importantly, the opposite race. I recall shortly after that incident, looking around and saying to myself, "These people think I'm dumb." Inwardly, I already felt intimidated being around rich Whites while I lived in the ghetto. They may not have been rich, but in my eyes they were. I'm pretty sure the racial incidents in my former neighborhood two years ago had affected how I viewed Whites. Either way, I did not want to be labeled as dumb, especially by Whites. I honestly believe that this incident marked a major turning point in my education. I began to focus a little more on my school work, and I attended school more that year. This was all intrinsic

motivation. As a result, my grades went from Ds to Cs to Bs and then As. By the time I made it to the seventh grade, I was making straight As.

*I cannot understand fully my response to this girl's comment. I believe my response was racially motivated. I would not have responded that way to the same degree if it was just another Black student janking on me. I was accustomed and already damaged by some of their jokes. I believe that this was the first time a White student ever said something that deeply offended me. She responded to me like I was stupid, and such a statement coming from a White student at that time was not easy to accept. I could have responded in various ways, but I chose to do the wisest thing at that time: Prove her wrong. My decision to straighten up academically was totally intrinsic from that point on, although that female student ignited the flame that would last throughout graduation.*

I don't recall much from my fifth- and sixth-grade years, other than the fact that I was more focused and doing better in school. I was more attentive in the Black teachers' classes probably because they seemed to be meaner than the White teachers. Also, two of them were Black males. I had a somewhat special attachment to them because they were different. Most of my elementary school teachers were female. Also, not having a dad made the two Black male teachers special to me as well. I did not have a close relationship with them at all, but they seemed to be good disciplinarians in their classrooms. One of them in particular, Mr. Lambers, was used by the principal to paddle students. I was afraid of him. I never acted up in his class or the other Black male teacher's class, Mr. Simmons. I only did that in the White female teachers' classrooms. I recalled having a Black female teacher, and she was mean. I never acted up in her class, because I was scared of her as well. Looking back, I appreciate having to repeat a grade and receiving that sarcastic remark from the White girl. It forced me to deal with myself at an early age. Also, having strong Black teachers helped me as well in elementary school.

*Mr. Lambers and Mr. Simmons were my first two Black male teachers. They were daddy figures to me. I did not like how they treated the Black students in contrast to the White*

*students. Their meanness as tough disciplinarians, however, in addition to the Black female teacher, helped me to control my behavior, resulting in better grades and achievement. I did continue, to some degree, to act out in the White female teachers' classrooms. One other participant, Jeremy, said he preferred the candidness of his Black teachers versus the niceness of the White female teachers. I believe this is cultural preference. Parenting practices differ by race: Black parents tend to be more straightforward and tough with discipline than White parent, and Black students expect their teachers to be the same way (Delpit, 1995). The classroom management practices of my Black teachers reminded me of the sternness of my mother, and the mothers of Jeremy and Johnny had similar qualities as well.*

It was during my elementary years at Blanchard that I really came to internalize the reality of my poverty. I was embarrassed for anyone outside of the projects to know where I lived. I was intimidated to be around rich White kids and became more conscious of how I dressed. I felt embarrassed with what I had to wear to school at times. I remember one of my friends from the projects [Jonathon] ridiculing me for the shoes I wore to school. A habit of Black children is to ridicule and make fun of each other. Sometimes it is only perceived as fun and play, but other times it can do serious damage to someone's self-esteem and self-image. Those times were tough for me. Christmas time was the worse time of the year for me. I can recall several Christmas days in which I did not receive anything. I would look out my window and see all the other kids in the projects playing with their toys, bikes, skateboards, etc. It was depressing and embarrassing. On some occasions I would even lie when asked what I received for Christmas. To hear what the White kids at Blanchard received on Christmas made me feel even worse.

*The reality of poverty was settling completely in my mind. The ribbing and janking made it worse for me. My self-esteem was low, but I managed to stay focused in the midst of it. My appearance may have been less than desirable, but my grades were looking better and better. I honestly don't know how I managed to stay on target academically. My mother had no input in this decision at all. The thought of White people thinking I was dumb cut deeply within my soul and forced me to do better.*



Concerning race issues, I witnessed a major incident involving my oldest brother while living in Elizabeth Canty. There apparently was a murder of a White woman that took place in Columbus around 1976. The police were looking for a Black male suspect and raided our apartment looking for my oldest brother. They received a tip from someone stating that my oldest brother fit the description. They held him for several days. According to my brother, they attempted to get him to repeat the message the murderer left on the victim's answering machine. He believed they were going to record what he said and use it against him in court as the person on the voice recorder. He was eventually released. I was too young to comprehend what had happened, but I most definitely remember the devastating effect it had on my mother.

*This was my first time seeing a large number of policemen raid a home. It was scary, chaotic, and unsuspected. My attention was focused on my mother's reaction to it all. She immediately broke down emotionally after she closed the door behind the policemen. In my mind at the time I did consider this a consequence of being poor.*

I attended Marshall Junior High my seventh- and eighth-grade years. It was for sure predominantly Black and what we consider now as a Title I school. This was a neighborhood school which educated children from two low-income project areas: Elizabeth Canty and Farley Homes. As I mentioned earlier, I was making straight As in the seventh grade, but I was still somewhat intimidated, probably because I had to go to another school. I also still had issues with being poor and *looking* poor. I knew the children from Elizabeth Canty, but there were a lot of students I didn't know. I also was feeling the pressure of being in the seventh grade: fitting in, dressing with the style, and looking cool. Black children are often concerned with how they dress and how others perceive them, especially Black boys. I was no different. I remember an embarrassing incident in which my class was preparing Christmas baskets for needy families and were

delivering them to the homes. My home ended up being one of those homes. I remember when I found out that they would be delivering the baskets in the Elizabeth Canty area. I was hoping I was not on the list, but I was. No one laughed at me outwardly, but I was really embarrassed.

*Poverty embarrassment was deeply rooted in my being. I obviously was scarred by the incidents at Blanchard. Although I was at a predominantly Black school, I was still very sensitive to how others perceived me. However, I remained focused academically and was now making straight As.*

In the eighth grade I managed to get a job with the school that entailed assisting the custodians after school for 2 to 3 hours each day. I used the money to buy the clothes I always wanted. Wearing nice clothes, having my hair fixed, and looking good were big things to me and many young Black boys from the projects at the time. I felt like somebody. My eighth-grade year was also the year girls really began to notice me. I had my first official girlfriend that year and also my first sexual experience. To be honest, I was in a rush to accomplish this due to all the peer pressure around me. Everybody else was doing it, so I joined in. I was tired of being the brunt of most of the virgin jokes from several of my friends, including Jonathon. My oldest brother Patrick did talk with me and Victor about sex. I guess he figured since there was no dad to talk to us, he'd be next in line for the task. I listened to him, but I didn't show it outwardly. My brother and I basically giggled and laughed it off. My oldest brother was also the one who attempted to physically discipline me when I talked back to my mother. I was her baby, so she even intervened when my oldest brother felt the need to beat me down. Due to my interest in the girls and knowing they were interested in me, my grades slipped from all As to As and Bs. The faculty at Marshall was integrated. There were several Black male teachers there, and they did stand out to me at the time, although I did not have a close

relationship with them. My teachers loved me, because I was well mannered and did not misbehave.

*Getting the part-time job demonstrated further my ability to set goals and work to achieve them. I recognized early, that if I was going to change my world around me, I would have to do it. I improved my grades tremendously as well as my outward appearance. I believe the radical changes academically and physically that I enacted upon myself were indicative of my longing for personal success and a better life. I was embarrassed with the fact that I was a virgin at that time, and I set out to change that as well. Bragging about sexual experiences was a big deal among my peers. Patrick was again taking the role of father figure in the home. My mother never talked with us about sex. Patrick's voice was no match for the peer pressure, and him talking to me only once about sex was not effective. I needed somebody in my life at least to the same degree as my peers. They were a driving force in my life. I hated negative attention. I was determined to do good in school, look good outwardly, and look good in the eyes of my peers. The effects of what that girl at Blanchard said to me were still active in my life: I was doing good academically as well as behaviorally.*

Kids growing up in the projects can be exposed to things that children in better homes may not ever see. There were violent fights in Elizabeth Canty at times. I recalled seeing a woman who was hit in the head with something hard, because her entire head and face were bloody completely. You'd think she would have prevented this from happening again, but it did. I saw this woman in this predicament twice. I saw this image in my sleep. She was so scary. There was this drunk guy who slit his wrist. It was a very animated scene when the paramedics attempted to get this man under control. I remember a murder that took place in this wooded area where we played often. I remember us going to see where the bloody body was hidden. Of course, the body was already removed by the police, but the pool of blood remained. Fights in Elizabeth Canty were normal and drew a lot of attention. I recall some of my friends or associates getting into trouble for stealing and other youthful crimes; however, I am thankful that I never followed those pathways. The guys that I constantly played with never got into trouble with the law at that time. Also, I remember the fear my mother had during the time of the Atlanta child

murders. I was too young to understand everything that was happening, but I knew that somebody somewhere was killing children. My mother was worried, which bred fear in me. The stocking strangler murders of Columbus happened several years prior to the Atlanta child murders. I do remember my mother making the comment that if such murders started happening in Columbus [*similar to what was happening in Atlanta*], she was not going to let us go to school.

After 7 years in Elizabeth Canty, we moved again, to an apartment across town. This was not a low income area, although some tenants like us were living there. I attended Spencer High for the first 3 years of high school. It was during this time frame that I had to decide whether I was going to stay in school or drop out. All of my older brothers had dropped out of school by this time. I was the only one still attending school. In fact, no one in my house at that time ever made it past the 11th-grade, including my mother. I remember coming home with my ninth-grade schedule. My brother Victor commented, "What are you doing taking Algebra? Boy, that's for smart folks. You ain't gonna be able to do that!" Although I had been doing pretty good in school, I partly believed him. By the end of the first grading period, it seemed he was right: I had a D in Algebra. My grades were fine in the other classes. The second grading period was even worse. I was suspended 5 days for fighting. A student grabbed one of the candy bars I was selling for a fund raiser and began eating it right in class. What made it worse in my eyes was that he was White. I had to prove myself to others watching, especially since several Black boys were pressuring me to do something about it. So I grabbed the boy around the neck, and he fell over on the floor while still sitting in his desk. I believe there

aren't that many Black males who would have responded differently to that kind of pressure.

The suspension hurt my grades. But the incident made me feel bigger. Things turned around for me in the math class for the second semester. For some reason, my schedule was changed and I ended up getting another Algebra teacher. My math grades went from Ds to As and Bs. The next year I took Geometry and did fine. My junior year I took Algebra II and loved it. I ended up majoring in math at Alabama State University. This experience taught me something. Sometimes it is the teacher and not the student. Had I remained with the first Algebra teacher, I would not have been a math teacher myself. One other incident stood out during my freshman year. There were few boys who sought to befriend me at school. I began hanging around with them whenever I could at school. On one particular Friday night, they called and asked if I wanted to go the football game with them. After much begging, my mother allowed me to. She kept saying no; looking back, I guess she had a bad feeling about me going. However, she gave in to my constant nagging. While at the game, a popular student stepped into the vehicle with me and the other three boys. We were already smoking cigarettes in the car. I had never put a cigarette to my mouth until that night. I succumbed to the peer pressure and did not want to look like a punk. I am surprised I did not start coughing because I had no idea what I was doing. The boy who entered the vehicle had marijuana on him and immediately began passing a *joint* around. At that moment I had to decide what I was going to do. As the joint went from hand to hand my heart beat faster. When it got to me I said, "Naw man, not tonight!" After they finally dropped me off back home, I decided I would never hang with them again.

*I believe that Friday night at the football game was my moment of temptation. Had I given in, I probably would not be writing this commentary now. Patrick commented in his narrative how you can make one decision and your life is going in that direction. That is so true. My life could have been easily altered in the wrong way like several of the participants of this study. Why was I tempted? I believe it was because I put myself out there. Had I not gone with those guys in the first place, I would never have been under the pressure to make a decision like that. That is precisely the point with several of the participants of this study. They put themselves in situations that catered to such temptations. For example, by the time Johnny was tempted to try crack, he was already conditioned and was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Victor's comment about me taking Algebra was an insult. He was basically saying no one in our home was smart enough to take such a course. I wanted to prove him wrong. I wonder how I would have responded if a Black kid took my candy. That White kid's actions reignited the incidents of my past, and had I done nothing, the Black male instigators would have taunted me for the rest of my high school years. In my mind, I had to take action. The fear of having to drop out of school began to develop in me during my ninth-grade year. I tend to wonder does this same fear grip the hearts of other Black males in similar situations. Black males in public school environments have to deal with more pressure than other ethnic groups.*

As I progressed through each grade level in high school, there was a fear growing inside. No one in my house ever made it past the 11th grade. I just knew there was going to be something to cause me to drop out of school like all the others in my family. I do not know if my mother was convinced prior to high school that I would make it so far educationally or not, but she made it known that she wanted one of us to graduate from high school. After my last brother Victor dropped out, she realized that I could possibly be that one. I was the only one left. She'd encourage me here and there and somehow make me feel that she was rooting for me. I appreciated it and began to realize that I was on my way to breaking the losing record in my family. I saw my brothers work those dead end jobs and struggle. I decided I wanted something different. By the time I made it to the 11th grade, I was scared. I was expecting something to happen to make me drop out. But I made it through with decent grades. During this time I was also emulating my two oldest brothers who were trying to make it in the music industry. They had very good voices and could sing very well. In fact, I entered my first talent show when I was in the

eighth grade with several other guys and won first place for best male group. My oldest brother Patrick frequently competed in major city-wide talent shows and won every time seemingly. My second oldest brother Mark was doing similar things. So I followed in their paths. We were all emulating various Rhythm and Blues singers. Rap music was not as influential then as it is now.

*The fear was mounting, and I was expecting something to happen to force me to drop out. My mother's actions at this time reminded me of my younger years when she gave me the most attention and made me feel extra special. It was as if she saw this scene years ago in the making. I did look up to my two older brothers and emulated them to a certain degree. They were always singing and competing, especially Patrick. Mark was a little timid but very talented. I at one point also dreamed of making it big in the music business. However, I had enough sense not to put all of my eggs in one basket. My ability to focus and set goals was indicative of my longing for personal success and a better life. I believe that it was during the latter part of my high school years that my Resilient I had developed. My refocusing at Blanchard as well as remaining focused throughout junior high played into the development of my Resilient I in high school.*

I mentioned earlier that I had another brother, Ron, who was raised by someone else. According to my mother, she was persuaded by my grandmother to give him to a couple who was close to the family and who could not have biological children. Both of them were well educated: One was a college professor and the other was a school teacher. What's interesting is that this brother graduated and obtained a B.S. degree as well. I remember him commenting that he wished he would have grown up with us. My response was strong: I wish I could have been in his shoes.

*I believe that the parents are the standard setters in the home. I would have been surprised if Ron dropped out of school under such conditions. I tend to believe that Ron's outcome would have been different had he remained with his biological brothers. The standard for education in my home was low. That is why dropping out of school was acceptable. If I wanted to drop out, my mother would have been concerned but would have allowed me to do it.*

I attended Baker High my senior year. I chose to move to this school out of intimidation with not having much and feeling that the students at Spencer High were

conceited. I guess my issues with poverty earlier in life really had a grip on me. I felt I was not accepted at Spencer High because I didn't have as much as some of the other students. This high school [*Spencer*] was about half White and half Black, with about equal numbers of students from middle income homes. Thus, I transferred to Baker High and mixed right in. Baker would have been considered a Title I school for sure. Many students who attended school there were from low income backgrounds. I felt right at home. I did well in school, but I was very careful about what I did. This was my last year, and I was not about to blow it. My first experience with alcohol didn't happen until close to the end of my senior year. I could see the finish line but had sense enough to know that it was not over as yet. There were a lot of things that could have distracted me over the last several years: girls, bad associations, and discouragement. I am glad I never got into any trouble with the law. I had made up my mind that I was going to graduate. From time to time, I would think about what the student said to me at Blanchard Elementary. Even more, I would consider the outcomes of everybody else in my family. I can't describe that feeling when I finally graduated from high school. I felt like I really had accomplished something. My diploma meant that I had a different mindset and could accomplish even more. I did just that. I went on to pursue post secondary education and majored in math and education. I became a math teacher, teaching Algebra and Geometry, subjects I was told were only for smart people.

*The fear of failing now was at its highest level for me. I planned my activities carefully and stayed focus: something I learned to do early in life. Was my journey of fear common for Black boys determined to graduate? None of the other graduating participants in this study mentioned being fearful as they progressed towards graduation. That does not infer that it does not happen. Receiving my diploma was like winning a gold medal for my country, but in this case it was for my family. I was the underdog!*



## Chapter V

### CASE ANALYSIS

The narratives presented individually represent the life stories of Black men who endured trials of racism, struggled with low self-esteem and lost sense of identity, and pressed their way through the harsh realities of poverty and absentee fathers. They managed to resiliently overcome the odds to enter into manhood to be examples for others to follow. Each life had its own unique message for all to read, examine, and appreciate. My examination and categorical analysis of the stories that were told to me resulted in 42 categories of topics covered (See Appendix F). Further analysis led to the compartmentalizing of categories from participants' experiences into five important areas of their lives: Inner Life, Social Life, Academic Life, Family Life, and Future Life. Each area of life had an impact on each participant's life—that connection embedded in the literature is what follows in the within-case analysis. The cross-case analysis addresses four themes that emerged across all narratives and the relation of those themes to existing literature.

#### Individual Traits (Within-Case Analysis)

##### *Analysis of Johnny*

*Inner Life.* I decided to call Johnny *The Optimist* simply because he described himself as a positive-minded person with high self-esteem. The ghetto life in the projects as well as the race experiences in society never affected his self-esteem or self-concept,

nor did they taint his view of Whites. From elementary to high school, Johnny befriended Whites and Blacks, socialized after school with numerous White friends on the high school level, and had several White girlfriends. How was Johnny able to maintain such a positive self-perception and outlook on life in spite of his living conditions and race issues in his school environments? I believe the answer is two-fold: his personality and his mother's influence. Johnny had the innate qualities that enabled him not only to survive in unpleasant environments, but also to thrive under harsh conditions of poverty and racism: "But Darrell, I was an excited, happy kid growing up in elementary school. I had high self-esteem. I loved myself. I loved what I was doing." Based on what I remember of Johnny growing up in the projects, I never recalled seeing him upset about his living conditions or the racial encounters at Blanchard Elementary. In fact, because of his outgoing personality and willingness to befriend Whites, he may have been spared verbal assaults at the predominantly White schools. During the initial interview and a follow-up interview, I asked him several times if he was ever racially targeted or had any confrontations with racism. He said that he could not recall anything, but was aware of it around him. In fact, he preferred being at the White schools:

I was too young to understand everything that was happening back then, but why do all Blacks have to go to one school while all Whites went to another? I didn't like that. That is why I was so happy when I went to Blanchard, because I finally get to be around other people other than Blacks. I just thought that I could be around other people. I'm just as good as they are. I always wanted to be around other people. I didn't just want to be around just Black people all the time.

I also believe that much of the credit should go to his mother. It was primarily she who instilled in Johnny the idea that the best schools were the White schools:

My mom and [older] sisters use to say how good Blanchard is and all the other White schools in comparison to J. D. Davis. The quality of the education, the physical buildings, you name it. They didn't want me going there anyway.

Because of the condition of J. D. Davis and the academics, they wanted me in a better school academically and physically.

I believe Johnny's mother, and to a lesser extent his older sisters, played a vital role in shaping his views of Whites. His mother stressed education in the home and was very influential in his early school life.

The results of this study revealed that 4 of the 8 participants had issues with low self-esteem when bused to predominantly White schools, especially the predominantly White elementary schools. The data also showed that these 4 participants as children were more susceptible to feeling intimidated at the White schools due to poverty and race than at the predominantly Black schools. I believe Johnny, as an exception, was able to adapt so well to the racist climate at both majority-White schools because of his high level of self-esteem, self-confidence, and positive attitude. Based on the narrative, I conclude that Johnny's high self-esteem was due to his mother's positive influence as well as his own personality traits. Johnny's academic achievements and positive relationships with White students and teachers were evidence of successful adaptation to such environments.

*Social Life.* Johnny was well-rounded socially, interacting positively with Whites and Blacks. Based on my recollection as well as the narrative, he had a friendly and inviting personality that attracted everyone. As a friend, I remember Johnny as a friendly outgoing person at Blanchard and Marshall. He was the only participant in this study who befriended so many Whites on all levels of schooling. It was on the high school level that Johnny's interactions with Whites became more personal: "We [he and his cousin] use to go over their houses after school, get high, have parties, women. You name it. These White guys. It was the norm for me, so it doesn't matter with me." Johnny's accounts

showed that racism was not a barrier for him, academically or socially. He recognized the racism around him but did not let it affect him:

That's where I met a lot of my White friends. I use to get high with White boys. I messed with White girls there. I met a lot of White friends there. I felt accepted among them. I'm pretty sure racism was there. But I didn't pay any attention to it, if that's makes any kind of sense. I'm pretty sure it was. But I really didn't pay any attention to it. It really didn't bother me, because I didn't see it at the time. Don't see it now. Don't bother me now.

Johnny's social skills and outgoing personality took him down the wrong road as he drifted off course onto a path of alcohol, drugs, and sex. He offered no straight answer for why he drifted off course; in his view, he just allowed himself to be distracted. I remember when he was hanging out with my older brother Mark. I was a freshman in college, around 1987. When he visited our home, he sometimes looked as if he was drunk or high. Johnny fathered four boys out of wedlock as a result of his wild, social binge. Currently Johnny is in the process of starting a multi-racial church. I asked him if his positive experiences with Whites influenced his decision to start such a ministry. He said that his past experiences did influence his decision, although God was the most influential. Overall, I believe that his good social skills and well-rounded personality were direct reflections of how he viewed himself. He was not intimidated by the Whites at Blanchard or Hardaway, nor was he embarrassed by his economic background and neighborhood environment. Johnny was always on the offensive, purposefully building relationships with Whites. His healthy self-concept was obvious in this statement: "I just thought that I could be around other people. I'm just as good as they are."

*Academic Life.* The narrative demonstrated that Johnny was well inclined academically. He performed well at all levels until he entered the 10th grade. His good performance in elementary and junior high school was due to two factors: self-motivation

and motherly influence. According to Johnny, he loved school and enjoyed the academic challenges. He made excellent grades at the elementary and junior high levels. Even though his grades plummeted in high school, he acknowledged that he could have done much better. His narrative showed that Johnny's mother played a major role in his academic achievement in elementary and junior high school. She set a standard of academic achievement in her home and made sure he did his best:

My mom helped me stay focused. She would beat me. [*He laughed.*] Let me put it this way. My mother was as involved as she could be, considering she was a single parent with seven kids. She didn't play. We had to do well in school, or we got a whipping. We couldn't bring home any Ds or Fs, or it would be a whipping.

In Johnny's younger years, his desire was to please his mother, but as Johnny got older, his mother's influence began to fade. Peers became his biggest influence, and his grades suffered through most of his high school years.

Most of his favorite teachers on all levels were White. What he remembers the most was their encouraging words and genuine concern:

Most of my White faculty, they just reached out to me. They encouraged me. I can recall a White male English teacher. He played a vital part in my life. He told me not to be a dancer, but I could be somebody. I told him I wanted to be a dancer, and he told me no. I could make something of myself. And so he really inspired me to be the best I can be in life. He really didn't want me to be a dancer, because he saw the work I did in his class. He saw the potential in me, to be the best I could be in life, rather than just settling for something that would not utilize all of my talents. I can remember this White female teacher. She was very so much so instrumental in me graduating from Hardaway, because she called my mom and showed that she cared. She was White. But she sat me down and told me I was going the wrong way. So, White teachers really impacted my life a whole lot, from elementary to high school. They really played a great role in my life. I'll never forget that. I remember a White male teacher in high school who would stop me in the hallway and ask how I was doing and give me words of encouragement. I had advanced classes all the way through. I told you I was a smart little boy, but I just did my bad dirt. They saw that in me. They saw the potential in me. And they reached out at me. And they tried to pull it out of me, and they did a good job. And uh, I respect them for that.

I believe that Johnny's outgoing personality, friendliness towards Whites, and positive attitude towards school in general may have played a role in his relationships with his White teachers. None of the other 7 participants mentioned having relationships with White teachers as productive or meaningful as his. The only Black teachers Johnny mentioned were the two Black male teachers at Blanchard Elementary, who stood out to Johnny because his dad was inactive in his life. The teachers he criticized the most were at his predominantly Black schools. He felt that those teachers, both Black and White, were not delivering challenging instruction: "The academic rigor at J. D. Davis and Marshall was a joke. That's all I can say. And I'm being honest. It's a shame because mostly Blacks are in those schools."

*Family Life.* Johnny was the youngest of seven children, three boys and four girls. He was raised by a single mother with no input from his father. His mother dropped out in elementary school. The oldest son and daughter dropped out of school to help with the bills. Based on Johnny's account, he had a strong relationship with his mother and wanted to please her. He was the youngest, which may have also influenced this relationship. I believe that due to the absence of a strong male figure in the home, his mother had to be more aggressive than normal:

She was a great disciplinarian when it came to school. I knew better [than] to bring home anything less than a C in that house. Because like I said, I was the youngest of seven and got multiple dads. We were very poor. And mom, she use to rule that household with an iron fist. And she meant that.

It was the strong bond and respect for his mother that kept him focused in school.

Johnny's bond with his mother was later challenged when he lost focus on his education. He wanted a relationship with his dad. He often asked his mother questions about his dad, and later in life sought to establish a relationship with him. According to Johnny, he also

sought a close relationship with his older brother. Johnny looked up to him and viewed him as a role model. Based on the evidence, I believe Johnny was seeking to fill the void of his absent father by attempting to establish a close relationship with his older brother.

*Future Life.* Johnny exhibited good potential for academic success beyond public education. He was very intelligent, focused, and apt to make excellent grades. He managed to maintain very good grades throughout elementary and junior high. In high school he was taking advanced classes, although he was distracted and performing way below his normal standard. Based on what Johnny told me, I believe he would have pursued post-secondary education immediately after graduation had he not drifted off course. He enlisted in the Armed Services, which I believe never would have happened had he stayed on track. His pursuit of academic excellence was evident in the academic degrees he obtained after refocusing his life. Johnny said that he is currently applying all of his business and biblical knowledge from his college degrees to establish a multi-racial church.

#### *Analysis of Jeremy*

*Inner Life.* Based on the narrative, I believe Jeremy struggled somewhat with low self-esteem and poor self-concept during elementary and junior high. He said that he felt ashamed of what he had to wear to school at Blanchard Elementary. This school was a culture shock to him, as he noted how much more well-off the White students were in comparison to him and others from the projects. He was intimidated by the Blanchard environment, which made him feel less sure of himself. This was evident in his comments about his departure from this elementary school:

Marshall was kind of fun. I played sports, football, basketball, track. I was around more Blacks and felt more comfortable. I think I learned a little bit more at

Marshall than at Blanchard, because I felt more at ease. I felt more accepted because of Black people being mostly there.

I concluded from these statements that Jeremy was not comfortable at Blanchard. The Marshall environment was one that he could relate to easily, since it was a majority-Black environment. I believe that his uneasiness at Blanchard was more likely due to poverty and racism. If Jeremy had come from a middle-class family, I believe that self-esteem would not have been a major issue for him at this school, although race would still have been an issue. Between poverty and race, poverty affected Jeremy's self-confidence more at Blanchard.

Jeremy's self-esteem and self-confidence were also affected somewhat by his speech impediment. He stuttered often when he talked, and his peers seized every opportunity to *jive* and *jank* on him. This unwelcomed attention made him frustrated to the point of nearly getting into a fight at Marshall:

I almost got into a fight because of my speech. At Marshall, I took a speech class to help me with my stutter. You may have forgotten, but I use to stutter a lot. A lot of times kids would pick on me because of that. Kids are cruel. And here you are trying your best to talk to them. And I wasn't hearing that anymore.

I do recall Jeremy's stuttering. He talked very fast at times, repeating several words in a sentence as he conversed with others. This impediment was recognized and addressed by educators at Marshall, but no evidence showed that he was receiving help at his other schools.

I believe that basketball gave Jeremy a major boost in esteem and confidence. He became a star athlete at Hardaway High as a freshman on the varsity team. There is no indication that Jeremy struggled with low self-esteem at this level. He was confident and popular, and received special treatment at times by his teachers: "I felt that I was getting



a little preferential treatment as an athlete.” I believe that if Jeremy did not have the athletic skills, he more than likely would have continued to struggle with issues of self-esteem at Hardaway High. This high school was very similar to Blanchard in demographics as well as racist attitudes. The only difference was that Jeremy played basketball, and with such skills came new social experiences.

Based on the narrative, Jeremy demonstrated resilience in avoiding the trouble of the streets and purposefully noting certain boys to avoid: “There were some boys I didn’t hang with because I saw what they were doing. I saw them robbing, fighting all the time, going to jail.” I remember numerous boys in the projects that often fought and got into trouble with the law, and Jeremy was referring to some of the same people. He could have easily drifted off track and been pulled into this group of defiant, violent boys, but he demonstrated courage and the ability to stay focused under peer pressure. I remember the pressure on me to stay away from these boys, who would call boys like me and Jeremy *Punks* and *Mommas’ Boys* because we avoided them and played close to home. I am pretty sure Jeremy had to deal with this also because most of these boys stayed in the area where he lived.

*Social Life.* Based on the evidence from the narrative and my personal knowledge of Jeremy, he was an outgoing, energetic person. I do not recall playing often with him in Elizabeth Cauty, probably because he lived in the front area by Randy, while I lived in the back area. Most of the time, I played only with others who lived near my apartment, such as Johnny, Jonathon, and Orlando. My memories of Jeremy at both schools, Blanchard and Marshall, are limited. We were friends, but not that close. His speech impediment stood out in my mind the most. According to the narrative, Jeremy interacted

mostly with other Blacks. He never mentioned having any White friends, even at the high school level when he was popular. This could have been the direct result of his negative experiences with race. He recalled racist incidents at every majority-White school he attended. Both fights he mentioned were with White boys, and he was the only one suspended both times. He even felt that the administration and teachers at Blanchard treated White students differently from Black students: "I think it was a tendency for the Blacks to get punished more than the Whites." Black males can be easily stereotyped as aggressive and violent, which in turn can breed distrust and resentment toward school officials (Gibbs, 1988a; Noguera, 2001a). Jeremy was stereotyped in these two incidents, and such racism may have added to his intentional aggression during recess. Jeremy took an active role in the racial conflicts at Blanchard:

Another incident I remember real well was when one of the Black male teachers Mr. Lambers had us out there playing tag football. And for some reason, the Black boys were on one side and the White boys were on the other side. And I don't know who did it first. But it quickly became tackle football.

The Blacks versus the Whites was a common competitive setup. Research has shown that Blacks tend to stick together under such pressure: "An example is the tendency of Black Americans to emphasize group loyalty in situations involving conflict or competition with Whites" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 185). This oppositional identity (Fordham & Ogbu) caused many Black students to band together for a common cause. Jeremy recalled racist incidents at Hardaway High as well. I believe that Jeremy's race experiences played a major role in his social life, as his tendency was to socialize with other Blacks. He did not feel comfortable at the White schools at all. He was relieved to leave Blanchard and attend a majority-Black junior high school, but his apprehensions of

interacting with Whites surfaced again when he was bused to Hardaway High: “White kids again.”

*Academic Life.* Jeremy’s grades were average, with occasional Ds and Fs. He admitted that he could have done better, but at least he kept his grades up. He repeated the third grade and had to attend summer school for English on the high school level. Jeremy said that he preferred the candidness of his Black teachers to the indirect politeness of his White teachers:

For example, the White teachers were all niceness, all smiles. But the Black teachers were more like, “Look, this is what you need to do to get through life.” The niceness was alright, but I preferred, “This is what you need!”

