Resilience: Factors that Influence Black Males to Re-enroll in High School or a General Equivalency Diploma Program

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Resilience: Factors that Influence Black Males to Re-enroll in High School or a General Equivalency Diploma Program

Abstract
Research has shown that Black males drop out of urban high schools due to the emotional, academic, and personal challenges they encounter in and out of school. However, there is a scarcity of academic research on the re-enrollment of urban, Black male students and the resilience they exhibit towards their diplomas. The purpose of this study is to understand resilience in Black males who dropout, re-enroll and complete their General Equivalency Diplomas or high school diplomas. The study determined what these students identify as components of their resilience. A qualitative research approach was utilized, specifically individual interviews, demographic sheets, field notes, and a group interview; all contributors to understand the behaviors and experiences of Black males who re-enrolled and completed their diplomas. Three themes emerged which include: a) accountability to caring adults and self; (b) his diploma as a symbol of a rebirth; and, (c) a newfound sense of purpose. Black males may find more social, emotional, and academic success in urban school districts if educators and community members’ practices fostered the process of building resilience.

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Resilience: Factors that Influence Black Males to Re-enroll in High School or a General Equivalency Diploma Program

By

Jerome Watts

Submitted in fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree

Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason, Chairperson

and

Dr. Diane Reed, Committee Member

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

May 2010
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother Bertha Mae Watts. She is a resilient Black woman! I thank her for teaching me to stand tall and proud as a Black male no matter what adverse situation I encounter. I thank God for such a loving and spiritual mother who has taught me to accomplish any goal or dream that I put in my mind, heart, and soul.
Biographical Sketch

Jerome Watts is currently the Program Administrator for a long-term suspension program in a large urban district. Mr. Watts attended Mansfield University and Buffalo State College from 1989 to 1993; graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education upon completion. In addition, he attended the State University of New York at Brockport from 1995 to 1998; graduating with a Master of Science in Educational Administration in 1997 and earning a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Administration in 1998.

Further, in the summer of 2007, he began his doctoral studies in the Ed. D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. Mr. Watts pursued his dissertation research in the area of educational resilience, with particular focus on urban Black males who re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED. Working under the direction of Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason, he earned his doctoral degree in May 2010.
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I also want to thank my children, Lauren, Marissa, Shayla, and Peyton for the many sacrifices that they have endured over the past few years. They are all resilient individuals and support one another with kindness and love. As daddy and coach, I am so blessed to have all of them in my life and am so proud of all of their current and future academic and athletic accomplishments.

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Abstract

Research has shown that Black males drop out of urban high schools due to the emotional, academic, and personal challenges they encounter in and out of school. However, there is a scarcity of academic research on the re-enrollment of urban, Black male students and the resilience they exhibit towards their diplomas. The purpose of this study is to understand resilience in Black males who dropout, re-enroll and complete their General Equivalency Diplomas or high school diplomas. The study determined what these students identify as components of their resilience. A qualitative research approach was utilized, specifically individual interviews, demographic sheets, field notes, and a group interview; all contributors to understand the behaviors and experiences of Black males who re-enrolled and completed their diplomas. Three themes emerged which include: a) accountability to caring adults and self; (b) his diploma as a symbol of a rebirth; and, (c) a newfound sense of purpose. Black males may find more social, emotional, and academic success in urban school districts if educators and community members’ practices fostered the process of building resilience.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The practice of students dropping out and re-enrolling in high school or General Educational Development (GED) programs has recently gained the interest of researchers, public officials, and school administrators due to the low academic achievement of high school students across the nation (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008). Students who re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or alternative certificate have the opportunity to continue on to college, have better employment opportunities, and have an improved economic status (McKeon, 2006). Earning a diploma is critical due to the rate of unemployment continuing to rise for high school dropouts, as they are more likely to be without a job compared to high school graduates (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004).

For example, Black males who do not complete their assigned high school requirements may face financial, social, and emotional challenges (Porter, 1997). Across the nation, Black males continue to drop out at a higher rate than their White counterparts. However, research indicates that Hispanic youth drop out of high school more than Black youth. During the year 2005, 6 percent of non-Hispanic Whites, 11 percent of Blacks, and 23 percent of Hispanics in the nation, ages ranging from 16-24, either dropped out of high school or never began. Hispanic males dropping out of school at a higher rate is based on the large number of immigrants that have never attended a school in the United States, but may need to complete similar educational requirements when enrolled (Child Trend DataBank, 2005).
Black male students also face being pushed out of the public school system as a result of poor teaching, lack of student-teacher relationships, poor academic performance, low attendance, and student disengagement (Gotbaum, 2002). Gotbaum argues that Black male students are convinced by their principals, teachers, and counselors that they do not belong in a traditional high school setting and are informed that being out of the school system will be better for their future and their fellow counterparts. Students with outstanding grades, attitudes, and supportive environments are encouraged to continue in school while those who are over-aged and with few credits are seen as disciplinary problems and difficult to work with throughout their schooling (Gotbaum, 2002). Educators may push capable students out of school and into the world of unemployment. Such push-out efforts by school administrators, teachers, and counselors can cause Black male students to drop out of school.

Furthermore, education, incarceration and Black males are linked by the high school dropout issue because most who are incarcerated have not completed their diploma (Harlow, 2003; Porter, 1997; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). For every 100,000 Black males in the nation, 3,138 are sentenced (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003) with 23% of Black male dropouts being incarcerated (Alternative Schools Network, 2009). As a result, nine out of ten prisons offer educational programs across the nation as dropouts are more likely to face the challenges of unemployment and incarceration (Harlow, 2003).

However, some Black males re-enroll in high school or a GED program and successfully complete their educational program. Re-enrolling is a second chance that can improve the quality of life for Black males who complete their high school diploma or
GED and is needed to increase their chances of becoming productive citizens (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). Opportunities to re-enroll in high school or a GED program can offer Black males a chance of providing economic and emotional support to their families and to themselves while becoming active community members and role models for Black urban youth facing similar issues.

*Statement of the Research Problem*

Black male students face many challenges in schooling, including cultural mismatch in classrooms, poor academic performance, over-representation in special education, and high rates of disciplinary consequences (Berliner et al., 2008; Kunjufu, 2002; Majors & Billson, 1992; Porter, 1997). Researchers believe that much of the academic failure of this student population is due to the internal and external factors in and out of the school system (Kunjufu, 2002; Wayman, 2001). Black males who face many social, emotional, and academic issues in and out of school are faced with negative stereotypes and unequal opportunities in employment and education.

For example, Black males placed in special education classes receive severe discipline consequences, such as multiple suspensions, and are more likely to drop out of high school (Kunjufu, 2002). Researchers point to the use of special education labels (e.g., behavioral disorder and emotional disturbed) as a manifestation of the cultural and academic disconnect between White school staff and Black male students (Noguera, 2003). If teachers and administrators do not understand Black male students’ communicative forms and behaviors, this provides opportunities to place Black males in secluded classrooms where they are segregated from the rest of the school population, not
as a means of addressing academic or neurological needs, but instead as a means of remedying culturally misunderstood behaviors (Boykin, 2005; Noguera, 2003). Educational professionals who have an unclear understanding of the close-knit relationships that Black males have within their sites of resilience, such as school, home, and the streets and the values they bring to the educational system may cause a disconnect between themselves and the student.

While these labels are essential for services, researchers have argued that such labels are too frequently affixed to Black male students; giving schools and teachers the power to label and control the educational outcomes of this population (Noguera, 2003; Porter 1997). During the year 2006-07, nearly 6.7 million students received IDEA services; with nearly 60% of the students being White, 20% Black, 17% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% American Indian (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Forty percent of IDEA students had specific learning or behavioral labels. Black males are consistently labeled with a disability and placed in special education classes where they are likely to be suspended or expelled twice more than general education students (Cooley, 1995). Nationwide, in the year 2006, suspension rates represented 15 percent of Black students compared to 5 percent of White students, along with an additional 5 percent of Black males being expelled (U.S Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). School systems not being culturally responsive may cause Black males to have a difficult time adjusting, thus, eventually dropping out of school. In turn, with less educational opportunities, Black males receive less employment opportunities, as a high school or college degree is needed for many job prospects.
However, some students decide to re-enroll in high schools or GED programs despite the continued presence of adversity around them and prevail to the positive outcome of completing their high school diploma or GED. These students demonstrate resilience in light of challenging circumstances. This study proposes to explore aspects of Black male resilience related to the decision to re-enroll in urban school systems and completing their diploma.

*Presumed cultural mismatch.* In this section, a description of the presumed cultural mismatch will be discussed, specifically the lack of understanding some educators have on the culture, style, and approach of Black males’ identity. The social and emotional issues, the reasons for disconnect, the negative responses by adults, and the low academic performance Black males face compared to their White counterparts will be shared as a means of framing why Black males drop out of high school.

Dropping out of high school has become a serious issue for Black males for a variety of reasons. Kunjufu (2005) posits that disengagement from school starts as early as the fourth grade for many Black male students. As students move from the nurturing atmosphere of kindergarten through grade three, Kunjufu argues educators start to fear the physical growth and attitude of Black males. According to Kunjufu (2002), middle-class, White female teachers, especially, see Black male students as physically imposing and a threat. These teachers, he argues, then label Black male students in response to their own fears. The racial disconnect may be due to the fact that many White teachers grew up in homogeneous areas or have been in White neighborhoods their entire lives. Differences are further compounded by a lack of knowledge on Black culture such as family bonding, spirituality, quest for freedom, justice, and equality in education and
employment; all aspects that Blacks share within their home, job, church or community (Irvine, 2003). The cultural sharing and building of positive relationships in school may be a motivator to engage Black males to learn.

Some researchers (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Payne, 2006) suggest that social and cultural contexts should be used as Black males identify their male role model stature, especially in the sites of resilience. Black male role models may support and engage Black male students in positive activities such as tutoring, job shadowing, and attending community events. This sharing of social and cultural context is limited in schools across the nation due to the low percent of Black male teachers (1%), the total percent of Black teachers (6%), and the high percent of female teachers (83%) at the elementary level (Gotbaum, 2002; Kunjufu, 2002; Riehl, 1999). Kunjufu (2002) states, “White male and female teachers who are now attempting to educate Black children have not taken one course in Black history, culture, family, learning style, or Ebonics” (p. 18). Educators who don’t understand the communicative forms of students may misdiagnosis students leading to inappropriate academic placements such as special education. Students sharing their experiences and teachers understanding and building positive relationships may increase students’ interest in school (Tyre, 2008; Irvine, 2003).

For example, engagement of students in culturally responsive pedagogy allows teachers to assist Black males in improving their academics (Irvine, 2003). As a result, Black males and their teachers have a better understanding of the history and struggles Blacks have faced; all leading to a positive educational outcome due to the representation of culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2003) states:

Culturally responsive teaching involves using the cultures, experiences, and
perspectives of African, Native, Latino, and Asian American students as filters through which to teach them academic knowledge and skills. Other critical elements of culturally responsive teaching are unpacking unequal distributions of power and privilege, and teaching students of color cultural competence about themselves and others (p.181).

Culturally responsive teachers can experience a better understanding of who they are, whom they teach their curriculum to, and how they teach the curriculum to Black males. Teachers who question their own personal views they have towards Black males and their knowledge of delivering effective multi-cultural curriculum may allow Black males to engage in lessons that have a direct impact on their personal lives, academic performance, social, political, economic, and cultural way of living (Gay, 2003). In turn, Black males and their teachers may encounter positive relationship building, stronger academic performance, and positive outcomes such as completing their high school diploma or GED.