I believe he related more to the Black teachers’ teaching style because that was how his mother dealt with him at home. She was straightforward with him, and Jeremy wanted his teachers to be the same way. Jeremy felt that his Black teachers at Blanchard were doing more for Black students than the White teachers. I believe that Jeremy’s experiences at Blanchard had a negative effect on his academic performance. He was intimidated there by the racism, embarrassed by his poverty, and disconnected from his White teachers. In my opinion as an educator, such an environment would not have been conducive to learning for Jeremy. He felt that his grades were better at Marshall because he could relax more in a majority Black atmosphere, but his grades got slightly worse on the high school level. He struggled with English and was distracted by the fame of basketball stardom. He said that his teachers did attempt to extend a helping hand:

As for my teachers, every now and then when my grades started to slip, they would pull me aside and tell me, “Joe look, you need to pull your grades up. When you have extra time, come see me and we’ll work on this.”

As Jeremy got closer to graduation, he did attempt to pay closer attention to his grades, as it was his goal to graduate from high school.

*Family Life.* Jeremy was the oldest of four boys. His parents divorced early in his life, around the second grade. Contact with his biological father was limited to the phone only and was short-lived. During most of his school life, he was raised by a single mother who graduated from high school. The evidence from the narrative showed a strong relationship between Jeremy and his mother. It was his mother who kept him focused academically and socially: “Not disappointing my mother was at the heart of this drive to stay focused.” Jeremy constantly considered his mother’s opinions and feelings throughout his schooling. His mother, not his peers, was the strongest influence in his life. He recognized his mother’s dilemma as a single parent, and appreciated her hard work. It was this mature recognition of his family’s plight that made him want to please his mother. He recognized his mother’s limitations as the head of the home and had much respect for her. Jeremy’s respect for his mother is common among some Black boys reared in single parent homes:

Because racism and social oppression often prevent African American males from being able to provide for their families, many lower-income black families are father-absent. Young males are often brought closer to the needs and feelings of their mothers because of their fathers’ absence and inability to provide for the family. Because the youth is constantly exposed to the problems and sacrifices of his mother’s attempt to raise a family without a co-provider, he may become unexpectedly sensitive, protective, and empathetic toward his mother and other women. He may take on more responsibilities and mature faster when compared to other adolescent groups. (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 95)

Jeremy said that he thought differently from most kids his age when he was younger. He considered himself the man of the house but under his mother’s authority. I believe his mature perception of his mother’s role made it easy for him to accept his place in the

home: “I was sort of the man of the house under her. She ran the show, but I was like the man of the house.” I believe that this was a clear depiction of resilience in that Jeremy could have easily ignored his mother and turned out differently.

His mother was concerned about his academics. Although she did not stress this point on a daily basis, her candidness and straightforward communication with Jeremy kept him focused enough to keep his grades above the failure mark most of the time. There was no indication that his mother responded negatively to his occasional bad grades. She instead used common sense and straightforward talk to get his attention: “She would say, ‘You’re the oldest and I’ve got the other three to deal with.’ So I understood what that meant. Basically, I had to act right and not go out there and get into trouble.” Jeremy was so accustomed to this type of communication that he appreciated the teachers who used this style. It was his Black teachers, male and female, at Blanchard who reminded him of his mother’s straightforward, in-your-face talk. In addition to the two Black male teachers at Blanchard, there was a particular Black female teacher at Blanchard who was mean and straightforward as well, and Jeremy indirectly referred to her in his interview.

*Future Life.* Jeremy was a talented basketball player, and that is why I referred to him as *The Promising Athlete*. Jeremy attended a Marshall Junior High basketball tryout with a friend from the projects, but had no intention of trying out. When the coach recognized his height, he encouraged him to try out. I believe that Jeremy’s self-confidence and esteem improved tremendously from that point on. He began to envision playing sports beyond high school. His goal was to play in the NBA. He made the varsity team as a freshman at Hardaway, which boosted his self-esteem substantially. Jeremy

was distracted temporarily from his academics by the fame, and his performance in the classroom reflected that. Upon entering his junior year, he refocused somewhat and began to seriously consider graduation and post-graduation decisions. Jeremy's goal-setting abilities were evident in his quest for an athletic scholarship to further his plans of reaching his goal. He was playing well on the courts, and expected a talent scout to come his way. He managed to play temporarily on the college level, but health concerns brought his athletic career to an end. Jeremy is currently married with two children and works for a construction company.

#### *Analysis of Orlando*

*Inner Life.* Based on my interpretation of the narrative, Orlando struggled with low self-esteem for three reasons: poverty, *ribbing*, and underachievement. He said that he did not like attending school when he had to wear ragged clothes because he was embarrassed by his appearance: "I only liked going to school when I had decent clothes. But when I had to wear the same clothes, I didn't really care for going. It was embarrassing to wear dirty clothes, feet coming out your shoes." Orlando commented that he almost cried when his mother bought him some cheap sneakers to wear. He was targeted for *ribbing* and *jiving* often due to his daily appearance. The ridiculing by his peers occurred mostly on the elementary level. There was no evidence that it occurred in junior high or high school. He participated in the *jiving* and *ribbing* as well, although he was targeted often by his peers. Orlando struggled academically throughout his school years, which I believe affected his self-esteem as well. He struggled early in his academic life and felt bad when certain teachers failed to help him: "I still don't understand why she didn't make the effort to help us. She saw the grades we're making like everybody

else. But she kept on with her lesson.” He was very sensitive to the candidness of certain teachers and was easily offended by their straightforwardness. For example, he said that he preferred the nicer teachers to the meaner teachers at all of his elementary schools. Most of his nice teachers mentioned in the interview were White. Orlando was particularly critical of one of the Black male teachers at Blanchard:

He was kinda hard on Black kids. He was into being physical with you. I just thought he could have got his point across by sitting us down talking to us. You know, I would hear him say to a kid, “Nappy Head.” “Boy you need to comb your hair. You need to put on some better clothes. Put on deodorant! Wear some clean pants!” I thought that was more hurtful than anything.

Overall, I believe that Orlando struggled with low self-esteem and had a negative self-concept throughout elementary school; he was very sensitive to criticism, and easily offended. Basketball gave him confidence, and that is why his self-esteem improved in junior high and high school.

*Social Life.* Orlando was an outgoing, friendly person. We played together often as kids. He was very athletic, and his love for outdoor activities enhanced his social skills. At Blanchard, I remember him as being friendly and fun to be around. He commented that he socialized mostly with Black students at both predominantly-White schools. He did this, he said, because he did not feel connected to Whites:

It was rough going from an all Black to an all White school. It was really hard, ‘cause you kind of shied away from everybody, ‘cause you talked differently, walked differently. You kind of kept to yourself, ‘cause you didn’t feel connected with them. I hated that time, I really did. The only friends I had were the kids who rode the bus with me, not White friends.

Orlando felt he was in a strange world as he was bused to both predominantly-White schools. He encountered a culture shock: the Whites talked and dressed differently, and I believe this was intimidating to him. He commented that he never knew he was poor until

he was bused to the White schools. He then realized that he talked and acted differently. He was relieved when he left Blanchard and returned to a predominantly-Black environment. When he was finally sent back to an all-Black school, he made these comments: “At Marshall, you felt that you could be yourself. You didn’t have to try to talk proper and try to act a certain way. Just pretty much be yourself, you know.”

Based on these comments, he felt compelled to talk and act in a way he was not comfortable with doing. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) described the burden of *acting White* as the pressure many young Black students face in their efforts to be accepted by White students. Students under such pressure are either ostracized by their Black peers or resist the pressure to fit in (Fordham & Ogbu). Orlando never said that he was ridiculed or scolded by his Black peers for adapting to the atmosphere at Blanchard, but he obviously felt the need for doing so, since he was out-numbered. Although Orlando has had numerous friends throughout each level of schooling, the social barrier between him and White students remained throughout each level. He said that he only had one White male friend at Blanchard, and a couple of White friends at Hardaway. Orlando did not comment on having White friends at Marshall, probably because there were very few White students there. On the high school level, his social skills improved as his basketball talent brought fame and friends, even some White friends. He did have plenty of Black friends and girlfriends. I believe that Orlando’s outgoing personality and self-esteem blossomed as he entertained numerous friends at parties and nightclubs.

*Academic Life.* Orlando struggled academically throughout school on all grade levels from start to finish, which eventually helped to destroy his aspirations. His early academic struggles were not unusual for Black males, although there are many



exceptions: “By all indicators, Black males consistently fall behind other students in early school performance and lead their peers in school infractions and other negative outcomes” (Davis, 2005, p. 134). Orlando had deficiencies early in school, and eventually repeated the third grade. He would never catch up with his peers academically. Research shows that SES plays a vital role in academic performance.

Poor and low-SES children, on average, perform significantly less well than nonpoor and middle-class children on numerous indicators of academic achievement, including achievement test scores, grade retentions, course failures, placement in special education, high school graduation rate, high school dropout rate, and completed years of schooling (McLoyd, 1998, p. 192).

Orlando was at a disadvantage early in his educational experience. He never knew he had academic deficiencies until he was bused to a predominantly White elementary school:

But when you go to a school like Reese Road, now all of a sudden you got to learn your time tables and different math problems. I was way behind. A lot of stuff they were saying I was amazed. I had no idea what they were talking about. It was like being in a different world, you know. I repeated the third grade, because I didn't know anything. They gave me Fs, and I repeated it.

Based on Orlando's narrative, he never established a routine for doing homework. Instead, Orlando immediately went outside to play after school. Education was not stressed in his home at all. His mother never expressed any concern for his academic performance. He admitted that at times he signed his mother's name on his report card: “I was signing my report card at that time. So she didn't know.” Orlando's grades improved at the junior high level, but he doubted whether it was because of his performance, and questioned the quality of education at this predominantly-Black junior high school. He felt that he was given grades in junior high and high school. His worst subject was English. He failed it twice on the high school level, and attended summer school twice.

Orlando's most memorable teachers were White, especially on the elementary level. These teachers stood out to him because they showed more concern for him, whereas some Black teachers, according to his narrative, showed no sympathy for his underachievement or economic condition. He was particularly critical of Mr. Simmons at Blanchard for his demeaning words, but praised Mr. Lambers for his kindness and concern. He felt that some of his teachers on the junior high and high school level were giving him grades because of his athletic abilities. Orlando felt that this did more harm than good, and that these teachers really did not care about him personally. He felt they only did this to keep him eligible to play basketball so that he could continue to win games: "I think they cared that I played sports. If I didn't play sports, I don't think they would have cared. I think they were just into sports." Orlando admitted that it was basketball that kept him in school: "But it was basketball that kept me going all the way through my 12th-grade year. I wanted to play basketball. If I never was on the basketball team, I would have quit. I know I would." High school sports can have a positive impact on academics (Braddock, 2005). In this case, it kept Orlando in school. According to Snyder and Spreitzer (1990), involvement in sports can be a motivation for academics, considering that one must remain eligible to play.

*Family Life.* Orlando was the youngest male of three boys and two girls. He had consistent contact with his dad until his parents divorced while he was in elementary school. Before the divorce, he had a good relationship with his dad. His dad later ceased being active in his life. Both parents were alcoholics and never finished school. Orlando was particularly embarrassed by his father's drinking habits. His two sisters eventually became alcoholics, and one of his older brothers was in and out of jail constantly. After

the divorce, his mother raised the family on governmental assistance. Education was not stressed in the home at all. There was no evidence in the narrative that Orlando had a strong relationship with his mother. This is not to say that no special bond between him and his mother existed, but I base my conclusion solely on what Orlando presented in the interview as well as my personal experiences with him. Orlando did have a special relationship with one of his older brothers, and he looked up to him as a role model. I recall playing basketball often with Orlando and this particular brother. This brother, a talented basketball player as well, helped Orlando to sharpen his basketball skills. This same brother managed to attend Tennessee State for a while and later enlisted in the Army. I believe he was the missing link in Orlando's life. Orlando needed him as he eventually became an alcoholic himself and lost focus on his goal of being a professional ball player.

*Future Life.* Orlando was a dreamer, and from an early age he dreamed of playing in the NBA: "I kind of looked up to the NBA players on TV, like Magic Johnson and Larry Bird." I remember Orlando used to stay current on sports statistics for basketball and football. Sometimes, he would sit in front of two televisions and watch two games simultaneously. He was good at all sports, but basketball was his special gift. In my opinion, he was the projects' best-kept secret, never to be exposed until junior high school. The teachers saw his potential for athletic success, which was probably one reason why they were willing to bend the rules to help his serious academic deficiencies. When he tried out for basketball at Hardaway High, he made the varsity team as a freshman. At the time, I was attending Spencer High and would hear students at my

school talking about Orlando's basketball skills. He was that good, and destined to play on the college level and beyond:

Now people on the street, people I would play basketball with, they saw me, how I could play. "Man, you going on to play college ball?" I use to hear it from everywhere. "Man I know you gonna go play for this school here."

Unfortunately, with no discipline or anyone to mentor him academically and socially, Orlando lost sight of his goals. He admitted that basketball kept him in school, but it did not keep him focused. He is currently married with children and works as a courier for the Muscogee County school system.

#### *Analysis of Patrick*

*Inner Life.* Based on the narrative and my personal experiences, Patrick was a positive, outgoing person with high self-esteem and self-confidence. Patrick made the best of his circumstances and did not let his present conditions get him down. He was always careful about his appearance: he often wore ties, his hair was permed, his clothes were neatly pressed, and his facial hair was carefully groomed. Patrick said that others in the projects may have viewed him as an outsider because of his appearance, but I believe that Patrick's outward appearance reflected his inward disposition. He had a healthy self-concept that shone through his clothes, hairstyles, and even his friends. When I think of Patrick, *cool pose* comes to mind:

Cool pose is a distinctive coping mechanism that serves to counter, at least in part, the dangers that black males encounter on a daily basis. As a performance, cool pose is designed to render the black male visible and to empower him; it eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities. Being cool is an ego booster for black males comparable to the kind white males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs, and bringing home decent wages. Cool pose is constructed from attitudes and actions that become firmly entrenched in the black male's psyche as he adopts a façade to ward off the anxiety of second-class status. It provides a mask that suggests competence, high self-esteem,

control, and inner strength. It also hides self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil. (Major & Billson, 1992, p. 5)

I believe that Patrick's appearance was a coping mechanism for the hurdles he had to endure as an uneducated, fatherless Black male reared in poverty. Looking like a million bucks empowered him and made him believe that he could conquer the world, but his posture also concealed the emotional scars from his false arrest and his struggles to make it in life.

Because he was able to make the best of his living conditions and maintained a positive outlook, Patrick matured faster than the average Black male his age. He assumed the responsibility of the man of our house, and served as a father figure during the racial conflicts in our majority-White neighborhood. Patrick was determined to protect his family as a father would have done:

Throwing rocks through our windows, I was really pissed off. I stayed outside each night for I don't know for how long. But I had me some drink bottles ready to tear somebody head off. I was sitting in the dark behind the house. I was going to protect my family.

I remember Patrick talking to me and Victor about sex. He was concerned about us, and felt he needed to be the one to talk to us since there was no man around to do it. And he was assuming the role of father again when he beat me to the floor on at least two occasions because I had begun to talk back to my mother. These were all clear indications that Patrick was maturing and taking on more responsibilities in the absence of a father in our home.

Patrick demonstrated resilience in his own unique way. He was very resilient socially, in that he avoided the street life in the projects and was determined to live an honest life while staying focused on his goals. He could have succumbed easily to the

unpleasant conditions of poverty and turned to a life of theft and robbery to meet his own personal needs, but his dreams and ambitions kept him off the streets and out of jail. As a teenager, he experimented with various drugs, but managed not to get hooked. He even bounced back from the jail incident, and refused to let it fester into anger and rage even though he felt he had been mistreated.

*Social Life.* Patrick was an ambitious, outgoing person. He admitted that he was very shy in his younger days, but I never could tell. He seemed to face challenges well; for example, even though the auditorium would be packed each year for the city-wide talent show, Patrick performed fearlessly. Patrick also chose his friends wisely. I remember the people who visited Patrick: All of them singers trying to make it in the music business, and none of them were criminals or trouble-makers. Patrick aligned himself with others who shared similar goals in life. There were young men on the street corners of the projects, drinking, gambling, and up to no good, but Patrick kept his distance:

They use to just look at me. I never did hang out and nobody ever tried to jump on me. I'd just walk up to the store, walk on back. They just looked at me like I was an outsider, I guess. But I definitely looked differently than they did. Even at that age, I kept myself looking good. I had a perm in my hair to keep my hair straight. And uh, I wanted to look like a star. I wanted to get out of there [Elizabeth Canty], so I knew what I wanted to do.

Evidence in the narrative suggests that Patrick's constant frequenting of nightclubs and numerous relations with various women in the city may have led to false accusations against him. A White woman on the north side of town was murdered by a Black man, and the police department thought Patrick may have been the murderer. Patrick's false arrest caused him to distrust Columbus so much that he moved to Atlanta: "I wanted to catch whatever skates I could catch, skateboard whatever, and get the heck

up out of Columbus, Georgia. And I'm telling you I had to get away." For Patrick, the problem was not so much the false arrest, because he was released, as the way the police treated him, playing mind games on him when they already knew he was not the right person. After he came home from jail, Patrick told me part of what he told them: "If ya'll kill me, you killing the wrong person." He told me that he cried and became very emotional after saying this, but the officers laughed at him before telling him he could go home. This extra interrogation was not necessary; it is this kind of treatment that causes some Black boys to become so ferociously defiant toward society (Kunfuj, 1986; Norguera, 2001; Ogbu, 1983). Patrick kept his cool and quietly exited the city, heading to Atlanta. There was no evidence in the narrative that Patrick had any White friends. I believe that his bouts with racism left a bitter taste in his mouth. He was angered by the rocks thrown through our windows and was outraged by the way the Columbus Police Department treated him. On the other hand, he could not recall any incidents of racism at school.

*Academic Life.* According to the narrative, Patrick struggled academically throughout each level. He said that he was placed in a *slow* class. It was not a special education class, so I suspect it was either a remedial class or a slower-paced class due to tracking. He admitted that school was just hard for him, and he struggled to comprehend. Patrick repeated the ninth grade, and as he grew older, his attitude toward school and perception of education gradually became more and more negative. Many Black boys can become more and more disengaged as they move to each level of schooling (Osborne, 1999b). Eventually, Patrick began to view school as an obstacle: "School seemed like something that was in my way. It was somewhere I had to go to spend 8 hours a day,

when I could be somewhere doing something else.” I believe that had Patrick received appropriate interventions in time, his perception of education would not have been so off-centered and negative. There was no one in his life to put education in the proper perspective in relation to his present life and future. There was no evidence that his schools were providing the proper help to rescue him, other than the one incident mentioned. Unfortunately, his mother did not know how to help him. And while school was not making sense to him, his jobs were meeting his present needs. Left alone, Patrick developed an awkward perception of education which eventually led him to remove the obstacle that was in his way: school. For some Black boys, it can be very difficult understanding the purpose and value of education, as Richardson and Gerlach (1980) noted:

In short, for Black dropouts the concept of education as a ladder for social mobility simply seems inconsistent with what they perceive to be their chances for success in life. Therefore, they do not view the educational system as a viable alternative, and they make the decision to drop out of school. (p. 492)

Based on the evidence, Patrick was consumed with getting ahead in life and did not have the patience for the things that seemingly were not helping him get ahead. I believe that Patrick would have stayed the course and graduated if school had better fit his plans for success. He wanted to be a music star, and school did not seem important or beneficial to helping him break into the music business. Given these beliefs, dropping out was inevitable.

I believe that my family’s constant moving from place to place may have contributed to Patrick’s low academic performance and subsequent perception of education: “I just remember that somewhere we had to move. I went through a lot. And the moving around had affected me a lot.” Patrick was so shy that he would not even eat



lunch in front of others, despite knowing there was no guarantee that food would be available when he arrived home. It was difficult for him to settle in at new schools, especially when transferring in the middle of the school year. The pressures to make new friends, get accustomed to new school environments, and meet the expectations of new teachers were too much for him to handle at times. Such uneasiness made it difficult to concentrate and learn effectively. I understand Patrick's feelings because I felt the same way. Whenever I settled in a school, we had to move somewhere else.

*Family Life.* The oldest of five boys, Patrick was raised by a single mother, and never had any contact with his father. As a younger brother, I observed a special relationship between Patrick and our mother. As the oldest boy, he assumed the role of man of the house, and this was how he related to his mother. Our mother was still in charge, but Patrick was her primary male assistant. He cared for her by assuming fatherly roles in the absence of a real father. That was why he responded as protector of our home when we were ill-treated in the predominantly-White neighborhood. He assumed the role of father when he counseled me and Victor concerning sex. Patrick was acting in the role of disciplinarian as he physically handled me when I occasionally disrespected our mother. Patrick's behavior in relationship to his mother was not unique, but instead is common for some Black fatherless males:

Because racism and social oppression often prevent African American males from being able to provide for their families, many lower-income black families are father-absent. Young males are often brought closer to the needs and feelings of their mothers because of their fathers' absence and inability to provide for the family. Because the youth is constantly exposed to the problems and sacrifices of his mother's attempt to raise a family without a co-provider, he may become unexpectedly sensitive, protective, and empathetic toward his mother and other women. He may take on more responsibilities and mature faster when compared to other adolescent groups. (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 95)

Education was not stressed in our home at all. Patrick needed interventions academically, but was left to himself to handle his educational affairs to a large extent: “And uh, but some kids, their parents have groomed them from an early age of working with numbers, and we didn’t have that. Our momma was working. If you didn’t get it, you just didn’t get it.”

Along with my brother Mark, for a period of time Patrick ventured onto a path of petty theft, stealing candy from various stores in the neighborhood. They were young teenagers at the time and had grown too big for my mother to handle. My mother’s concept of child-rearing was simple: Beat them now or visit them later in jail. But now, out of desperation, she enlisted one of my uncles to physically discipline Patrick and Mark. I remember my older brothers getting whippings from my uncle on several occasions. During that time, two-liter bottles were made of glass, and I remember my mother throwing bottles at Patrick and Mark as she chased them out the front door for various transgressions. My mother realized early that without proper interventions, she would have been visiting her sons in prison one day. Although she did not have the skills or knowledge to help us educationally, she did her best to deliver the proper correction to keep her older boys out of trouble. I talked with Patrick about our uncle’s interventions during a follow-up interview. He said that what his mother allowed our uncle to do was necessary and effective. He reminded me that neither he nor Mark has ever served time in jail.

*Future Life.* Black boys tend to turn to sports or the music business as viable sources of success and achievement (Hoberman, 1997). Considering the everyday environment for many Black boys raised in the ghetto, the only realistic examples of

success stories that they can identify with are in sports, music, and drugs. It is obvious a Black male can make it big in sports, and Black males see examples of this success all the time. Some of their friends win football and basketball scholarships, and some may go a little further and make it into the pro arena. This is a viable avenue of success for a few. Similarly, the music business has been providing means of upward mobility for Blacks for years. The media confirms this daily. Unfortunately, selling drugs has also been a lucrative market for Black males. For those at-risk Black males who do not have the athletic abilities to compete for scholarships nor the talent to win a contract in the music business, selling drugs can become the most realistic option apart from honest work in the labor market. Fortunately, Patrick was not going to sell drugs. Considering his frequent visits to the clubs, I am sure it was an option, but Patrick remained focused. Even when he quit school, he was still focused on his goal.

Patrick was a dreamer. I called him the *Talented Singer* because people who heard him sing all said that he could *blow* and was gifted in this area. Patrick recognized his gift from an early age:

Also as a child, I discovered that I could sing. And I was writing songs even as a child. Uh, probably ‘round about the first time I discovered I could sing and write songs, might have been about eight or nine when I started composing songs.

From that point on, he began to dream of entertaining thousands of people. He practiced and sharpened his vocal skills as often as possible. Patrick not only dreamed of being a star, but he also dressed like one. He kept himself looking neat as possible. He surrounded himself with other singers and chose his friends wisely. Patrick had a plan, and every major decision he made seemed to be aligned with his plans in some way. He dropped out of school because he felt that school was a hindrance. He worked various

jobs with the belief that they were only temporary means to an end for him, and used the money he earned to buy nice clothes so that he could look like a star on and off stage. Patrick competed in various talent shows, sent demos to various record labels, and stayed current on all the latest musical styles and artists. He managed to make a record with *Excitement*, a group he and one of his friends started. Unfortunately, the record did not do well and the group later disbanded. He has not given up on his dream: "I'm still gonna pursue music." Patrick recently uploaded to *YouTube* a series of videos of himself singing to various tunes in an effort to get exposure. He is married with two children, and is currently employed with an automobile dealership.

#### *Analysis of Randy*

*Inner Life.* Based on the narrative, Randy was a positive-minded, outgoing student. He never seemed to let his circumstances get him down. According to the narrative, he had high self-esteem and a healthy self-concept. I remember Randy as a playful individual with a lot of energy. Randy thought so positively of himself that his exposure to the well-off White students at Blanchard shocked him but did not intimidate him: "I think it kind of affected my self esteem in a positive way." Randy exhibited resilience in several ways. He admitted that he got into trouble at school, including occasional fights with Black and White students. This could have been much worse in that his grades could have been affected more by his behavior, yet he managed to graduate with his behavior minimally affecting his grades. He was resilient socially in that he turned out to be an honest, hard-working member of society. He had the potential for success in the workforce due to his discipline and endurance. Being reared in the

projects and poverty, Randy could have easily turned to drugs or crime, but he vowed early in life not to go in such a direction:

You know, if I tell somebody today that I never smoked a cigarette or done this or that, they would look at me strange, because I made it up in my mind that I was not going to do those things.

Randy was also a very disciplined individual when it came to spending and saving, even at a young age. He exhibited an uncanny ability to set financial goals for the future and then set aside money assiduously to reach them. In the midst of poor conditions and dire needs, he made sacrifices and controlled his spending for the sake of reaching his desired goals:

I would take an old peanut butter or jelly jar about that big, and fill them up with pennies, nickels, and dimes. And once they got too big, I would transfer it to dollars and hid it throughout the house.

Randy was also a disciplined, dependable, hard worker. He always looked for opportunities to earn and save money, even at a young age. He was disciplined enough to be able to work and buy his own school clothes from the seventh grade through graduation.

*Social Life.* Based on the narrative, Randy was a very social, outgoing student. I remember him as being friendly, able to get along with others, and very energetic. Sometimes this energy got him into trouble, as he admitted to being sent to the principal's office for either fighting or misbehaving in class at every school he attended. Randy was suspended from school for various misbehaviors, including fighting and disrupting class. He mingled mostly with other Black students. There is no evidence in the narrative that he had any close White friends. It took him some time to get used to the unfamiliar turf of Blanchard Elementary, having been accustomed to attending the majority-Black J. D.

Davis Elementary School. In his effort to befriend a White male student, he called him a *nigger*, but was quickly corrected:

To another Black person it didn't really mean anything. But I used it one time with one of the other kids, a White kid. I said it to him not meaning any harm with it. But they corrected me and said, "That's not me, I'm not that."

In the Black culture, when used among Blacks, the word *nigger* can be taken as slang for friend or homeboy. A good example: "What's up, my nigga?" A person saying this is basically asking the other person, "How is it going?" Randy considered the White student as part of the clique, but the White student obviously understood the ramifications of *nigger*. He quickly disowned it and corrected Randy. Blanchard was a culture shock to Randy, and he was forced to make adjustments in order to socially survive in this predominantly White environment. He was not used to parents actively participating in their children's education by celebrating birthdays and visiting the school often, students having lunch money and plenty of school supplies, and students being required to do projects. Randy felt relieved when sent to a predominantly Black junior high school. He described it as a family atmosphere: "It was more of a family and not a school, more of a family or distant cousin type thing. You know what I'm saying? It was more natural." The White atmosphere at Blanchard proved to be difficult for Randy to adjust to. He felt out of place at Blanchard, but could relate easily to the students at Marshall. He commented that he could open up and experience things at Marshall. I believe that Randy felt restricted socially at Blanchard. Its environment was perhaps natural and non-constraining for the White students but not for Randy and a few others in this study. The only direct racial encounter he mentioned was at his predominantly White high school,

Hardaway High. He got into a physical altercation with a White male who called him a *nigger*. Both students were suspended.

*Academic Life.* Randy was an average student making mostly Bs and Cs throughout every level of schooling. His grades improved slightly at Marshall, but were about the same at Hardaway. Throughout school, he did only just enough to get by. He had to repeat the second grade. Black males tend to lag behind early in education and may begin to misbehave in the process (Davis, 2005). Randy said that he had been in trouble at every school he attended: “Every school I’ve been to I’ve been to the principal’s office. Fights with Black kids and White kids.” Randy’s “do just enough to get by” mentality may have contributed to his misbehaving at school. He had no plans to go to college. When he graduated, school was over. His plans were strictly military, which was the direct influence of his granddad. The only teachers who really stood out in his mind were the two Black male teachers at Blanchard, Mr. Lambers and Mr. Simmons. He commented that they were role models for him. He noticed a major difference in how the White teachers at Hardaway High treated the White and Black students. According to Randy, the White students were held to greater expectations than the Black students. He described Hardaway as a family atmosphere similar to Marshall but to the advantage of White students: “You know it was like the Marshall thing. It was a neighborhood school, and pretty much everybody who stayed in that neighborhood went to that school. So it was the same way at Hardaway.”

*Family Life.* Randy was the oldest of six children, and the only boy. He was the only participant in this study who had consistent contact with his father and grandfather. While his parents were together, education was somewhat stressed. Both parents showed

concern but were not apt to follow up or help with homework unless asked. His parents divorced when he was in the fourth grade, but his father remains an influential force in his life up to this day. Randy said that the divorce did affect him emotionally, but he managed to get through it. He described his mother as too strict and easily angered at times. The evidence from the narrative showed that Randy had a stronger bond with his father than his mother. He chose to go live with his father after a discipline incident with his mother, and remained with him through graduation. He described his father as stern, but apt to provide and keep him on course:

He just made sure I stayed on track, went to school, and the things I needed were provided. Uh, there were a couple of times I got off the track and he would sit me down and try to talk to me and this and that.

Randy's grandfather, who influenced him to pursue a military career, also played a major role in his life.

*Future Life.* Randy never intended to pursue post-secondary education, and he repeated the second grade. His grades were mostly average throughout his public education, but he demonstrated early in life the potential for success in the workforce. He was a hard worker, dedicated, and able to set realistic goals and see them through to the end. These qualities were evident in his ability to save and to work minimum-wage jobs without transportation. It was his granddad who inspired him to pursue a military career:

My granddaddy was a role model. I always looked up to those two, and they made sure you stayed on track. I have been in the military for 20 years. He was ex-military. He was the reason I went into the military.

Randy commented that the parenting skills learned from his dad and granddad are in force in his home today as he deals with his son. He is currently married with two



children. Randy retired from active duty in the Army, and is now in the Reserves and working a full-time job.

### *Analysis of Victor*

*Inner Life.* Based on the narrative, Victor struggled seriously with self-esteem and self-confidence. I believe this was due to his poverty and in particular the consequences of his poverty: unpleasant appearance, continuous *ribbing* by his peers, and low academic performance as a result of peer rejection. Victor had to attend school wearing whatever was available. Many times his clothes were simply old hand-me-downs. His appearance brought him much unwanted attention: “I didn’t hardly have any clothes. I didn’t have but like two outfits for the whole year. It affected my self-esteem and grades, because kids would pick on you and stuff like that.”

Victor had a reputation for *ribbing* on others, but it was the *jiving* and *ribbing* by others that eventually got the best of him. His grades and academic performance began to be adversely affected by the constant ridicule, which in turn further damaged his self-esteem. He was so preoccupied and distracted by peer rejection that he could not and, in many cases, did not want to focus on academics. School, in Victor’s mind, was connected directly to the embarrassment he experienced on all levels of schooling. At home, his social life was vibrant, but it was a different picture at school. As a younger brother, I never heard him talk about what was happening at school, nor did I witness any of these adverse affects. At one point Victor got so depressed about school that he eventually became temporarily suicidal:

I remember one student told me one time ... he talked about me so bad. This was my last year and stuff. He told me, “If I was you, I’d go ahead and shoot myself and kill myself. Man I’ll end that.” I remember I use to think about that, and it stuck in my head.