Black adolescence males’ identity and hypermasculinity. Research has noted that many urban Black males bring a cool style and approach to the academic setting that many educators misunderstand and view as threatening due to their lack of cultural understanding, thus, use against the students by imposing excessive in school punishments (Majors & Billson, 1992). According to Majors and Billson, cool pose is a ritualized expression used to deliver a message of control and strength from Black males as they attempt to fulfill the role of manhood without the necessary means. Due to the lack of fair and equitable resources, Black males use their cool pose to express their masculinity because they have become frustrated, angry, and alienated. This frustration is
expressed across the context of school, home, and the streets as they use their cool pose to detract the many obstacles they face in their lives. Majors and Billson (1992) state, “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 anxiety of second-class status” (p. 5). Inclusive of the way Black male students walk, talk, and dress, cool pose represents their identity as they bond and connect with each other, and express their unity. Students have established a cool pose that has become their coping mechanism to survive the many daily racist acts against them in and out of school.

Black males’ cool pose is about empowerment, respect, and taking control of their own actions in order to enhance their masculinity, popularity, and self-confidence (p. 46). It also may be constructed that cool pose is about positive protective factors that are part of their lives; which may include students’ speaking out against a teacher or classroom rule, joining a gang, wearing the top-of-the-line gear to impress their friends, or listening to rap music that represents their self-identity. However, Dyson (2005) argues that their identity is under cultural assault as educators, police officers, attorneys, judges, and many other professionals challenge it and misunderstand their mentality for survival. Educators may see Black males as those who have behavioral problems and are lazy and unwilling to work hard for success in the school setting. This misunderstanding of the connection between school, home, and the street life may cause educators to disrespect the cool pose of Black male students and not focus on the educational attainment of the student. This lack of educational support towards Black males increases the chances of disengagement and may drive them to drop out of school and towards the many social injustices they face, such as unemployment and poverty (Porter, 1997).
Being cool in school means having a variety of emotions when faced with anxiety, including being tough, fearless, calm, and emotionless. The expected outcome is to show others that you are in control of the situation, strong, and proud (Majors & Billson, 1992). According to Majors and Billson, Black men have defined manhood as breadwinner, provider, procreator, and protector in alignment with their White counterparts; however, research has indicated that Black males have not had the consistent access to the same means in meeting success and their masculinity (p. 1). This has caused Black males to face many adverse situations in their lives as they continue to fall short compared to their White counterparts. Hunter and Davis (1994) state:

Being Black and male in American society places one at risk for unemployment, school failure, violence, and crime. Historically, these patterns have been viewed, to varying degrees, as products of racism, unemployment, and poverty, as well as the results of cultural adaptations to these systematic pressures (p. 21). As the struggles continue, Black males who face the risk of not supporting their family, unemployment, incarceration, and poor schooling attempt to establish their self-identity while facing the ongoing adversity in their lives.

**Black/white achievement gap.** Urban districts across the nation continue not to meet the academic needs of Black male students in traditional or alternative settings, resulting in low academic achievement (Jackson, 2008). Due to the failure of urban districts, an educational gap has Black males far behind their White counterparts. In New York State, for example, the 2003 cohort represents a wide achievement gap, with 81% of White male students and 51% of Black male students graduating in June of 2007 with a local or Regents diploma. This increased in August 2007, to 55% of Black males
compared to 82% of White males with a local or Regents diploma through August 2007 (Duncan-Poitier, 2008). A gap of 27% separates the number of districts that fail to graduate the majority of their Black male students with their peers in New York State. The majority of White male students received Regents diplomas (72%) while only 33% of Black male students received Regents diplomas and had a 17% drop-out rate through June, 2007 (Duncan-Poitier, 2008).

The 2008 Schott Study (Jackson, 2008) reports that New York State is ranked 45th out of the 50 states in lowest performance level shown by Black males. Specifically, some New York State urban districts fall into the category of the ten lowest-performing districts for Black males in the nation. For example, New York City school district enrollment of Black males was 159,555 with an estimate of 32% of Black males graduating; Buffalo City School District enrollment was 10,666 with an estimate of 31% graduating. Further, the Rochester City School District had the lowest graduation rate for Black males in New York State with a total enrollment in 2004-2005 at 11,270, with an estimate of only 29% of Black males completing their high school diploma (Jackson, 2008).

Poor academic performance, especially a Black male student’s reading level in sixth grade, is an indicator that he will drop out of high school, where as research shows that reading achievement in sixth grade and increased suspension occurs and continues in middle and high school (Pallas, 1986; Anderson, Howard and Gram, 2007; Tyre, 2008). Large, comprehensive, urban high schools report the highest drop-out rates, with half of the ninth graders leaving school with below-average reading levels (Bryk & Thum, 1989). According to Tyre (2008), Black boys perform lower than their White peers, and
the gap of about five points that exists with boys and girls in third grade grows to fourteen points by the time the students reach high school (p. 135). Black males are not successful in reading, as 86% are not at a level of proficiency in fourth grade and 89% are not in eighth grade (Lewis & Erskine, 2008). Tyre states:

We are failing to connect boys to reading and the repercussions are spreading like dry rot through our schools. Right now in this country, thirty-three percent of male high school seniors score “below basic” in national measures of reading achievement (p. 137).

Black male students with these literacy deficiencies may enter high school several years later than their peers of the same age, complete less credits than needed to become a sophomore, thus, the vicious cycle of being an over-aged and under-credited high school student who is at least two years behind in accumulating credits towards completing his diploma (Gotbaum, 2002; Kunjufu, 2002). For example, Gotbaum studied 17 and 18-year old freshmen students of whom were both male and female that were told they would not have enough time, credits, or the necessary requirements completed to graduate on time. Nevertheless, these students were recommended to join a GED program. Essentially, the decision to drop out is ultimately made by the students, as the difficulty in catching up and completing high school becomes a realization, especially if the students were discharged.

Re-enrolling in high school or a GED program. Re-enrolling in high school is defined as the process of dropping out and returning to high school or a program to complete a high school diploma or a GED (Hurst, Kelly & Princiotta, 2004). However, very little national data is kept on the number of students who re-enroll in high school
after dropping out (Berliner et al., 2008). Berliner et al. states:

While there has been considerable recent research on this national education crisis, much less is known about the number and characteristics of those students who drop out and then re-enroll but face nearly impenetrable barriers to graduation (p. 1).

Local, state, and federal policies such as No Child Left Behind do not focus on re-enrollment data that could track the rates of Black males who drop out and re-enroll.

Black male students facing the social and academic barriers in traditional high school settings also re-enroll to prepare for the GED test (Gotbaum, 2002; Song & Hsu, 2008). The GED has been considered an alternative way to catch up for high school dropouts who have either zero or a few credits they received while enrolled in high school (U.S Department of Education National Center for Education Evaluation, 2008). The test is organized within federal, state, and local agencies to offer opportunities for students who re-enroll the chance to complete their alternative degree, attend college, or go to the workforce upon completion.

The GED test was established in 1942 for returning World War II veterans who had not completed high school but who had the academic ability to continue on to post-secondary school (Ou, 2008). Since the 1970s, over 700,000 students have taken the test per year, with over a million students in the peak year of 2001 (Song & Hsu, 2008). This number decreased to 603,019 in the year 2002 due to the rigorous academic changes connected to the test (McKeon, 2006). For example, candidates are tested for seven hours over a two-day span on their academic skills and knowledge base: ability to solve problems, communicate effectively, read, and write on grade level. The five subtests
include writing, social studies, reading, mathematics, and science. Students must receive an average score of 450 across the five subtests with no test below 410 in order to earn their GED (Ou, 2008).

Unfortunately, some students do not get to the exam level due to the intake process used to determine their academic level and their past educational preparation; in addition to the academic, counseling, and work-related services they need to utilize in order to pass the exam (New York City Department of Education, 2009). The number of dropouts who re-enrolled and passed the GED test in 2002 decreased 47.3%, dropping from 683,866 to 360,444 who passed in 2001 (McKeon, 2006). Research indicates students continue to drop out early in their high school careers and further, struggle to pass in their GED programs (Cross, 1981). Students that fail the GED test may continue to re-enroll as they work towards earning their diploma.

Theoretical Framework

Masten (2001) believes that resilience does not emerge from innate qualities, but rather from ordinary and normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in both their families and communities (p. 227). Thus, this theoretical framework is important to this study, as Black males show aspects of resilience across the context of school, home, and street life; enabling them to face and overcome difficult situations that may have otherwise resulted in negative outcomes, such as incarceration, dropping out of school, depression, or illegal activities. However, some Black males experience the development of resilience due to protective supports, which include: families, friends, educators, or community members. Each member or individual serves as a guide and protector for Black males as they endure the pain and suffering connected
to the adversity.

Additionally, Leak (2003) lends a further understanding of resilience, defining it as an individual’s ability to face traumatic life events, stress, and disappointments through positive, life-altering actions. This may also include psychological resilience, which is an individual’s ability to withstand stressors and not have psychological dysfunctions, such as mental illness or negative moods (Neill, 2006). Psychological stressors or risk factors include death; chronic illness; sexual, physical, or emotional abuse; fear; unemployment; and community violence. However, Leak states, “resilience theory identifies the protective factors within the family, school, and community that assist children in maintaining self-concept and self-efficacy when faced with the type of adversity that causes other students to give up” (p. 27). This adversity may include poverty, low academic performance, suspensions, lack of positive relationships, as well as social and emotional challenges. Thus, a young Black male uses adversity as a way to create positive outcomes when facing a continuation of negative outcomes. Leak states, “A child who feels alienated by teachers and peers may be susceptible to acting out in class, which contributes to self-destructive behavior and dropping out” (p. 26).

Essentially, these protective factors serve as critical aspects to Black males resilience because they help guide these males toward positive outcomes in their daily endeavors. Positive outcomes are achieved through rational and behavioral means that supports their desired goals.

For many Black males, characteristics of resilience are culturally related (Leak, 2003). For example, Payne (2006) states, “the sites of resilience theory describes the ‘streets’ as a place of bonding, building strength, and community for Black men as they
negotiate their notion of masculinity” (p. 288). Black males social behaviors include bonding, such as playing basketball, rhyming slang, and hanging on the block, and in addition, also illegal activities, such as robbing, selling drugs, and committing violent acts.

Payne (2006) describes these activities in connection to those Black males who endure the street life path due to the difficulties they face socioeconomically, leading to few legal, economic, and academic opportunities to result in positive outcomes. He states, “A sites-of resilience analysis theorizes resilience in the context of race and historical racism, socio-historical patterns, the intersection of concentrated poverty (capitalism) and resilience (e.g., unemployment rates and poverty rates), and the importance of phenomenological based analyses” (p. 289). Moreover, the streets can serve as a place where some Black males build positive relationships with other male and community members during their development of resilience. These positive relationships support them in urban schools where they may feel disrespected and dismissed by educators whose policies and procedures do not match. Nevertheless, schools may not build systems to accept and adjust to the life of Black males outside the educational setting. However, for Black males, sites of resilience can include community centers, churches, stores, schools, work environments, and also family gatherings. At these sites, positive relationships are established to further assist Black males in attaining successful results in life.

Resilience as a theoretical lens in this study is significant due to the framework it offers urban school districts to follow when supporting Black males in re-enrolling and completing their high school diploma or GED. In this study, the data collected reflects
the personal stories of Black males, with notable attention to the negative experiences many of them faced as urban high school students (e.g., external racism, limited employment opportunities, equitable education), their resilience development through the use of human protective factors and self-efficacy, as well as the positive outcomes that resulted. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological study method helped further capture the participants’ perceptions on resilience and their experiences before and after dropping out, as well as while being re-enrolled in school (Patten, 2002). According to the Patten and this study, examining Black males perceptions and acquiring knowledge on those who re-enroll, can likely enhance educational professionals further understanding of the adverse situations, resilience development, and positive outcomes that result when Black males re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED.

Furthermore, this theoretical framework sheds importance to the study as it indicates available support systems and tools that Black males can utilize to achieve positive outcomes when facing challenging situations in their lives. Masten’s (2001) definition will guide the research study as Black males who re-enroll may face adversity and show aspects of resilient behaviors as they complete their high school diploma or GED.