His negative experiences and ill feelings toward education and peers got the best of him and led him to give up eventually on education.

Although Victor did not exhibit academic resilience, he did demonstrate resilience in other ways. Victor could have easily gone the way of the streets, venturing off onto a path of rebellion, defiance, and robbery, considering the constant external pressure of embarrassing remarks and ill feelings about his economic conditions. He instead did something about it using what he had: dependability and a hard-worker mentality. Victor had jobs throughout junior high and high school, as he sought to change his family's condition: "I always said that once I get a job, I will make sure that no one will have to go through what I did." I remember Victor as a very hard worker, and my mother used to comment on his work habits as well. He was resilient in refusing a life of crime and deceit and working faithfully and honestly to overcome poverty.

*Social Life.* I called Victor *The Comedian* because he could make anybody laugh. On the outside he seemed happy, content, and undisturbed by our family's poor living conditions. In the neighborhood on an average day, Victor spent most of his time outside playing with me, Jonathon, Johnny, and some others who lived in our area of the projects. He was very outgoing, friendly, shy at times but apt to help others. He and I often laugh about the time when he was bold enough to help an old lady carry her groceries to her house. We all thought this lady was a witch, and I often had nightmares featuring her. In my eyes, Victor was the champ at *playing the dozens* and *janking*. He would have the crowd laughing, although he never seemed to take it so far as to offend someone. I was surprised to learn, as a result of conducting the interview, that he was not the champ at school; even worse, his peers offended him almost on a daily basis at certain schools.

According to his narrative, Victor did not have much of a social life at school, which was where it mattered the most in my opinion. It was the constant peer ridiculing and intense *ribbing* that eventually led to him dropping out. It is the norm for Black boys to *play the dozens* on each other, but it can have a damaging effect, even to the point of making someone drop out of school: “In many ways, then, the dozens is a cruel game. Words are weapons aimed at destruction of another man’s honor and pride” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 97). Victor was the target of vicious ribbing, which relies on amplifying someone’s personal defects, such as appearance and clothes (Majors & Billson). He admitted that if he had money and better clothes, it would have turned out differently for him educationally: “If things would have been different, clothes, having more money, I would have stayed in school. I know I would have.”

I do not ever recall Victor having White friends; nor did he mention any White friends in the interview. His exposure to racism in the classroom was limited and pertained mostly to his teachers. He did recall a string of major racial incidents in a predominantly White neighborhood. It was the first time he realized White hatred towards Blacks: “That was the first time I realized racism and racial stuff.”

*Academic Life.* Victor is the perfect example of a Black male who became more and more disengaged with school as he got older. In fact, he acknowledged that as he got older his grades got worse. What was happening in Victor’s life accords with research: “African American boys are particularly likely to become disidentified with academics as they move through their education” (Osborne, 1999b). His disidentification had much to do with his family’s circumstances and the continuous peer ridicule he experienced almost on a daily basis. Victor was the target of much *jiving* and *janking* at school,

primarily because of his appearance, and because of the ridicule, he could no longer concentrate in school. This eventually led to him no longer caring about school at all. I believe his attitude was negative towards school primarily because it was at school that his peers rejected him and talked about him the most. This happened often with Victor. It is a cultural thing for Black boys to be excessively concerned with their outward appearance (Majors & Billson, 1992). Other people's perceptions of them play a vital role in how they dress (Majors & Billson). Research shows that boys are more fragile emotionally than we have believed (Gurian, 2001). To have to come to school dressed in a way that attracted negative attention was humiliating for Victor, and he endured this for years.

It was at Hardaway High that he had his worst educational experiences. The peer ridicule rose to an all time high, while his grades fell to an all time low. He was failing, and his teachers seemed unconcerned: "They didn't care. As long as I had been at that school, they never asked for no extra class or special ed, or anything like that. Black and White teachers both the same. They didn't care at all." Victor wanted help and did not intend to drop out from the start. According to Victor, he intended to graduate from high school, but he did not know how to get the right help. Victor even felt that some of his teachers conspired in the *jiving* game by sending him to the board or making him stand in front of the class regardless of what he was wearing. As an educator, I think his teachers may have been requiring him to do presentations as they did with other students. Based on the evidence, his teachers witnessed the vicious *jiving* but made no attempt to stop it. In Victor's perception, the teachers took indifference to the point of actively taking part in the ridiculing. His outcome may have been different had his teachers intervened or

perhaps found creative ways to grade Victor's work without making him stand in front of the class. Either way, with such negative perceptions, he was bound to drop out. His mother did not try to talk him out of it; nor was she aware of everything that was going on with Victor's education.

*Family Life.* Victor was the fourth boy of five boys in all. He had limited interaction with his father, having seen him face to face only once. Victor was raised by a single mother who dropped out of school. His family constantly moved from place to place, and he commented that he thought he had attended every elementary school in the city. He told his life story from the standpoint of poverty, recalling numerous situations in which the family was in need. Based on the narrative, Victor did not seem to have a strong bond with his mother. As a brother, however, I witnessed a special bond between him and my mother. It was not like the bond I had with her, but it was still special. She observed Victor's caring heart and sacrificial efforts to help her financially. She often commented on his unselfishness and dependability: "I can depend on Victor. He is always willing to help. God is going to bless him." I believe that Victor was sensitive and sympathetic towards our mother's plight. Every man that fathered one of her boys shirked his responsibilities, and it bothered Victor to the point of action. Victor's actions are common among many Black fatherless males, according to Majors and Billson (1992). I think the best evidence of her special bond with Victor was her leaving Victor in charge of her affairs when she passed. She trusted him that he would see it all through to completion. I was the educated one in the bunch, but she left Victor with such responsibilities.

Education was not stressed in our home at all, so I was not surprised when Victor said that our mother did not try to talk him out of dropping out. My mother did not know how to help us educationally. She cared about every single one of us, and did what she could to provide for us. There is no evidence that our mother showed concern for Victor's poor performance in school. My mother's two older boys dropped out, and she probably expected Victor to do the same.

*Future Life.* I believe that Victor demonstrated potential for success in the workforce early in life. He was not academically inclined, but he was dependable, trustworthy, and a hard worker. This was evident when he found a temporary job as a young teenager cleaning bricks for a nearby construction crew. He held numerous jobs throughout his teenage years, all for the purpose of making life better for the family. I knew he would land a well-paying job one day and work it faithfully. He originally had plans for a military career, as he was an ROTC cadet, but that goal ended after he dropped out of school. Victor did not pursue a GED even though I constantly told him that I would help him. He is now married with two children, and employed with a company that supplies breakfast and lunch items for all the schools in Muscogee County. He works 6 days a week, averaging about 55 to 60 hours a week.

#### *Analysis of Jonathon*

*Inner Life.* Based on the narrative and my personal experiences, Jonathon was an energetic kid with high self-esteem. He was very confident and cocky. He prided himself in being able to *play the dozens* very well and *ribbing* on others to the point of shame. I believe that this somewhat arrogant, aggressive side of him stemmed from the material items he possessed in the projects, including a moped, bikes, and often expensive clothes.

Jonathon was a project kid, but you probably could not tell by his appearance. Such lavishness inflated his ego, and he seized every opportunity to *rib* and *jank* on others less fortunate. It was Jonathon who made me and others like Orlando feel like dirt because of our appearance at Blanchard. We were friends, but friendship always took a backseat to *ribbing*.

I believe that one of Jonathon's problems was his lack of self-control and inability to stay focused. As an educator, I have dealt with numerous students who had similar social characteristics as Jonathon. They were apt to *jive* on others, and very easily distracted. Students who fit in this category had little impulse control and constantly distracted the class. Academic performance was always the area most impaired in such students who failed to control their impulses, and Jonathon was no exception.

*Social Life.* Jonathon was an outgoing, active person, apt to tell jokes and *rib* on others, who could entertain the crowd easily with his charisma. Jonathon was very athletic and played backyard sports often in the neighborhood. I played with him often, along with Johnny and Orlando. He was a fun person to be around most of the time. I only regretted knowing him at school, where his *ribbing* was unbearable at times. His uncanny *jiving* abilities made him so popular that bystanders loved the excitement of verbal battles involving Jonathon. The worse he made an opponent feel, the bigger his ego became. I remember Jonathon and Victor often battling it out verbally at home.

Majors and Billson (1992) commented on this verbal competition:

The accent on verbal performance and competence in the dozens game also has psychosocial implications relating to the development of the adolescent black male's "rep," or reputation. His status, identity, and masculinity ride on his reputation as a cool, competent player. In the concrete anonymity of inner-city streets, he must find ways to dramatize himself. Verbal performances showcased

in the dozens are one way to take center stage. Being able to joke, engage in verbal games, and “talk shit” adds to his reputation. (p. 100)

Jonathon built a reputation of talking trash and tearing down opponents, and he earned respect from his peers for this ability. He had a reputation of *janking*, as we used to call it. In fact, we engaged more often in *ribbing* than *playing the dozens*: “The person being attacked also learns very early how to defend himself through a process called “ribbing.” Ribbing can target what the opponent is wearing and how he walks, talks, or relates to others” (Majors & Billson, p. 96). It was common for a child from the ghetto to be ridiculed for what he or she was wearing. After the smoke was clear, the participants in the verbal contests generally went back to hanging out and having fun. However, I have seen times when some became so upset by what was said that they ended friendships or initiated fights. Jonathon was the brunt of many jokes because of his physical features, but never for what he wore. That was his advantage.

Jonathon’s social skills got him into trouble at school. According to the narrative, he did not have the discipline to control his impulse to *jive*: “I was sent to the office on that day for talking in class. I was a class clown anyway. I *janked* on people a lot. They would just tell me to get out.” He was so accustomed to making fun of others that he failed to control his behavior in the classroom. This misbehaving in school could be traced back to the second grade. He repeated three grades primarily because he was too social and too easily distracted. Majors and Billson (1992) commented on the educational consequences of such behavior in school:

This high verbal skill developed by some black youths is not rewarded in schools that demand silence and stress written rather than oral abilities. For this reason, the same verbal agility that brings black youths status on the streets often gets them into trouble in school. (p. 99)



Jonathon socialized mostly with other Blacks at the elementary-school level. His energy and social personality sometimes got him in verbal and physical conflicts with both Blacks and Whites. He was engaged in numerous racial conflicts at Blanchard, and the physical education field was often his battleground: “It was like five or six different White boys that I had run-ins with. Most of the fights would happen during PE. Fights, fights, fights.” Jonathon was shocked that White kids at such young ages knew how to use the word *nigger*, but research shows that young children do understand and recognize racism and do show preferential treatment based on skin color at young ages (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Jonathon expressed relief when leaving Blanchard to return to a majority-Black environment. He did recount several incidents with White school officials on all three levels. A White female teacher at Blanchard and a White assistant principal at Marshall were both distrustful of Jonathon’s explanations of how he got the expensive jackets. They both thought that he stole them. Both incidents angered Jonathon because they were based on the assumption that he could not be the owner of such expensive items. It is evident that the various racial incidents on all levels of schooling did not taint Jonathon’s view of Whites, because he did have several White friends on the high school level, and he occasionally visited their homes.

*Academic Life.* Jonathon enjoyed going to school because of the social atmosphere, but he disliked classwork and homework. He admitted that he failed at least two grades because of his refusal to do his work, both at home and at school:

I repeated the seventh grade. For the seventh grade...I just failed. That was nobody’s fault but mine. I wasn’t doing nothing. I didn’t wanna do no homework. I didn’t wanna do no classwork. I didn’t wanna do none of that.

Jonathon refused to admit that it was his fault for failing the third time, but the evidence seemed to point mostly in his direction, and not at the teachers. He continued to *jive* and distract others, although he said that he got frustrated with the teachers' refusal to help him. I believe his teachers gave up on him out of frustration. Jonathon repeated a grade and exhibited behavior problems on all three levels of schooling (second, seventh, and ninth). Research shows that such a track record will almost certainly end with dropping out of school (McLoyd, 1998; Osborne, 1999b). Although there are exceptions, as this study demonstrated, grade retentions and behavior problems are typical for many Black males with similar demographics (Carter, 2003; Davis, 2005). Jonathon was no exception.

The narrative showed that Jonathon did not seem to get along with White female teachers, especially at the majority-White schools. He accused the White teachers at Blanchard of showing preferential treatment towards the White students and the White teachers at Hardaway of favoring White students and middle-class Black students. The Black male teachers at Blanchard stood out to him, and seemingly connected to him in ways others could not: "I remember the two Black male teachers, Mr. Simmons and Mr. Lambers. They were more concerned about us than the White teachers, about getting our education." These two teachers were strong disciplinarians in the classroom, and Mr. Lambers was just as effective during recess when he was on duty. Jonathon acted out in their classrooms as well, but was immediately reprimanded: "I got jacked up quite a few times." He was critical of these two men in one area only: unfair disciplinary practices. They had different standards of discipline for the two races, and these differences were obvious to the Black and White students. I tend to wonder how much the unfair

disciplinary practices of these two Black males exacerbated the racial war among the students. These types of teacher behaviors cause Black boys to distrust the system and in some cases to rebel: “The oppositional identity of the minority evolves also because they perceive and experience the treatment by whites as collective and enduring oppression” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 181). There was an oppositional identity among us that kept many of the Black students at Blanchard united during recess. I took part in it, but Jonathon, due to his social characteristics and somewhat aggressive personality, was very active in it. Jonathon was very critical of these two teachers’ unfair practices. I believe that they connected with Jonathon in ways the White female teachers could not, but they also helped create some of the problems they were trying to eradicate.

*Family Life.* Jonathon was the only child in his family, raised by a single mother and grandmother, so he got a double dose of maternal affection. His mother graduated from high school and repeatedly emphasized the importance of an education. Jonathon said that his mother issued disciplinary actions whenever he got in trouble at school or had bad grades on his report card. As Jonathon got older, his mother’s disciplinary influence weakened. He repeated three grades primarily as a result of misbehavior. Jonathon outgrew his mother’s strength and will power: “She was on me while I was in high school but she saw that it wasn’t gonna do me no good.”

Jonathon was one of two participants in this study who had contact with his father. His dad provided for him only financially, never assisting with raising his son. Jonathon only saw his father during holidays like Christmas. He was often envied for the material items his father bought him, but I believe that being accustomed to good clothes and jewelry backfired on him. After quitting school, I believe, he could not handle living

without these amenities and resorted to a fast way of making the money: selling drugs. There were no strings attached to the expensive things his dad provided. In my opinion as a friend and father, I believe Jonathon was spoiled and had no discipline for hard work ethics. His father could have held his son accountable for the bad grades and behavior by using the expensive items as incentives for better academic performance. I believe Jonathon would not have been so quick to ridicule others if he himself had to wear cheap clothing. As a parent, I believe that humility and a more balanced outlook could have had a tremendous effect on his academic outcome. His father owned two popular clothing stores in the downtown area: Looking back, I often wonder what would have happened to Jonathon had his father mentored him for a business career in retail sales. Why not open a third store and put the son in charge of it? I believe that Jonathon would have been an asset to his dad's clothing business. He had the communication and people skills necessary for the trade. This is evident in his personality and *janking* skills. Majors and Billson (1992) commented on the untapped skills of many Black males in the streets:

The street corner hustlers might have become aggressive salesmen, businessmen, or politicians under more favorable conditions. But in the face of restricted opportunities, lack of middle-class black role models, and confronted with the successful models of the hustler and pimp, the young black male is tempted to take the street route to success. Ironically, the street man and the mainstream man both want the same thing. Both want to make it and to be seen by their families and friends as secure and successful—as somebody. But each sees a different road as the logical one to take. (p. 88)

I believe that there are many untapped potential success stories in the drug business. It takes skills similar to running a legitimate business to manage a drug business. Jonathon confirmed this with his words:

So, I started selling drugs myself, which was the worse mistake I ever made in my life. Some of the guys that I knew and knew me I approached them and told them that I wanted to work. And I started from the bottom and went to the top. The

bottom was street level, standing on the corner and stuff like that. I went from standing on a corner to sitting behind a desk. In other words, I was like a boss. I built my reputation up, and the people I was working with had saw that they could trust me ... and I talked with one of my friends. And he gave me a job, an even bigger package. Now, I ain't street level no more. I'm kind of like supplying, you know.

Drug dealing has the structure of any other business opportunity. In fact, there is room for advancement and upward mobility. This is no secret, and it is why I believe that Black males flock to this avenue of opportunity. When all other sources for survival and stability have been blocked or are out of reach, this business is seemingly the next best opportunity (Nelson, 2008). As a friend and parent, I believe that Jonathon's demise could have been avoided. Many Black men struggle with the pressures of being the provider, but do not resort to selling drugs. As this study has demonstrated, not all Black males turn out to be hustlers, and not every Black father has shirked his responsibilities. Jonathon, with his youthful personality and people skills, could have been as successful as his father in the clothing business. He just needed guidance and mentoring from his dad, who knew the business very well.

*Future Life.* It was Jonathon's choice to be called *The Hustler*, but that career was not his original intention. Jonathon was a talented athlete, along with Jeremy and Orlando. For example, these three, along with several other boys, embarrassed the Carver High junior varsity basketball team in a scrimmage game. They were only in the eighth grade at the time. Jonathon's goal in life was to play professional football or basketball. His plan to achieve that goal was to earn a scholarship to play on the college level, and then, he hoped, to get drafted. Jonathon, however, had no discipline academically. He was not academically inclined at all; the worst side of him surfaced in classroom settings. As his narrative revealed, his lack of discipline led to his academic demise and ultimately

the forfeiture of his dreams. Jonathon repeated the ninth grade as a result of discipline and academic problems. When he found out he could not play sports his second time in the ninth grade, he rebelled and wanted to be expelled. According to Kao and Tienda (1998), blocked opportunities can adversely affect attitude and academic performance: “On the other hand, blocked opportunities can lead to educational underperformance if a racial or ethnic group becomes skeptical about the value of educational success as a means to upward mobility” (p. 353). Jonathon’s aspirations were to play sports on the collegiate and professional level. When that was blocked, he refused to cooperate with the school officials. He blamed the teachers for his grade retention the first time in the ninth grade, but he took the blame for failing the ninth grade the second time. When his dreams were shattered, he rebelled. After expulsion, he decided to quit altogether. Jonathon eventually turned to drugs when the menial jobs could not satisfy his desire for material things, and this turn landed him in prison on several occasions. Every participant in this study stood the chance of venturing off onto a road of disaster of some sort, considering the challenges of absentee fatherism, poverty, grade retentions, and race/gender (Garibaldi, 1992; Holland, 1991; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Osborne, 1999b; Skolnick & Currie, 1994). However, most of the participants resisted the temptations of the streets and became productive members of society. Two participants developed serious, life-threatening addictions, but bounced back and recovered quickly. Jonathon was the only participant who chose to sell drugs to make a living. He initially tried to do the right thing.

Of course, I started clubbing, going to the night clubs. And when I seen these guys with these nice things, I was wondering, “Where are these guys working at with all these nice things? I need to try to find out where they working at.” So I was moving around, looking around, trying to figure out where they were working

at. I could never figure it out. Then finally I figured it out. They were selling drugs. I said, “Okay, so that’s where it’s at.”

The key words are *nice things*. Jonathon had been spoiled over the years by his dad buying him nice things with few or no strings attached. As a parent, I believe there should have been more accountability for his behavior and performance at school. Jonathon could not fathom living without the nice things. Unfortunately, some Black males turn to the illegal drug business when there seems to be no other means for upward mobility.

Who are the successful adult males in the inner city environment? For the most part, they are those who have also failed in the educational arena, yet have acquired the “American Dream” through their involvement in the most negative aspects of the inner city milieu. Therefore, it is no surprise that young inner city males want to be like these role models when the home and the school offer no alternative adult males with whom they may identify early in life (Holland, 1991, p. 40).

At the time of his interview, charges were pending against him for possession of drugs. As of today, those charges have been dropped. However, I recently discovered that he is currently serving 18 months in a federal prison for possession of a gun. The gun charge resulted in the raid on his home that he talked about in the narrative. He is currently married and has five children.

#### *Analysis of Darrell*

*Inner Life.* I gave myself the title *The Underdog* because that is how I saw myself in my quest to accomplish something unprecedented in my family: to graduate from high school. From an early age I exhibited resilience and the ability to set goals and achieve them. For example, after the insulting remark from the White girl at Blanchard, I decided then to change my behavior and refocus. I had been a class clown, and my grades reflected it. My grades changed dramatically from Ds and Fs to As and Bs. That experience gave me great confidence in my abilities. The idea of graduating came later as

I entered high school, and with it came the fear of dropping out because everyone else in my family dropped out. I overcame this fear by continuing to stay focused and drawing strength from previous victories of academic achievements. Although I acknowledged my mother for her support, I gave myself most of the credit. My motivation, self-determination, and desire to change were innate: If not, I would have dropped out like everybody else in my family because there were no external stimuli to sustain me. If I really wanted to drop out, my mother would have allowed it.

Several factors shaped my personality, including poverty, racism, and an absent father. At a young age, I recognized my family was poor, and this knowledge profoundly affected my self-esteem. I felt that I was not as good as others, although my abilities proved otherwise. No matter how well I performed in school, this weakness was always present. For example, I felt that the White students at Blanchard were much better than I was at everything simply because they had more of everything I did not have: nice clothes, school supplies, money, and dads. One of the things I envied the most about the White students at Blanchard was the access and availability of a father. I always questioned my mother on the whereabouts of my missing dad. When I was young, I pointed to certain men who looked like me and asked my mother if they were my daddy. Observing active White fathers at my elementary school made me feel even more rejected, and it had a way of reminding me of how poor I was. Without a caring father, I felt like a boy with no identity: I had low self-esteem, little confidence in myself, and a frail disposition.

Racism also played a major role in the development of my personality and mindset. I recognized racism for the first time when my family had the many



confrontations with Whites in a majority-White neighborhood. My views from that point on began to change: In my mind, Whites hated Blacks, and I was Black. I assumed for the most part that all Whites felt that way about Black people. I believe that if my mother, or maybe an older brother, had talked with me about race issues in a balanced way, I would have had a more wholesome view of Whites, but I was largely left to myself to make sense of what was happening in that neighborhood. As a result, racism made me feel even more rejected, but it also bred a little anger and resentment in me towards Whites. By the time I was bused to Blanchard, my subjective *Racism* I was almost fully developed, and I was conditioned to respond negatively to the racist remarks from the White students.

I believe that living without an active father played a major role in the development of who I am today. As an inquisitive child, I knew something was missing in my life besides the better things in life: I did not have a father. Living in poverty and having to go without the basic things normally taken for granted were bad enough. Due to these conditions being coupled with the absence of a caring dad in the house, I was one emotionally unhealthy child. At times I felt disowned, and if it were not for my mother's genuine love and personalized attention to me, I know my life would have turned out differently. This emotional void due to my absent father eventually turned into anger and resentment for being abandoned. Looking back, I was so angry at my dad because I believed that had he been available, more of my needs would have been met, and I would have been spared the turmoil. As a child, I viewed fathers as money machines. I saw how my mother's few boyfriends made a big difference when they helped her financially. Thus, in my mind, having a dad around all the time would have made a world of a difference. I also viewed fathers as the means to a complete home and family life.

Although I could not articulate this as a child, I knew it in my heart every time I observed White fathers visiting Blanchard, or when the White students mentioned anything concerning their dads. As an educator today, I am very sensitive and sympathetic to fatherless children. I know how it affected me, and I have dealt with troubled children who have been emotionally hurt by such desertion.

I consider myself a very resilient person, considering my obstacles of poverty, early retention, an absentee father, and gender/race conflicts. The statistics paint a gloomy picture for some Black males under similar conditions: For some African American males reared fatherless in poverty, the outcome is bleak: grade retentions, underachievement, violence, drugs, and imprisonment [See Chapter I Introduction]. However, not every Black male succumbs to such circumstances. I, for one, decided to make a change for the better, and I made this decision in the fourth grade on my own accord. I had begun on a path of underachievement and misbehavior in school: That is why I was retained in the fourth grade. Although my report card said that I had accumulated too many unexcused absences [I believe 29 in all], the real reason was that my grades were low, and when I felt like staying home, I faked a stomach ache. I was examined by a doctor, who concluded that I may have had an ulcer, but I do recall faking stomach aches numerous times. I recognized early in life that if I wanted a better life, then it would have to take some rearrangement on my part. I concentrated more, did my homework more often, and ceased being the class clown. My grades improved tremendously. I later sought to change my outward appearance by obtaining a part-time after-school job with the custodians at Marshall Junior High. The school had two job openings for low-income students during after-school hours, and somehow I was chosen

for one of them. Some of my friends laughed at me, but I did not care: This job was the solution to my clothing dilemma. Making it through high school was my ultimate act of resilience, considering that no other person in my family managed to accomplish that. It would have been much easier to simply succumb to the social status quo in my home: drop out and get a job. However, I believe it was primarily my previous acts of resilience that bred enough confidence in me to stay the course.

*Social Life.* I had always been a shy boy, and kept to myself often. I believe this timid and frail disposition stemmed from my inward dealings with poverty and absentee fatherism. My perspective of my economic and family conditions caused me to think less of myself and to feel rejected at times. My family's constant moving from neighborhood to neighborhood made me even worse socially. I was forced to make new friends all the time, and I found it to be very stressful when I had to enroll in another school. I was constantly the brunt of much *jiving* and *janking* because of my physical appearance. My family was very poor, and I had to rely on hand-me-downs and wear raggedy clothes for much of my early schooling. This predicament alone caused much damage to my self-esteem, as I brought a lot of attention to myself. As a result, my social skills were lacking, and I did not have the confidence to interact freely with my peers, especially with the White students at Blanchard.

I made friends mostly with the Black students at every school I attended. I do not ever recall having close relationships with any White students. I believe that my experiences with racism affected me socially. The confrontations between my family and the Whites in that majority-White neighborhood help shaped my view of Whites for several years to come. I stood by passively watching as my two older brothers and my

mother responded to the rock throwing and verbal assaults. No one explained to me what was going on, so I assumed all Whites felt that way. My enrollment at Blanchard took my experiences with racism to another level: This time I was a direct target and took an active part in the race battles during recess. I remember being in one fist fight involving racism and several verbal exchanges. I believe that racism at Blanchard not only affected and limited my relationships with the White students but also negatively affected my self-esteem as well. I was already embarrassed by my poverty and economic status. Having to deal with racist remarks at this predominantly White school made me feel even worse at times.

*Academic Life.* In elementary school, my grades went from average to bad and then to good. By the time I was in the fourth grade, my grades had plummeted drastically. I had become a class clown, and my teachers never took me seriously. I was just there. I had missed many days out of school that year, 29 in all. Black boys are likely to miss many days from school (Garibaldi, 1992), and I was no exception. It was the incident with the White girl at Blanchard that ignited the motivation in me. Looking back, my only explanation for why I responded that way to the girl's comment was because she was White. I had both good and bad experiences at Blanchard with Whites, but the bad ones stood out in my mind. I did not like what she said and how she said it, and it was enough for me to prove that I was smart and capable. As a result of this experience, my grades improved to the point where I was making straight As in the seventh grade. I focused so much on my academics that I cannot recall any race incidents involving me directly in the fifth or sixth grade; most of the race-related incidents happened in the fourth grade. My relationships with my teachers at Blanchard improved somewhat as

well. They finally began to take me seriously. I kept my grades up all the way through high school. My grades temporarily plummeted the first semester of my ninth grade year due to a fight I had with a White male and also because I was struggling in Algebra, but I rebounded quickly the second semester. I received several awards in high school, including Page One Nominee for Social Studies. I graduated with the highest GPA of all the Black males in attendance at Baker High. I attribute my academic success to self-motivation and partly my mother's encouragement.

*Family Life.* I am the youngest of five boys. One of my older brothers was given away to a couple close to our family, and the other four boys were raised by my mother alone. All five of us had different fathers: Only two of us had ever seen our dads, and even that contact was minimal. My mother told me that my dad left when I was about 3 months old. He was married at the time my mother was pregnant with me. My mother and I had a very strong bond: I was her baby. She treated me in a special way that exceeded her treatment and relationships with her other boys. That is not to say that neither of them had close bonds with her, but I know her attention to me was special because it bred jealousy at times. I tend to believe that she discerned that I was special, unique, and different from my brothers in some strange way. Besides me, everyone in my house dropped out of school by the 11th grade. I suspect that my mother somehow knew that I would go all the way. I do not ever recall my mother being concerned about my grades, whether good or bad, but as I entered high school, her sideline encouragement seemed to have intensified. I do recall her once or twice telling me that I was doing well in school, but nothing dramatic. I knew within my heart that she wanted me to stay in school and graduate. I appreciated her kindness and special treatment throughout the

years, and graduating from school was a good way to thank her. I am convinced, however, that my mother would have allowed me to drop out if I wanted to, considering she never argued with my brothers when they dropped out. My mother, along with two of my brothers, dropped out in the 10th grade. Victor dropped out in the 11th grade. Mark, my second oldest brother, somehow made it all the way to the 10th grade not knowing how to read or write.

My family was very poor, and many times we had to rely on relatives to help with food. My mother worked on a nearby Army base for years until she fell down some stairs; she never worked again. We were from that point on dependent on governmental assistance for survival. I believe I was in the third grade when my mother began to rely on Welfare and food stamps. My family was very unstable financially and moved from neighborhood to neighborhood, even when my mother was working a full-time job. By the time I was in the fourth grade, I had attended eight elementary schools. This instability affected me emotionally and socially: I had to deal constantly with the pressure of being the new kid and having to make new friends.

*Future Life.* I believe that all children have dreams and aspirations. I was no exception, but throughout elementary school my economic dilemma had my attention: I was too busy worrying about my financial circumstances and appearance to dream and think big. It was not until I entered junior high that I began to dream. At that time, my older brothers, Patrick and Mark, were sharpening their vocal abilities and competing in talent shows, and I began to emulate them. I wanted to be a singer. I won my first talent show in the eighth grade. At times, Patrick gave me tips. Mark and I sang together in a talent show at Richardson's Lounge, a popular local night club. I was too young to be in a

night club, but Mark convinced them to let me in. Although I was dreaming of making it big in the music industry, I remained focused in school and intended to graduate. In high school, my back-up plan to the music industry was the military. I was good at math and half-heartedly wanted to be a math teacher, but I did not think I could make it in college at the time. In fact, I signed up for the Army during my senior year and had been sworn in. However, when the counselor told me that I had the highest average of all the Black boys at my school and that I should try college, I reconsidered my options. A Black male teacher from Marshall Junior High also encouraged me to pursue a college degree, and helped me fill out the application for the Pell Grant. I convinced the Army recruiter to release me from my military obligations since I had obtained an academic scholarship from Alabama State University and my direction in life had changed. I am presently married with four children and am employed in Lee County, Alabama as an assistant principal.

#### Collective Traits (Cross-Case Analysis)

##### *Emergent Themes*

After examining each participant individually, I looked for patterns and themes across all participants. Of the themes that emerged from that analysis, four themes were evident across all cases, while two additional themes, Resilience and *Playing the Dozens*, were evident in all of the cases except Jonathon and Johnny, respectively. The four consistent themes were as follows:

1. Longing for Personal Success (I Wanna Be Somebody!)
2. Longing for Fatherly Support/Relationship (I Need My Dad!)
3. Longing for Fair Treatment (Don't Treat Me Like That!)

#### 4. Longing for Better Life (I Want Something Better Than This!)

Table 5 shows the frequency of themes mentioned in the participants' narratives.

Table 5

*Frequency of Themes Across Narratives*

Part.	Personal Success	Fatherly Support	Fair Treatment	Better Life	Resilience
Johnny	13	12	1	9	13
Jeremy	10	6	9	8	9
Orlando	7	4	4	6	8
Patrick	10	2	5	10	8
Randy	6	9	3	6	5
Victor	8	3	5	7	3
Jonathon	7	5	16	6	0
Darrell	9	3	4	5	7

*Note.* Randy's frequency responses for Fatherly Support were different from the other 7 participants in that he had consistent access to his father. Instead of recording responses in reference to not having a father, I instead recorded his responses concerning the availability of his father and grandfather.