Research Questions

To better understand the challenges Black males face across the context of school, home, and street life, this study will examine the following question: What aspects of resilience emerges in an examination of Black male high school dropouts who re-enroll? In posing this question, the purpose of this study seeks to better understand resilience in Black males that overcome many obstacles in their lives which includes re-enrollment
into an urban school district and completion of their high school diploma or GED. Furthermore, what do these students identify as essential components of their resilience that have allowed them to re-enroll in school or GED programs? Such information is deeply missed in the research literature and is needed as it will provide a better understanding of Black male students who re-enroll, receive their diploma, and have the opportunity to improve their educational and personal career.

**Chapter Summary**

While the literature illuminates resilience in academically successful Black males, what is not known is what resilience looks like in Black males who drop out and re-enroll in high school or GED completion programs. This study seeks a better understanding of resilience in Black males that face adversity and develop resilience with the support of a family member or advocate and further, recognizes the positive outcomes that result for their future successes. In the next chapter, the selective review of literature will discuss the purpose, data collection methods and the findings of literature connected to the study’s definition of resilience. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology, data collection and data analysis used in the study. Further, Chapter 4 will share the study’s findings. Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the study and recommendations for policy practice and future research.
Glossary of Terms

**Academic Risk** – Students’ school behavior and performance that reflects a history of absenteeism, grade retention, academic trouble, disengagement from school life, and dropping out (Lee & Burkam, 2003). This is applicable to the current study as the four Black male participants had a history of being academically at-risk of dropping out.

**Cool Pose** – A ritualized expression used to deliver a message of control and strength from Black males as they attempt to fulfill the role of manhood without the necessary means (Major & Billson, 1992). For purpose of this study cool pose is expressed as the approach and message of control Black males that face adversity across the context of school, home, and street life.

**Dropout** – A person who leaves high school before completing the necessary requirements to earn a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). For purpose of the current study dropout includes the four participants who left school while enrolled in high school.

**GED (General Educational Development)** – Exam started in 1942 for returning World War II veterans who had not completed high school but who had the academic ability to continue on to post-secondary school (Ou, 2008). This is applicable to the current study as three of the four Black male participants re-enrolled into a GED program.

**Re-enroll** – The process used by a district and a dropout to re-enter high school or a GED program (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). This is applicable to the current study as the four Black male participants re-enrolled into high school or a GED program.

**Resilience** – “Emerges not from special qualities but rather from the everyday ordinary,
normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children; in their families and relationships; and in their communities” (Masten, 2001, p. 227). For the purpose of the current study, resilience serves as the theoretical framework.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter is a selective review of literature on resilience including adversity, protective factors that build resilience, and positive outcomes experienced by Black males. The chapter will present empirical work related to the current study as Black males’ exhibit aspects of resilience as they re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED. The literature shares common themes such as presumed cultural mismatch, sites of resilience, academic performance, characteristics of resilience, positive relationships with a caring adult, and the attribute of persistence shown by Black males. These studies further expand upon the development of resilience in Black males that re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED.

Black males facing adversity in school. Research indicates that the pairing of Black male students with White teachers may cause a cultural mismatch in the educational setting (Davis, 2003; Kunjufu, 2002; Porter, 1997). For example, the purpose of Cooper’s (2000) study was to determine the school experiences of high school students. Cooper administered an 85-item questionnaire to 743 high school students (29% Black) to determine their feelings and attitudes towards school and what they encountered during their time in school. Cooper’s findings included Black males who were placed in remedial math by their White teachers, consequently, struggling to find academic or personal success. The lack of a fair and equitable educational system disempowered and diminished the Black males’ ability to enjoy their school experience.
It also made them feel that it was an intentional act of racism by the White teachers due to the fact that the majority of students placed in the remedial math class were Black males. This study’s findings further shared that Black males felt that their core experience was unreflective of the inclusive, multicultural, and competitive environment like that of their White peers in the school. Nevertheless, positive relationships were not built around Black male students, causing a greater disengagement from school and difficulty developing their resilience.

Ninth grade can be the most difficult grade for a Black male student and is often the grade where they start to fall off track in completing their diploma. Balfanz (2007) completed a mixed method study that interviewed 60 representatives from 22 urban school districts and compiled data on ninth grade transitions to examine why urban students are academically unsuccessful in the ninth grade. He discovered that in 17 of the 22 districts, over 20% of their enrolled freshmen did not return for their second year. Further, Kemple, Herlihy, Smith (2005), reviewed data for 100 ninth-grade students in the spring of the students’ following year (tenth grade year) and noted that 56 were classified as *on-time* and received enough credits to be a sophomore, while 20 had dropped out and 24 repeated ninth grade. Of these 100 students, one-half of them dropped out three years later. Moreover, twenty of the *on-time* freshmen had fallen behind in credits by their third year in high school.

Freshmen grades are considered a predictor in determining if a student will graduate from high school. Allensworth and Easton (2005) completed a quantitative study with the Chicago Public School District in developing an *on-track* data indicator to be included in the accountability system. The purpose of the study was to determine the
number of ninth grade students repeating ninth grade in the Chicago Public School System and identify why. The data system tracks the academic grades of ninth-grade students who earn at least five full-year course credits, and also those with low grades, such as F’s in their subjects. The data revealed that freshmen off track who are behind in the required amount of graduation credits, are three times more likely to not complete high school; additionally, it was found that only 31% of students with more than three F’s during their first year of high school graduate with their senior class (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). This study identified Black urban males repeating ninth grade at a higher rate than their White counterparts and eventually dropping out of school due to the greater number of adverse situations, lack of connections with teachers, and poor academic standing prior to entering high school.

Black males who are over-aged and lack academic credits may eventually drop out of high school. The New York City Office of Multiple Pathways along with the Parthenon Group (2003) completed a quantitative study and identified 138,000 students who were over-aged, under-credited students, and/or former students in the New York City Public School District. Of the 138,000 students, 68,000 had dropped out, and of the 70,000 students who were still enrolled in school, 33,600 (48%) were still freshmen. The purpose of the study was to identify when students dropped out and the number of credits they attained before dropping out. The results of the study showed that many of the repeat freshmen had very few credits and were now on the path of being over-aged and under-credited.

Furthermore, districts across the nation may push Black males out of their high schools due to a variety of factors. Stearns and Glennie (2006) reviewed quantitative data
from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction including drop-out information, gender and ethnicity, school, age, and grade of students from transcripts. The purpose of the study was to determine the specific reasons why students were dropping out of the assigned districts in North Carolina. Reasons for leaving were also reviewed including push-out factors (e.g., suspension, expulsions, incarceration, attendance, and academic problems) along with pull-out factors (e.g., pregnancy, marriage, childcare, employment, and family reasons). This cross-section of data on the 1998-1999 dropouts exhibited ninth grade as the most probable dropout grade, which is shown with out of 58,446 total students, Black student dropouts in grades nine through twelve- represented 20,528 with ninth-grade dropouts being 6,455 of the total. These Black males were 16 years old or younger and pushed out of school due to disciplinary reasons. Older Black males dropped out to take care of a family member, look for employment, or attempt their GED.

Attendance factors play a role in the academic outcomes of Black males. Neild, Stoner-Eby and Furstenberg (2008) used data from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study (PELS), which consists of large-scale longitudinal studies of different students from an urban district to discuss and discover why a large number of students repeat ninth grade. The qualitative data includes survey responses and telephone interviews from students, parents, and individual data (e.g., behavior, grades, and test scores) from the district to review the transition process of students from eighth to ninth grade. Ten percent of the 1995-1996 eighth graders who attended one of the 45 random schools selected were from the PELS and were followed during their time in high school for the current study. The researchers found that ninth grade course failure and poor
attendance increased the probability of dropping out from their assigned high school within six years. Sixty percent of PELS dropouts were in their third, fourth, or fifth year of high school; however, 46% were still listed as ninth graders and 88% had earned three credits. This study identified the need to build positive relationships with Black males while improving their attendance and academic performance as ninth graders. As the findings indicate, students may be in school; however they are not earning the needed credits to move to sophomore, junior, or senior status in high school.

*Educational path of a Black male.* Students who drop out of high school may be part of a family generation cycle of dropouts. For example, students who drop out may be part of generational academic challenges where their parents, grandparents, or other kin have also faced inequitable educational opportunities in the school setting or other social and emotional opportunities which forced them to drop out (Ou, 2008). Furthermore, Ou (2008) used data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS), which is a twenty-year study that investigated Black and Latino students who grew up in high-poverty neighborhoods in Chicago. This original sample included 1,539 students; 989 graduated from kindergarten in a program called Child-Parent Center, and 550 were part of other government-funded kindergarten programs. The purpose of the study was to identify the academic path, along with the social and emotional outcomes of students who participated in the original study.

Black students accounted for 93.3% of the population (48.2% male) as Ou (2008) used 1,372 youth (352 dropouts, 279 GED recipients, and 741 high school graduates) from the original sample and collected quantitative and qualitative data from their birth to early adulthood. Ou found significant differences among dropouts, GED recipients, and
high school graduates. For example, dropouts and high school graduates had significant differences in various factors including race/ethnicity, eligibility for free and reduced-cost lunch, mother being a teen at the child’s birth, and parent(s) unemployed at the child’s age of three, as well as four or more people living at the household.

The differences between dropouts and high school graduates, as well as the between GED recipients and high school graduates included the mother being a high school dropout and single parent by the time the child reaches three years old. Ou (2008) also notes considerable differences in academic achievement between dropouts and high school graduates and between dropouts and GED recipients in the Iowa Test of basic skills kindergarten scores. The GED recipients were more likely to attend post-secondary schools than the students who dropped out, and high school graduates were more likely to attend post-secondary school than the GED recipients (p. 93). This connects to the current study as Black males may re-enroll and complete their GED programs; opening up future college and employment opportunities. As described in the study, parental support and guidance assisted the students while facing the adverse situations in the family and their personal lives. Mothers who raised their children alone continued building their resilience as the students were able to continue on and complete their diploma.

*Barriers to GED.* Furthermore, Black males may run into barriers as they re-enroll and attempt to complete their educational program. The purpose of King’s (2002) study was to determine barriers recent high school dropouts encountered in pursuing GED programs and those that the GED teachers created for GED participants. The 119 recent high school dropout participants in the quantitative study were enrolled in 11 GED
programs in 9 communities in the southern part of the United States. The participants’ ages ranged from 16-23 and they left high school within the last five years of the study. This research connects to Black males as they may drop out of high school and re-enroll and complete their GED program.

The Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS), which had a current reliability coefficient of .91, was the main instrument utilized and further, it listed 34 reasons associated with deterrents to participation in adult education (p. 147). King administered the DPS on an individual basis and read the items due to the low literacy population. A Likert scale of one through five was used to exhibit the participants’ relevance to their situation. Analysis of the data consisted of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-PC) for statistical analysis and multivariate analysis tested the research hypothesis. Demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, residence, household, distance from nearest GED center, and time withdrawn from school was kept by frequency counts and put into percentages.

The study involved 51% men and 49% women; with 59% Black participants and 41% White participants. The average age was 18.6 with 48% of the participants having a household income of less than $20,000. Black male and White female participants in the study waited longer to register for a GED program after dropping out of high school compared to White male participants in the study who re-enrolled. Results indicated that family restraint was the primary barrier to participating in GED programs which included lack of family encouragement, childcare, reduced family time due to commitment to GED program, and other family issues. This is also important to the current study as Black male students may need the support of family and school members to build their
resilience in re-enrolling and completing their GED program.

Characteristics of resilient Black male students. Building relationships and supporting each other has allowed for students to find success in their school environment. Griffin and Allen (2006) interviewed a total of 17 Black juniors and seniors (9 females and 8 males) from a high-resourced high school and a low-resourced high school; determining similarities and differences among the two schools. Differences included more resources to assist Black students at the high-level school; however, they were in a racial climate that hindered their access to the needed college resources. For example, they were placed in academically lower classes, did not receive additional academic support as did their White counterparts, and had teachers who were not caring and culturally responsive. The low school had a lack of resources to assist the students in preparing for college, but possessed a culture of teachers willing to assist them academically through African American culturally responsive curriculum, and further, offered the needed support and guidance to build up their resilience against the adversity they faced. The purpose of the study was to identify the resilience students exhibited and how it was established. Even though the students faced different challenges, both groups showed resilient behaviors and described how they bonded together to develop their resilience to achieve their goals. Resilient behaviors such as establishing positive relationships with peers and having common positive outcomes such as completing their high school diploma, was an important part of the study. Research has shown that some resilient Black male students have the innate ability to be resilient in succeeding despite the adversity they may face with protective supports in the school system (Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2002). The will to not give up and falter becomes a mindset with students
who want to do well; however, they may still face adverse situations such as poverty, crime, drugs, racism in and out of school, and peer pressure to mention a few (Werner & Smith, 1992).

In addition, Padron, Waxman, and Huang (1999), completed a qualitative study on resilient Black males in a school setting. The purpose of the study was to identify the aspects shown within the classroom instruction and learning environment in an urban district that determined resilient and non-resilient students. Results indicated that a positive learning environment, a strong interaction with teachers, and a satisfaction with their reading and language arts program was important for resilient students. Non-resilient students had more difficulties with their homework, less teacher interactions and socialized more with their peers in class.

Additionally, Morales (2008) completed a qualitative study on resilient students. The purpose of the study was to understand the cognitive and affective phenomena of 50 academically resilient students’ mental states of whom found academic success despite all of their adversity (p. 152). The data for the research was collected by asking open-ended questions, reviewing academic transcripts, analyzing demographic information, and listening to the students’ responses. Each participant had a minimum grade point average of 3.0, parents with a high school degree or below, and identified themselves as a person of color.

The major themes that appeared were: cultural and constant discontinuity, the burden of race and cultural inversion, creating and sustaining positive self image, self acknowledgement, and characteristics connected to a specific sociopolitical system. The students also showed pride towards the academic work they were able to accomplish.
Essentially, this pride leads to students working harder and looking forward to having greater academic success. This motivation comes from the additional support of a caring adult, enabling students to continually persevere and complete their high diploma requirements.

Black males’ persistence has been shown to be a key factor in completing their educational program. According to Knesting (2008), “Beyond the academic demands of homework and test, it takes all the energy some students have just to go to school each morning” (p. 3). Knesting completed a qualitative case study of a group of high school students who were at-risk of not completing their high school diploma. However, the students demonstrated resilient and persistent attributes when attending school despite the many challenges they faced. Moreover, the author focused on gaining a better understanding of their resilience and persistence through the personal stories and voices of the students.

The study took place in a comprehensive high school that portrayed a high dropout rate. Seventeen students in grades nine through twelve participated in the research with ten being male and seven female. Thirteen of the students were White and four were Black; eight students had been retained in elementary or middle school. The students interviewed described having committed and caring teachers as being more important to their persistence, more than any counseling program. Four factors were described as critical to students’ persistence: listening to the students, showing respect, showing school’s role in dropout prevention, and encouraging students’ role in dropout prevention.

Black males may have a positive impact on negative school cultures by having a
voice in their educational program and with the support of caring adults as they complete their educational program. Murray and Naranjo (2008) conducted a study that examined factors and processes connected with Black male students working towards their high school diploma. This qualitative study included 11 Black graduating seniors who were labeled as having a learning disability. Students were interviewed and field notes were collected to determine the role in which protective factors and processes contributed to their ability to persist in school. The study showed a variety of factors and processes that increased their ability to adapt to a school environment, where only 20% of their freshmen cohort completed school on-time. Common themes associated with educational resilience and school persistence included peer, teacher, and family support as major reasons for the success of the students.

The study was designed to allow students to voice their perspectives about the main factors and processes that led them to complete their high school diploma. The researchers’ intent was to gain rich descriptions of students’ perspectives that played a role in their educational resilience and school persistence. Two major themes emerged in the study: risk factors and protective factors. Risk factors included school failure, disengagement from school, and negative feedback from peers. Protective factors included support from family, school or community members, positive role models, and peers portrayed similar resilient attributes in order to attain academic success.

In addition to structural and societal risks that Black male students faced, in association with living in poverty, they also were academically at risk of school failure, as 10 out of 11 students were performing below grade level and further, with half facing a serious health issue during or since birth. Protective factors included self-determination;
willingness to seek support; and belief in the societal value of education, family, peers, and teachers. These factors played a major role in the educational resilience of urban Black students classified with a learning disability as they completed their high school diploma. These resilient students were able to overcome their adversity, develop resilience, and have a positive outcome.

Furthermore, an adverse school culture can push Black males out of school. Roderick (2003) found a lack of engagement of Black males in the 10th grade due to the students’ adverse experiences in the school setting such as neglect, rejection by staff, and weak academic structures. Roderick (2003) conducted a qualitative study that examined the in- and out-of-school experiences of 15 Black male students and determined that they fall into groups of withdrawn, disengaged, and resilient. According to Roderick (2003), withdrawn refers to Black male students who had below average to average academic skills in the 8th grade, and made an early exit from high school due to expulsion or a violent act that has lead to his early withdrawal. Disengaged refers to Black male students with average to above average academic skills in the 8th grade, regularly attended high school, portrayed solid academic skills, but was unable to graduate due to lack of accumulated credits, family stress, and disruptions in their life. Roderick (2003) defined resilience as the ability for Black male students to overcome obstacles and find academic success in their school. She referred to examples of resilience in Black male students who have received support from family and school members to build up their resilient characteristics. Black male students in the study that were considered resilient demonstrated characteristics such as connecting to strong families and adults; engaging in activities, using problem solving and communication skills; and focusing on
understanding their racial background and history. This is important to the current study as these resilient behaviors may guide Black male participants into a positive outcome linked to the attributes of resilience. These characteristics were not evident in the withdrawn and the disengaged Black students who eventually dropped out of school.

Redditt (2005) completed a qualitative study on eight Black males who dropped out of high school. The participants were between the ages of 16 and 70 and had faced many social and emotional adverse issues while growing up. Redditt conducted interviews, coded the information, and gave a descriptive narrative on each participant (p.50). Study findings indicated that while the students faced many adverse issues including living with a single parent, financial instability, and early drug and alcohol usage, their belief in spirituality served as a protective factor in building up their resilience. The purpose of the study was to find out their experiences of being a Black male dropout.

Yates, Pelphrey, and Smith’s (2008) phenomenological study was completed to determine factors that caused pre-service Black male teachers to continue in Historical Black Universities in the Mid-South. Resilience was the conceptual framework that the study was grounded in, and the results connected to the protective factors of resilience. The results included families and communities, individual beliefs, and connections to school as the themes to continuing their education at their college.

A consistent support group allows for Black males to stay resilient during difficult times. In a qualitative study completed by Floyd (1996), 20 Black high school seniors were chosen to participate. The sample included 10 Black males and 10 Black females who were from low-income homes and had faced adverse situations in their lives. Floyd
interviewed the students and asked them to identify the adults who had an influence on their lives. Additional questions were on their family expectations for them in the present and the future.

Floyd (1996) found that the influence of a supportive family member was a critical factor to the success of the child, with this individual often serving as the mother. Other external supports mentioned included a coach, uncle, or teacher who played a part in their life. The power of hard work was mentioned as a way to overcome obstacles and that their efforts would pay off if they worked hard at it.

Miller and MacIntosh’s (1999) mixed methods study was used to study the protective factors that facilitate resilience in Black students who attend urban schools. The study consisted of 131 participants who answered questionnaires administered by Black graduate students. Participants included 83 (63.4%) females and 48 (36.6%) males. Students were in grades eight through twelve with 51% living with both parents, 47% living with one, and the rest identified other means of living in their response. Participants were involved in general education (38.5%), college preparation and honors (43.8%), and vocational (14%) classes. Within the study, the independent variable was stress which included passing their classes and the control variable included dealing with daily hassle. The variable was measured in two areas that included active and general. The Perceived Stress Scale was the main instrument used to determine active stress.

Black males’ adversity. Black males face different and/or similar adverse stressors as their White or Hispanic urban counterparts. Kilmer, Cowen, Wyman, Work, and Magnus (1998) completed a quantitative study on the stressors that urban youth faced both in and out of school. The study was a comparison of stressful life events and
circumstances (SLE-Cs) in Black, White, and Hispanic youths. The purpose of the study was to identify the specific stress areas in certain racial groups in order to come up with possible interventions needed for each group. Comparing the SLE-Cs of poor urban youth within a 6-12 month time period allowed the researchers to add to the scant research on this topic.

The participants in the study included a total of 1,179 Black, White, and Hispanic students in grades two through six. The students participated in one of two studies on the resilient outcomes of urban school children who are highly stressed. The study included 621 Black students, 367 White students, 191 Hispanic students for a total of 551 males and 628 females. Most of the Black students (76%) received free or reduced-cost lunch and lived in a single parent home family (70%).

The Life Event Checklist (LEC) created by Work, Parker, and Cowen (1990) was used in the study and parents checked what SLE-Cs that themselves, as well as children had faced, including: death of a close family member, ongoing family arguments, violence, or protective services. The LEC score of the participant was determined by the number of items checked. Two subsamples (n1=591, n2=588) from the LEC findings and a prior analysis that matched for gender, ethnicity, grade level, and school were used.

The results of the study shared the outcomes on the five factors. In Factor one, family turmoil, Whites had more movement in and out of the home more than Blacks. They also had more family arguments and children were bothered by the disagreements in the White households more than children were bothered in the Black households. Additionally, Hispanic children faced more divorce and separations than White and Black families. However, Blacks and Hispanic families had more close family members
incarcerated than their White counterparts. Factor two, poverty, showed major differences as Hispanic and Black families lived in greater poverty with less food and clothing for their children than Whites. Factor three, family separation or social services, showed that Black children were assigned the role of caregiver of the family at a higher rate than Whites, and Black children had been placed in a different home, such as a close family relative or in the foster care system more often. Factor four included family injury or illness, which showed that Blacks and Hispanics had experienced more death of a sibling or parent in the family than Whites. It also showed Whites and Blacks losing a close relative more often than Hispanics. Factor five, violent neighborhoods, showed Whites grieving over the death of a pet or a best friend moving away, more than Blacks and Hispanics. The study shows the adversity that may be faced by Black males as the attempt to provide for their family and complete their high school diploma or GED. In turn, the intervention needed for Black males that re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED during the adverse situations may include positive relationships that build up their resilient behavior.

*Black males’ sites of resilience development.* Black males have notable sites where they develop and use their resilience across the context of school, home, and the streets. Furthermore, Payne’s (2006) research entailed finding out “how street-life-oriented, Black men negotiate their survival in connection to their masculinity” (p.290). By posing the questions of how Black males’ notions of their masculinity are expressed upon listing to a popular hip-hop song and how their masculinity is enacted in the face of social injustices, a qualitative study was completed. This included 371 surveys and 22 individual interviews of two different groups of Black men. The first group of four high
school students ranging in ages from 16 to 18 years old and the second group ranging in ages from 29 to 44 were asked to listen to, read, discuss, and note sections that they could relate to, or simply identify with, in the hip hop song *A Gangster and a Gentleman* by Styles P. The song expresses how Styles P. addresses and negotiates his masculinity while facing racism, poverty, lack of a quality education, and minimum access to economic success. According to Payne (2006), high school male students see street life as a resilient way to survive, eat, make it through economic poverty, and represent their way of standing up and being men. The young men reported that they felt dismissed, ignored, and under-valued by their school administrators, teachers, and others in the school system in authoritative positions. Payne (2006) also reports that the students felt abandoned, disrespected, betrayed, and alienated among all ranks in society. The students also emphasized how respect from self, family, friends, and community, however, difficult to attain, was important to their masculinity.