*Longing for Personal Success (I Wanna Be Somebody!).* One of the themes common among the group as a whole was aspirations. There was not a single person in the group who did not have a dream or something to look forward to and work towards fulfilling in the future. Every participant wanted to be successful, but participants defined success in different ways. Victor and Randy set goals of military careers. This was



evident in Victor's participation in ROTC and Randy's grandfather's military influence. Johnny, Patrick, and I had aspirations of making it in the entertainment industry. I was highly influenced in this area by my two older brothers, Patrick and Mark. They practiced singing constantly, and I wanted to sing just like them. Orlando, Jonathon, and Jeremy were working towards winning athletic scholarships for college and ultimately playing professional ball. This was evident in their determination and extraordinary athletic skills.

I do not remember playing with Jeremy in the neighborhood, but I recall playing backyard sports all the time with Orlando and Jonathon: tackle the man with the ball, football, basketball (using a bicycle rim and board nailed to a tree), and other creative games to keep us occupied. Both were good athletes, but Orlando was extraordinary on the court. Orlando, Jonathon, and Jeremy played basketball in junior high and high school together. Our junior high school won the city-wide basketball championship our eighth-grade year. They were so good the coach at Carver High would have done just about anything to get them at his school:

When we won that championship game at Marshall, our basketball coach took us up there to Carver High School to scrimmage their junior varsity team. Their junior varsity was sophomores and juniors. We were eighth graders, and we ran them out their own gym. And that coach begged us to get our parents to transfer us to Carver High.

Jeremy made it further than the other two in that he played temporarily in college. Health complications cut his athletic career short, unfortunately.

Three of the participants had goals of making it big in the music and entertainment business: Patrick, Johnny, and me. Patrick, my oldest brother, influenced me in this area. I would see and hear him practicing often. He performed often in the city-wide talent shows and would win best male vocalist each year he entered. He worked

hard at improving himself for the sole purpose of making it in the music business. That was and still is his heart's desire. One day, when I was in the eighth grade, I formed a group to perform in the Marshall Junior High talent show. This was a big event for the school each year. The school auditorium was packed to capacity during this annual event. I was the lead singer, and we were named the best male group. When we performed the next year, we won this award again. I remember Patrick giving me tips from time to time about stage presence and using a microphone effectively. Both of my older brothers were good singers, but neither of them managed to land major recording contracts. Patrick did record one song with a local group called *Excitement*. I wanted to follow in my brothers' footsteps in this area simply because I thought that was the thing for me to do. They practiced all the time; therefore, I began to do the same thing. However, I was not going to drop out of school, and toward the end of my high school years I decided instead to enter military service, like so many of my peers. I would have gone into the Army, but a Black male teacher from Marshall Junior High convinced me to pursue post-secondary education instead. Johnny wanted to be a professional dancer when he was in high school. He danced often at parties and night clubs, and wanted to make a career out of what he enjoyed doing the most. In a follow-up interview, Johnny said that he eventually stopped chasing that dream and chose to go into the Marines instead.

Randy and Victor both had plans to pursue military careers upon graduation.

Randy said that it was his grandfather who inspired him to make a career in the military:

My granddaddy was a role model. I always looked up to those two, and they made sure you stayed on track. I have been in the military for 20 years. He was ex-military. He was the reason I went into the military. It was in the 11th grade that I decided to do a military career like my granddaddy.

Randy's grandfather was an important influence, and Randy said that his grandfather's parenting skills were military in nature. Randy served 20 years in the Army and is currently in the Army National Guard. Victor, in a follow-up interview, said that he had intended to enlist in the military upon graduation. He ended up dropping out of school to avoid the ridicule from his peers.

Two of the 8 participants [Victor and Randy] had plans for military careers, while 3 participants [Johnny, Orlando, and Randy] actually enlisted. Two participants, [Johnny and Orlando] chose the military option only after their initial plans failed. I enlisted in the Army in the Delayed Entry Program since a singing career was out of reach. Many of my peers from Baker High who managed to graduate but had no aspirations for post-secondary education chose military careers. Military examples, including friends, cousins, and uncles, were all around me; I was simply following the crowd. From my perspective, everybody was going into the military, so I assumed that was the thing to do after graduation. A few months after I was sworn in, I decided to pursue post-secondary education instead and was released from my military obligations. The military is a viable option for many Black males who graduate or obtain a GED (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, 2005). African American males on the enlisted side of the four military branches totaled 175,554 or roughly 15% for 2005 (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness). Table 6 shows the participants' initial aspirations, along with their actual career choices.

Table 6

*Participant Aspirations*

Participants	Initial Career Choice	Actual Career Choice
Johnny	Professional Dancer	Military/Ministry
Jeremy	Professional Athlete	Civilian Work
Orlando	Professional Athlete	Military/Civilian Work
Patrick	Professional Singer	Civilian Work
Randy	Military	Military
Victor	Military	Civilian Work
Jonathon	Professional Athlete	Illegal Drug Business
Darrell	Professional Singer	Education

*Note:* Johnny and Orlando served very short terms in the military.

Kao and Tienda (1998) demonstrated that in spite of the educational underachievement of many African American males, they do have aspirations and life goals. Their analysis of student aspirations using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 on students at three different levels [8th, 10th, and 12th grades] showed that Blacks and Hispanics had high aspirations, although their achievement and attainment were low (Kao & Tienda). This study also revealed that early or later retentions negatively affected college aspirations. Kao and Tienda further reported that, according to NELS data, Black males could have been doing poorly in school, yet they continued to dream and aspire—a point that is also evident in my data, as

previous retentions did not dampen college aspirations. Every participant in this study who had college aspirations repeated at least one grade. Garibaldi (1992) surveyed 2,250 African American males in the New Orleans Public School System. He found that although they led all ethnic groups in suspensions, retentions, and dropouts in the school system, 95% reported that they expected to graduate. MacLeod (1995) conducted a two-part study on aspirations and attainment in a particular low-income neighborhood. He conducted interviews with members of two youth groups initially in 1983, the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers, and then followed up on the same participants in 1991. The Hallway Hangers were mostly White boys of Italian and Irish descent, with the exceptions of one Black male and one Hispanic male. Most of them were dropouts and juvenile delinquents. The Brothers were comprised mostly of African American males, with the exception of one White male. All of the boys in this group had graduated from high school and earned some college credits, with one member completing a degree. MacLeod found that The Hallway Hangers had very low aspirations and negative attitudes toward future prospects, while The Brothers had high aspirations and more positive attitudes toward the future. The results of this study also indicated that although their aspirations were much higher, most members of The Brothers fared only slightly better than The Hallway Hangers in landing jobs that paid more than minimum wage (MacLeod).

All three studies cited above, along with my study, indicate that educational underachievement is not a barrier to aspirations among Black males. The future athletes in my research project had either average or below-average grades. Jonathon failed the second, seventh, and ninth grades, but continued to dream big. He relinquished his efforts

only when he realized he could not transfer to Carver High, where he believed he should have been all along. Jeremy's grades were average, but he held onto his ambitions.

Orlando struggled academically throughout high school, having to attend summer school twice on the high school level, but continued to play basketball. To this day, Patrick has not stopped believing in his dream.

How realistic were the goals and aspirations of the participants for my study? In my opinion as an educator, Jonathon's goals were not realistic due to his poor performance in school. Based on his narrative, Jonathon did not believe that academics affect collegiate goals. Regardless of what happened in school, he continued to believe it was possible for him to make it to the professional level of sports. Given these beliefs, Jonathon was inevitably setting himself up for a major disappointment. In my opinion as a close friend, Orlando was NBA material in the making. He was good, and as his narrative showed, others thought so as well. Unfortunately, in his own words, Orlando performed terribly in academic settings and developed a deadly alcoholic addiction. His dream was virtually out of reach, and he later realized it: "I got into harder alcohol, liquor. I dreamed of making it to college and the NBA, but I couldn't think straight. I was gone. I couldn't think straight at all." Patrick, similarly, did not believe academic performance was a prerequisite to the entertainment world. As a brother, I believe Patrick did all he could do apart from academics to make his dream a reality: consistent rehearsals, talent shows, and demos sent to various labels. Was his dream realistic or a pie in the sky? Based on my firsthand knowledge, I would say it was realistic. Patrick won best male vocalist in every city wide talent show he entered. He aligned himself with other talented, undiscovered artists and managed to professionally record a song as part

of a group. As a brother, the only thing I believe he could have done more as a potential recording artist was to be more aggressive in personally visiting and hand-delivering demos to major recording labels. One reason he moved to Atlanta was for more exposure. He recently posted several video demos on *YouTube*, which is evidence of his relentless pursuit of his dream.

Making it into the pro arena, whether through entertainment or sports, is very difficult, and few succeed. As an educator, I believe that playing school sports and aspiring to play professional sports has advantages. School systems have established guidelines, codes of conduct, and academic standards for sports participation. Such standards in turn force students, especially Black males, to monitor grades as well as behavior. Participation in sports also teaches discipline, teamwork, and social skills. I have seen numerous examples of this positive effect on African American males' attitudes, conduct, and academic performance. Braddock (2005) cited various studies that confirm my observations as well: "Taken together, these data offer evidence that athletic participation can and often does have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement in traditional pro-academic norms and behaviors for males and females" (p. 266).

On the other hand, very few athletes each year manage to get drafted into the professional leagues, and professional aspirations often lead to disappointment (Braddock, 2005). For this reason, as an educator, I suggest that aspiring Black male athletes should not put all their eggs in one basket. There should always be a backup plan, especially in the case of African American male athletes, since the odds are stacked against them (Braddock). In this study, none of the three aspiring athletes spoke of having

second career options. Based on Jonathon's narrative, sports participation had little effect on his academic performance and behavior. He was in trouble often at school on all levels and repeated three grades. Upon dropping out of school with no backup plan, Jonathon struggled to find stability and jobs to meet his hunger for the finer things in life. The military was not an option for Jonathon since he dropped out of school. According to Orlando's narrative, sports participation had little impact on his academic performance, considering his indifference to academics. However, basketball was his anchor to education: "If I never was on the basketball team, I would have quit. I know I would." Although Orlando did not speak of a second career option, he found a readily available option with the Marines. Based on the terrible outcome of this choice and his unauthorized leave of absence, I believe that Orlando's choice of the Marines was rash and ill-conceived, and he was not fully prepared for life beyond basketball. Jeremy's narrative suggests that sports had a good effect on him academically and behaviorally. Although his grades were not bad, he admitted that they could have been better. There was no indication that he exhibited behavior problems on the high school level, although he had exhibited behavior problems in the past. He managed to play on the college level for a short period of time, having gone much further than the other two athletes in this study. Jeremy's second option did not involve the armed services, more than likely due to health complications. His only other option was the workforce.

This study and my experience suggest that what many of us needed was realistic guidance and mentoring to help us stay focused on our goals and ambitions. Studies on mentoring have found that youth exposed to consistent mentors are more focused than they were without mentors (De Anda, 2001; Jekielek, Moore, and Hair, 2002). With the



exception of Randy, none of the other 7 participants had any consistent male input from a father or mentor. In this study, Randy was the only participant who managed to follow through completely on his aspired-to career choice (See Table 6). According to Holland (1991), male role models are a necessity for the socialization and academic progress of Black boys:

However, the single-parent, female headed households in this nation's urban communities deny the young black male child a major vehicle necessary in the socialization process of all boys, an adult male.... During the first eight to ten years of his life, the lack of consistent, positive, adult male role models may be a primary factor affecting the young black male's ability to succeed in academic settings. (p. 40)

Randy had consistent input and guidance from his father and grandfather, a double portion of positive male influence. Randy's narrative revealed that it was his grandfather who influenced him to choose the Armed Services as a career. There have been numerous studies documenting the benefits of mentors in the absence of fathers. De Anda investigated Project R.E.S.C.U.E (Reaching Each Student's Capacity Utilizing Education), a Los Angeles based mentoring program serving male and female low-income students from 31 active gangs. The results showed that the students developed strong bonds with the mentors and made positive, emotional and social developmental changes. The mentors provided opportunities that encouraged educational and career goals and moved the youth substantially in the direction of the goals. Jekielek et al. evaluated various mentoring programs around the country, including Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Buddy System, BELONG, Career Beginnings, Campus Partners in Learning, Hospital Youth Mentoring Program, and Linking Lifetimes, to assess their effects on students before and after being exposed to mentoring. The overall results showed that the youth who were mentored in the various programs had fewer unexcused absences from

school, better attitudes and behavior in school, increased chances of going to college, decreased alcohol and drug use and delinquent behavior, and improved parental relationships; they also exhibited more positive attitudes towards their elders and towards helping others. Although the results cited above include both genders and various races, research results clearly show that male mentors, in the absence of dedicated fathers, can produce positive results.

A particular mentor benefit that I want to highlight here is career influence. Project R.E.S.C.U.E enabled gang-influenced teenagers to make more positive decisions about their future, including career choices, and helped them move in the direction of goal attainment (De Anda, 2001). The focus of this program was to help at-risk teenagers avoid the social dangers and to take control of their lives by actively mapping out their future (De Anda). The mentors of the program literally took at-risk teenagers from gang-infested neighborhoods in Los Angeles by the hand, built positive relationships with them, and allowed them to spend time with them at their worksites and jobs (De Anda). In light of the literature, it is interesting that Randy was the only participant who followed through completely on his initial career choice [See Table 7] and the only participant whose father and grandfather were influential in his life. He had positive relationships with both of them. The rest of us stumbled through life choices with varying degrees of success, and several participants veered off onto dangerous paths. We had no clear directions for our futures and no realistic plans for getting there. This would help explain my indecisive behavior of blindly following my brothers into entertainment and later my peers into the military. Some of the participants' aspirations were unrealistic and out of reach. We had no mentors and were undisciplined academically. As my study has

indicated, the 7 fatherless participants faced greater probabilities of succumbing to the pitfalls of life that Randy clearly was able to avoid with the strict supervision of adult males. Randy was not perfect, as he misbehaved occasionally and got into fights at school, but he was under the consistent supervision of a strict father and an even stricter, former drill-sergeant grandfather.

All I needed was one person to step in and encourage me to try college instead of the military. This person, a Black male teacher from Marshall Junior High, helped me to complete the Pell Grant application, which was intimidating just to read. If not for this man, I probably would not be conducting this research project. When I stepped onto the campus of Alabama State University, I was scared and nervous. I had never been away from home, and my mother did not want me to leave. However, my uncle looked me squarely in my face and said, “You ain’t going home!” I needed to hear that from a man, because in his absence my mother would have taken me back home. Based on his narrative, Jonathon would have benefitted from career guidance from his dad or constant input from a strong, positive figure. As I have suggested, the most suitable career mentor for Jonathon would have been his father, considering his business expertise and accomplishments. Jonathon clearly had the people skills, outgoing personality, and business skills. Unfortunately, left to himself, Jonathon applied such skills in building a lucrative, illegal drug business instead. I wonder if Jonathon’s outcome would have been different had his father provided transportation for his son to attend Carver after being expelled from Hardaway. Orlando, who had so much potential, also needed a positive figure to steer him back on the right path. The advice from the Black male counselor at his school—”After you drink, eat a lemon so people can’t smell it.”—was unprofessional

in my opinion as an educator. Instead, Orlando needed to be told that he was selling out on his dreams. As his narrative indicated, I believe the most suitable career mentor for Orlando was his older brother, who mentored him on the court and helped him master his basketball skills. This older brother eventually went on to college, played basketball temporarily, and then enlisted in the Army. In his brother's absence, Orlando was left to himself and eventually wandered onto a dangerous path of alcohol addiction. Research shows that an obvious benefit of mentoring is decreased drug and alcohol use (Jekielek et al., 2002).

As Johnny's narrative suggests, he needed a strong mentor who would steer him away from drugs, alcohol, and party scenes, and encourage him to maximize his academic potential (Jekielek et al., 2002). According to Johnny, he was open for input and guidance from his older brother, who could have served as the ideal mentor. However, sibling rivalry severed their relationship. Johnny's narrative revealed that his decision to enlist in the Marines was ill-conceived and a waste of time, considering his eventual unauthorized leave of absence. As his narrative demonstrated, he was destined for academic greatness all along and earned several degrees, including a doctorate. Unfortunately, in the absence of strong, persistent guidance and direction, he developed a dangerous crack addiction and fathered four boys out of wedlock prior to gaining a new lease on life. As Victor's narrative suggested, he intended to embark on a military career and was active in JROTC, but he lacked the self-confidence and self-esteem needed to survive the vicious *ribbing* and *jiving*. He struggled academically, primarily because of the intense peer distractions. Access to an academic mentor could have alleviated some of his stress and given him the confidence he so desperately needed (Jekielek et al.).

Patrick's narrative showed that he struggled in school and could have benefitted from the input of an academic mentor as well. He ventured off onto a temporary, experimental path of drugs but quickly regained focus on his primary goal of becoming a recording artist. Patrick needed a mentor, not least because mentoring leads to improved academic performance (Jekielek et al.). If appropriately mentored, he might have considered education an asset rather than a liability, and thus enjoyed more career options.

Unfortunately, Patrick had no backup plan. As a brother, I observed him struggle for years to find a job that paid more than minimum wages. In contrast, as Jeremy's narrative suggested, his mother's stern and candid direction kept him on track academically and cognizant of his career choices: "You have an opportunity to go to school. You get to go and learn and have the opportunity to better yourself." The fact that his mother was a former high school basketball player herself may have influenced her son's career choice. He managed to make it to college on an athletic scholarship but only temporarily because of health problems. Once that was over, his only other option was the workforce. Based on his narrative, I believe that Jeremy's average academic performance left him with limited options upon graduation.

As this study has shown, the 8 participants longed for personal success and had aspirations in life regardless of their academic underachievement, distractions, and social pitfalls. Several participants' career choices were found to be unrealistic and unattainable. This study indicated that the 7 fatherless participants struggled to successfully map out realistic career paths, as several ventured off onto self-destructive pathways. Randy, the only participant with an active father, successfully chose his career, followed through completely, and is currently active in the same career field.

*Longing for Fatherly Support/Relationship (I Need My Dad!).* The longing for fatherly support and a real father/son relationship underlay each narrative. Even though this desire was not voiced in equal detail in all narratives, it was present in each. As each participant told his story, the subtle hints of how life would have been if a daddy was there resonated. Randy, who was the exception, told his life story as a person whose father had been actively involved in his life. Even though his father was disabled, and unable to provide much financially, he was still present: “My dad was making sure I stayed on track. He was the type of person where he would say it one time. If he has to repeat himself, you know you’re in trouble.” The rest of us longed for that kind of firm guidance as we stumbled through a dark room looking for the light switch. Randy’s scenario was the opposite of Jonathon’s: While Randy had an actively involved father who did not contribute much financially, Jonathon’s father contributed financially but was never present. According to Jonathon’s narrative, he needed his dad’s heart as well as his wallet: “He did provide for me, but just not having that father figure around was, you know, kind of difficult.”

This is not to say that a single mother is necessarily inadequate, because single mothers successfully raise children all the time. However, according to this study, when a father figure was not present, the chances were greater that the young boy would stray. For example, as a child Johnny was afraid of his mother and sought to obey her every command, but as he entered high school and his attitude and physical appearance changed, his mother could no longer handle him. Orlando’s father was no longer in the picture, and his mother was often drunk, as were his two older sisters. He commented that his dad was strict when he was around:

If he was there, I don't think I would have started drinking, 'cause he was kind of strict. But once he left, that was it. My mother was drinking too, so she didn't try to talk to me about it.

So there was no one to restrain Orlando as he began to drink. It was the same thing with Jonathon, me, and my older brothers Patrick and Mark. My mother had to have my uncle come over from time to time and physically beat Patrick and Mark with his long, leather belt. They were too big for her, and considering that they had begun to steal things from stores, she needed help. When I got to the age where I began talking back to my mother, Patrick disciplined me physically. Without his interventions, I could become more disrespectful. Randy's dad was not perfect, but he was present in his life, as was his grandfather. This was an exceptional scenario. The rest of us didn't even have the first father available.

Throughout the narratives, I could hear the resentment towards the absent fathers. Jonathon, for example, remembered that his father "...took care of me, but as far as spending quality time with me, uh coming to the school to check on me, helping me with my homework and stuff like that, he was never there." Jonathon appreciated his dad's financial support, but his corrective and guiding presence was needed more. Johnny commented: "It just hurts me that I can't show my sons that their granddad, we have a relationship. I will not do my kids that way." Johnny wanted desperately to repair the breach in his relationship with his father so that his own children could reap the benefits. Orlando, meanwhile, was ashamed of his absent father, and resentful "...because he was always drunk. He was not supporting me financially. He never came to a basketball game, but he heard about it." In Orlando's mind, a supportive father offered more than financial support: he also sacrificed time. Patrick said that as a child he did not reflect

often on not having a dad around: “I mean, I didn’t really think about none of that stuff like a daddy until later on in life. And I know it had affected me even when dealing with my own kids.” His reflections about his absent father came later, as he considered his own obligations as a parent. Genuine resentment can be heard in Victor’s voice:

“Looking back, I never really thought about my dad. He obviously never thought about me. I remember seeing him only once. I always said I will never do my kids like that.”

Victor’s fatherless experience taught him to do the very opposite with his own children.

Jeremy’s anger as a child was also clear in his statements:

I did have a little contact with my dad over the phone, but not a whole lot. It didn’t mean a whole lot to me at the time, because I was mad. I felt like he should have been there. He should have been more of a man.

He recognized clearly the difference between his mother’s position in the home and his father’s phone calls from out of town. He easily discerned his mother’s faithfulness and his father’s lack of concern. As for me, I was angry for a period of time because of the hardships my family had to endure and the things I had to go without. In my mind, a father had money, and I wanted a father around so I could have the things I desperately needed.

There was a sense of abandonment in the narratives as the participants expressed their feelings about their fathers. Patrick and I were the only participants who never saw our dads at all. I don’t know what’s worse: never having met your dad and receiving no support from him, or knowing who your dad is and receiving no support from him.

Johnny knew where his dad was, and later in life attempted to repair the relationship. His dad gave him a very cold shoulder. As for me, I think it was better not to have met my father at all than to know him and receive no support. Such a scenario would have made



me even angrier at him for not being there for me. To me, it was like being in a hole, and knowing that someone up there on level ground had a rope to get me out but would not take the time to pull me up. This is not to say that having a dad would have made my life entirely different, because Randy and Jonathon offered two unique scenarios. As a result of the stories participants shared with me, I believe it would have been much better for the participants without dads to have had responsible men in their lives just as Randy did.

Public discourse often asks why Black men shirk their responsibilities and often abandon their children, but this question ignores the fact that not all Black men run away from their responsibilities. When they are able to, they do provide for their children and make good husbands (Connor, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Nelson, 2008). All participants in this study are presently married and providing for their families, except Jonathon, who is currently serving an 18 month prison term. Even Jonathon was providing for his children while selling drugs and expressed deep concern for their welfare:

I still had a conscience while I was selling it, because my kids had the top of the line things while I would see kids who were in need. These kids were the very children of the adults I was selling drugs to. So I felt bad about that. . . . Because to watch a child suffer is not a good thing. That really tears me down. And I'm watching my children suffer for the mistakes that I made in the past. I can't really do for them like I use to. Uh, if I have to leave, who gonna take care of them? 'Cause I don't care if you find the best babysitter. Ain't nobody gonna treat your children like you do.

According to Majors and Billson, some Black men equate the ability to impregnate with masculinity: "For the lower-income black male, the joys of fatherhood lie in the act of procreation and in knowing that he has progeny, not necessarily in knowing that he can support his babies" (p. 16). The abandonment of parental responsibilities has been linked to the inability of some Black men to gain meaningful employment (Majors & Billson;

Nelson, 2008). Some Black men abandoned their fatherly roles because of the inner guilt of failure for not being able to provide, not because they did not care (Majors & Billson). In many cases, blocked opportunities, lack of upward mobility, and the psychological effects of racism have hindered and prevented some Black men from consistently providing and taking care of their children (Majors & Billson; Nelson). Majors and Billson noted that:

Being a male means to be responsible and a good provider for self and family. For black males, this is not a straightforward achievement. Outlets for achieving masculine pride and identity, especially in political, economic, and educational systems, are more fully available to white males than to black males. This in turn restricts the black man's ability to achieve in family systems, to take care of a wife and family, or to be a present and supportive father. (p. 30-31)

Evidence shows that when Black men have the financial ability, they do take care of their children (Majors & Billson, 1992; Nelson, 2008). This study adds to the literature that supports that idea. However, participants' voices also revealed that those who were raised fatherless are determined not to repeat the mistakes of their absent fathers. Of the 8 participants interviewed for this study, only one, Randy, was directly raised and supported by his father. The other 7 participants were abandoned by their fathers, and they passionately declared that they were not going to treat their own children the same way. Randy, on the other hand, put into practice the parenting skills passed down from his father and grandfather: "But in the long run, it sticks like glue. Like I tell my son, I'm hard on him. You gotta be. You know what I'm saying? If not, they will easily get into trouble." The other 7 participants recognized the failures of their fathers and the value of true paternal responsibilities. This is evident in their active involvement in their own homes today.

Effective Black male teachers can provide some surrogate presence in the lives of young Black, fatherless boys. According to Holland (1991):

However, the single-parent, female headed households in this nation's urban communities deny the young Black male child a major vehicle necessary in the socialization process of all boys, an adult male. To compound an already calamitous situation, the boys are then sent to school where, for the first four or five years of their educational experience, they are confronted with an environment that is also devoid of adult male role models. In most elementary schools, the principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers are all female. During the first eight to ten years of his life, the lack of consistent, positive, adult male role models may be a primary factor affecting the young black male's ability to succeed in academic settings. (p. 40)

According to Nelson (2008), nearly 60% of all African American children are reared in homes without fathers, and 50% of such children live in poverty. With such large numbers of Black fatherless males attending schools, Black male teachers can make a difference. Due to the number of hours children spend with teachers each day, Black male teachers can impact their lives and possibly affect the negative statistics. However, Black male teachers are scarce, and represent only 1% of the teaching force (Kunjufu, 2002). White females comprise 83% of the elementary teaching force (Kunjufu). Eighty-six percent of Whites in suburban areas live in neighborhoods that contain less than 1% Black residents (Kunjufu). These neighborhoods provide the bulk of the teaching force (Howard, 1999). Jordon and Cooper (2003) offered advantages of recruiting more African American male teachers:

However, having stated this, Black male teachers perhaps have several important advantages in educating Black adolescents. These include, for example, strategic use of shared knowledge, modeling appropriate behavior, and in some cases, common social experiences. The rapport that Black male teachers can rapidly establish with Black male students through their common cultural heritage can be maintained in the face of social class differences. The value added dimension of being exposed to good teachers who are Black men might be a key factor in raising the probability of success for some Black male students. (p. 206)

Six of the 8 participants attended Blanchard Elementary, and every single one of them had something to say about the two Black male teachers at this school. They definitely impacted our lives, although some of the participants criticized their discipline tactics. Mr. Simmons and Mr. Lambers were perceived as strong Black men. All 6 participants believed that they were generally concerned about us and wanted us to succeed in life. Johnny commented: “I remember the two Black male teachers there, Mr. Simmons and Mr. Lambers. They were like father figures to me. I felt a little more drawn to them because of my ethnic background.” Randy said: “I remember the two Black male teachers. They were good role models. First of all, I remember Mr. Lambers as being a big, strong Black man. Not necessarily controlling, but demanding.” Orlando recalled the student-friendly qualities of Mr. Lambers: “He wanted you to get the lesson, and I heard him tell people that, “I love you and I want you to do good.” Jonathon remembered their true intentions:

They wanted to see us prosper and not go through some of the things the Black community is going through now. They wanted us to get that education and get out there and get those white collar jobs and stuff like that.

Jeremy recalled why he was so attached to them: “You couldn’t wait to get to school to see Mr. Lambers. I grew up without a father and so these guys stood out to me.” As for me, I clearly was attracted to them because of not having a father in my home. If I remember correctly, these two Black males were the first Black male teachers I encountered.

According to the narratives, the 6 participants connected with these two Black male teachers on levels that I believe were not possible with the White female teachers. This connection was cultural and ethnic in nature. They knew how to speak a language

with which we could identify. Orlando remembered Mr. Simmons telling him and others, “Boy you need to comb your hair. You need to put on some better clothes. Put on deodorant! Wear some clean pants!” Mr. Simmons’ words were cruel at times, but they got our attention. Jeremy remembered the two men’s lessons as “Look, this is what you need to do to get through life” and “Hey look! You’re not doing what you can do!” He appreciated their candidness and concern for our future. Randy remembered their lessons as “I love you and want you to do good.” In Jonathan’s memory, they taught him “Now you know you need to tighten up, man. You know when you get a certain age and gotta provide for your family, you ain’t gonna be able to do that digging ditches.” These two teachers had a way of communicating to us the urgency of our education. Such communication was natural for these men and not artificial. Although we had our criticisms, we all felt that they were genuinely concerned for us. I do not believe that this level of connectedness was possible with the White teachers, for cultural reasons. I believe that Mr. Lambers and Mr. Simmons legitimized and confirmed our presence at Blanchard by identifying with us as Black male teachers.

Delpit (1995) commented on teaching minority students how to operate in the dominant culture society:

There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power.” . . . The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. . . . If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. (p. 25)

The two Black male teachers at Blanchard understood clearly that there was a dominant culture in operation at Blanchard and in the larger society. This is evident in Mr. Simmons’ words: “Boy you can’t do that! We at this White people school, you can’t act

like that. And I want you to do better.” This educated Black male acknowledged that Blanchard was a “White people school,” according to Orlando’s narrative. Looking back at the narratives of the 6 participants who attended Blanchard, I believe we would all agree with his statement. We were ghetto kids bused into a new world. Orlando said that at one school the White students stared at him as if he was a mascot. We came with our old habits, being ourselves. However, Mr. Simmons tried to communicate a truth the best way he could: “You have got to act differently if you expect to survive here.” [This is my interpretation of what Mr. Simmons said.] We were on unfamiliar turf, and it was very uncomfortable at times being there. The White students did not need a lecture on how to conduct themselves there, but we did. The odds were stacked against the Black kids bused to Blanchard and certain other predominantly-White schools: we encountered teacher bias, unfair suspensions, student race conflicts, and cultural student/teacher disconnect. I believe that both Black male teachers were in essence gatekeepers, attempting to teach us how to operate at Blanchard and society as a whole, giving us the rites of passage:

Boy you need to comb your hair. You need to put on some better clothes. Put on deodorant! Wear some clean pants!.... Now you know you need to tighten up, man. You know when you get a certain age and gotta provide for your family, you ain’t gonna be able to do that digging ditches.... Look, this is what you need to do to get through life.

These words were initially offensive to us, but in hindsight they constituted good, cultural advice that was never spoken by any of the White teachers. These two particular teachers knew exactly what to say to us, and we remembered their words. They obviously felt the need to tell us. Did they already know what was in store for us at this “White people school?” I believe they did. They were educated and bused to this predominantly White

school just as we were, though they were experiencing race conflicts on another level. The only difference is that they understood what was going on and successfully adapted to the “culture of power” (Delpit, p. 25).