Furthermore, Black males may become disengaged in school as early as the fourth grade (Kunjufu, 2002) and could be connected to their neighborhoods and stressful life events as urban elementary-school children. Students within their sites of resilience including school, church, or in their neighborhood, needed to establish relationships and protective factors to develop their resilience. Attar, Guerra, and Tolan (1994) completed a mixed method study on urban elementary students who lived in poverty, had neighborhood disadvantages due to poverty, and stressful life events. The study was held in six schools in a large Midwestern city and included 384 participants with 220 students being Black and 164 Hispanic. The primary focus was the resilience shown and how the participants adjusted to the stress they faced on an ongoing basis. Data was triangulated
as a self-report and completion of a peer-nominated assessment. The assessments included a variety of questions and the trained investigators read them to each participant. Demographic records, census, and school information on indicators of chronic environmental stress were collected. A Stress Index scale was used that included the subscales of Circumscribed Event and Life Transitions from the Social Stress Measures such as suspension from school. Exposure to Violence items were created for this study and included violent activities that may be witnessed by elementary children. A teacher rating of depression/anxiety and aggression was also completed that includes a checklist of 118 child behavioral-problem items.

The results in the Attar et al. (1994) study on the occurrence of stressful life events in Black and Hispanic elementary youth in neighborhood disadvantage connects to the resilience Black males show as they encounter violence, poverty, and stressors in their sites of resilience. Some students were able to overcome the stressors they faced with the support of a caring adult within the site of resilience. Students in the high level neighborhood disadvantage which included poverty and lack of economic development reported experiencing more stressors than children living in moderate neighborhood disadvantage areas. However, children in moderate areas also expressed experiencing stress as four out of the sixteen stressful life event choices were selected compared to seven out of the sixteen for high neighborhood disadvantage students. Students who lived in poverty, did not have parental or teacher support, and continued to have stressful life events in urban areas. This contributed to the aggressive behavior of Black male students in schools and their neighborhoods. The poor quality of life in highly stressful communities seemed to produce more negative life events in urban areas which had high
crime rates and incarcerated Black males. Within the areas of stress, some Black males
dshowed signs of resilience when overcoming the negative impacts at the elementary level
with the support of a caring adult. Essentially, these students continued to persevere
while facing many adverse situations at home. In addition, Stephen’s (1990) completed a
qualitative study on 220 males that were sentenced and placed in a maximum security
prison in New York State due to various crimes committed. Stephen discovered that 79%
of the inmate population had not received their diploma and were high school drop outs
due to various reasons, including grade retention, poor attendance, suspension, and
school transfers. Inmates also reported that they did not participate in extracurricular
activities and spent less time with a school counselor while enrolled in school. These
inmates dropped out of school and committed crimes due to two major reasons: poor
socioeconomic conditions and poor role models. Stephen’s findings support the increased
number of role models in prisons who place higher value on the academic, social, and
emotional learning for inmates. The prisoners with the support of an adult were able to
build their resilience and improve their educational outcomes when being released.

Furthermore, incarcerated Black males may also find academic success through
resilient behaviors. Feinstein, Baartman, Buboltz, Sonnichsen, and Solomon’s (2008)
qualitative study examined the positive factors in the lives of 18 juvenile Black males
incarcerated in a low-security correctional facility to determine the main approaches that
foster resilience. The participants from the states of South Dakota and Minnesota were
between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. The boys were court ordered to the facility and
were involved in crimes which included sex offences, drug and alcohol abuse, and
vandalism.
The researchers, Feinstein, et al. used interview questions based on observations from Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Subsystem, which is an approach to understanding human development based on relationships formed in one’s environment. The Search Institutes’ Risk and Resilience Theory is based on 40 scientifically based experiences, relationships, opportunities, skills, and character traits that represent the resilient adolescent. The researchers independently picked quotes that related to both theories and formed themes and relationships between statements. A key aspect to Black males finding academic and social success includes positive relationships and caring adults in their lives. The purpose of the study was to identify the resilient characteristics of the males and identify who were the key players in building their resilience.

Results showed that these males portrayed factors including high expectations for their future, wanted to earn their high school diploma, and wanted to make money to go to college. Family support was minimal and unstable; however, most of the boys wanted to have family members that demonstrated positive attributes, rather than ones that encouraged them to participate in activities that did not lead them to further success in their daily endeavors. Role models played an important role, including ones that were professional athletes or actors. The correctional facility was seen as a caring environment where the boys could seek emotional support and advice from adults. The facility also offered problem-solving activities, including conflict resolution, anger management, and counseling to assist the males in reaching their positive outcome to obtain their GED or high school diploma.

Young Black males that have been incarcerated can exhibit resilience with the assistance of a transitional counselor. Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, and D’Ambrosio
(2001), completed a five year qualitative study on adults who were incarcerated as adolescents and received support from a transitional counselor as they returned to their communities. The researchers discussed predelinquent history, experiences in the correctional systems, and post correctional transition with the eight men and seven women participants. Results showed that about half of the participants were raising children, employed, completed or attending school and found success in their lives. The other participants felt unsuccessful, continued to commit crimes and/or returned to incarceration. Resilient participants had a transitional counselor in the correctional facility, who acted as the caring adult who supported them through their difficult times. This counselor served as one of their significant support systems that enabled them to move forward and succeed as an adult with the ongoing help of family members and resilient aspects developed.

In addition, mothers played a major impact on the academic success of Black males within their sites of resilience development including home, school, and the streets. Wilson (2009) completed a qualitative study on the extent that parental factors played on students’ perceptions and achievements in school. Participants in the study were chosen from the longitudinal project called the Promotion of Academic Competence Project. This project looked at the developmental patterns of resilience and competence of urban Black males. Data was collected during the students’ sixth, seventh, and eighth grade years and year three of the students eighth, ninth, and tenth grade years. The subsample included 60 low-income high school students and parents with 80% of the families living below the poverty line. Participants completed questionnaires to measure social economic status, social support, perception of kin and non-kin support received, mothers’ self-
identity, and students’ feelings towards their parents monitoring their behavior and engaging in their schooling.

Results indicated that there is a strong relationship between mothers supporting their child and the well being of the child within their sites of resilience. Findings also indicated that there is a decreased level of parent support when social supports are involved in the well being of the child. Mother involvement was critical to the success of the child in school, at home, and/or the streets.

Resilient families play a major role in instilling a resilient attitude in Black male students who have dropped out and re-enrolled (Gibson, 2002). The families are typically more religious, emotionally warm, and have characteristics of consistent parental monitoring (p. 112). Strong family beliefs are instilled in the children, goals are set, and a plan is put into action for the betterment of the student and the family (Gibson, 2002; Kunjufu, 2000). Resilient families also have the needed assistance of extended family members who assist and encourage Black students to face adversity and to find success in their lives (Gibson, 2002). Uncles, aunts, grandparents, and other family members encourage Black males to continue moving forward and to use their extended network when they have academic, social, and emotional issues that lead them to dropping out and re-enrolling (Leak, 2003).

**Chapter summary.** This chapter provided a selective review of the literature on Black male secondary school students who drop out and re-enroll in school or GED programs. The chapter highlighted empirical literature and findings related to Black males in secondary schools and examined questions, settings, populations, and findings. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology data collection methods and data analysis study
on secondary Black males who re-enroll in school or in GED programs and complete their diploma.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the study methodology, data collection, and data analysis on secondary Black males 18 and over who re-enroll and complete their high school or GED diploma. To understand the phenomenal of four Black males that re-enrolled and completed their high school diploma or GED, a phenomenological study was used as the qualitative strategy of inquiry.

Study setting. The location of the study was a city in Upstate New York that will be referred to by the pseudonym, Clearview. Clearview has a city population of approximately 208,123 with 48% of the population White, 38% Black, 13% Hispanic, 4% mixed races, and 2% Asian being reported in the year of 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Seventy-three percent of the population 25 or older reported during the year 2000 that they completed their high school diploma, and 20% completed their bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Clearview has a high poverty rate which is common in most urban areas. During the year 1999, 40% of the population owned their home and had a median income of $61,300. The median income per household was reported as $27,123, per capita money income as $15,588, and 26% of the population was living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

The Clearview Public School District has over 34,000 students with 19 secondary schools having a combined total of over 15,000 students. The student profile includes 65% African American, 21% Hispanic, 12% White, and 2% a combination of Asian,
Native American, East Indian, and other. In the district, 50% of the schools are at a 90% poverty rate, 88% of the students receive free and reduced-cost lunch, 17% of the students have special needs, and 8% have limited English proficiency. The district has one of the highest poverty rates in New York State.

Two school settings within Clearview were used to locate participants for this study. The first school is called Central High School, a 7-12 high school with over 1,800 students. The second is the Bayview Community Learning Center, a GED program that works with students and adults in completing GED diplomas. Students who re-enroll at Central High School complete the registration papers at one of three district-wide placement centers located across Clearview. During this time, students are scheduled to return back to the high school they left, and the updated information is placed in the student management system. Students are asked to complete paperwork and report on their whereabouts during their time out of school, which most often is attributable to employment, incarceration, or unemployment. Once completed, returning students are asked to contact their former school and meet with the principal or designee for a re-entry conference and to receive their schedule. This re-enrollment option is available for students up to the age of twenty. Central High School has many academic programs for students, including a program that prepares students to be teachers and guarantees graduates of the program a job in Clearview upon completion of their college teaching certification program. Finance, culinary arts, and business are also part of the academic offerings at Central High School.

Bayview Community Learning Center has the opportunity for dropouts to walk in or contact the main office and set up an appointment with a counselor. At the Center, they
complete the necessary paperwork, receive a description of the program, and set up the
date for their pre-test, which is used to determine their level of readiness for the GED
exam. A transition counselor works with those transitioning from jail and assists the
students throughout the entire GED process. The re-enrollment process is contingent
upon the students’ motivation and determination to re-enroll into high school or a GED
program.

Bayview Community Learning Center is the main GED program located in
Clearview and has played a major role in assisting both students 18 and over and adult
dropouts in preparing and completing their GED programs. The program has morning,
afternoon, and evening sessions to meet the needs of the students and adults attending.
Counselors are available and a work component is also offered to assist students who
may be facing social, emotional, and academic needs. Students may drop out of high
school and immediately re-enroll in this alternative program. The length of time in the
program is determined based on the students’ scores during the entrance exam. The
instructors work with students based on their individual academic needs to meet the
requirements of passing the GED test. A transition program is also part of the program, as
a transition counselor is assigned to students who were incarcerated and willing to
participate in the program. Upon completion of the preparation program, students take
the GED test in hopes of receiving their GED diploma. The program design is established
to assist students socially, emotionally, and academically during their transition from
incarceration. This support is offered to assist the students in building their confidence
and creating a positive attitude in and out of school.

*Participant selection.* The researcher drew upon professional networks within
each building to identify study participants. The researcher worked in both buildings and knows many of the staff members. Access to participants and updated contact information was established by working with known contacts, specifically a school and transitional counselor assisted the researcher in contacting participants who met the requirements to participate. The participants’ study selection criteria included Black male students age 18 or older and a high school dropout who re-enrolled in Central High School or the Bayview Community Learning Center and completed their high school diploma or GED.

Initial contact was made by the researcher through a school contact, site visits, and telephone calls with the participants to inform them of the study, to gauge their interest in the study, and to share a verbal description of participation with each student. Upon agreeing to participate, the researcher asked each participant to complete a consent form (see Appendix A) that was signed by the participants; and additionally, at that time, the participants were informed of the data collection procedures. Participants also completed a demographic sheet (see Appendix B) before the start of the interviews.