The only criticisms several of us had of Mr. Lambers and Mr. Simmons concerned how they physically handled the Black students. Mr. Simmons was known to jack students up in their seats when they were misbehaving. Orlando recalled: “There were two Black male teachers there. I can’t forget them, because one of them was tough, Mr. Simmons.” Randy recalled the sharpness of Mr. Simmons: “He was more blunt towards the Black students, treating them more of his own for guidance.” Jonathon remembered the differential treatment of Black and White students: “The White kids did it too, playing with each other and everything. He wouldn’t put his hands on the Whites. He would just tell them to stop. But for us, in the air!” Mr. Lambers was known to pull boys up by the belt loop during recess and paddle them if they were not doing push ups correctly. Both would handle students physically, especially Mr. Simmons in the classroom. There was one problem with this. None of the participants can ever recall seeing these teachers handle the White students this way, even though the White students were just as guilty of the same infractions that would cause the Black students to be “handled like a ragdoll,” as Jonathon put it. According to Jonathon, Mr. Lambers would send the White students to the office. What message was being communicated to the White students? I believe that the biased actions of these two teachers reinforced the negative stereotypes of Blacks, and inadvertently justified the White students’ attitudes toward their Black classmates. A percentage of the White students at Blanchard Elementary knew how to use the word *nigger* fluently. Every time a Black student was

handled like a ragdoll and a White student politely told to stop, racism and preferential treatment seemed justified in the eyes of all the beholders. Did these two male teachers mean well? We all thought they did, but their actions were at times hurting just as much as helping. Yet, we hold these two in high regard in our minds and hearts. They were father figures, no doubt. However, these two apparently were silently battling a race war of their own, or they would have treated the White students the same way. I still remember my comment one day in Mr. Simmons' class: "They won't do the White kids like that, because they are afraid of their dads!"

As this research suggests, the 7 participants who had no fathers or mentors were largely left to themselves as they stumbled through the processes and stages of boyhood to manhood. We yearned for that genuine, fatherly support and guidance. As the narratives demonstrated, we were vulnerable to many of the common pitfalls of peer pressure, rebellion, academic underachievement, and addictions that responsible fathers or mentors could have helped us to avoid. Randy commented that his father was present to keep him on track. He described his father and grandfather as stern but caring. As his narrative demonstrated, Randy was one of the most stable participants in this study. As this study has shown, Black male teachers are invaluable as they can help fill the void in the absence of responsible Black fathers.

*Longing for Fair Treatment (Don't Treat Me Like That!).* Every person in this study had to battle racism in various forms from students, teachers, administrators, and city officials in some cases. Each participant gave his battle accounts of being treated differently, stereotyped, and falsely accused, receiving cold racial stares, and dealing with the N word. Collectively, their voices came together in sweet harmony: "Don't treat me



like that!” I was not surprised that the participants had recollections about race issues, considering the past turbulence of desegregation in Columbus (Causey, 2001). The desegregation mandate of 1971 (Causey) forced Black and White students and teachers to make an effort to somehow lay aside their differences and work together. Although the physical process took years to complete, attitude change took even longer. As the participants in this study integrated various White schools, they soon realized that hateful and racist attitudes were still very much alive in society. Orlando described how the White students responded to him: “They looked at me and the other girl like almost as if we were mascots. A matter of fact, one girl told me she had never seen a Black person before other than on TV.” Jeremy said: “I was somewhat use to it, but I could tell there was a difference the way the White kids interacted with you. For example, in Georgia they look at you kind of funny.” Jonathon was shocked to hear these young kids using such racist terminology: “It was very uncomfortable coming from an all Black school to this White school, being around these White students who actually had racial slurs towards you.”

I believe that one of the worst schools for this type of behavior was Blanchard Elementary. The racist tensions grew to the point where recess was segregated and heated at times. It was common for us to congregate by race on the playing field. Under such conditions of race division, it was just a matter of time before a verbal or physical altercation took place. This did not happen every day, but such gatherings were frequent. I recalled getting into a short fight with one White student. We both threw a punch at the same time, causing our fists to collide. We both quickly realized how painful that was, so we simply walked away from each other. Jonathon recalled the common scenes during

recess: “They just kind of looked down on us. They kind of gave us that *turn up your nose* look.” Various faculty members seemed to favor one race over the other. Even the two Black male teachers at Blanchard were openly showing preferential treatment towards the White students. Jeremy recalled two incidents in which he was singled out for harsher punishments. Both incidents occurred at the predominantly White schools. According to Jeremy, a particular incident happened at Blanchard: “I know at one time I got into a fight with a White guy, and I was the one who got sent home and not him. But we both were fighting.” Another similar incident happened to Jeremy at Gentry Elementary. Jeremy also described an incident at Hardaway High, in which some White students were making fun of the Black students as they were going into the cafeteria to eat breakfast. Jonathon recalled an incident at Blanchard in which a teacher questioned how he was able to afford the expensive leather jacket he wore to school:

I never forget, it was a brown leather jacket with a hood. And uh, I remember Ms. Mills asking me how did I get that jacket. And I told her my dad bought it for me for Christmas. And she asked me, “Who is your dad?”

The jacket mysteriously disappeared, and then reappeared a few days later in the same teacher’s classroom. Jonathon said that he got the impression that this teacher took his jacket and sought to find the real owner, insinuating that he stole it.

Out of 6 participants who attended Blanchard Elementary, four were relieved to leave Blanchard and return to a majority-Black school. Randy felt that Marshall offered an inviting family atmosphere: “I think I fitted in more there than at Blanchard because it was more culturally accepting, because all the kids were predominantly Black.” In contrast, Blanchard was not that type of environment for many Black students. He commented that he could open up and experience things at Marshall. I can conclude that

Randy was not openly relaxed at Blanchard. Based on his narrative, Blanchard was more of a culture shock to Randy. Orlando commented: “At Marshall, you felt that you could be yourself. You didn’t have to try to talk proper and try to act a certain way. Just pretty much be yourself, you know. And I enjoyed Marshall.” He felt relieved by having been placed back in an environment that he could relate to. Orlando’s narrative suggested that he felt he was largely an impostor or actor at Blanchard. He felt he had to talk, act, and carry himself in a way that was befitting of students at Blanchard. He made the statement: “I was back.” Marshall was a sigh of relief for him. Jonathon expressed similar feelings: “I felt a whole lot better leaving Blanchard going to Marshall, because I was around a whole lot of people I could relate to.” As Jonathon’s narrative suggests, he could not relate to the White students at Blanchard, having constantly engaged several White boys in verbal and physical confrontations. Even Jeremy expressed similar sentiments about having left Blanchard: “I was around more Blacks and felt more comfortable. I think I learned a little bit more at Marshall than at Blanchard, because I felt more at ease. I felt more accepted because of Black people being mostly there.” The environment at Blanchard was somewhat uncomfortable for Jeremy, and inhibited his learning to a certain degree. All four participants struck a common chord about their experiences at Blanchard: They did not feel welcomed. As these participants perceived it, there were elements of distraction and uneasiness at Blanchard due to racism, and these elements may have affected them academically.

The burden of *acting White* comes into play here (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fordham and Ogbu discussed how Black students, in such environments as Blanchard Elementary, would join together in opposition to form a comradery and an oppositional

social identity in rebellion against the status quo. In turn, students are pressured to maintain their Black identities and view academic pursuits as *acting White*. There does not seem to be any evidence of this in Orlando's behavior of feeling pressured to act and talk like the majority at Blanchard. There was no evidence that Orlando was ridiculed or ostracized by other Black boys for attempting to *talk White*. However, I do recall an incident of being with several other Black boys and coloring our papers black with a message: "We're Black not White!" An oppositional social identity among the few boys here was definitely in play. For whatever reason, we felt the need to express this message to the teacher. A much larger oppositional social identity network operated during recess for both races. There was a little race war going on, and there was no adult intervention. I do not ever recall any adults talking to us about race relations, getting along with others, or accepting our differences. We consistently formed teams by race, and no adult ever seemed to notice or intervene. Jeremy somehow knew that if he wanted to get back at any White boy and go unnoticed, he could do it during recess. As an educator, I believe that adult intervention was needed. The young Black and White kids needed a lesson on race relations. Unfortunately, many of these students, Black and White, would later meet again at Hardaway High with the same mentalities.

Several of the participants who attended predominantly White schools contrasted the teaching practices of the White and Black teachers. As for me, I noticed one thing. When I was at Blanchard, I recalled acting up and misbehaving in Mr. Simmons' class only once. He jacked me up in my seat, and I do not recall ever doing it again. After my punishment the first time, I learned my lesson. The Black female teacher, Ms. Cotton, was mean, and I was scared of her. I only recall misbehaving mostly in the White

teachers' classrooms, and they were all female. I remember turning my eye glasses upside down and beating on my desk. The White students loved that and laughed. On that same day, we changed classes and moved to Mr. Lambers' classroom. A particular White female student beckoned for me to do the same thing. I refused quickly, because I knew the consequences of my actions in his classroom, and she could not convince me to do it in Mr. Simmons' classroom either. Jeremy commented on teacher differences:

There was definitely a difference between the White teachers and the Black teachers. For example, the White teachers were all niceness, all smiles. But the Black teachers were more like, "Look, this is what you need to do to get through life." The niceness was alright, but I preferred, "This is what you need!"

Orlando preferred the *nice* style of teaching over the Black *candid* approach. He compared the Black teachers to the one White teacher he had at Carver Elementary, a majority-Black school: "The White teacher showed more kindness toward helping you understand what you had to do. She was very patient. I'll never forget her. In fact, she the only one I actually do remember by name, you know." Orlando was also very critical of Mr. Simmons' candidness and rough handling of Black students. The Black and White teachers' methods of teaching and handling students may be somewhat reflective of cultural parenting skills. In a study of culturally influenced parenting practices, Kusserow (2004) conducted an ethnographic study of individualism in three communities of New York: Parkside, Queenston, and Kelley. The parents of Queenston, a lower-working-class community consisting of housing projects, violence, and prostitutes, sought to instill values for survival in their children through hard individualism:

"Tough" was often part of a constellation of other words and phrases stating the child "isn't a pushover," "speaks her own mind," or is "her own person," which portrayed a solidity to the self that the parent was quite proud of. The words "spoiled," "fresh," "whiny," "weak-minded," "prissy," "soft," "mushy," and

“pushover” were used in reference to qualities the parents hated and would not tolerate in their children. (p. 36)

In comparison to the other two communities, these parents purposefully sought to make their children *hard* by teasing them, using humor, yelling, constantly telling them to *suck it up*, and minimizing compliments to them in certain areas (Kusserow). The hardcore, tough image that some Black males display in educational and social settings could possibly be the direct result of parental influences. As noted by Kusserow, in Queenston, the rates were very high for crime, drop outs, and teen pregnancy. In a study of culturally influenced oral interactions, Delpit (1995) noted that working class children accustomed to the authoritative commands of their parents may not understand the indirect, non-authoritative commands of most middle-class teachers. As a result, “the attempt by the teacher to reduce an exhibition of power by expressing herself in indirect terms may remove the very explicitness that the child needs to understand the rules of the new classroom culture” (p. 34-35). According to Delpit, Black children need direct commands from authoritative teachers who know how to control the class:

Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority. When the teacher instead acts as a “chum,” the message sent is that this adult has no authority, and the children react accordingly. One reason that is so, is that Black people often view issues of power and authority differently than people from mainstream middle-class backgrounds. (p. 35)

Middle-class parents are likely to give the directive to a child to take his bath as, “Isn’t it time for your bath?”.... By contrast, a Black mother, in whose house I was recently a guest, said to her eight-year old son, “Boy, get your rusty behind in that bathtub.” (p. 34)

Black children raised in such environments expect teachers and other authoritative figures to be in command (Delpit).

I was accustomed to being given straight commands and took advantage of the less commanding teachers. I tended to act up in the White female teachers' classrooms because there seemed to be few authoritative commands directed at me. Sometimes they would just ignore my behavior, while at other times they would correct me, but never in a commanding way that would breed fear in me. Orlando probably preferred the nicer teacher approach because of his personality. There was a cultural connection between the Black teachers at Blanchard, especially the two males, and all 6 of the participants in this study who attended Blanchard. The Black teachers were commanding: "The Black child may perceive the middle-class teacher as weak, ineffectual, and incapable of taking on the role of being the teacher; therefore, there is no need to follow her directives" (Delpit, p. 36). Jeremy was more attracted to the Black male teachers at Blanchard because of how they addressed him. They exhibited an in-your-face approach that commanded his attention, very similar to how his mother addressed him at home.

Patrick was very angry at our racist White neighbors in one neighborhood, and sought to protect our family: "Throwing rocks through our windows, I was really pissed off. I stayed outside each night for I don't know for how long. But I had me some drink bottles ready to tear somebody head off." I remember vividly how Patrick, Mark, and my mother would be in the yard arguing and yelling at a group of White residents who had gathered in front of our house. Victor recalled: "I remember them being in our yard calling us names. They were cussing too. Their parents were in it too, but they didn't say much. Their parents would be out in their yards during these arguments." Victor and I were very young at this time, so we just passively watched the drama unfold. Patrick, out of frustration and distrust of the Columbus Justice System, moved to Atlanta: "I wanted

to get the hell out of Columbus. I wanted to catch whatever skates I could catch, skateboard whatever, and get the heck up out of Columbus, Georgia. And I'm telling you I had to get away.”

As this research suggests, the participants faced trials of racism on various levels. Although many incidents of racism in this study involved other students, several participants had negative race experiences involving teachers and the justice system. The participants of this study wanted fair treatment, and they retaliated against bigotry, racial stereotypes, and preferential treatment.

*Longing for Better Life (I Want Something Better Than This!).* Every participant in this study was raised in poverty, hated his living conditions, and wanted something better in life and a better lifestyle. The grueling realities of poverty in the ghetto were frustrating for many and embarrassing for some. Five of the 8 participants described incidents of embarrassment concerning their outer appearances and financial circumstances. I remembered the continuous verbal harassment of Jonathon and other students in relation to what I was wearing. Most of my clothes during that time were either cheap or hand-me-downs. Once a week I wore Victor's shoes to school because they were not considered buddies. My brother Victor dressed out in JROTC every Tuesday, so I always looked forward to that day. Orlando reminded me during his interview of the red and black buddies I wore to school during that time. Orlando recalled his experiences with poverty and the embarrassment associated with it: “It was embarrassing to wear dirty clothes, feet coming out your shoes. It was embarrassing. Kids made fun of me, mostly the Black kids.” It was difficult for Orlando to attend school and focus on schoolwork while his appearance was troubling him. His words suggested that



his academic performance, along with self-esteem, was more than likely affected. Orlando did not mention any such incidents on the junior high and high school level. This was ironic to me initially, because his economic condition did not change: He was poor throughout high school. Based on his narrative, the only change was social: He began to play basketball on the junior high level, and this earned him a level of notoriety and fame. Basketball changed Orlando's status level among his peers, and I believe that such a change brought him much-needed peer respect. He was still poor, but his peers were not as apt to rib and jive on him. Orlando was awesome on the court, and the spectators, including his peers, paid more attention to his talent and potential than to his appearance. His poverty was still evident to all during this time because he was constantly given clothes anonymously during high school. After his upbringing in poor living conditions, Orlando readily basked in this newfound stardom and fame: He definitely wanted a better lifestyle, even if it meant accepting clothing donations. I believe Orlando's initial career choice, the NBA, reflected his desire for a better life as well. Professional athletes make a lot of money, and he believed he had the skills to play on such a level.

Of all the participants in this study, Victor had the worst experiences with poverty and articulated his desire for a better standard of living in a very emotional manner. He was viciously ridiculed by his peers, having to wear hand-me-downs and ragged clothing throughout each level of schooling: "And you just don't have the get up about yourself, when you have no clothes to wear, no shoes, and nothing like that." His statements were very similar to Orlando's statement as they expressed his lack of motivation to attend school. Victor could not concentrate on his academic work because of the vicious and continuous *ribbing* of his peers. Based on his narrative, it was this level of ridicule that

drove his relentless pursuit of economic and financial change in his family. Victor's desire for a better lifestyle was evident in his desire to get a job and help the family: "So I dropped out and got a job. That's why you didn't have to drop out. Once I got a job, I took care of everybody. I would buy me clothes, and buy you clothes." Victor was determined to change his circumstances as well as everybody else's in the family, if possible.

Considering Orlando's and Victor's statements of peer distractions, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs must be revisited (Woolfolk, 2001). According to Abraham Maslow, humans have a ladder of needs that range from lower to higher levels (Woolfolk). Lower-level needs such as survival, safety, and belonging must be met before higher-level needs of intellectual achievement and self-actualization can be met (Woolfolk). Woolfolk noted:

Students who come to school hungry, sick, or hurt are unlikely to be motivated to seek knowledge and understanding. A child whose feelings of safety and sense of belonging are threatened by divorce may have little interest in learning to divide fractions. If the classroom is a fearful, unpredictable place and students seldom know where they stand, they are likely to be more concerned with security and less with learning. (p. 371)

In this study, both Orlando and Victor were hindered academically because both found it difficult to ignore their impoverished conditions and the peer ridicule. Both admitted to lacking the motivation to attend school due to their lack of the basic need of clothing. At times, Victor was concerned about the basic need of food as well. Victor's predicament was so bad he eventually dropped out of school. I was ridiculed often by peers for my appearance, but it did not affect me to the extent of not being able to concentrate. For a period of time, I dreaded going to school at Blanchard except on Tuesdays. [I wore Victor's shoes on Tuesdays because of his involvement in JROTC.] However, in the

midst of the ridicule and embarrassment, I decided to make a change academically and began to improve my grades. I wanted to change my circumstances as well, but quitting school did not seem to be the solution. I had four examples in my family of what not to do with your education. I chose to use my education to my benefit and stay the course. I had enough sense to recognize the vicious limitations of an incomplete education.

In each narrative, one could sense the struggles and longing for something better. Even Jonathon struggled with the harsh reality of where he was in life, although he tended to have more confidence than others:

By them being out there at this school by Weems Road, you could tell that they were from middle class or even higher class homes. And they kind of looked down on us because we were shipped from the other side of town, the southside.

The phrase “shipped from the other side of town” carries with it the allusion of slaves being shipped to America. No matter how much his dad bought him, Jonathon was still poor and the White kids saw that. Jonathon recognized early that he lived on the southside and people equated that area with poverty. How did the White student know that Jonathon was poor? It was not because of how he dressed. It was because of his race and associations. He was Black and rode the bus to school with the rest of the Black kids. Jonathon did have a plan for a better life: “My goal since junior high was to be a professional basketball or football player.” Which sport he played didn’t matter to him, as long as it brought him the money. Unfortunately, his plan did not work out, and he ended up discovering another source for real money: “Where are these guys working at with all these nice things?.... They were selling drugs.” Jonathon wanted a better lifestyle, just as the rest of us did, but he wanted to take a shortcut to get it. I often wonder why he, but not some of the other participants under similar circumstances, decided to sell drugs. The

narratives showed that the other 7 participants sought to earn a decent and honest living. I believe this finding reflects personality and upbringing. Jonathon had plenty of nice things, and he was not willing to go without them. His circumstances had already conditioned him for the opportunity. Couple this with his out-going personality, and you had one smooth-talking drug dealer.

My oldest brother Patrick was always a dreamer: “And uh, I never wanted to be a crook or thug. That just never was me, and in my heart and bones, I felt my day was coming when I was going to be more than what my circumstances were.” Patrick’s circumstances said one thing, but his heart said something else. He always dressed like he was successful, and kept his hair permed and looking good. Having been raised in the ghetto, he did his best to look like a million bucks. Patrick idolized the singers of that time, especially R&B singers, and often dressed like them. Based on his narrative and my personal knowledge of him, Patrick dressed and carried himself according to the future lifestyle he wanted to have in life. Randy said that being around the White kids made him reflect on what he wanted to have in life: “You wanna have something. When you grow up, you wanna have something. You wanna be something. And you don’t wanna be pretty much struggling.” He was at times embarrassed by his appearance, especially at Blanchard among the financially stable White students. As his narrative indicated, Randy has always been a goal setter in the midst of financial needs. He had an uncanny ability and discipline to put away for the future. Early on, he knew where he wanted to be in life. As Randy put it, “When you got a goal and a mission, you can’t let nothing stop you.” Jeremy also had a plan to change his lifestyle: “I did use to dream of going to college to play and make it into the NBA. I was starting to visualize that in my 11th-grade year.”

Jeremy's mother also planted seeds in his mind for aspiring for a better lifestyle: "And she was saying that, "You have an opportunity to go to school. You get to go and learn and have the opportunity to better yourself."

Research shows that SES can contribute to ambitious aspirations (Kao & Tienda, 1998). MacLeod (1995) found that the low-income African American males comprising the *Brothers* had high expectations for the future and ambitious hopes for a better lifestyle:

SUPER: I'll have a house, a nice car, no one bothering me. Won't have to take no hard time from no one. Yeah, I'll have a good job, too.

JUAN: I'll have a regular house, y'know, with a yard and everything. I'll have a steady job, a good job. I'll be living the good life, the easy life.

MIKE: I might have a wife, some kids. I might be holding down a regular business job like an old guy. I hope I'll be able to do a lot of skiing and stuff like that when I'm old.

CRAIG: I'll probably be having a good job on my hands, I think. Working in an office as an architect, y'know, with my own drawing board, doing my own stuff, or at least close to there. (p. 74-75)

Although the African American males in MacLeod's study were more academically inclined than the Black males in my study, both groups of males came from similar economic and familial backgrounds. For my study, the reality of poverty was at the foundation of the 8 participants' goals and ambitions in life. For most of them, having struggled without the basic necessities was motivation to hope for a better standard of living.

As this research has shown, the 8 African American males in my study spoke vividly about their lives of poverty and wanted to improve their standards of living. With their poor economic and living conditions came frustration, embarrassment, and ridicule

from their peers. Some participants managed to maintain positive attitudes in spite of their living conditions while others were emotionally scarred. The bitter reality of poverty was at the core of the participants' longing for a better life.

#### *Other Thematic Discussions*

*Resilience.* Resilience must be discussed here in light of the successes of many of the participants. Resilience can be defined in various ways, depending on the nature of adaptation. Masten (1994) defined resilience as "...successful adaptation despite risk and adversity" (p. 3). Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) defined educational resilience as "...the heightened likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities, brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (p. 46). Risk factors and protective factors come into play as well in discussing resilience. A risk factor is a variable that carries a high probability of negative outcome, while a protective factor is a variable that facilitates a positive outcome (Masten). It is the ability to adapt in adverse situations that enables one to overcome and succeed in life (Masten). For this research project, I investigated the educational and social outcomes of eight African American males who were raised in poor and adverse conditions. The risk factors for the African American males in this study were almost identical for each participant: low-income families, violent neighborhoods, poverty, fatherlessness, racism, grade retention, and race/gender issues. The lack of emphasis on education in the home was a risk factor for 5 participants. For the 5 participants who graduated, the protective factors were self-motivation, goal setting, and a positive attitude towards school. Parental support was a factor for four of the five graduates. Based on the evidence, I believe that the positive attitudes toward school were the most important

variable for the 5 participants who graduated. Five of the 8 participants used various modes of adaptive distancing to avoid bad influences in order to survive in life (Masten). Although Patrick and Victor were not educationally resilient, they were socially resilient in that they avoided the street life and became honest, hard-working, law-abiding citizens.

According to Wang et al. (1994), social competence, good problem-solving skills, independence, and a clear sense of purpose are the major characteristics of resilient children (p. 49). An added trait is exposure to positive adults: “Most resilient children have at least one strong relationship with an adult (not always a parent), and this relationship diminishes risks associated with family discord” (p. 56). Based on the results of this study, all 8 participants to some degree exhibited social competence, developed a sense of purpose, and connected with at least one positive adult. Four participants [Victor, Patrick, Randy, and I] exhibited all five characteristics to a certain degree. For example, social competence was not fully developed for some, while it was a major trait for others. Three participants [Patrick, Orlando, and I] developed social competence as they moved through each level of schooling, while the other 5 participants were socially competent for most of their school years. Based on the data, independence and problem-solving skills were characteristics for only 4 participants [Victor, Patrick, Randy, and I]. Each of these 4 participants demonstrated the ability and courage to face problems in life apart from the support of parents. I decided to make an academic change for the better early in life without the guidance of an adult; Victor and Patrick took on major roles in our family without my mother’s pleading and sought to solve their problems through hard

work. Randy demonstrated independence and problem-solving skills by working several jobs and saving most of his money.

Although all 8 participants were driven by a sense of purpose at some time during their school years, only 3 participants [Patrick, Orlando, and Jonathon] knew what they wanted to do in life while in elementary school. This was evident in Orlando and Jonathon playing sports in junior high and high school and Patrick consistently singing and practicing after school hours. All 8 participants had exposure to positive adults at some point in their lives. Based on the narratives, 5 of the 8 participants had very strong bonds with their mothers. This special bond had a positive influence on the participants' behavior in various ways, resulting in enhanced resilient qualities. Patrick's bond with his mother influenced him to take on more mature roles in the home as a surrogate father. I believe that Patrick's resilient qualities were enhanced by this fatherly role in that he matured faster and kept his focus on his goals in life. Victor's bond with his mother influenced him to assist with the family's financial crisis by acquiring jobs throughout junior high and high school. Victor's role enhanced his resilient qualities in that he avoided the streets and obtained various jobs to make a better life. Jeremy, Johnny, and I all had similar motherly bonds motivating us to do well in school and graduate. Jeremy's mother also influenced him to steer away from trouble on the streets. Randy had a very special bond with his father, resulting in him staying out of trouble and graduating from high school. Orlando had a very special relationship with one of his older brothers, who was also a talented basketball player, and He spent time mentoring Orlando for basketball stardom, giving him tips and advice to better his game. Based on his narrative, Jonathon



did not have any positive figures in his life other than his mother and grandmother, and their influence on his behavior and decisions in life was weak.

Exposure to supportive adults early in life and consistently throughout life shields children from the harmful effects of adversities and enhances their self-concept and self-worth (Wang et al., 1994). In general, because all of the participants in this study had caring and supportive mothers [Randy also having a caring father], I believe that the positive effect of such support was evident in all of their lives to varying degrees. There were, however, several participants who stood out to me as I studied the data. Of all the participants, I believe that Johnny demonstrated this shielding effect the most at the elementary school level, because he blossomed at Blanchard in spite of the school's racist environment. I believe that his high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence were partially due to his mother's encouragement and influence:

But Darrell, I was an excited, happy kid growing up in elementary school. I had high self-esteem. I loved myself. I loved what I was doing.... My mom and [older] sisters use to say how good Blanchard is and all the other White schools in comparison to J. D. Davis. The quality of the education, the physical buildings, you name it. They didn't want me going there anyway. Because of the condition of J. D. Davis and the academics, they wanted me in a better school academically and physically.

Jeremy was clearly affected by his mother's guidance and stern words of instruction. He purposefully avoided the troublesome kids in his neighborhood and found more positive activities to engage in: "I had to accept the fact that mom has four boys in the can [slang for Elizabeth Canty], and I'm the oldest. There were some boys I didn't hang with because I saw what they were doing." I believe that Jeremy's mature recognition of his role as the oldest boy boosted his self-esteem, and operating in such a role made him all the more careful to preserve his status. Randy enjoyed the support of a caring mother as

well as consistent, positive input from his father and grandfather. Randy acknowledged his father's and grandfather's guidance and direction as the means by which he stayed on track: "I had my granddaddy there. My granddaddy was a role model. I always looked up to those two, and they made sure you stayed on track.... My daddy influenced me by keeping me on track along the way."

Noguera (2001b) noted:

Confronted with a variety of obstacles and challenges, some Black males still find ways to survive and, in some cases, to excel. Interestingly, we know much less about resilience, perseverance, and the coping strategies employed by individuals whose lives are surrounded by hardships than we know about those who succumb and become victims of their environment. (p. 57)

Generally, what makes one drop out of school while another experiencing similar circumstances endures and graduates is not clear. Due to the underperformance and behavior problems of many Black males, scholars debate whether cultural or environmental factors are to blame (Noguera). However, it seems that factors on both sides contribute in some way to the perceptions and behaviors of Black males: "What is less understood is how environmental and cultural forces influence the way in which Black males come to perceive schooling and how those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school" (p. 52-53). In this particular study, 5 out of 8 participants graduated from high school. These five graduates faced similar circumstances as the other three who dropped out. I believe that both cultural and environmental factors influenced the decisions of these eight Black men to stay in school or drop out. In particular, I have found that perception and parental emphasis on education were factors that influenced the participants' educational outcomes. I believe that in general, environmental and cultural factors influence perception and outlook,

which in turn affect behavior and performance. Patrick, for example, was raised in an environment of poverty, and his family's culture did not stress the importance of education. He struggled in school and could not see how education would benefit him. He had a job which paid him money, something his education was not giving him, and he viewed his singing talent as an avenue to make much more money in the future. Patrick's environment of poverty and cultural family view of education help developed his perception of education as an obstacle. How did this affect his performance and behavior in school? Patrick was not a behavior problem, but his motivation and performance were low, which eventually led to him dropping out. Table 7 summarizes the cultural and environmental influences on participants' school performance.

Table 7

*Environmental/Cultural Influences*

Participants	Environ. Factors	Cultural Factors	Perception of Education	Education Outcome
Johnny	poverty	educ. stressed	opportunity	graduated
Jeremy	poverty	educ. stressed	opportunity	graduated
Orlando	poverty	educ. not stressed	opportunity	graduated
Patrick	poverty	educ. not stressed	obstacle	dropped out
Randy	poverty	educ. stressed	opportunity	graduated
Victor	poverty	educ. not stressed	frustration	dropped out
Jonathon	poverty	educ. stressed	oppor/unfair	dropped out
Darrell	poverty	educ. not stressed	opportunity	graduated

*Note:* Jonathon did manage to get his GED sometime after he dropped out of school.

According to Table 7, all of the participants who had healthy views of school and education graduated in spite of the environmental and cultural hurdles. This is noted as acting out of individual agency (Noguera, 2001b). The three others, who had negative views of school, dropped out. Jonathon originally held a positive view of school as an opportunity for upward mobility via sports. However, once he perceived this opportunity was blocked, his attitude and perception of Hardaway High changed. He felt mistreated and began to purposefully act out in order to be expelled. He continued to view school in general as an opportunity after expulsion from Hardaway High, because he attempted to enroll at Carver High for the same purpose of winning an athletic scholarship. His plan

did not work, so he dropped out. The participants with positive outlooks on education could have succumbed to their environmental and cultural hurdles, but they somehow saw beyond these obstacles. Some of them had personal qualities that helped form their more positive views of school. As for me, I was fatherless and reared in poverty, and education was not stressed at home, but I managed to assess the pros and cons of dropping out. My older brothers' outcomes made me think twice. Also, my mother was rooting for me in the background. Johnny was also fatherless and raised in poverty. Education was stressed in his home, but he also enjoyed going to school and had a positive attitude. Randy was raised by both parents, and mentored by his grandfather. The additional support was helpful for him. Among the participants in this study, I believe that perception was the deciding factor for dropping out or staying in school. Black males with negative perceptions of education, especially those with backgrounds similar to these participants, have a much greater probability of dropping out of school: "Similarly, efforts to improve the academic performance of African American males must begin by understanding the attitudes that influence how they perceive schooling and academic pursuits" (Noguera, p. 60).

Sanders (1998) conducted a study of 827 African American eighth-grade students. Data was collected through questionnaires and forty semi-structured interviews. Various results were reported. In particular, boys were less likely than girls to view education as important for future success (Sanders). Perception of education as important increased when students perceived that parents and teachers supported their schooling (Sanders). The family, church, and school had strong impact on students' views of self and importance of education: "The study thus suggests that by providing encouragement and

guidance, significant adults in the family, church, and school help students to develop the attitudes and behaviors necessary for school success” (p. 401). The study confirmed the importance of Black male adolescents having examples of academic success and upward mobility via education:

If, in their households and neighborhoods, African American adolescents are not exposed to individuals who confirm the possibility of mobility through education, they may possess an abstract belief in the importance of schooling, but not a concrete one that significantly affects academic effort and outcomes. (p. 401)

None of the 8 participants in this study had consistent examples of educational success in their lives, although 2 participants [Jonathon and Jeremy] had parents who graduated. The 3 participants in this study who exhibited negative views of education and dropped out [Jonathon, Patrick, and Victor] did not have the benefit of such examples. As for supportive teachers, Jonathon mentioned only the Black male teachers at Blanchard Elementary. He never mentioned any positive, supportive teachers beyond elementary school, which probably reflects his attitude and behavior problems. Jonathon for a time viewed education as a means for future success via athletics, but that was only temporary. Victor and Patrick did not mention any such teachers in their interviews. Concerning supportive parents for these three, only Jonathon’s mother was supportive of education, and that support dwindled as he got older and more rebellious.

I believe that supportive parents and teachers also played a role in the educational outcomes of the 5 participants that graduated from high school. All of the graduating participants, with the exception of Orlando, had supportive parents. All 5 participants had more positive relationships with teachers than the 3 participants who dropped out. Sanders (1998) revealed the importance of supportive parents, teachers, and church members in the lives of African American males. Kind words of encouragement as well

as supportive efforts from these three sources can impact the way in which Black boys view education (Sanders). In my study, perception of education played a major role in the academic success and failure of the 8 participants. The impact of churches on student achievement was not addressed in my study, but warrants further inquiry. The Black Church played a vital role during slavery and the civil rights movement (King, 1964). This could very well be a missing link in solutions to our problems in the Black community today as well.

Resilience was the key factor for Sam, George, and Rameck, three Black men who grew up in a very rough, poor area of Newark, New Jersey (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2002, 2007). As children of poverty, they were raised in single-parent homes for the majority of their childhood and teenage years. Their circumstances were very similar to those of the participants of this study. Several factors enabled these males to graduate from public school, and subsequently from medical school. Sam, George, and Rameck recognized early their future outside of education. They saw first-hand the destiny of Black boys in their neighborhoods who dropped out: drugs, jail, and the cemetery. These three African American males made a pact to finish school and become doctors. They had dreams of being something in life. It was a visit to a dentist's office that inspired George to want to become a dentist himself:

I don't remember the dentist's name, but I never forgot what he did for me. He gave me a dream. And there was no greater gift for a smart kid growing up in a place where dreams were snatched away all the time. (Davis et al., 2002, p. 6)

This dentist took extra time to answer George's questions, and allowed him to examine the various dental instruments. It was George who inspired the other two to become doctors:

I was the one who had ever thought of becoming a doctor before that day. The truth is, none of us had seen anything to make us believe it was really possible. Sometimes, though, you just have to step out there and believe in something you can't quite see. And something deep down was telling me this was one of those times. "Man, we could go to college for free," I emphasized. What did we have to lose by applying? "Let's do this," I said in as persuasive a voice as I could muster. Finally, they [Sam and Remeck] gave in. (Davis et al., 2002, p. 72)

They relied on each other for a network of support that lasted throughout the eight years of medical school (Davis et al.). These males also enjoyed the support of teachers and relatives. Even with the network of support, it took self-determination to stay focused each day and not to give up. They made costly mistakes along the way, but having supportive adults made up for the poor decisions (Davis et al.).

One of the three men, Sam, made an interesting comment about why few Blacks go into the medical field: "You can't aim for what you can't see" (Davis et al., 2002, p. 177). These men had no personal examples to follow; they had only each other to depend on, along with the encouragement and support of a few relatives, teachers, and friends. This was clearly not the norm in poor, Black communities, where there are few examples of this level of educational success. One of the three men made several mistakes that could have cost him his career, yet adults with influence, writing letters on his behalf, saved him. These men struggled into manhood without the guidance of real fathers. Only one of the three men dreamed of becoming a doctor early in life (Davis et al.). The other two latched on later in life, having been directed, influenced, and somewhat inspired by their friend. The potential was always there, but someone had to tap into it. As for me, I never would have pursued post-secondary education if not for the Black male teacher from Marshall Junior High who told me I could do it. African American males need supportive people in their lives who believe in their success and are willing to help them,



even through the embarrassing mistakes along the way (Wang et al., 1994). I believe that African American males also need supportive adults who can be influential voices on their behalf. For my study, Jonathon, Patrick, and Victor needed adults who could speak on behalf of their needs to school officials; such interventions may have precluded their dropping out. Black boys need to be taught the value and power of networking, teamwork, and partnership (Davis et al.). From my own experiences, I have never witnessed such a group of African American males coming together in agreement to dream big and be there to support each other no matter what:

As I watched Sam walk across the stage, I sat still and quiet. Pride swirled through my body. I was thinking, "Man, we really did this." I thought of all we had been through together, from boys comparing sneakers on the schoolyard in junior high to men walking across the stage to become doctors. We had leapt into the unknown together and locked hands and pulled one another up, over, and through the rough spots. I remembered how much I had hurt for him when he had failed the state board exam, how I'd driven to Camden one and a half hours each way nearly every weekend after that to be there for him. I tried to get him to play basketball and just have some fun to get his mind off the results of that test. It was all I could do to show him that I cared and the he wasn't alone. (Davis et al., p. 228)

As this research has shown, resilience was a major factor for most of the participants of this study. According to the narratives, the risk factors were almost identical for the 8 participants. Five of the eight Black men in this study demonstrated educational resilience, managing to beat the odds and graduating from high school. This study found that perception of education was a major determining factor for graduating or dropping out. Supportive adults were also a key factor for 4 of the 5 participants who graduated, while social competence, sense of purpose, and positive adults were common for all 8 participants.

*Playing the Dozens.* A common trait among all of the participants was playing the dozens. I recalled Patrick, years ago, talking about how he and his friends engaged in janking on each other. Some of the things I heard him repeat were very lewd at times. Victor was known for his stylish ribbing. However, it was this cultural activity that led to his educational demise: “It affected my grades, because how could you concentrate, when kids picking at you and make you feel like I don’t know what? It was mostly Black kids picking at me.” Orlando recalled incidents of jiving at times when his appearance drew negative attention. He did not want to go to school during these times: “It was embarrassing to wear dirty clothes, feet coming out your shoes. It was embarrassing. Kids made fun of me, mostly the Black kids. And it wasn’t out of hatred or anything.” Jeremy’s stutter, along with his poverty, led to social conflicts: “I almost got into a fight because of my speech....A lot of times kids would pick on me because of that. Kids are cruel.” Randy, in contrast, recalled the fun of jiving: “I wasn’t picked on for what I wore, but we all were what you called joking and playing the dozens. We all got that. Nobody was immune to that. It was just an everyday thing, trying to have fun.” Jonathon was the master jankster: “I was a class clown anyway. I janked on people a lot.” I recall vividly the embarrassment from such folly. Jonathon and a few others constantly harassed me verbally because of my appearance. I dreaded going to school on the days I had to wear my red and black buddies. Eventually, I managed to get my first job during junior high school, thereby earning money for clothes that were in step with the styles of that time.

Majors and Billson (1992) described the advantages of *playing the dozens*:

The most important contribution of the dozens game may be as a coping mechanism to help teach black adolescent males how to control their feelings. Learning how to keep cool, monitor tempers, anger, frustration, pent-up aggression, and other anxieties is crucial in the black world. (p. 101)

In the game of *playing the dozens*, each player can be under substantial pressure as he receives various insults against himself, his family, and especially his mother. I have noticed from past experiences that boys tend to respond with much emotion when mothers are brought into the picture, which makes the competition even more tempting. Majors & Billson believe that such insults added to the pressure to respond quickly and can teach Black youth how to survive in the real world:

Holding feelings in under incredible stress is a discipline fostered by the ritualistic insults in the dozens game, which was, we think, developed under slavery—a time when African Americans were the butt of insidious insults on their dignity.... Why is verbal ability such a highly regarded skill in the African American community? One reason is that it often makes the difference between getting by and getting ahead. Many role models for black youth—pimps, entertainers, musicians, ministers, and politicians—make it because of their fancy mouthwork. Those who can emulate them can become miniheroes themselves. (Majors & Billson, p. 98-99)

My experiences with this cultural activity were mixed. It was fun just as long as my feelings were not hurt, but most of the time, that is exactly what happened to me. Feelings and one's sense of masculinity are hurt often, depending on the opponent. Even today as an educator, I have witnessed incidents of fights and near-fights due to this vicious verbal game. To survive in this game of words today, Black boys have to be strong mentally and have strong self-worth and esteem (Majors & Billson). Victor, although he made many laugh with his jokes and ability to *jank*, found himself defenseless at school and eventually retreated from the educational scene in utter defeat, never to return again. The purpose of this research endeavor was not to explore the effects of *playing the dozens* on achievement, but it seemed to be an influential variable affecting self-esteem to a degree. Victor presented one of the worse-case scenarios. It did affect self-esteem for several of the participants in this study throughout each level of

schooling. I believe that it was clear in Victor's case that *ribbing* and *jiving* affected his academic performance. It also had a negative effect on Orlando's academic performance in addition to his self-esteem. However, this was not the case for Jeremy and me, as only our self-esteem was affected.

As this research has shown, *playing the dozens* was a common trait among the 8 participants. This verbal game of insults negatively affected the educational achievement and self-esteem of 4 participants of this study. For the other 4 participants, *playing the dozens* was perceived as a friendly game and had no negative effects on them. Based on his narrative, Victor was negatively affected the most by *ribbing* and *jiving*, as he eventually dropped out of school to avoid the peer ridicule.

## Chapter VI.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section, *Summary of Findings*, summarizes the findings of this study. The next section, *Application of Findings*, discusses the lessons learned from this research and applies them to society as a whole. *Literature Applications* seeks to apply concepts in the literature to education and society. *Future Research* discusses areas of needed research based on the results of this study. The last section, *Final Thoughts*, provides a short capstone to this study.

#### *Summary of Findings*

My study focused on eight African American males raised in a low-income neighborhood of Columbus, Georgia. With the exception of one participant, 7 of the 8 were raised by single mothers. Only one participant had consistent access to an active father. All but one participant repeated at least one grade. The results of this study showed that each participant desired personal success, fatherly support, fair treatment, and improved lifestyles. The study also indicated that 7 of the 8 participants exhibited resilience socially and educationally. Lastly, this study has demonstrated the effects of *playing the dozens* and *ribbing* on the achievement and self-esteem of these participants.

There were several questions that guided this study. What were the educational experiences and related life experiences of African American males growing up with me in Elizabeth Canty Apartments? I found that 7 of the 8 participants repeated at least one grade. Five of the 8 participants graduated from high school. Of the 6 participants who

attended Blanchard Elementary, 4 preferred attending majority-Black schools. Concerning life experiences, all 8 participants described incidents related to poverty and racism and vividly expressed their desires to overcome such barriers. Seven participants expressed disappointment in not having supportive fathers, while 3 participants took on leadership roles in their homes in the absence of fathers. Several participants ventured off temporarily onto destructive pathways of drugs and alcohol. Out of 8 Black male participants, only one reported that he sold drugs to make a living.

What were the barriers to their success? The participants reported that the barriers in their lives were poverty, racism, and absentee fathers [with the exception of Randy]. Poverty was a major challenge for the participants as their families struggled to make ends meet. Several participants spoke vividly of the emotional turmoil associated with poverty, while others managed to keep positive attitudes during their economic struggles. Racism was a challenge for every participant, and they responded to racist incidents in various ways. Several participants engaged in fights, while others clearly ignored it. Racism negatively affected the educational achievement of several participants who attended Blanchard Elementary. Seven of the 8 participants expressed their feelings about their missing fathers. In general, they felt that their lives would have been enhanced had their fathers been present and more supportive.

To what extent did race affect their educational outcomes? Six of the 8 participants in this study attended Blanchard Elementary, and 5 participants gave various accounts of racism involving students, teachers, and administrators. Four of these 5 participants expressed relief about leaving Blanchard. Racist encounters at Blanchard Elementary did have some effect on the educational achievement of 4 participants, as

their comments demonstrated. They spoke of being able to open up and relax at majority-Black Marshall Junior High in contrast to their experiences at predominantly White Blanchard Elementary. Two of these four participants also commented that they learned more at Marshall than at Blanchard. Two participants spoke favorably of some of their White teachers. Johnny, in particular, felt that he learned more from White teachers than from Black teachers overall. He was the only participant in this study who had very good relationships with White teachers. Three participants felt that they were mistreated by certain White teachers, and two of them felt that their grades reflected this maltreatment. Two participants felt that they were mistreated by particular White administrators, resulting in unfair suspensions.

How did the challenges of my life and the lives of my Black male peers relate to the challenges of African American males' lives as described in the research literature? For this study, the challenges for the 8 participants were almost identical to those indicated in the literature: poverty, racism, absentee fathers (with the exception of Randy), grade retentions, and race/gender issues. According to the literature, poverty and low SES present a major hurdle for most Black males (Earls, 1991; Noguera, 2001b). The odds of getting out of the ghetto were stacked against us, but 7 of the 8 participants currently have higher standards of living than their parents [Jonathon is currently incarcerated.]. According to the literature, racism still exists and is very much alive in our schools and society today as it was when we were in school (Bakari, 2003; Nelson, 2008). Racism was a major challenge for every participant in this study. How each person handled it varied. While some participants ignored the racism, others responded to it with verbal and sometimes physical confrontations. The literature suggests a possible cultural

disconnect between White female teachers and African American male students in light of national educational statistics (Irvine, 1991; Cooper & Jordan, 2005). As noted above, of the 8 Black male participants, only one spoke favorably of relationships with White teachers. Yet, 6 of the 8 participants spoke favorably of several of their Black male teachers. I believe that the results of this study confirm what some researchers believe exists in our classrooms today: a cultural divide between most White teachers, especially female, and Black students, particularly males.

The absent father was a major hurdle for 7 participants in this study, and according to the literature, this issue remains a problem plaguing Black America today (Nelson, 2008). In this study, absent fathers were not linked directly to the participants' misbehaviors and underachievement. However, I was able to compare the outcome of Randy to those of the other participants. Randy's father was always active in his life, especially after the divorce. His father's strict supervision, along with the military parental style of Randy's grandfather, kept Randy on a sure path throughout his youth. He did get into fights occasionally, and his grades were generally average. He, however, was one of the most focused and disciplined participants in the study, and as a result he fulfilled his childhood dream of a military career much like his grandfather's. The rest of us struggled and stumbled throughout the various stages of life with either no clear direction for success or very little support to make our dreams realities. According to the literature, Black boys are likely to be retained at least once (Smith, 2005), suspended (Cooper & Jordan, 2005), and/or placed in special education (Blacks Overrepresented in Special Education, 2007). In this study 7 of the 8 participants were retained at least once, and 4 participants had been suspended at least once. None of the participants were ever



placed in special education, but Patrick was placed in a slower class at one point, most likely due to the school's tracking policy (Oakes, 1985).

What factors contributed to some of the participants graduating from high school while others dropped out and, in some cases, were imprisoned? Five of the 8 participants in this study graduated from high school. The factors contributing to that graduation rate were self-determination and parental support. Another major contributing factor was the participants' perception of education [See Table 7]. The 5 participants who graduated had one major commonality, a positive perception of education. They all viewed education as a means for upward mobility. The 3 participants who dropped out of school had negative views of education. Victor's source of frustration was the classroom. His peers *ribbed* him viciously, and he struggled academically. Patrick said that school was in his way. Jonathon began to view school negatively when he realized his chances of winning a scholarship were virtually impossible. I originally intended to include incarcerated individuals in this study, but the various prisons in Georgia constantly presented me with barriers. For various reasons, it was difficult getting on the visitations list, and I was prohibited from recording or writing during any interview. Thus, I decided to limit my study to currently non-incarcerated participants. Two participants in this study had served time for criminal offenses: Johnny served time for unauthorized absence in the Marines, and Jonathon served two terms for possession of drugs with intent to sell.

### *Application of Findings*

I believe there are lessons to be learned from this research for parents, teachers, and administrators. For single parents of Black males, I believe this study has shown that some African American males reared in poverty may struggle with low self-esteem and

need frequent and consistent encouragement. Four of the 8 participants described incidents of low self-esteem linked to their conditions of poverty. In general, all children need encouragement, but I believe that poor, fatherless Black males need it more than others. These 4 participants were embarrassed by their appearance and ridiculed by their peers. Why is this so important? Culturally, Black males put a lot of emphasis on outward appearance, and their sense of self-worth is directly connected to it, as Majors and Billson (1992) pointed out. The 4 participants of this study were no exception, and their academic performance was affected to varying degrees. Victor was the worst case, as his education was most impacted by low self-esteem. There was no indication that these particular participants received encouraging words or pep talks from their mothers concerning self-esteem or self-concept. Based on their narratives, the participants seemed to have been left to fend for themselves emotionally and socially. In the absence of dependable father figures, low-income single mothers of Black boys need to encourage them often to develop a healthy self-concept in the midst of impoverished conditions. As this study has shown, 5 of the 6 participants who attended Blanchard were intimidated in this predominantly White environment and did not feel welcomed. We needed to be told that we were just as good as any of the White children and had every right to be at that school. According to Johnny's narrative, he thrived in such environments because he had a healthy self-concept, and his mother provided much encouragement. He was just as poor and needy as most of us were, yet he had high self-esteem.

For single mothers and missing fathers of Black boys, this study has clearly shown that boys want real relationships with their missing fathers. This was evident in the 7 participants' comments about their missing fathers as well as in the way in which

the 6 participants described the importance of their Black male teachers at Blanchard. Based on this evidence, I believe that Black single mothers should make every effort to provide opportunities for their sons to see their fathers or find father figures who could provide surrogate fatherly support in the absence of dedicated fathers. I also highly encourage fathers of Black boys who have been absent or negligent to repair the damages, because I believe it is never too late. Any healthy father/son relationship, no matter how late in the game, is worthwhile, although it is best to start early to possibly minimize social and educational problems. As a dedicated father, I believe that such rewards are priceless. As Randy's narrative has demonstrated, a dedicated father can have the biggest influence in a child's life, steering him in the right direction and helping him avoid adolescent pitfalls.

For White teachers of low-income Black males, this study confirms the growing belief that White teachers and Black male students are divided by culture. As I discovered this finding, I pondered over the question, "Where did this cultural disconnect in public schools begin?" I believe the answer lies in a statement by a White female teacher in an interview by Causey (2001): "It was almost like joining the Peace Corps. Going to a place you've never been, living with people you've never dealt with, not understanding their culture, where they were coming from" (p. 415). The cultural divide in our schools began with integration, as this teacher was describing her initial reaction to desegregation in Columbus, Georgia. Integration forced the union of two very distinct cultures under one roof, but unfortunately, they never embraced each other. The cultural divide in the classroom was apparent in this teacher's statement, as it remains to this day in classrooms across America (Cooper & Jordan, 2005).

According to Causey (2001), Muscogee County School District never offered professional development or teacher training to target race issues. As an educator, I have taught in the public school system for 14 years, and I have never been required to attend any seminar concerning the cultural divide or culturally relevant pedagogy. It is in this context that I recommend that school systems provide all teachers with mandatory training on cultural and race issues that affect minority student achievement, in particular, Black culture and effective pedagogy for African American males. Irvine (1991) suggested that White teachers become cultural translators and bicultural: “thoroughly knowledgeable and sensitive about black children’s language, style of presentation, community values, traditions, legends, myths, history, symbols, and norms” (p. 126). Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested that teachers should be trained in culturally relevant pedagogy, given opportunities to observe effective culturally relevant teaching, and required to have prolonged immersion in Black culture. I believe another component in this process of healing is open and honest dialogue, giving educators of all cultures opportunities to honestly and effectively critique themselves as well as the system. As mentioned earlier, only one of 8 participants [Johnny] had good relationships with White teachers. Johnny named several White teachers who impacted his life the most, and they were all from the predominantly White schools he attended. Such predominantly White environments intimidated most of the other participants. According to Johnny’s narrative, these White teachers inspired him, but most of the other participants found inspiration from Black male teachers. I believe there were numerous opportunities for the various White teachers to connect with the other 7 participants in this study, but the results showed otherwise. As an educator, I have learned from experience that making positive

connections with students [Black and White] and building healthy student/teacher relationships can go a long way in deterring future discipline problems while maximizing achievement. Proper training for teachers in culture could be the solution to the cultural disconnect.

I believe that this study has produced lessons and insights that would be useful for administrators and other school-level leaders. It has shown that African American males, especially those reared in poverty, have aspirations and goals in life just as other students do. As an administrator and school leader, I know that low SES students and at-risk minority students can easily be stereotyped as trouble-makers and assumed to have no direction in life or value for education. As the participants of this study indicated, the opposite is true. Only one of the 8 participants viewed education as a waste of his time. Five participants had goals that were dependent upon the completion of school. These African American male students wanted to achieve and do well in life. Considering the cultural and racial divide between White teachers and Black male students that this study has confirmed, I believe that administrators and other school leaders should investigate discipline incidents more thoroughly before suspending or expelling such students. Five of the 8 participants in this study described various incidents of preferential treatment of White students by teachers and school leaders, especially in reference to discipline. This study has indicated that mistreated Black students take note of such incidents, resulting in the widening of the cultural divide.

#### *Literature Applications*

Ladson-Billings (1994) asked if Black students were better off educated separately: “Do African American students need separate schools?” She answers her own

question by saying, “I conclude with an answer: What African American students need are *better* schools” (p. 137). She argued that such schools should use culturally relevant teaching practices:

Thus culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one’s history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted. Or they may result from the staffing pattern in the school (when all teachers and the principal are white and only the janitors and cafeteria workers are African Americans, for example) and from the tracking of African American students into the lowest-level classes. The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a “relevant black personality” that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture. Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (p. 17-18)

The analysis of narratives of the participants in this study indicated that a more culturally relevant curriculum was needed at each of the predominantly White schools the 8 participants attended. Many of the participants did not feel welcomed and comfortable in the classrooms, and a culturally relevant curriculum might have eradicated the uneasiness that most of us felt. At Blanchard Elementary for example, our Black presence there needed to be confirmed and legitimized not just by the Black teachers, but by the White faculty as well. In such a White dominated environment, a curriculum that recognized our value and worth would have made a significant difference in our perceptions of race. I believe that our academic performance would have been better for some, had they not been faced with the distractions caused by racial conflicts. For years, Black students have had to adjust to the more Eurocentric teaching styles and curricula offering very limited culturally-sensitive components for other races. The participants’ experiences in majority-White schools in Muscogee County were no different. Orlando, for example,

struggled at the White schools for various reasons. Was it because the White schools had tougher curricula, or was he culturally alienated? I believe it was a little of both. Orlando clearly had academic deficits coming from majority-Black Carver Elementary, but he also felt alienated among the White students.

By the same token, I believe that our predominantly Black schools need to be better equipped for educating Black males as well. Several participants in this study commented on the substandard education at some of the majority-Black schools they attended. For example, it was evident that Orlando was not academically prepared for the academic rigor of both majority-White schools he attended, and the pressure to perform on such levels affected him emotionally. Johnny also was very critical of the majority-Black schools he attended, citing evidence of sub-standard practices.

Even today, as schools in Muscogee County regress back to pre-integration demographics, I believe that the majority-White schools and the schools with predominantly White faculties and majority Black students need to establish culturally relevant environments. Racism is still very much alive in our schools, and is mostly concentrated in the predominantly-White educational environments (Bakari, 2003; Ferguson, 2003). One of the things this study has shown is that poor African American males can be intimidated in White school environments, likely affecting achievement. Schools have the responsibility of teaching every race, thereby maximizing academic achievement for all. I believe that a curriculum and atmosphere that incorporates culturally responsive pedagogy would alleviate the marginalization and alienation of African American males in the classroom as well as the negative views African American students have toward our educational system. An environment of culturally diverse

teaching, which invites rather than alienates, could foster a positive outlook on life and a healthier self-concept for low-income Black males, thus addressing the issue of low self-esteem and self-worth. Ladson-Billings (1994) said that schools should “Provide educational self-determination; Honor and respect the students’ home culture; Help African American students understand the world as it is and equip them to change it for the better” (p. 137-139). I believe that self-determination was needed in the lives of the 3 participants of this study who dropped out and may be a key factor missing in the lives of many dropouts today. Of the 8 participants in this study, 4 struggled with low self-esteem in various stages of their lives and lacked the necessary confidence and self-determination to maximize their achievement. In such cases, it is important for teachers to fill these voids by instilling confidence and motivation in our Black males. This study revealed such participants’ insecurities. My older brother Victor especially needed encouraging teachers, as he lacked the confidence and determination to endure. I believe our experiences at Blanchard and other predominantly White schools would have been different had we all been taught to respect each other and to value cultural differences. Minority students in majority-White environments need to feel welcomed and included; otherwise their achievement and performance may be negatively affected.

According to Ladson-Billings (1999), school systems should do the following:

1. Recruit teacher candidates who have expressed an interest and a desire to work with African American students.
2. Provide educational experiences that help teachers understand the central role of culture.
3. Provide teacher candidates with opportunities to critique the system in ways that will help them choose a role as either agent of change or defender of the status quo.
4. Systematically require teacher candidates to have prolonged immersion in African American culture.
5. Provide opportunities for observation of culturally relevant teaching.



6. Conduct student teaching over a longer period of time and in a more controlled environment. (p. 131-135)

As the minority populations in America's public schools increase and classrooms become more and more diverse, it is vitally important for *all* teachers to be culturally diverse, readily able to address diverse needs and learning styles. As an educator, I believe that teachers need to be equipped with diverse methods for effectively educating minorities. Teacher preparation classes must incorporate more research on Black males, since this group is suffering the most educationally and in other areas. I believe that it would be beneficial for student teachers to conduct intensive observations under the guidance of successful teachers of Black males who effectively incorporate culturally relevant components. Lessons in culture for student teachers would be beneficial only if they are practical and not just theoretical in nature. In my opinion as an educator, multicultural courses need to be culture-specific, targeting specific ethnic groups.

The results of this study showed that 5 of the 8 participants felt uncomfortable in majority-White environments and preferred to be in majority-Black schools. This was a clear indication to me that the majority-White schools they attended did not have successful strategies for teaching Black males. We were expected to conform to the existing school culture, which aligned with the student culture of the White students. I often hear White teachers say that they do not *see* race: They only *see* students, and treat all of them the same. Such declarations are misleading. As Irvine (1991) commented,

When teachers ignore students' race and claim that they treat all children the same, they usually mean that their model of the ideal student is white and middle-class and that all students are treated as if they are or should be both white and middle class. Such treatment contributes to perceptions of inferiority about black culture and life and to denial and self-hatred by black children. (p. 54)

Blanchard and the other majority-White schools we attended were no different. Not only did Blanchard Elementary cater to middle-class White students, but the atmosphere was racially intense at times. We were bused across town to an unfamiliar turf, and most of us were intimidated. There was a reason I and several other Black boys colored our white paper black and then openly declared our ethnicity. It is virtually impossible to ignore race in the classroom. Children from different backgrounds, especially those different from the teacher's ethnicity, need to be strategically included in the lessons. Careful attention needs to be placed on understanding cultures in order for various cultural groups to feel welcomed and not marginalized, as often happens for Black boys:

Rather, I suggest that schools must provide these children the content that other families from a different cultural orientation provide at home. This does not mean separating children according to family background, but instead, ensuring that each classroom incorporates strategies appropriate for all the children in its confines. (Delpit, 1995, p. 30)

Delpit offered a deeper dimension for understanding culture than just textbook knowledge. She pointed out that teachers can be more effective at educating diverse student populations when efforts are made to include culture and home life in classroom discussions and activities (Delpit). This implies knowing first-hand the home environments of minority students and specifically incorporating home life components into the lessons as often as possible (Delpit). This may involve the teacher visiting some of the homes of minority students in order to really understand everyday life for those students. Looking back, I believe the White female teachers at Blanchard could have had better rapport with the Black students if they had taken the time to visit Elizabeth Canty, meet parents, and visit some of the students' homes. The Black teachers, especially Mr.

Simmons and Mr. Lambers, automatically connected with us, but the White teachers needed to move out of their comfort zones if they were to connect with us effectively.

Delpit (1995) offered advice for classroom teachers in fostering cultural acceptance of every student. Teachers should acknowledge and accept students' home language and not allow it to stifle growth and achievement: "Students' home discourses are vital to their perception of self and sense of community connectedness" (p. 163). Why did Orlando feel compelled to talk White? Who told him that he was not talking properly? Orlando never said that anyone in particular corrected his speech patterns, but in an effort to fit in, he attempted to alter his speech. Again, this is evidence of intimidation and marginalization. Delpit suggests that minority students' language and other unique traits be celebrated and not corrected, instead, giving them additional skills to survive in the dominant culture of society. Second, teachers must recognize the conflicts between home and school life. Students who seem unable to learn may actually be refusing to learn and participate in order to protect their sense of identity (Delpit). Allowing room for student expression of self can alleviate and dissolve such conflict of interest. Also, knowledge of students' lives outside the classroom brings awareness of other areas of students' strength and counteracts the tendency of some teachers to *teach down* to students of other cultures (Delpit). I recall being so intimidated and embarrassed of my economic condition at Blanchard that I would not have wanted any of the White teachers to be familiar with my living conditions and home environment. The atmosphere at Blanchard did not cater to openness as such. That is why 4 participants celebrated when we were promoted to the seventh grade. Yet, as Delpit suggested, teachers firsthand knowledge of our culture and home life could very well have been the catalyst for

healing, acceptance, and belonging. Third, teachers must acknowledge the injustices in society, including how society allows some to succeed apart from merit (Delpit). Such open discussions can be liberating.

Only after acknowledging the inequity of the system can the teacher's stance then be "Let me show you how to cheat!" And of course, to cheat is to learn the discourse which would otherwise be used to exclude them from participating in and transforming the mainstream. This is what many black teachers of the segregated South intended when they, like the teachers of Bill Trent and Clarence Cunningham, told their students that they *had* to "do better than those white kids." We can again let our students know that they can resist a system that seeks to limit them to the bottom rung of the social and economic ladder. (p. 165)

I believe that the Black male teachers at Blanchard were attempting to show us how to cheat. They spoke to us in a way in which we could understand and identify with, using such phrases as "This is what you need!" and "You know when you get a certain age and gotta provide for your family, you ain't gonna be able to do that digging ditches." They spoke to us with urgency and clear directives in a way we could understand. These two male teachers were father figures and sources of identification for Black boys in a culturally and socially uncomfortable environment. Based on the narratives of the 6 participants who attended Blanchard Elementary, I believe these two teachers were attempting to perform the rites of passage on our behalf, officially ushering us into an unfamiliar culture and environment of Blanchard Elementary School. Although this ceremonial procedure included harsh corrections, I believe they were sincere in their efforts to legitimize our Black presence in an atmosphere that was sometimes antagonistic and unwelcoming. That is why I believe that more Black male teachers as such are desperately needed for Black male students today, especially on the elementary level (Kunjufu, 2002).

According to Delpit (1995), schools must enact cultural awareness in part by allowing students free expression of their culture. Often, minority students are reprimanded and corrected for not being able to speak and write in Standard English (Delpit). I recall Orlando and Jeremy struggling with their high school English courses and having to attend summer school as a result. Oral and written language varies according to culture (Delpit). By the same token, reading programs that emphasize process rather than skills such as fluency do more harm than good for African American students, considering that Black English is different from Standard English (Delpit). Black students need to be taught Standard English, but including activities that praise cultural linguistic styles is very beneficial in providing warm, inviting classroom atmospheres that breed acceptance and cultural pride rather than rejection and cultural degradation (Delpit). Emphasis should be placed on teaching everyone the necessary skills to survive and succeed in the real world while continually acknowledging the various cultural contributions and differences as representative of the growing diverse classroom populations (Delpit). Delpit described the *culture of power* in which the minority populations, especially African Americans, were denied the rights and the means to operate:

To summarize, I suggest that students must be *taught* the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own "expertness" as well; and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent. (p. 45)

In other words, Black students need to be taught how to be successful with the right and necessary tools, and given equal access to rites of passage in this endeavor. My oldest

brother, Patrick, dropped out of school not just because he was struggling, but also because he failed to see the importance of education. I believe that Patrick would have stayed the course and graduated had he been exposed to a more practical and culturally responsive curriculum, which would have given him recognizable skills for succeeding in life and a culturally supportive environment in which to do it. Delpit also suggested that in order to effectively educate poor children and children of color, schools must solicit input from adults who share their culture—Black parents, Black teachers, and members of poor Black communities—as they devise such a curriculum. Delpit’s suggestions transcend the general textbook knowledge catering to particular ethnic groups that now passes for multi-cultural education. In order to identify with and effectively reach African American males in education, we must provide curricula with which they can identify and to which they can relate. Why not include input from those who know, recognize, and operate in the Black culture on a daily basis? I believe that this is the missing ingredient for the cultural component. Such a curriculum might have made the difference for Patrick and Victor. It might have interested Jonathon enough to keep his attention in the classroom.