*Study participants.* Participants’ demographics are presented in Table one, which gives a profile of the participants. This information includes their age, number of times dropped out and re-enrolled, year completed diploma, and future plans. Information was obtained from the interviews, focus groups, and the demographic sheet. The process of participant selections yielded four participants.
Table 3.1

Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Times Dropped Out</th>
<th>Times Re-enrolled</th>
<th>Diploma/GED</th>
<th>Future Plan</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>JS</td>
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<td>GED</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JS was a 26-year-old Black male who recently completed his GED at the Bayview Community Learning Center. He attended elementary school in the Clearview Central School District and attended two different high schools. One high school was in Clearview and one was outside Clearview in a suburban district; when he was placed in foster care as a ninth grader. JS was age 15 when he dropped out of the suburban district. JS returned to Clearview, re-enrolled and then, at the age of 17, dropped out of the district’s alternative high school he was assigned to attend. He dropped out due to his involvement in drug related activities to make money. Between the ages of 13 and 26 JS had been incarcerated intermittently as a juvenile and as an adult. JS re-enrolled to get off the streets and improve his employment and college opportunities. Currently, he plans to attend the local community college in Clearview.

Twenty year-old DH, also completed his GED at Bayview Community Learning Center. DH dropped out of high school twice before entering a GED program and the
Bayview Community Learning Center. DH dropped out because he was selling drugs and wanted to make quick money on the streets. During this period, DH was incarcerated in juvenile and adult facilities. DH re-enrolled to improve upon his personal attributes, his education, and make money legally. Currently, he plans to attend the local community college in Clearview.

The third participant was 24-year-old TH, a graduate of the Bayview Transition program. TH dropped out of school when he was 17 and also was incarcerated as a juvenile and an adult for petty crimes, including theft and harassment. TH enrolled back into school at the age of 23 after being incarcerated and joining the transition program at Bayview Community Learning Center. Currently, his plans include attending the local community college in Clearview.

PG was the only participant in the group who completed his high school diploma at Central High School and had never been incarcerated. The 21-year-old student was very quiet and shy. During his time in middle and high school, PG worked to support his mother who is diabetic and needed ongoing assistance. In the past, he also relocated out of state forcing him to resign from his employment. When he relocated, he did not re-enroll into the local high school but rather opted to take care of his mother full-time. PG returned to Clearwater and re-enrolled into Central High School at the age of 20. Currently, he is looking for employment and taking care of his ailing mother.

Data collection methods. This study utilized multiple data collection forms including individual interviews, a focus group, demographic sheets, and field notes.

Individual interviews. The researcher held one individual face-to-face interview with four Black male participants from Clearview Central School District who had
dropped out, re-enrolled, and completed their high school diploma or GED. Participants were interviewed by the researcher in semi-structured, open-ended interviews that were audio-recorded and held at Central and Bayview. Open-ended interview protocol questions allowed the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of the participants (Appendix C). Participants were interviewed over a period of one month, with one occasion lasting for approximately 60 minutes for each participant. The purpose of the interview was to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experiences. Also, questions probed the process of re-enrolling and what support the student received since returning to high school or the GED program. Students were asked to discuss dropout events, re-enrollment, possible graduation outcomes, specific challenges they have overcome, and supports that fostered resilience.

*Focus group.* A focus group with participants was held with all four participants. During the meeting, participants listened to the rap song, *All the Above* by rap artists Maino and T-Pain (Silver, 2009). The purpose of the focus group meeting was to listen to the participants’ responses and feelings towards the rap song as the lyrics stressed the tough road Maino took to survive in the streets and overcome the difficulties and adversities in order to become a successful rapper. The song lyrics (Appendix D) describe the life of Maino, a Black male raised in poverty, incarcerated many times, and told that he would never make it in the rap game or life. The song captures Maino’s resilience, and his ability to find a positive outcome within his hardships. The participants were asked to describe what the song represents and how the authors’ words relate to their lives. The participants faced many of the street issues Maino faced including incarceration, police harassment, poverty, and lack of an equitable education. They also overcome many
negative situations in their lives to experience positive outcomes, including completing their high school diploma or GED. Their responses to the rap song assisted the researcher in determining aspects of resilience they have shown.

Additionally, participants were asked to define seven key words that emerged from the initial coding of each individual interview. The en vivo words were: relationship, respect, religion, relocating, remorsefulness, repentance, and role modeling. Participants shared their life experiences within each defined word and the impact the key definitions have had on them dropping out, re-enrolling, and completing their high school diploma or GED. They also shared how the words presented connected to their future endeavors which included family, continuing education, employment, and assisting other youth.

Finally, participants were also asked to describe where they see themselves in 5, 10, and 20 years. The purpose was to determine if the participants had established future goals. Each participant wrote down their responses and then shared the information with the researcher.

*Demographic sheets.* Participants completed a demographic informational sheet (see Appendix B) after completing the study consent form. This sheet included their name (pseudonym name also), home address, telephone number, email address, elementary and high school attended, year started high school, month and year dropped out of high school, and year and month re-enrolled. Each participant’s demographic sheet information was examined to better inform the researcher of similarities and/or differences among participants. It also provided updated data on the participants, which was important to the process and assisted in creating themes.
Field notes. The researcher kept field notes during and after the interviews occurred. Field notes were important as the researcher was able to obtain the non-verbal language expressed by the participants, including body language, sounds, and expressions. This data represents their thoughts and feelings as assessed by the researcher. The researcher gained a sense about the tone and ideas that the students were experiencing during the interviews and focus groups and documented them in the field notes.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviewed the multiple sources of data, and organized it into categories and themes that examined all the data sources on Black males who re-enroll and complete high school or a GED program. The data on the participants was reviewed many times by the researcher, and an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data on the characteristics of resilient Black male students occurred.

Theme basket coding technique. The data analysis process was ongoing and the researcher continually reflected on the data using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This consisted of the researcher reviewing the data consistently and comparing the units of meaning discovered. As a code was discovered, the researcher placed words on the data sheets and crossed compared them until a relationship was found. The researcher combined inductive category coding along with comparing and reviewing the descriptive experiences shared by the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the experiences were recorded and classified on the discovery theme charts, they were also compared across the discovered categories. In turn, the research started to show relationships among the categories. The process went through continual
adjustments during data collection and analysis, leading into the procedure of category coding. Using this method allowed the researcher to categorize and code within units of meaning and form new categories when no similar unit of meaning was found.

Transcripts were decoded and words were discovered that expressed feelings and emotions connected to the participants; these words were highlighted. A 1 x 3, white, self-adhesive label with the highlighted word was folded in half and placed on the right column of the transcribed sheet where the major words were located. The researcher deemed these as theme labels that were used to illuminate common and unique words mentioned by the participants. Each transcribed sheet had between 15 and 25 theme labels that illuminated in the research as common words stated by the participants continued to occur.

As a result, words from the interviews and focus groups were written on large sheets of chart paper called discovery theme charts and constantly reviewed to find a common meaning. Words on the discovery theme charts were coded and larger codes were recognized. Out of the larger meaning, seven major words started to become apparent. The researcher cut each transcribed interview into sections based on the theme labels and statements made by the participants and placed on 5 x 8 index cards, which were called theme cards. These codes were written on seven manila envelopes and seven large sheets of chart paper.

The codes included religion, respect, remorsefulness, rebel, repent, role model, and relocation. The researcher placed the theme cards on the chart paper that were associated with the discovered coded words to create what the researcher called a theme chart. The theme chart guided the research to the three major findings that were revealed
in the research. Rules of inclusion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were established for each section to ensure the theme cards were gathered together under the correct category name.

By using the manila envelopes, the researcher was able to fold up all the charts and theme cards and place them in what the researcher called theme envelopes. The theme envelopes were placed in a rubber file folder basket that the researcher called a theme basket and used to transport all the qualitative data with the researcher.

Trustworthiness. To ensure that the research is trustworthy, the researcher employed certain procedures to check for the accuracy of the findings from the viewpoint of the researcher and the participants. Multiple strategies were used by the researcher including triangulation of data, member checking, and rich description of the findings. Triangulation incorporated cross-checking data including interviews with participants, focus groups, field notes, and demographic sheets used in the study to find commonalities throughout the variety of data. Multiple truths and interpretations were discovered as the triangulated data was verified for accuracy. Also member checking consisted of the researcher restating and summarizing data gained from the interview questions with all of the participants during the focus group held. The researcher shared their responses with the participants to check for understanding of the data.

Two critical friends (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) were also used by the researcher to discuss and verify data findings and conclusions. Both of these critical friends had prior expertise in working with current researchers on Black males. One critical friend has led a suburban high school and further, supported an initiative on improving the academic achievement of Black males across their district. Another critical
friend works in an urban district that has pushed for district wide changes on improving relationships and academic practices of teachers to improve the academic outcomes of Black males. Both confirmed data shared with them during the discussion sessions that took place.

Chapter summary. The chapter presented detailed information on the qualitative methodology used in the study. Data sources included individual interviews, a focus group session with all participants, demographic sheets, and field notes. Codes were discovered and the Theme Basket technique was discussed. Chapter 4 presents findings associated with the characteristics of resilience of Black males who re-enroll and complete their high school or GED diploma. The findings will discuss the major themes that illuminate from the research.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe aspects of resilience which emerge in an examination of Black male high school dropouts who re-enroll in an urban high school or an urban GED program; completing their high school or GED diploma. This chapter will provide the findings from the data collected from the participants in the research. Three major themes are shared that connect to the aspects of resilience Black males exhibit when they re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED.

Study Findings

The first theme to emerge was accountability of Black males to caring adults. Accountability to caring adults represents the participants’ sense of responsibility to others for their actions including re-enrolling in school and completing their diploma. The second theme, diploma as a symbol of rebirth, represents how participants changed their actions and personal views on education while re-enrolled and completing their diploma. The theme also illuminates how their diplomas represent an aspect of resilience in that the participants overcame adverse situations which led to the positive educational outcome of completing their diploma. A newfound sense of purpose, the third theme, represents the participants understanding that their life now has a purpose and future actions may include parts of the experiences that have shaped them This includes the participants making better decisions and choices that can improve their lives and the lives of other Black males. The theme also showed how a newfound sense of purpose
functions as an aspect of resilience, as the participants’ envision future success while understanding that it may only occur through their self-efficacy and belief in their abilities to be successful.

Study context played a large role in the evolution of themes. In this case, context is not limited to school, but context cuts across home and street life. Home in this sense, refers to the living space of the participants and is connected to immediate family including parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Street life refers to the place where the participants spent their time when not at home or enrolled in school and built a variety of relationships with friends and others (Payne, 2006). Street life also represents spaces where participants engaged in legal activities such as playing basketball or hanging with friends. Conversely, street life also represents illegal activities such as selling narcotics, loitering, or gang violence with which the participants were involved. Finally, school captures the place where participants attended to learn the state-mandated requirements such as English, math, social studies, and science.

Accountability to a caring adult

All participants in the study indicated the significant role that a caring adult or family member played in their development of resilience while they faced adversity such as incarceration or dropping out of school. Across all participants, many aspects of their lives consisted of being accountable to a caring adult or family member at home, in school, and in the streets.

Development of resilience and positive outcome. Family members assisted the participants in their development of resilience. During the time of the adverse situations, a caring family member played a major role in the lives of the participants by
challenging, inspiring, encouraging, and holding them accountable to persevere and complete their diploma. Participants were able to clearly describe positive family members who wanted them to experience social, emotional, and academic success for their actions while in school. Murray and Naranjo (2008) describe family and school support systems as a needed entity of resilience to assist students in overcoming adversity and successfully develop resilience. The guided support of these family members was a critical aspect in the participants’ ability to face adversity. Their relationships with family members, friends, the school staff, spiritual beings, authority figures, and others all had a direct impact on the positive or negative consequences they faced for their actions both in and out of school.

*Family support.* JS shared how he and his mother prayed together and bonded as they encouraged his brother to overcome his injuries. JS also described how his push towards resilience was encouraged by his mother’s consistent love, support and the will of his brother to survive during his adverse situation.