I am convinced that whether we have separate or integrated schools, we need more African American male teachers, especially on the elementary level. Black males in their early grades need to see more teachers with whom they can easily identify. The two African American male teachers at Blanchard Elementary impacted the life of each participant who attended that school. They were not perfect, but they left a lasting impression in our minds and hearts. Considering the staggering statistics on absentee fatherism, young Black males, especially those reared in poverty and drug-infested

neighborhoods, need to consistently see positive examples of adult men with whom they can identify.

However, the single-parent, female headed households in this nation's urban communities deny the young black male child a major vehicle necessary in the socialization process of all boys, an adult male. To compound an already calamitous situation, the boys are then sent to school where, for the first four or five years of their educational experience, they are confronted with an environment that is also devoid of adult male role models. In most elementary schools, the principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers are all female. During the first eight to ten years of his life, the lack of consistent, positive, adult male role models may be a primary factor affecting the young black male's ability to succeed in academic settings. (Holland, 1991, p. 40)

Given the shortage of African American male teachers, I suggest that schools enlist the help of Black fraternities and other community organizations, such as Concerned Black Men and Big Brothers/Big Sisters, in supplying Black men for mentoring and tutoring roles in the classrooms. Even though they are not teachers, their presence can make a difference. There needs to be a more concerted effort by state departments, universities, and local school systems to recruit more Black males in teacher preparation programs. Researchers gave several reasons for the diminishing numbers of Blacks in education: decreasing numbers of education majors across the country; decreasing attendance of Black students in post-secondary education; migration of Black females to other fields; low passage rates of teacher competency tests by Blacks; and less than optimal working conditions (Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 1991; Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004). Even the number of Black principals has decreased, due to Black teacher shortages as well as demotions, dismissals, and resignations after desegregation (Irvine). Delpit offered several recommendations to help remedy this situation: raising teacher salaries, increasing financial aid for minority students, providing tutorial sessions for passing teacher examinations, recruiting non-traditional college students such as military retirees,

and restructuring schools to provide more teacher autonomy and opportunities for career advancement.

As an administrator/researcher, I believe there needs to be a more concerted effort in getting low-income parents involved in their children's education. Studies have demonstrated the positive effect of Black parent involvement on Black students' achievement (Irvine, 1991). As for this study, several of the participants were shocked to see how active the White students' parents were at their schools, especially fathers. We rarely observed this level of commitment at the predominantly Black schools. Based on our experiences, Black parents mostly visited our schools because their children were in trouble. Generally, Black parents' lack of involvement in their children's education is not due to indifference or lack of concern, but to misperceptions and lack of cultural synchronization between Black families and schools (Irvine). There is evidence of maltreatment and stereotypical behavior of schools towards Black parents, and such parents refrain from participating and confronting this behavior out of fear and concern that their children will be targeted by the schools (Irvine). In other cases, desegregation made it virtually impossible for some Black parents to get involved because their children were bused to schools far away from their neighborhoods (Irvine). This was obviously the case for Blanchard Elementary, Hardaway High, and other predominantly White schools in this study. We were bused across town, and most of our mothers lacked adequate transportation. Desegregation had a major impact on Black parent involvement in other ways, as well:

Prior to desegregation, black parents communicated with school officials in the black neighborhoods where they both lived. Black churches, lodges, barber and beauty shops, and benevolent societies were places where parents and teachers informally and frequently exchanged and shared information about black children.



Desegregation eliminated these informal communication structures because both the black and the white teachers of black children no longer lived in the black communities. (Irvine, p. 108)

One advantage of a neighborhood school for the participants in this study was that our parents could get there easily if necessary, but it was almost impossible for our parents to get to the White schools. We did not have the privilege of going home early if we were sick: We had to endure the discomfort until we made it home on the bus. Desegregation also dissolved many formerly all-Black schools by busing the Black children to the White schools and scattering Black teachers and some administrators throughout the local schools (Causey, 2001; Irvine). This in turn dealt a harsh blow to Black student and teacher relationships and Black parent involvement (Causey; Irvine). In this study, none of the participants' parents were actively involved in the PTA or any other avenues for parental involvement.

According to the narratives, none of the participants' parents were actively involved in school activities. Irvine (1991) offered advice on how schools and other community organizations can work together in forming alliances with Black parents and getting them more involved with their local schools. Such tips include training for parents to help their children achieve in school. This alone could possibly have made a world of difference in my brothers' educational outcomes. Simple tips such as consistently following up on us when we arrived at home, and making sure we did our homework, would have been beneficial for Orlando and others. Irvine encouraged schools to enlist Black churches, social service agencies, and volunteer service organizations to help in this endeavor. The areas of focus for these workshops are general parenting skills, teaching, and advocating. Such workshops should encourage parents to set clear and

consistent rules for appropriate behavior at home and school (Irvine). Black parents should also model the ideal behavior they want their own children to exhibit (Irvine). Black parents should be teachers in their homes, by making accommodations for their children to do homework in quiet areas, asking probing questions about their education at school, and limiting television time (Irvine). This all equates to helping Black parents be more accountable for their children's education. I do not believe that the participants' parents of this study did not care: They simply did not know how to help. This problem transcends race: The biggest challenge for me as an administrator is getting parents of any color or ethnicity to be more responsible for their children's education. Also, Irvine urged Black parents to become stronger advocates for their children's education. Based on my experiences, this advocacy was non-existent in the projects. During desegregation, it was mostly the White parents who advocated on behalf of their children, opposing busing and any legislation requiring their children to transfer to Black schools (Causey, 2001). Community organizations and Black churches should lead the way in equipping low-income parents so that they can more effectively get involved in their children's education (Irvine). Irvine encourages Black parents to visit the schools more often and inquire about specific areas of their children's education. She also stressed the importance of attendance at teacher conferences and PTA meetings (Irvine).

Resilience was an important factor in the educational and social outcomes of the participants in this study, and there are steps that families, teachers, and schools can take to encourage resilience. Supportive families that are caring and structured, hold high expectations for behavior, encourage participation in the family's life, foster family cohesion with minimal discord, and adhere to consistent discipline and rules produce

positive outcomes in at-risk children (Wang et al., 1994). These characteristics were visible in the homes of Johnny, Randy, Jeremy, and Jonathon. I believe it was not consistent in Jonathon's home, however, which may have led to his uncontrollable behavior and his eventual dropping out of school. Family involvement has increased student achievement and attendance, while reducing dropout rates and delinquency (Wang et al.).

Effective, resilience-building teachers are caring, engaging, and sensitive to student diversity. They are able to individualize instruction according to student differences, connect schooling experiences to family life and prior knowledge, employ diverse teaching strategies, and maximize resources to enhance student development. They also use culturally relevant material, model appropriate behavior and problem-solving skills, provide opportunities for students to set realistic expectations, and help students become active learners (Wang et al., 1994). Victor and Patrick needed caring teachers, not the type who watched them struggle and did little or nothing to help. Teachers who can connect education with family life will gain students' trust and attention (Delpit, 1995). Education needs to be meaningful to Black males, as in Patrick's case. Keeping students actively engaged was always a challenge for me as an ex-math teacher, but doing so minimized discipline problems in my classroom. I wonder how often Jonathon sat in classrooms where teachers lectured often: As an administrator, I have found that teachers who relied primarily on lectures often had numerous discipline problems in their classrooms. I especially want to emphasize the teacher qualities that highlight cultural differences. Individualized instruction is vitally important for those students who just do not *get it* the traditional way (Tomlinson, 1999). Minority students

need teachers who are talented, diverse, and willing to try appropriate strategies (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Patrick and Victor would have benefitted from such teachers and might have turned out differently. Connecting family life to the classroom is inviting to Black males, as their cultural background is different from the mainstream (Delpit, 1995).

According to Wang et al. (1994), effective, resilience-fostering schools have clearly defined goals, develop students' communication skills, are organized into small units, employ flexible scheduling arrangements, encourage peer helping, and encourage teacher innovations. Further, they point out that such schools are well equipped with diverse learning resources, encourage parental participation and communication, create connections with outside agencies, have high attendance and graduation rates, help students pursue post-secondary education and jobs in the workforce after graduation, foster student involvement and belonging, and have high expectations for student achievement. As an educator, I believe that the most successful schools are the ones where administrators, teachers, and staff think outside the box and develop creative ways to educate at-risk students. Shrinking the current over-crowded classrooms could work well for Black males. The atmosphere would be less distracting, and students may have a better chance of receiving personalized help. Schools may need to look more into flexible schedules, perhaps making room for struggling students to alternate regular classes with tutorial sessions. At a Title I school where I was employed as a math teacher, flexible scheduling worked well with the at-risk groups. I think that schools become resilient as they give teachers the freedom to be innovative and experiment with new ways to help struggling students. The ultimate goal of any school should be to help students enroll in

college or find jobs in the workforce. When students clearly see this purpose of education, I believe, they are less likely to drop out.

### *Future Research*

As noted above, this research study has demonstrated that African American males have goals and aspirations, desire to be treated fairly, want relationships with their fathers, seek to improve their standards of living, and can exhibit resiliency when faced with obstacles and hardships. However, there are limitations to this study. My study was limited to eight African American males. I believe that there are many more examples of Black male resiliency just in the context of Elizabeth Canty alone. This study touched on the issue of delinquent fatherhood, but did not delve deeply into this issue. For example, I would have liked to interview Randy's father, but I believe that option lay beyond the scope of this study. Also, this study only touched on the influence of Black male teachers. I did consider interviewing the two Black male teachers from Blanchard, but I later decided against it because I wanted to concentrate on my former peers for this study. Lastly, while this study confirmed that there is a cultural disconnect between White teachers and Black male students, it went no further than that. For example, I did not interview any of the White teachers alluded to in this study.

Based on the results of this research project, I recommend further qualitative research on resilience, Black male fatherhood, Black male teachers, and the cultural divide between White teachers and Black male students. I believe that more research is needed in the area of Black male resilience. There are many other examples of African American males who adapt to adverse situations and succeed. As this research endeavor indicates, not every Black male succumbs to the horrendous conditions as described in

literature and statistics on Black male mis-education and delinquency. However, more qualitative research is needed in this area. Are there common protective factors for impoverished Black male adolescents? The common protective factors for most of the participants of this study were self-motivation, goal setting, a positive attitude towards school, social competence, and a strong mother/son bond. I believe that understanding the possible common protective factors for poor Black males could enable us to target critical skills in building resilience in African American males. Are there particular personality traits that enable certain individuals to be resilient? I often wonder why some African American males resist the deadly temptations of the streets and overcome nearly insurmountable odds, while others in similar circumstances give in and suffer inevitable defeat. Life history interviews targeting the lives of resilient Black males would give us insight into the dynamics of resilience. I believe that such information could possibly enable us to foster such characteristics in at-risk Black males.

Additionally, more research is needed on the impact and influence of African American fathers. Despite what is portrayed often in the media, Black men want to provide for their families (Majors & Billson, 1992; Nelson, 2008). This study showed that Black boys want real relationships with their fathers. However, this study did not show how active Black fathers influence their sons. Randy's narrative did give us a glimpse of such a scenario, but the details are lacking. What are the effects of active African American fathers on the behavior and academic achievement of Black boys? I believe that this question can best be answered with a mixed-methods study. Quantitative methods could be applied in comparing the discipline and academic records from two groups of Black boys with similar socio-economic backgrounds: those with active

fathers, and those with single mothers. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, could be applied by following up on a select number of Black males in both groups for further inquiry. What are the effects of Black absentee fathers on African American males? Why do some Black men desert their children? These questions would best be answered with qualitative studies. It is possible that such information could enable communities to provide effective programs in an effort to combat this all too familiar problem in Black communities. How do Black fathers perceive their role in the home, this generation of young Black males, Black males and education, and the media portrayal of Black men? Using a qualitative base, in-depth answers to these questions could help us understand how Black men view themselves and the world around them, possibly giving us more insight into solving this problem in the Black communities.

I think that more qualitative research is also needed in the area of Black male teachers. They are a valuable source of strength for young Black males, as this project has demonstrated for 6 of the 8 participants. However, more questions need to be answered. What are the characteristics of effective Black male teachers? How do African American male students perceive their Black male teachers? This information could help institutions better train Black males in teacher preparatory programs before they enter the classroom. We might also ask the few Black males in the teaching force why they chose education as a career. Why are most Black male college students avoiding the teaching field? Such information could enable school systems and post-secondary institutions to more effectively recruit African American males into education.

Lastly, I believe that more insight is needed concerning the cultural disconnect between White teachers and Black male students. This study confirmed the reality of

such a divide between the two races, but it failed to offer more insight into the true causes of this problem. How do White female teachers perceive Black male students? How do Black male students perceive White female teachers? How can healthy White teacher/Black male student relationships be fostered? Such questions can best be answered by qualitative methods, and the answers can help us devise effective teacher workshops. More data and knowledge in these areas can help us cover all necessary grounds in a concerted effort to reach every African American male and to ensure that this group of students flourishes to its fullest potential.

### *Final Thoughts*

A recent review article stressed the need for disaggregating ethnic and racial groups when conducting research on cultural explanations for racial and ethnic stratification in academic achievement (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). In my study I have made it a point to be clear that I am talking about Black males who came from poverty and specific related conditions. I am not making claims about all African American males.

We cannot usher in effective change efforts without honesty. There is clearly a cultural gap between White teachers and African American students, especially Black males. Even worse, racism, racial bias, and stereotyping still exist in society as well as the classrooms. Teachers of African American males need to honestly evaluate themselves with regard to these issues and be willing to embrace change. If what we are doing is not working, then we need to find what will work and do it consistently for the sake of equality and not leaving any students behind. The parents of African American male students need to take more responsibility as well. More parent involvement is



needed. Schools need to find creative ways to get the parents, even if they are single mothers, more involved in the education of their children. This deficiency plagues Black families, especially poor families. More generally, educational institutions need to promote and facilitate open and honest dialogue between Blacks and Whites about the dynamics of race and schooling and their impact on the success of African American students, particularly males.

I want to mention here that a few White teachers left a good mark on some of the participants' lives in this study, just as a few Black teachers who negatively affected some of their lives as well. We need good teachers of all races in the classrooms. However, because of the dire needs of African American males in this country, emphasis has to be placed on finding effective solutions to remedy their crisis. The problem with Black boys is not just in our schools, but in the Black communities and society as a whole. Black boys have to be reached at an early age in order to foster change for their future. Black men are needed in the classrooms. Mentors are needed where the fathers have slacked off. Young African American males need to see successful Black men in the workforce. Successful Black men need to volunteer their time in these schools, especially elementary schools, so that our Black boys can see that there is hope beyond just music, sports, and in some cases, drugs. However, as this research project proudly demonstrates, not every poor, fatherless, Black male in the ghetto turns out poorly or defeated in life. There is a ray of hope in every young Black male's eyes. They have aspirations, dreams, and goals for a better life, as one participant articulated:

I remember coming up as a child, in my heart I knew one day I would have some things, wife, kids, a nice home. I didn't think about no cars and this and that. But I knew I wanted to accomplish something and be somebody. And that drive driving me wouldn't let me falter...I was gonna do what I had to do. And here I am today, but I still haven't got some of the things I want, but it's not over with me yet though. But anyway uh, it's all good. I'm here. I'm still gonna pursue music. And uh like I said, any child coming up in the ghetto, sometimes those kids are very creative because they have, if you've been given nothing, to work a little harder than others to achieve something. If you got everything already bestowed on you at life, you probably won't have anything to contribute to mankind or life or whatever. (Patrick)

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## APPENDIX A: Conceptualization Memos

Memo (April 25, 2006)

Conversation with Dr. Schmertzing over the Phone Concerning Dissertation Topic

I talked briefly with Dr. Schmertzing about several things. I first brought up the topic of dissertation committee. He made several suggestions of possible members, including his wife. Dr. Ballard and a new African American female professor experienced with researching issues with African Americans would be good choices. He said he would check with these professors, along with other possible members.

We also talked about the literature available on the topic of educating African American males. I told him that I have the books by suskind, fashola, and mccall. I also mentioned that I had located other books on ebay on this topic. He reminded me to look closely at the authors to see if their work is researched based. He suggested that I get the 2003 edition of "qualitative research and evaluation" by patton. He also suggested that I look at the book by Miriam in order to familiarize myself with the various designs, including phenomenological.

We also talked about the pre-proposal defense as well as the actual defense of the proposal. He said that an estimated time in which I should be ready to defend my proposal is sometime during midsummer. We discussed the basic components of the proposal: intro, lit review, methodology...? We ended the conversation at this point. I do need to know the other components, but if they are the same as during the courses I have taken, then I should know the other components.

Memo (June 4, 2007)

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seidman's writings correlate with much of what I've already discovered with other writers/researchers. He makes a good point with the woodchopper scenario. The way the observer views this behavior may not be consistent with the way the woodchopper views his own behavior. So in order for the observer to accurately understand the situation, he has to tap into the woodchopper's subjective understanding. The way to get into this dimension is through interviewing. In particular, he has to ask all of the right questions, know what to ask that will help the woodchopper tap into his own subjectivity. This will be very helpful to me when I am interviewing these guys from my past. I know them already, and they know me. It's not like I'm interviewing total strangers. Familiarity can easily set in where I just assume things about these guys. For example, I assume ahead of time that Jamie held similar views as myself and experienced things the same way I did. After all, we have very similar backgrounds. Nevertheless, his experiences with race and his views were different from mine. I'm pretty sure, that familiarity subjectivity was bleeding into that pilot interview. The author did make the comment about the issues involved with friends interviewing friends. Both the interviewer and the interviewee can assume that both understand each other. Therefore, there is no major effort to be detailed. He says there should be some distance between the interviewer and interviewee.

Every author has his or her own techniques for gathering data. I assume it is up to me whose methods I will ultimately endorse in that sense. This author suggests conducting interviews in series of three's. The first one is to be a life history. You are interviewing the participant on his past all the way to his or her current state. The second interview picks up where the first one left off, with emphasis on the participant's current experiences. The third interview has the participant to put everything in context by having him reflect on his experiences. Each interview is to be kept at 90 minutes. Interestingly, he disagrees with allowing the interview to go past the allotted time, even if the participant continues to share details. I remember in the meeting on May 24 with the committee, I admitted that after my 3 hour interview with Jamie I turned off the recorder, but the interview really was not over. Looking back, I wish I did leave the recorder on. I also admitted that I shared some stories in the interview. But I was told it is good to do so. Sometimes it is a good idea to be open with the respondent. Even Seidman suggests sharing stories if it will help the interview. But he also warns against telling too many stories, as this can frustrate or distract the interviewee.

This author, along with others, stresses the importance of not force-fitting theories into the analysis of the interviews. The theories I develop should flow from the words of the interviewees themselves. This is the first time I saw the concept of profiles. This is a form of transcribing where the interviewer transposes the words of the participant into a first-person narrative. The questions and comments of the interviewer are taken out.

## **Chp 1: Why Interview?**

- Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness.
- Woodchopping incident: the observer can watch this behavior and have an observational understanding of the woodchopper. But what the observer understands as a result of this observation may not be at all consistent with how the woodchopper views his own behavior. To understand the woodchopper's behavior, the observer would have to gain access to the woodchopper's subjective understanding.
- Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior.

## **Chp 2: A Structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing**

- 3 interviews:
  1. interview 1: focused life history involving the participant putting their past experiences in context of the research topic. They are asked to reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood, and at work.
  2. interview 2: details of experience concentrating on concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic of study.
  3. interview 3: reflection on the meaning of their experience. Making meaning requires the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation.
- With each interview being 90 minutes, space the interviews 3 days to a week apart.
- Although the interviewer can strive to have the meaning being made in the interview as much a function of the participant's reconstruction and reflection as possible, the interviewer must nevertheless recognize that the meaning, to some degree, a function of the participant's interaction with the interviewer.

## **Chp 3: proposing research**

- the theory used to discern and forge relationships among the words that participants share with interviewers must come out of those words themselves. Theory cannot and should not be imposed on the words but must emanate from them.

## **Chp 6: technique isn't everything, but it is a lot**

- interviewers must listen on 3 levels: listen to what the participant is saying; listen to his or her inner voice; listen while remaining aware of the process as well as the substance.

- The key to asking questions is to let them flow from what the participant is saying. Build on what the participant has begun to share.
- Avoid leading questions. Ask open ended questions.
- 2 types of open ended questions: grand tour questions that ask the participant to reconstruct a significant segment of an experience; questions that focus more on the subjective experience of the participant than on the external structure. “what was it like for you?”
- Ask the participant role-playing questions and ask them to tell stories.
- Avoid asking them to rely on memory, instead have them reconstruct.
- There are times when an interviewer’s experience may connect to that of the participant. Sharing that experience in a frank and personal way may encourage the participant to continue reconstructing his or her own in a more inner voice than before.
- There is a delicate balance between jumping in too soon with a question and waiting too long in silence.

### **Chp 8: analyzing, interpreting, and sharing interview material**

- The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text. It is important that researchers acknowledge that in this stage of the process they are exercising judgment about what is significant in the transcript.
- A profile is in the participant’s words, but is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said. Once you have read the transcript, marked passages of interest, and labeled those passages, make 2 copies. From one of the copies, select all passages that you marked as important and put them together as a single transcript. As you reread it, ask yourself which passages are the most compelling, those that you are just not willing to put aside. Underline them. Now you are ready to craft a narrative based on them.
- In making and analyzing thematic connections, ask yourself these questions:
  1. what is the subject of the marked passages?
  2. is there a word within the passage itself that suggests a category into which the passage might fit?
- Some passages stand out because they are contradictory and seem decisively inconsistent with others. It is tempting to put them aside. These have to be kept in the foreground, lest researchers exercise their own biased subjectivity, noticing and using only materials that support their own opinions.
- In interpreting the material, researchers need to do the following:
  1. ask yourself what you learned from doing the interviews, studying the transcripts, marking and labeling them, crafting profiles, and organizing categories of excerpts. What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants they interviewed? How do they understand and explain these connections? What do they understand now that they did not understand before they began the interviews? What surprises have there been? What confirmations of previous instincts? How have their interviews been consistent with the literature? How inconsistent? How have they gone beyond?

## Memo on May 24, 2007 Meeting with Proposal Committee

I met with Dr. Richardson and both Schmertzings concerning the contents of my proposal. Dr. Lockhart could not be there. I talked with Dr. Lockhart over the phone the night before the meeting. She gave me some pointers on what I could add to the proposal. She recalled the incidents surrounding education in the Columbus, Ga. area during the time period of my stay in Elizabeth Canty: Braxton Neil committing suicide, the NAACP bringing attention to racial issues, and Braxton Neil's successor murdered in his home. She suggested researching the educational climate during this time period, since I am researching the lives of black men who attended school in this area during these events. I am putting emphasis on race and education as I conduct life histories of my old male colleagues. However, I never thought to include the events and the overall racial climate of Columbus as part of my research. I encountered race issues to some degree in school as well as socially in the city. I think that adding this Columbus history to my research will make it more holistic and put my life histories more in context. Dr. Lockhart told me that she emailed me links and other information, but I have not received anything via email from her. I will contact her again.

Dr. Richardson spoke favorably about the proposal. He said that I was really showing my feelings throughout the paper, which is a good thing. I continued to bring up the issue of subjectivity, but he encouraged me to just interview the guys and not worry too much about my subjectivities. He, along with Dr. R. Schmertzing, informed me that it was fine to even share a story with the interviewee if it will help the interviewee relax and be open to share his experiences. I guess I have developed such complexities with subjectivity to the point that it's hard to believe I can relax and make friendly connections with the respondents. I know these guys, and they already know me. That is probably the reason I am so uptight about the subjectivity issue. Recalling the pilot interview with Jamie, I was very open with Jamie, and he seemed to be very open towards me. After my 3 hr interview with him, I stopped the recorder and began sharing with him. At the time I was thinking this was not correct interview protocol. But I was assured in the meeting that such a technique can enhance the interview and build rapport with the interviewees.

Dr. Richardson suggested several books for me to add to my reading. I have ordered the books and am awaiting their arrival. He is interested in knowing more about the pop culture during the time period in Elizabeth Canty. What was pulling these guys? Who were their idols? What was everybody into? For myself, I was into the R&B scene. Talent shows were a big thing then. I, along with Jamie and others, entered the junior high talent show in the eighth and ninth grades. Dr. Richardson also mentioned a 60 Minutes segment on prisoners that would be a great interest to me. He also mentioned a radio program, WFSU 88.9, that would fit my research. He said he would email me more information.

Dr. L. Schmertzing gave me pointers on the grammar, punctuation, and APA format of the paper. I need to make corrections in the reference section. She also made a very good point about interviewing those who have had religious experiences after the time period in my proposal. She warns that they may tell their stories in context of their religious experiences. I never considered that. In fact, I immediately updated my subjective I's, with Christianity being a new one. I have got to make sure that I don't

allow my Christian subjectivity to taint my own recollection of my past. Dr. R. Schmertzing informed me that I am to add all additional readings and adjustments to the current proposal. Submit the paper to him first, and he will meet with the others to make recommendations for approval.

June 21, 2008

Atkinson (1998) used the term commentary (commentators) for such researchers who insert introductions, summaries, and annotated notes throughout the narrative in order to add insights or other perspectives to what the interviewee is saying. So he would actually consider what I did to the narratives as a commentary.

I think that I now have an understanding in terms of what my methodology entails. I have developed codes and categories and have used a word processor to cut and pace sentences from the transcribed interviews. I will analyze these for recognizable patterns and emerging themes. At the same time, I have developed narratives based on the transcripts, following primarily what Atkinson (1998) suggested. I will look at each narrative holistically for meaning as well. I will then attempt to connect what I discovered through the coding and the narratives in order to fully interpret what each participant has said.

June 22, 2008

In reading through Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, I found the information to be very detailed and artistically written. I needed to understand and become knowledgeable of their components of portraiture development. In particular, I paid close attention to their methodology sections. I decided early on, that I did not want to produce portraits as they consider them. I am more interested in commentating, according to Atkinson, 1998. However, I am interested in the methodology, because a lot of their techniques mentioned, coincide with other writers work. In fact, these authors refer to many of the authors' writings that I have been reviewing. Such techniques as coding, searching for emerging themes, and recognizing patterns are all techniques that I will apply in one way or another. What I like about this particular book is that they give details on the mental processes involved in finding the themes and patterns. I will employ these methods but stop short of creating a full portrait.

June 22, 2008

I went back and looked back at Seidman, 2006 in my quest to further understand and decide on a clear path of methodological analysis. Seidman suggests two methods of analysis of in-depth interviews. One way for researchers to present findings is to create profiles or narratives on each participant. This is nothing new to me, but I had to go back and retrace my steps to make sure I know which methods of analysis to use, along with particular writers' suggestions. He goes on to present a second option of analysis, coding. Coding is not new to me either. Both methods are available and are widely used in various research projects. I needed clarification because I am doing a little of both, coding and narration. I intend to code and classify excerpts from the interview transcripts and look for patterns and emerging themes in order to draw conclusions. I also want to create and study the narratives formed from the interviews in a holistic fashion in order to gain insight into each person's story. I will in the end attempt to make connections between both methods of analysis. I believe this analytical pathway gives me a more complete scrutiny of the data and a more firm foundation upon which to build my theme and theoretical base.



## APPENDIX B: Conceptualization Emails

Wednesday, July 2, 2008 5:45 PM


**From:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"Richard Schmertzing" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

 I have it and it is good! I have combed through that book at least 7 times, noting the references at the end of each chapter. I got a lot leads by doing that. Guess what? I nailed the interview of all interviews. I told you that I was hoping I could interview an old friend who had a dad who bought him everything while living in the projects: nice clothes, toys, bike, moped, you name it. And how did he turn out? A dropout selling drugs!!! He gave me an ear full and was very candid as well. He has been in jail twice and is pending a federal court hearing, in which he may be serving 7 years. They held him without bond for 6 months, which is part of the reason why I never could get to him. He had about \$98,000 in savings, and when they finally let him out on bail, he had nothing. A relative of his spent every dime seemingly. He made the most thought provoking statements. He said that he always felt bad when he bought his children all of the nicest things and saw other children in dire need, the very children of the adults he was selling the drugs to. He is the eighth interview. I will try to get another in if I can, but if not, he just made my day. What a way to close out the narratives. Enjoy yourself!

--- On Tue, 7/1/08, Richard Schmertzing <rwschmer@valdosta.edu> wrote:

From: Richard Schmertzing <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

Subject: More reading!

To: "darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

Date: Tuesday, July 1, 2008, 11:46 PM

Greetings Darrell,

I hope you are doing well and gearing up for a relaxing and joyous 4<sup>th</sup> of July! Lorraine and I are on the Beach at St. Petersburg, combining mornings of work with afternoons of beaching with evenings of watching baseball. A pretty good mix. It is what we call a working vacation. One of the books I brought along to read is "Educating African American Males" edited by Fashola and was struck by how on the money it is for what you are doing. As I recall, you have that book, right? The references at the end of the first chapter has a number of critical readings for your work, for example and particularly, J.J. Irvine, "Black Students and school failure: Policies, practices, and prescriptions," and Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Tatum, Kanjufu, Polite, et al, all of Sanders, and so on.

Let me know what you think.

Regards,

Richard

**mar29-doseldon-narrative**

Saturday, March 29, 2008 4:27 PM

**From:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>


[View contact details](#)

**To:**

rwschmer@valdosta.edu, "lorraine schmertzing" <lschmert@valdosta.edu>

**Message contains attachments**

[jamie sank's narrative.doc \(59KB\)](#), [otis porter narrative.doc \(70KB\)](#), [Vincent Seldon narrative.doc \(50KB\)](#)

 These are 3 narratives. I want feedback on the language/grammar (I am not asking that you help me correct them grammatically). I attempted to keep each of them as close to the participant's words as much as possible. Was I correct in doing so? I included three but if you look at just one, that's fine. Each person of course is unique. Orlando was raised in poverty with very little clothing but had an awesome basketball talent. Johnny was raised in poverty but did well in school and had a positive outlook on life. Victor (my brother) was raised in poverty and had seemingly nothing to work with at all (If you only read one, read this one. I must admit, I had a lump in my throat as I transcribed it. It was funny while I was interviewing him because he is a natural comedian). It is interesting how the teachers responded to each of them accordingly. All 3 attended the same high school. Jamie and Otis attended mostly the same elementary and junior high schools as well.

Mrs. Schmertzing told me to send her an email stating that I wish to graduate in the Fall of 08. I am serious about this. Now that I know that I have to be finished by August, that gives me even more motivation. As I mentioned to R. Schmertzing, I intend to use my dissertation to make a case for mentoring in my old neighborhood, Elizabeth Canty Apts. This will be my way of giving back and helping today's youth in that area of the city. Some of the participants in my study I intend to solicit help in the mentoring program.

Also, I am reminding R. Schmertzing to email me the other dissertation format that he mentioned to me. He said that the structure of narratives is slightly different from Melvin's. I believe that particular student was including discussions of some sort with each narrative rather than waiting until the discussion section. I am interested in seeing it because I most definitely wanted to input my interpretation/comments in some of the interviews as I was putting them in narrative form.

---

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**Fw: today's NYTimes, a tough love column from Bob Herbert**

Wednesday, October 24, 2007 7:44 AM


**From:**

"Richard Schmertzing" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"Darrell Seldon" <BigDSeldon@yahoo.com>

 Greetings Darrell,

Thought you might find this interesting. How is it going? I see Barbara sent you an update on the IRB's readiness to deal with interviews in prison.

Regards,

Richard

----- Original Message -----

October 16, 2007

Op-Ed Columnist

New York Times

### **Tough, Sad and Smart**

By BOB HERBERT

They are a longtime odd couple, Bill Cosby and Harvard's Dr. Alvin Poussaint, and their latest campaign is nothing less than an effort to save the soul of black America.

Mr. Cosby, of course, is the boisterous veteran comedian who has spent the last few years hammering home some brutal truths about self-destructive behavior within the African-American community.

"A word to the wise ain't necessary," Mr. Cosby likes to say. "It's the stupid ones who need the advice."