JS’s mother continued to challenge him at a high level on his past and current actions including re-enrolling and completing his GED. However, he felt his mother did not respect him while growing up or during the time he completed his GED. Even though JS’s mother was upset by his disruptive life, JS explained that she consistently spoke to him about his inappropriate behavior and informed him that he would be held accountable for all of his actions. JS shared that he, “never had any family support.” Due to his misunderstanding of his family support, his determination to do better did increase. As stated, “I guess that’s what made me want to do better, because now you got to respect this.” JS was referring to his desire and determination to beat all odds and
establish a positive behavior that guided him to his GED. JS finally realized that his mother was concerned about his actions and was supporting him during the time he re-enrolled. JS stated, “When I hung my GED on my mother’s wall, she treated it like it was hers, you know.”

According to TH, his mother and brother served as significant influences in his life while growing up and further, throughout the process of completing his GED. In addition, TH’s mother was working toward completing her bachelor’s degree at the same time TH was finishing his GED. TH reported:

I didn’t want to do anything that was hard because just coping to get through the day and being locked in a cage all day was hard. I started attending these programs like anger management and domestic violence and then one day I met a transitional counselor who told me about the GED program at Bayview. My mother and brother pushed me forward.

TH shared that being held accountable by his mother and brother during his resilience development guided him to change his behavior. Their support further pushed him to continually attend the appropriate social and emotional classes, re-enroll, and complete his GED. His efforts to improve as a student and individual were continually supported and modeled by his mother and brother who increased his ability to find success no matter what obstacles are presented to him in life.

Maternal accountability was further supported as DH shared that his mother showed support to him when he returned home from being incarcerated. She spoke to him about the challenges of returning to school and the positive outcome of completing his diploma. DH enjoyed doing things with his friends and family members while he also
sold drugs on the streets. At school, home, and on the streets, DH credits his mother for staying connected with him through good and bad times and further, pushing him to re-enroll. DH shared:

My mom was a big part of that. She wanted me to do a lot and do good things. I know she was disappointed when I was younger and dropped out. She saw me doing well in school but also doing bad things. She really lost it when I dropped out, but was happy when I re-enrolled.

DH described how his mother encouraged him to re-enroll while he was incarcerated and to continually build his resilience. He also talked about how she nurtured him through the many difficult days he had within the criminal justice system as well. She never stopped supporting him, shown by her constant visits to see him at the jail and frequent communication ties. DH’s mother was a vital support system while he completed his diploma.

PG’s grandmother served as the accountable force who provided him the extra instructional and emotional support, assistance while re-enrolling back into school, and additional tutoring help he needed. PG stated:

To tell you the truth, my grandma is the one who got me back in school. She took me down to the Board of Education and signed me up into the little waiting process. I had to wait another month just to get back in school and basically she got me back in there to do what I needed to do and keep me on track. She stayed on the phone with me and helped me with my homework.

According to PG, when he faced adversity such as dropping out, needing tutoring assistance, and supporting his mother, his grandmother stepped in and encouraged him to
persevere. She served as the positive reinforcer that pushed him to complete his high school diploma. PG shared that his grandmother constantly encouraged the importance of a good education. She consistently shared with him that receiving a solid education would allow him to fully mature as a young adult and fulfill his future endeavors.

As shown, family members played an important role in assisting the participants in building resilience, re-enrolling, and completing their GED or high school diploma, through their ongoing communication and encouragement. Essentially, the participants knowledge of these critical support systems served as their guiding piece to completing their GED or high school diploma. This allowed them to reach out to particular family members who would encourage them to continue their resilient efforts when faced with adversity.

**Teachers & Counselors Holding Participants Accountable**

Teachers and counselors also assisted the participants in developing resilience by encouraging them to complete their work, attend school, and prepare for exams as they completed their high school diploma or GED. Participants described how teachers and counselors continually provided students with positive feedback in order to build their resilience and confidence. The students felt that the teachers respected them and served as a major support system in their resilience development, which included participants’ current teachers and counselors, as well as, ones from their past.

JS, for example, had a positive relationship with his middle and high school teachers during his challenging times. Even though he did not always agree with his teachers and felt that they were racist at times, he credits all of them for holding him accountable in becoming a good student. JS clearly stated that Ms. CT “stayed on my
back like I was her child and made sure I was spelling at the college level.” Ms. CT continually held JS accountable by expecting him to do his best work, complete assignments, and prepare for tests. JS reported that all his teachers were White and pushed him to be successful during his middle school years. Essentially, all of them played a part in JS re-enrolling and completing his GED. When JS shared his experience with his supportive White teachers, he described that at that time he felt it was an attempt to embarrass him and saw it as a racist issue between his teachers and self. As an adult, JS explained that he presently understands why his teachers held him accountable and continually pushed him to do well, as his knowledge was evident during his GED completion. JS shared:

I never felt like any of my teachers didn’t care for me. The overall picture is like wow, all my teachers made sure I learned. I could tell you all my teachers from the third grade, each and every one. If it wasn’t for them I wouldn’t know the things I know. That’s what they taught me and I used to challenge the teacher. I was never the type that bites the hand that will feed me, but at the same time you have to challenge the master. I’d get a college style book and just learn and ask the teachers questions. They knew the answers, but sometimes I would get them.

JS described how Ms. CH, a transitional counselor at Bayview Community Learning Center, continually held him to high expectations, such as re-enrolling and participating in all school related activities. Her influence was vital to his resilience development. JS stated:

I did it, but Ms. CH helped me accelerate me in believing in myself. Ms. CH used to tell me how smart I was because of the songs I wrote and that I should
accelerate. When Ms. CH told me that I remember what another guy told me. He said, “only fools graduate, the wise continue to study.” I looked at him like, if you don’t get out of my face. But, when Ms. CH showed up I was thinking about what the man said. I thought about all these people who just go to school, get their Bachelor’s and Masters just to get a better paying job. Like Ms. CH said you accelerate and improve your fundamentals, but it is to make more income. I want to have my Doctorate like you. I want to read hieroglyphics. I can do whatever I want to do. I just have to take one step at a time. The Lord said he’s going to take two steps for me and that’s what I’m going to do.

Ms. CH accelerated JS’s resilience development by believing in his abilities to succeed academically and emotionally. She shared her experiences with him and built up his resilience to move forward through the adverse situations and to complete his diploma. CH never gave up on JS; serving as a critical part of his positive outcome and the changes in his life.

TH rarely felt confident in elementary, middle, or high school due to his learning disability. TH stated, “I never really felt positive about school until recently when I enrolled myself and started working with some people.” Ms. CH served as TH’s force of accountability, encouraging and expecting him to study and prepare for his GED exam. CH served as an effective mediator in assisting him back to school and helping him complete his GED. She helped him sign up, gave him rides to class, and answered any questions he had about the process, while holding him accountable to continually follow up with her. TH shared:

I was incarcerated downtown, and she would come and she told me about this
GED program. She was helping people to get back on the right track, taking their GED, enrolling in college, and that’s something I always wanted to do. I figured she was here for a reason and I went and checked it out. Here I sit today with my GED and going to college soon, so I’m taking it one day at a time.

Ms. CH was there for TH to build up his resilience and expected him to reach his positive outcome of GED completion. Constant encouragement and positive feedback were important factors in TH’s development. TH clearly understood that he could reach his goal if he worked hard at accomplishing it through the consistent support received by Ms. CH.

As DH worked towards the completion of his GED, many people assisted him during that time and held him accountable by setting high expectations. DH was involved in a trade program that taught him construction work and assigned him a counselor to assist in the program. When needing materials, emotional support, or academic help, he was able to turn to his teacher and counselor who held him liable in completing his GED and trade certificates. DH explained:

My counselor, Ms. Ash, and I were real close and TJ my teacher. Anything we needed they were helping me with it. So, they were really behind me even when I went to jail including my mom. Ms. CH, who I also met in jail, use to come to the transitional service class every Wednesday basically transitioning me from jail back to society.

These caring relationships were able to motivate DH to continually move forward in his life. In jail, he started to prepare for life outside of incarceration, including completing his GED and preparing to attend a local junior college. Ms. CH played a major role in
assisting DH and in understanding the procedures needed to complete his GED and sign up for college classes. DH expressed:

She helped me sign up for CM junior college in August. I start the end of August and had plans of what I wanted to do when I got out of jail. So, really it was a lot of people that stayed behind me, but a big part of my motivation was I cannot keep doing what I was doing. I know I needed to do something different and that’s what I did.

Ms. CH expected DH to find a job and improve his school work, which were his actions once out of school.

During his re-enrollment time, PG felt that most of his teachers assisted him towards completing his high school diploma once he re-enrolled. He stated, “Some of the teachers were nice about the situation. They stayed at school and helped me with the work.” This included the close relationships he had with his high school counselor, Ms. M., and Biology teacher, Ms. L., who pushed him and guided him along the way. PG shared:

Ms. M. was the one who helped me have the courage to talk to teachers and ask for help. I didn’t really want to ask for help, but she encouraged me that I shouldn’t be ashamed to ask for the help I needed. My science teacher, Ms. L., also helped me beyond my limits by taking me home, taking me here and there for my mom. She really helped me do what was necessary to pass, too, not just with earth science and biology, but with my other classes, too.

Ms. M and Ms. L were the powerful school forces that held PG to reasonable, but high expectations. Both of these teachers believed in his abilities and assisted him in
developing a resilient attitude. This attitude was the vital piece to his ability to reach his goal of completing his high school diploma. Both professionals continued to support him; however their belief in PG’s potential to be successful was beyond that of his diploma completion.

The participants were held accountable to re-enrolling and completing their diploma by counselors and teachers in their school system. They were held to high expectations during their time of resilience development and to push forward to achieve the positive outcome of completing their GED or high school diploma. Counselors and teachers were determined for each student to receive their diploma and believed in their academic and emotional abilities. They never gave up on the participants and wanted to see the best possible outcome for each one of them. Accountability was a major aspect of resilience that the participants showed upon completion of their high school diploma or GED. The will to persevere during adverse times and reach positive outcomes was a powerful tool that was gained by the participants through various school members’ support.

*Diploma as a Rebirth*

Across all the participants, a *rebirth*ing experience occurred. All participants see their diploma as a symbol of *rebirth*, a representation of how they changed their actions and personal views on education while re-enrolled and upon completion. Participants recognized the completion of their GED or high school diploma as an opportunity to start new in life and move forward with motivating ambitions and goals.

JS was the oldest of the participants and encountered many dangerous situations in his past endeavors, including selling drugs, gang involvement, incarceration, and loss
of friends due to the drug activity in which he participated. Completing his GED was
within his daily mind set; however, reflecting upon his negative past experiences further
pushed him towards completion of gaining a positive outcome. JS stated:

I realized that I had played with fires. It got to the point that the system was
offering me 6 to 15 years. I was sitting in my cell asking the Lord to get me out of
this one last time. I decided that I was going to do it, but it felt like there was no
getting out of the 6-15 years, which made my legs go weak. All that for just a
couple of bags, but the Lord got me out of the situation.

JS was in the process of developing his resilience by overcoming various obstacles
presented to him through positive actions. Essentially, he became a powerful believer
within his resilient spirituality and self when earning his degree and having a new start to
his life, such as college and employment opportunities.

Many situations occurred for JS including speaking with a street friend, a
recollection of death, and the many friends he lost overtime; all leading to his feeling of
rebirth. He reflected on his many memories and decided that he had to stay out of prison
and get his GED. This role model was a friend that JS hustled with in the streets for
years and with whom he had also been incarcerated. The difference between the two was
the amount of time JS was going to receive compared to the 50 years his friend RJ had
already received and was to serve. JS shared:

It was either just jump off the bridge or kill yourself or man just turn around and
do it man. It was like all I saw was death out there. All my friends were dying,
going to jail, and doing fifty years. A friend of mine named RJ told me that I was
too smart for this and not to come back to jail. RJ had blown his trial and was
given fifty years. I went back and chilled with him ten times for petty crimes, but his words and others started sticking with me. It started rushing, stampeding, and making me want to get my grind on. I started thinking, “I don’t want to die in here.”