Dr. Poussaint is a quiet, elegant professor of psychiatry who, in public at least, is in no way funny. He teaches at the Harvard Medical School and is a staff member at the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston, where he sees kids struggling in some of the toughest circumstances imaginable.

I always wonder, whenever I talk to Dr. Poussaint, why he isn't better known. He's one of the smartest individuals in the country on issues of race, class and justice.

For three years, Mr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint have been traveling the country, meeting with as many people as possible to explore the problems facing the black community.

There is a sense of deep sadness and loss grief evident in both men over the tragedy that has befallen so many blacks in America. They were on “Meet the Press” for the entire hour Sunday, talking about their new book, a cri de coeur against the forces of self-sabotage titled, “Come On, People: On the Path From Victims to Victors.”

There weren’t many laughs over the course of the hour. Speaking about the epidemic of fatherlessness in black families, Mr. Cosby imagined a young fatherless child thinking: “Somewhere in my life a person called my father has not shown up, and I feel very sad about this because I don’t know if I’m ugly I don’t know what the reason is.”

Dr. Poussaint, referring to boys who get into trouble, added: “I think a lot of these males kind of have a father hunger and actually grieve that they don’t have a father. And I think later a lot of that turns into anger. ‘Why aren’t you with me? Why don’t you care about me?’ ”

The absence of fathers, and the resultant feelings of abandonment felt by boys and girls, inevitably affect the children’s sense of self-worth, he said.

The book lays out the difficult route black people will have to take to free the many who are still trapped in prisons of extreme violence, poverty, degradation and depression.

It’s a work with a palpable undercurrent of love throughout. And yet it pulls no punches. In a chapter titled “What’s Going on With Black Men?,” the authors (in a voice that sounds remarkably like Mr. Cosby’s) note:

“You can’t land a plane in Rome saying, ‘Whassup?’ to the control tower. You can’t be a doctor telling your nurse, ‘Dat tumor be nasty.’ ”

Racism is still a plague and neither Mr. Cosby nor Dr. Poussaint give it short shrift. But they also note that in past years blacks were able to progress despite the most malignant forms of racism and that many are succeeding today.

“Blaming white people,” they write, “can be a way for some black people to feel better about themselves, but it doesn’t pay the electric bills. There are more doors of opportunity open for black people today than ever before in the history of America.”

I couldn’t agree more. Racism disgusts me, and I think it should be fought with much greater ferocity than we see today. But that’s no reason to drop out of school, or take drugs, or refuse to care for one’s children, or shoot somebody.

The most important step toward ending the tragic cycles of violence and poverty among African-Americans also happens to be the heaviest lift reconnecting black fathers to their children.

In an interview yesterday, Dr. Poussaint said: “You go into whole neighborhoods and there are no fathers there. What you find is apathy in a lot of the males who don’t even know that they are supposed to be a father.”

The book covers a great deal that has been talked about incessantly the importance of family and education and hard work and mentoring and civic participation. But hand in hand with its practical advice and the undercurrent of deep love for one's community is a stress on the absolute importance of maintaining one's personal dignity and self-respect.

It's a tough book. Victimhood is cast as the enemy. Defeat, failure and hopelessness are not to be tolerated.

Hard times and rough circumstances are not excuses for degrading others or allowing oneself to be degraded. In fact, they're not excuses for anything, except to try harder.

---

No virus found in this incoming message.

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Version: 7.5.488 / Virus Database: 269.15.6/1086 - Release Date: 10/22/2007 7:57 PM

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**Re: citing interviews**

Tuesday, July 17, 2007 11:11 AM

**From:**

"Lorraine Schmertzing" <lschmert@valdosta.edu>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

**Cc:**

rwschmer@valdosta.edu

 Darrell,

Your way is fine. Follows APA rules for multiple citations of the same author in the same year by putting 1997a for the first one you use. In the reference section you will say who it is and the details. Every time after that you use the same interview use author, 1997a. When you cite a different interview it becomes 1997b, and so forth.

Hope this helps.

dr. LS

darrell seldon wrote:

>The question I have is pertaining to citing interviews conducted by others, such as the desegregation interviews conducted by Dr. Virginia Causey at CSU. When I consulted the APA manual and website, interviews are normally treated as personal communication for non-retrievable data. I noticed how Melvin handled his interviews in his dissertation. But I am using second-hand interview data. I did contact the archives section at CSU library. I was told I am to include the following when citing the interviews: where the data is kept, who did the interview, who is interviewed, and the date of the interview. These are going to be very long parenthetical citations!!! I believe I would probably get a different answer from Causey herself, but she is out for the summer. What I wanted to do was cite them in the text with the interviewer and date and then give formal entries for each one in the reference section. She conducted all of the interviews in 1997. But if I did this,

> everytime I cite an interview, they would all look the same (Causey, 1997), which would create another problem. How would the reader know which interview I am referring to? (I've run into the same problem with newspaper articles in which I am citing from an author who wrote several articles the same year, which is normal for newspapers.) This could be corrected if I included the last name of the person being interviewed, maybe. Any ideas?

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**Re: doseldon-sample questions-june28**

Monday, July 2, 2007 1:47 PM


**From:**

"Richard Schmertzing" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

 Greetings Darrell,

I enjoyed our chance to talk the other day. I have printed out the questions and will look at them when I get to the office. I think they will be fine (after all they are only "sample" questions!). Be careful to not create an interview guide that is too scripted. We want to ask questions in a conversational and open-ended manner so that we allow the interviewee to "map their own territory" with regards to the area of interest.

I would suggest the following changes:

5. change "would possibly" to might
7. How would you evaluate the quality (or lack thereof) of the education offered at the schools you attended?
9. Make each of these questions into a numbered question.
12. Again, it is never a good idea to ask more than one question at a time.
17. Did your parents (or other adult figures in your family) encourage you to work and stay in school?

Regards,

Richard

Dr. Richard Schmertzing, Professor, Graduate Research Faculty  
Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology  
Dewar College of Education  
Valdosta State University  
229-333-5933 (office)  
229-219-0911 (home)  
229-563-0762 (cell)  
[rwschmer@valdosta.edu](mailto:rwschmer@valdosta.edu)

----- Original Message -----



**From:** darrell seldon

**To:** lorraine schmertzing ; rwschmer@valdosta.edu

**Sent:** Thursday, June 28, 2007 7:51 PM

**Subject:** doseldon-sample questions-june28

Per my conversation with R. Schmertzing on 6-28-07, I am still in the process of being IRB approved. The only thing that's pending is discussing the corrected sample interview questions with my advisor prior to resubmitting them to the IRB committee. The corrections were simply rewording several of the questions, nothing major in my opinion. I wrote these back in Oct. '06, before I researched various authorities on qualitative research. At the time of writing them, I was only trying to give the committee a sample of the types of questions I would possibly ask. I will develop an interview guide which will be more detailed. Attached are the original questions, along with corrected questions suggested by reviewer 2, whoever that is. Thanks for your time.

---

Yahoo! oneSearch: Finally, [mobile search that gives answers](#), not web links.

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**my proposal**

Thursday, May 17, 2007 5:25 PM

**From:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

[View contact details](#)


**To:**

mjrchar@valdosta.edu

**Message contains attachments**

[dissertation proposal 2.doc \(83KB\)](#)

-----Inline Attachment Follows-----

 I am getting this to you late. I was so busy and distracted with chopping away at all of the suggestions DR. Schmertzing gave me recently that I forgot to do the most important thing. Here is my proposal. I have been instructed to expand the methodology. So that's what I'm working on now. I really am looking forward to working with each of you on my committee. My cell # is 706-615-0118. Please call me any time. Again, I apologize for the delay.

---

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## Proposal hearing for Darrell Seldon


Wednesday, May 9, 2007 10:53 PM

**From:**

"Richard Schmertzling" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"Darrell Seldon" <BigDSeldon@yahoo.com>, "Matthew Richard" <mjrchar@valdosta.edu>, "Dr. Lorraine Schmertzling" <lschmert@valdosta.edu>, "Calandra Lockhart" <cdlockhart@valdosta.edu>, "Richard Schmertzling" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>... more 

 Dear Folks,

I have asked Darrell to send the latest version of his proposal to all. I have also asked him to read methodological work on life history interviewing (e.g., Robert Atkinson's work, selections from the Sage Handbook of Interviewing Research, Siedman's book on Interviewing as Qualitative Research, and etc.) and perhaps write a 5 page reflective addendum to his proposal on issues related to interviewing such as subjectivity, researcher role and so on. If any of you have any suggestions for Darrell, please forward them to him. We will meet at 3 pm on the 24th of May in room 235 in the College of Education (the new Dean's Conference Room at the head of the stairs). Dr. Lockhart will not be able to meet with us in person because of a family emergency but she will tele-conference with us.

I look forward to working with all of you on what I believe will be a very important and interesting dissertation.

Best regards,

Richard

Dr. Richard Schmertzling, Professor, Graduate Research Faculty  
Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology  
Dewar College of Education  
Valdosta State University  
229-333-5933 (office)  
229-219-0911 (home)  
229-563-0762 (cell)  
[rwschmer@valdosta.edu](mailto:rwschmer@valdosta.edu)

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**Re: rule**

Monday, March 5, 2007 12:03 PM


**From:**

"darrell seldon" <[bigdseldon@yahoo.com](mailto:bigdseldon@yahoo.com)>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"Lorraine Schmertzling" <[lschmert@valdosta.edu](mailto:lschmert@valdosta.edu)>

 I will arrange my schedule around the committee members' schedules. If possible, don't schedule it too early in the morning. It will take me about 3 hours to get there. Other than that, I'm ready. I will email the corrected proposal shortly.

--- Lorraine Schmertzling <[lschmert@valdosta.edu](mailto:lschmert@valdosta.edu)> wrote:

> Darrell,  
> No irritate-ness on this end.  
> According to APA page 68, "Racial and ethnic groups  
> are designated by proper nouns and are capitlaized. Therefore, use Black and  
> White instead of black and white."  
> I believe we will need to schedule a preprosal or  
> proposal defense for you soon. Is anytime of the day or week better for you  
> than another time? thanks, Dr. LS  
> ----- Original Message -----  
> From: "darrell seldon" <[bigdseldon@yahoo.com](mailto:bigdseldon@yahoo.com)>  
> To: <[rwschmer@valdosta.edu](mailto:rwschmer@valdosta.edu)>  
> Cc: "lorraine schmertzling" <[lschmert@valdosta.edu](mailto:lschmert@valdosta.edu)>  
> Sent: Sunday, March 04, 2007 7:00 PM  
> Subject: the corrected prosposal  
> >I have finished the necessary corrections but I  
> have a question before I send it to you. This is  
> something I should know but I don't. Under what circumstances  
> do I capitalize the letter b in the word black as it  
> > pertains to race? As I have researched the  
> literature for my paper, I noticed that some authors  
> capitalize the word black while others did not. Every time  
> I've seen the word hispanic it has been capitalized as  
> far as I can remember. If it was up to me, I'd  
> capitalize every word that refers to a race of people, but  
> there has to be a rule for this.  
> By the way, thanks for your input throughout the  
> paper. I hope I didn't irritate you with all of my mistakes.

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**Re: Greetings and a book suggestion**

Tuesday, February 21, 2006 10:17 AM


**From:**

"Richard Schmertzing" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

 Sounds great Darrell. I probably told you that Emory too is supposed to have a good collection related to African American education. My friend and former student colleague is there (Vanessa Siddle Walker) and it is her primary research interest. If you think you might make a trip there, let me know and I will try to contact Vanessa to find out more specifics about Emory.

Regards,

Richard

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [darrell seldon](#)

**To:** [Richard Schmertzing](#)

**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2006 10:15 PM

**Subject:** Re: Greetings and a book suggestion

i will try that number. the book by mccall is at the library. i will get it tomorrow. the other one by fashola will have to be purchased. i will place an arder for it tomorrow. in the next week i will conduct two interviews just to get some practice. i am going to go back out to columbus state to conduct a more thorough search later this week. thanks for your help.

**Richard Schmertzing** <rwschmer@valdosta.edu> wrote:

Hey Darrell,

The phone number I found on the web link I sent you is 212-678-3774. Did you try that?

Regards,

Richard

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [darrell seldon](#)

**To:** [Richard Schmertzing](#)

**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2006 3:06 PM

**Subject:** Re: Greetings and a book suggestion

i attempted to purchase a membership for online access 5 times but it could not be completed. i will keep trying. i was looking for a phone # to possibly reach someone in order to purchase online membership over the phone.

**Richard Schmertzing** <rwschmer@valdosta.edu> wrote:

Sounds good Darrell. I have pasted the links to the Journal that has the special issue on Education and African American males--the first link takes you to the information about the issue

and the second link takes you to the place where you can subscribe for the web version of the journal (for a year) for \$15. Keep in touch and let me know how things are going and when you are ready to move things ahead significantly.

All the best to you and your family.

Regards,

Richard!

<http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=12306>>

<http://www.tcrecord.org/Subscriptions.asp>

----- Original Message -----

**From:** darrell seldon

**To:** Richard Schmertzling

**Sent:** Monday, February 06, 2006 9:02 PM

**Subject:** Re: Greetings and a book suggestion

i checked and you did email this book in! fo to me. i will check and see if the local library has this book. if not i will purchase it. my wife read the book by nathan mccall and says it is at the local library. i will check into that one as well.

**Richard Schmertzling** <[rwschmer@valdosta.edu](mailto:rwschmer@valdosta.edu)> wrote:

Greetings Darrell,

I hope you had a relaxing and joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year. I ran across a terrific book that I thought you would like to know about (if you don't already). It is *Educating African American Males*, edited by Olatokunbo S. Fashola and was published in 2005 by Corwin Press; ISBN 1-4129-1434-5.

Regards,

Richard

Dr. Richard Schmertzling, Associate Professor, Graduate Research Faculty  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research  
College of Education  
Valdosta State University  
229-333-5924 (office)  
229-219-0911 (home)  
[rwschmer@valdosta.edu](mailto:rwschmer@valdosta.edu)

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**RE: Comps**

Wednesday, January 4, 2006 8:09 PM

**From:**

This sender is DomainKeys verified

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>


[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"Gene & Schvonia Starr" <schvonia@yahoo.com>, cherring4@bellsouth.net, "Freeman, Todd" <tfreeman@auburnschools.org>, "Stan Garland" <scgarlan@surfsouth.com>, "Molly Hart" <mhart@mcsdga.net>, "Patricia Jackson" <pjackson@dougherty.k12.ga.us>, "Derald Jones" <derald@bellsouth.net>, "Julie Moilanen" <j.moilanen@grady.k12.ga.us>, "Jim Rehberg" <jimr@rose.net>, "Darrell Seldon" <BigDSeldon@yahoo.com>, "Wendell Stone" <wstone@coffee.k12.ga.us>, "Andrew Weaver" <AW2314@aol.com>, "Warren Weeks" <wweeks@gocats.org>, "Carlise Womack" <cwomack@bainbridge.edu>, Lascott2021@aol.com, sccain@mail.rose.net... more 

**Message contains attachments**

Comp notes.doc (114KB)

 i summarized each of the author's writings in the jb reader. i had the actual books for some of the authors' articles. i have attached these summaries. i did each on separate pages so that i could write notes, such as when other writers had similar views. disregard these if they are not helpful to you. the challenge is being able to recall these facts when needed. study! study! study!

**Molly Hart <mhart@mcsdga.net>** wrote:

I agree with Jason. We are responsible for what we have been presented and what was in the syllabi. I have done the same thing with the readings—making notes on each researcher/chapter in JB. I also created subject lists with all the authors listed such as “the importance of trust”: Wheatley, Schlechty, Senge, Evans etc. I wrote a sentence or two summarizing the researcher’s perspective. Of course, I need to memorize all this. Don’t forget all the one page book summaries that we copied for each other. They are useful to find out who supports key ideas so that you can write things like: “Sergiovanni describes trust as a requirement for servant leadership. Wheatley, in “Leadership for a New Science” supports this, as does Short and Greer, as a nesscessary component of not only servant leadership, but empowerment as well. Clearly, one of the first things I would do as a leader is work to establish trust with my colleagues. I would do that through.....” I could have gotten all of that information from the one-page summaries.

For the research part, I broke the information down into eight or so designs (experimental, nonexperimental, survey, mixed methods, etc) then listed the characteristics and statistical tests if applicable. Also listed limitations of those designs. I think it would be a mistake to study only statistics, and not the bigger picture of research design. Statistics really only applies to a small part of research, and what will save you is understanding the other parts (how to come up with appropriate questions, ethical concerns of educational research, appropriate generalizations, importance of qualitative findings, etc). Think of all that you know about survey research, and what you have done for projects already. Then build on that. Cheryl, I think you are stuck because you are letting the stats intimidate you! Check out the electronic statistics textbook at

[www.statsoft.com](http://www.statsoft.com) if you cannot bear to open our textbook. Also, T. Creighton wrote a really good book for schools "Schools and Data: The educators guide for using data to improve decision-making." It goes through statistics as they would be used for schools. It may or may not help. Just don't let fear take over!! You manipulate statistics, they do not manipulate you! Furthermore, a baseline knowledge is all that is expected of a beginning researcher.

Although we are responsible for the material, I can't help but think that the longer it takes them to forward the questions (I will forward my own if I can find them tonight. They are not on the computer—we got a new one.) the less I am concerned about being about to nail the question down. I will just have a general answer with lots of support.

Molly

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Wright, Jason [mailto:jdwright@auburnschools.org]

**Sent:** Wednesday, January 04, 2006 8:26 AM

**To:** Gene & Schvonia Starr; cherring4@bellsouth.net; Freeman, Todd; Stan Garland; Molly Hart; Patricia Jackson; Derald Jones; Julie Moilanen; Jim Rehberg; Darrell Seldon; Wendell Stone; Andrew Weaver; Warren Weeks; Carlise Womack; Lascott2021@aol.com; sccain@mail.rose.net

**Subject:** RE: Comps

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas or Happy Holiday season as well. I have begun to go through the JB reader and notebooks I have for each class making "summary sheets" or at least attempting to organize main ideas and common themes. While it is a bit unusual for me to start a project like this early in the game, I have come to the realization we (as students) are responsible for the material that has been presented to us already. I am approaching the comps as a "global" project--not necessarily focusing on too many specific quotes, concepts, principles, etc, rather more general themes by author or content area for the leadership portion. I will make efforts to focus on specifics from the stats class.

My hope is that this may be helpful to some of you. Best wishes, see you soon.

Jason

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Gene & Schvonia Starr [mailto:schvonia@yahoo.com]

**Sent:** Tuesday, January 03, 2006 6:20 PM

**To:** cherring4@bellsouth.net; Freeman, Todd; Stan Garland; Molly Hart; Patricia Jackson; Derald Jones; Julie Moilanen; Jim Rehberg; Darrell Seldon; Wendell Stone; 'Andrew Weaver'; Warren Weeks; Carlise Womack; Wright, Jason; Lascott2021@aol.com; sccain@mail.rose.net

**Subject:** Re: Comps

Hi to all and I hope you had a blessed Holiday Season. My family and I had a very nice one.

We are now four weeks away from COMP's and have very little to go on. I will step out onto the proverbial limb and say I feel like we have been left hanging in the wind.



I have not received the practice questions as promised.  
I have not recieved our compiled questions as promised.  
I have have only a wing and prayer. Prayer has worked so far I will once again rely on it.  
Frustrated and a little \_\_\_\_\_ oh well you know what I am saying!  
Stand up and be heard or not.

Hey by the wa,y I still need a Math and an Exceptional Eduaction teacher if you know someone who is looking for work.

Always,

Gene

***cherring4@bellsouth.net*** wrote:

Does anyone have any additional info on this - I am worried -you all know how I felt (and some of you felt the same) about my mastery of statistics - please advise. If you can give me any guidance on how to study for this I'd appreciate it.

Did we all just get "S"'s for grades this time instead of letter grades??? just wondering...

Happy New Year to all!!!

Cheryl Herring

>

> From: "Randall V. Bass"

> Date: 2005/12/05 Mon PM 04:23:23 EST

> To: Todd Freeman ,

> Stan Garland , Molly Hart ,

> Patricia Jackson ,

> Derald Jones ,

> Julie Moilanen ,

> Jim Rehberg , Darrell Seldon ,

> Gene Starr ,

> Wendell Stone ,

> "Andrew Weaver" , Warren Weeks ,

> Carlise Womack ,

> "Wright, Jason" , Lascott2021@aol.com,

> Cheryl Herring ,

> "sccain@mail.rose.net"

> CC: "Richard W. Schmertzing"

> Subject: Comps

> I've had an inquiry about how to study for the research portion of the  
> comps. Since there will be one 4-hour question on research, I suggest  
> that you think big. Look for something that involves mixed methods and  
> be prepared to give lots of detail about methods. Do not ignore the  
> importance of statistics. At a minimum, you should be able to select  
> appropriate tests for your purposes and tell how the results would be

- > interpreted. This question may also include some statistical results
- > that you will be asked to interpret. As a part of selecting an
- > appropriate test, be sure that you are familiar with the assumptions of
- > parametric statistics.
- > Qualitatively speaking, you may have a better handle on things. If not,
- > I suggest you contact Dr. Schmertzing for some guidance. I'm sending
- > this email to him so he will know what to expect.
- > I hope this helps you prepare for comps.
- > Randy Bass

---

Yahoo! DSL Something to write home about. Just \$16.99/mo. or less

[Flag this message](#)

**Re: possible dissertation topic**

Wednesday, August 24, 2005 6:25 AM


**From:**

"darrell seldon" <bigdseldon@yahoo.com>

[View contact details](#)

**To:**

"Richard Schmertzling" <rwschmer@valdosta.edu>

 i am interested most definitely, but i think that relying on my own program is risky. it is difficult getting men on board with this idea. they are slow to respond. big brothers and sisters are targeting black men as mentors as well, and i am sure it is difficult for them as well. i just don't want to be caught at the end with not enough data to use. that's all of our fears going into the dissertation. however, i would love to be able to show the results of my program. but just as a precaution if things go wrong down the road, could i possibly conduct a similar study on existing mentor/mentee relationships with similar at-risk boys? i just want to have a backup.

***Richard Schmertzling*** <rwschmer@valdosta.edu> wrote:

Greetings Darrell,

I think there are some real possibilities there--for example you could do a case study of the program itself and interview mentors as well as students (several of whom you could do a more in depth case study similar to what you did in the qualitative class. In other words, there are several ways (at least) that you could design something related to the topic. Probably the best way to proceed at this point is for us to do some brainstorming and see what emerges; you could then take one (or several) of those ideas, memo about them, concept map them, and create rough data planning matrixes on each that interests you. Let me know what you think.

Hope you and yours are doing well.

Regards,

RS

Dr. Richard Schmertzling, Associate Professor, Graduate Research Faculty

Department of Educational Leadership and Research

College of Education

Valdosta State University

229-333-5924 (office)

229-219-0911 (home)

[rwschmer@valdosta.edu](mailto:rwschmer@valdosta.edu)

----- Original Message -----

**From:** darrell seldon

**To:** rwschmer@valdosta.edu

**Sent:** Wednesday, August 17, 2005 11:51 PM

**Subject:** possible dissertation topic

i am darrell seldon and i had a qualitative research class with you. remember, i did my paper on alternative schools. doctor leech told me to email you. i am currently taking the public service class with leech, where i am required to do 50 volunteer hours. i decided to start a mentor program that targets 8-12 year old at-risk boys, rather than just doing hours with an organization. this mentoring program is faith-based and will continue far beyond the duration of this course. i am on a mission to build a team of christian men who would volunteer to mentor these boys in the columbus area. it is tough selling this to the men in my church. but mentoring has the potential to change lives and redirect the paths of troubled youth. there are a lot of good, mature, christian men in our churches who can effectively lead these boys in the right direction. someone just need to gather them together and sell them this vision. maybe i am the one. for so long, churches have stood by and watched the down-hill spiraling of such youth in low-income areas of our cities. just to go into these areas and share our faith is not enough. i am convinced that strategically matching a troubled boy with an adult christian male will make a difference.

i said all that to say this. i just recently thought about this being a dissertation topic. i would love to do a qualitative work in this area of some sort. i know this has probably been done before. and, this is risky, because the program is still in its infancy. but if i could follow several of these boys through the program with observations and in-depth interviews, i could research the effects of the program on the youth. by the way, i spent much of the summer typing up a policies and procedures manual for the program. along with documented research, maybe i could get governmental funding for the program in the future, if i choose to go that route.

what do you think? is this dissertation worthy? thanks for your time!

---

## APPENDIX C: IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board  
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

**PROTOCOL CONTINUATION REVIEW REPORT**

**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** IRB-02058-2006

**INVESTIGATOR:** Darrell Seldon

**PROJECT TITLE:** African American Males and Education: A Study of Successes and Failures

**CONTINUATION APPROVAL DATE:** 08/11/08

**NEW EXPIRATION DATE:** 08/20/09

- TYPE OF REVIEW:**
- Expedited review of previously expedited protocol
  - Expedited Review Category 8 - Review of a protocol previously approved through convened review where:
    - The research involves no greater than minimal risk and no additional risks have been identified; or
    - The research is permanently closed to enrollment of new participants, all participants have completed all research-related interventions, and the research remains active only for long-term follow-up of participants; or
    - No participants have been enrolled and no additional risks have been identified; or
    - The remaining research activities are limited to data analysis
  - Convened review

**DETERMINATION:**

- Protocol continuation is approved for an additional 12 months through the New Expiration Date noted above. If you are using an informed consent form, you will receive a copy of the form, which bears an updated IRB approval stamp, in the mail in the next few days. If you are still enrolling participants in your study, please **use this updated consent form as the copy master** as soon as you receive it. Please also remember the following:
  1. You must receive IRB approval for any protocol modifications prior to implementing them.
  2. You must report to the IRB, through the Office of Grants & Contracts, any unanticipated problems or adverse events which become apparent during the course or as a result of the research and the actions you have taken.
  3. You may not conduct research activities involving participants or data about them (including interaction, intervention, data collection, and data analysis) beyond the expiration date noted above.
- Protocol continuation approval is pending. You may **not** implement the proposed changes until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of approval. You may send your responses to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

*Hil Harper*

*9/2/09*

**Thank you for submitting a**

**continuation request.**

Hil Harper, IRB Chair  
229-259-5045.

Date

**Please direct questions to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or**

## APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

African American Males and Education: A Study of Successes and Failures  
Darrell Seldon

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted by Darrell Seldon at Valdosta State University. The University asks that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The researcher, Darrell Seldon, will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

You are asked to participate in a study of African American males who grew up with the researcher, Darrell Seldon, in Elizabeth Carty Apartments during 1975-1982. Your participation entails you answering questions regarding your upbringing in this neighborhood, your opinions about your educational experiences, and issues involving race that you have encountered during and after the time period specified. The interviews will be recorded. However, your identity will be kept totally confidential. Names of individuals you may talk about during the interview (such as family members, teachers, and friends) will also be kept confidential. It is not always possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure. However, reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks. There is a possibility that recalling events of your childhood may be upsetting. If you need to talk with someone about your experiences and feelings, you may call Charlene Johnson of the Pastoral Institute at 706-649-6500. There may be a cost for this service. Participants are responsible for any counseling fees incurred. The information you voluntarily disclose will possibly be used by researchers and school systems to more effectively educate African American males. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Should you agree to participate and/or decide at a later date to withdraw from the study, you may do so without penalty of any sort and information about you will not be included in the results of the study.

If you have any questions about the research project, you may contact me at 706-615-0118. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Administrator at Valdosta State University at 229-333-7837 or [IRB@valdosta.edu](mailto:IRB@valdosta.edu). (The IRB is a university committee responsible for ensuring the rights and well-being of research participants.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## APPENDIX E: Interview Guide

## Interview Guide

Developed on October 2, 2007

### Areas To Be Covered

1. family structure
  - a. # of family members
  - b. Family economic status
  - c. Family educational status (drop outs/graduates)
  
2. education
  - a. schools attended
  - b. teachers
  - c. examples of racism in schools
  - d. grades earned on each level
  - e. behavior
  
3. factors contributing to dropping out/graduating
  - a. education stressed/not stressed in home
  - b. perception of education
  - c. family support
  - d. distractions
  
4. role models/idols
  - a. father figures
  - b. relatives
  - c. friends
  
5. goals/dreams
  - a. plans for the future
  - b. goals accomplished/abandoned

### Sample Interview Questions

1. Describe the family you were raised in.
2. Were you raised by both parents?
3. What was the family's income level?
4. How many of your family members graduated?
5. Was your father active in your life?
6. If your father was not active in your life, describe how your life might have been different if he was.
7. Describe the schools you attended.
8. What were your grades like at each school attended?
9. What was school like for you at each level?

10. Describe in detail any incidents of racism on each level involving students and teachers.
11. Did you intend to graduate or drop out?
12. What factors contributed to you dropping out/graduating?
13. Describe your perception of education.
14. Did your parents or other adult figures encourage you to work hard and stay in school?
15. Was education stressed in your home?
16. How would you evaluate the quality of the education offered at the schools you attended on each level?
17. Did you ever feel mistreated by your teachers because of your race?
18. Did you ever feel mistreated by your peers because of your race?
19. Who were the role models in your life?
20. Did you have any idols?
21. Describe your goals and dreams in life.
22. At what time in your life did you began to set these goals?
23. How would your life have been had your dad been active in your life?
24. Describe how it was living in the projects.
25. How has your experiences in the projects affected you as a parent?

## APPENDIX F: Category Occurrence Chart

Table 8

*Category Occurrence*

Category	Participants							
	Ran	Vic	Dar	Pat	Joh	Orl	Jer	Jon
Absentee Father	n	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Arrested	n	n	n	y	y	n	n	y
Bad Black Teachers	n	y	n	n	y	y	n	n
Low Grades	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Bad White Teachers	n	y	n	n	y	n	y	y
Behavior Problems	y	n	y	n	n	y	y	y
Better White Schools	y	n	n	n	y	y	n	n
Desegregation	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Distractions	n	y	y	y	y	y	n	y
Dropped Out	n	y	n	y	n	n	n	y
Drugs/Alcohol	n	n	n	n	y	y	n	y
Education Stressed	y	n	n	n	y	n	y	y
Family Instability	n	y	y	y	n	n	n	n
Family Support	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Father Figures	y	n	y	n	y	y	y	y
Goal Setting	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y

Table 8 cont'd

*Category Occurrence*

Category	Participants							
	Ran	Vic	Dar	Pat	Joh	Orl	Jer	Jon
Good Black Teachers	y	n	y	n	y	y	y	y
Idols	y	n	y	y	y	y	y	y
Low Self-Esteem	n	y	y	n	n	y	n	n
Nice White Teachers	n	n	n	n	y	y	n	n
Peer Pressure	n	y	y	y	y	y	n	n
Poverty	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Poverty Embarrassed	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	n
Poverty Rejection	n	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Pride	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	y
Puberty	n	n	y	y	y	y	y	y
Racism	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Religion	n	n	n	n	y	y	n	y
Resilience	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	n
Retained	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	y
Perception of Success	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Self-Determination	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y

Table 8 cont'd

*Category Occurrence*

Category	Participants							
	Ran	Vic	Dar	Pat	Joh	Orl	Jer	Jon
Self-Worth	y	n	y	y	y	y	y	y
Shy	n	y	y	y	n	n	n	n
Sibling Rivalry	n	n	y	n	y	n	n	n
Special Education	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Substandard Black Schools	y	n	n	n	y	y	n	n
Talents	n	n	y	y	y	y	y	y
Teacher Inspiration	y	n	y	n	y	y	y	y
Teen Promiscuity	n	n	y	y	y	y	n	y
Teen Rebellion	y	n	y	n	y	n	n	y
Tracking	n	n	n	y	n	n	n	n

*Note.* This table represents occurrence only, not frequency. For example, if a participant made reference to his talents or special abilities, then a y for *yes* was entered for that participant in that category. However, for this particular table, I did not tally the number of times that participant referred to his talents during the interview process. Such information was readily available due to how the excerpts were sorted.