JS did not want to commit suicide or return to jail and realized that his street life was leading to death if he continued to lead that life. JS shared:

This new life represents the birth of a clean slate. Go to school and keep them scores up because I’m going to need people to fund me. I have no choice but to kill, kill, kill, them scores. Instead of doing the wrong kind of killing, I’m going to do the right kind.

JS finally started to have confidence and believed in his academic capabilities. JS shared that he would continue to find academic success and work hard to achieve it.

DH was constantly caught selling drugs and receiving jail time or probation. DH beat the court system many times; however, his time in court and hustling in the streets was time away from school. It became wasted time in DH’s mind once he matured enough to realize what poor choices he had been making. His moment of reflection, which led to his rebirth and completion of his diploma, like JS, took place when he was headed for a long jail sentence. DH explained:

It was August 29th, 2007 when I got arrested again. The police kicked in the door, and I was on the spot and they arrested me. I was in possession of a controlled substance so that charge was on top of my two violations. The system really worked with me because I could have been looking at some State time if they charged me with a felony. It got dropped down to a misdemeanor and I did some
time. When I got out, I said I can’t keep doing this. I had been going to jail since
I was 14 until I was 18. I was like wow! I can’t keep doing the same thing!
He immediately conceptualized this rebirth as a way to earn a better income, continue to
college, and have confidence in his ability to survive without selling drugs.

DH had no clue what he could be doing in his life, but knew the street life could
not continue, nevertheless, he saw education as a means of rebirth. He had to become
more focused and listen to his mother who continued to support his educational goals.
His moment of reflection opened up a world of educational opportunities for DH
including the YB construction program. DH no longer wanted to be part of the system
that was holding him back, enabling him to persevere. DH shared:

I was attending CMD Community College learning construction trade and I was
still dabbling in the streets. I was a month into the program and I caught a
controlled substance case in the third degree and a warrant for an assault charge. I
tried to get out of it but they wouldn’t let me because I had been on probation
since I was 14. They said I had too many prior drug charges and they hit me with
ten months. They dropped the controlled substance down to a second and the
assault charge did not stick. So, I went to jail October 6th, got out May 4th of this
year and that was my last time. When I got out and jumped back into the YB
program, that’s when I really told myself I needed to stop. I really saw that I
can’t do it no more and there were a lot of people I was letting down.
DH shared that his confidence and belief in his academic ability increased while earning
his degree, which enabled him to view education as a chance to succeed in life. This
success and rebirth started with the completion of his GED.
TH shared how he never enjoyed school while growing up. He described how he would continually skip school; however, when he did attend, would constantly cause problems in order to be suspended. TH stated:

Well coming up through school from elementary to high school, I always had problems with grades and I did not feel like I was smart enough. My teachers told me I had a learning disability so I always used that as an excuse when I was younger to not get things done. I never really felt positive about school up until recently when I enrolled myself and starting working with MS. CH and my GED teachers.

TH reported that he did not apply himself when in school and felt discouraged by his special education label. In turn, his behavior and academic performance was poor as he struggled to find success in school. His GED served as a re-birth and opportunity for him to find a positive outcome and look towards college opportunities. TH shared:

Well the best part about getting the degree done was it gave me the opportunity to move forward with my life and now I can proceed with the things I want to do as far as college. I’m enrolled for this fall and want to be a dental hygienist. I know it is a long road ahead and it will be extremely difficult. As long as I have people there who keep pushing because everything is going to be alright. I know I’ll be okay because I have my mom, brother, and other loved ones.

TH’s diploma represents his rebirth and has him looking into further educational opportunities at a higher level.

PG worked many jobs and knew he faced a life of low wages and unemployment if he did not receive his degree. PG’s rebirth experience occurred once he earned his
high school diploma. He changed his actions and personal views on education while re-enrolled and completing his diploma. PG stated:

I felt kind of good chilling out of school sometimes. Sometimes, I didn’t feel good because I was home while all the kids were at school learning. I was at home just watching television and doing nothing with myself. As I laid on the couch looking at kids going to school, I started thinking that should be me, but I’m at home taking care of my mom and my responsibilities. I guess it made me feel kind of good about myself, but at the end of the day, it was not about that. It was about me getting my education.

As PG moved forward during his rebirth, he had made many bad choices that contributed to him dropping out and feeling alone. This rebirth through education included PG completing his high school diploma while facing an adverse situation in school that attempted to push him out. PG stated:

One of my teachers told me that I was too old for school and school was not the place for me. She said school was not the place for me, and I snapped on her. I was basically telling her off and letting her know that she has no clue what I have been through and that she does not know me like that. I told her that she does not know where I come from and asked her why she was trying to play me like that. Then after a while, the conversation died down and I got kicked out of class. As I reflected on the situation, I thought, like I should have taken another approach and been smarter at that point in time. I should have been the bigger person. I just walked out and she really hurt my feelings telling me I was not going to be able to finish school. That’s another reason I wanted to finish school because a lot of
people were telling me that I couldn’t finish school because I was too old or I wasn’t smart enough to have my own business.

PG described his rebirth through education which included him completing his high school diploma with the support of family and school staff. Even when confronted with an adverse situation, he was able to be resilient and prevail while moving towards his positive outcome of completing his diploma.

Participants shared that their rebirth represents how they changed their actions and personal opinions on education while re-enrolled and completing their diploma. The participants remember the adversity and challenging experiences they encountered as a dropout, when re-enrolled, and while completing their diploma requirements. They are now optimistic about their next educational opportunities. Black males have struggled due to the lack of a fair and equitable educational system, which has left many of them behind. The participants represented how Black males can find success and rebirth through an educational system that continues to deprive Black males of re-enrolling and completing their high school diploma or GED. Aspects of resilient Black males are exhibited in this study, as they completed their high school diploma or GED, even though they faced a tremendous amount of pain, suffering, and adversity.

*A Newfound Sense of Purpose*

The participants had a newfound sense of purpose as Black males once they completed their diploma. This newfound sense of purpose was developed during their educational experiences, including the adversity they faced, the process of their resilience development, and the positive outcome of completing their high school diploma or GED; guiding their future actions. Participants believed that their newfound sense of purpose
entailed financial stability, improved moral and ethical values, and positive outcomes for themselves and family. Also, across the participants, the rap song *All the Above* by artists Maino and T-Payne provoked an intense feeling and thus, reaction by the participants; due to the song lyrics connection to their newfound sense of purpose.

For example, JS’s described having a newfound sense of Black empowerment, respect, and positive moral thinking and interest in sharing his newfound sense of purpose with other youth. JS stated:

If you don’t have the proper denim to wear to school, you didn’t even want to go. I was in general education classes, so I couldn’t have 33 students clowning me. I was ordered to sell drugs and all my friends were doing the same thing. Like we were selling crack out of the 5th grade. I never had a job, and now I’m looking at $10.00 an hour like that is nothing to me. All it did was resorted me to incarceration, almost lost my life a couple times. I always asked the Lord why you kept me alive, the bullet just missed me. Now, I see why, maybe I could tell my story, make a documentary.

JS recognizes that his past experiences have shaped his newfound sense of purpose since completing his GED and further, stated that in five years, he would “still be in school and mentoring others to be successful in life.” In ten years, JS sees himself “working hard and living honest with a decent job” and in twenty years “sitting back laughing about all the things I’ve accomplished.”

JS wants to tell his story to younger urban students in order to show remorsefulness for the wrong that he has done and also to show pride at the road he has taken in completing his GED. JS stated:
More or less, I should feel full or satisfied with my diploma, but I’m not. I’m satisfied with what I did, but I’m not satisfied with what I can do. You know what I’m saying. It’s not enough man! I need more steak and I mean more steak. I need ten GED’s right now! It is not going to end there; I got to step it up. Nothing is more important than getting them grades up with me right now. I will go to school dirty if I have to. Like they say, “don’t care how you go, just go for the learning” and all that stuff my mom used to say.

JS also has gained the self-confidence to continually accomplish further positive outcomes in his life. The completing of his GED is just the start for him. His resilient behavior that led to his GED completion has him wanting more steak including his current enrollment in the local junior college, his dream to complete his Doctoral degree, and his self-confidence in having a successful and bright life. JS has been empowered and believes that he can accomplish all that he sets forth to accomplish. His spirit and determination to make the future bright is evident, as JS said:

I may have to throw a piece of Doublemint gum in mouth because I may not have time to gargle because I’ll be out the door so fast. I got to do it man, then along the way I’ll just see the light. I’ll start going back to church a little more even though I know my body is the church, and I have to stop spray painting the church. I’m getting more spiritual as I go along man and I’m not trying to rest or front out here. I’m not painting a picture of just some fantasy. Hopefully, I can meet more brothers like you because you are an inspiration. I want to be like you man. I want to have rank in my name and respect and I’ll get it.

JS shared that his newfound sense of purpose allowed him to have a strong belief
in his academic ability and confidence level to deal with adverse situations in his life, similar to Maino’s thoughts expressed in his rap. JS shared:

Maino was basically saying that there’s no reality above the struggle he’s been through. He knows that he is on his way to the top and he’s everything in one. That’s how I feel too. The stuff we are all going through seems like every time I get in a better predicament, someone is trying to get in my way. I just try to get over it. I have been going through so much stuff that I have to stand firm. No sense crying over it. I mean there are people out there with a worse story than me. I may think it is hard, but then you see somebody else in a worse predicament and a position and you start feeling better. Right now I feel like I have nowhere to go but up.

JS’s newfound sense of purpose has him aiming to attain higher goals in life. JS shared that the road will continue to have adverse situations, but he has developed enough resilience to encounter the challenges and have a positive outcome in the end. The respect and empowerment he gained through resilient development has increased his self-confidence and determination to continue his education and beat the many challenges that he may encounter. His resilient characteristics are evident in the words that he continually expresses, as he is excited about his future and newfound sense of purpose.

DH also has a newfound sense of purpose with the completion of his GED. He described that his pride, confidence, and belief system has increased, as he has overcome many struggles at home, in the streets, and at school, including racism, lack of teacher-student relationships, and dropping out. His newfound sense of purpose is about Black empowerment, respect, and possessing a positive attitude and will in having more
educational success in life. DH expressed a strong interest in enrolling in the local junior college or using his asbestos removal certification for employment. He also shared that in five years he would be “a CEO of my own variety of businesses.” DH stated:

I was always the type of person moving around doing something, but really doing nothing all day. I was always moving going here or going there catching this or that light. I feel like I took that energy and basically applied it to something else. I used to stay up for days and weeks with no sleep. I now take that energy and apply it to the work that I’m doing now. It works!

DH’s newfound sense of purpose has allowed him to recognize the importance of education as he approaches it with pride, determination, and respect. The completion of DH’s GED empowered him to believe that his resilient characteristics will guide him to better educational and employment opportunities. DH also thinks that in ten years he will be “reaping the benefits of his hard labor” and further, in twenty years, “retired and volunteering wisdom.”

DH’s GED completion served as one of his greatest accomplishments and newfound sense of purpose; even though many expressed that it was unattainable for him. DH shared:

Right now, I got my GED, and that was one of my barriers holding me back. I can now include that on my applications that I fill out. I have my GED and a lot of other skills I have learned. I’m still doing the YB construction work and want to get into real estate. I know now how to fix houses, so I want to buy houses, fix them, and own a property management company. I have my asbestos license and I’m a certified handler. This fall I start massage therapy classes at the community
college this August. I want to get my CDL for truck driving, and I want to take
the Postal Exam. There are a lot of jobs I want to do that does not consist of me
punching a clock. I’m like that, I want to do what I want to do. Basically, I just
want to be able to sit in the house and collect money legally.

As JS mentioned, DH also wants to live a productive life free of crime and violence.

DH’s newfound sense of purpose also allowed him to recognize his past and use
his experiences including adversity, building resilience, and completion of his GED, to
shape his future outcomes. DH explained:

Maino was determined to do what he had to do to find success even after being
locked up for ten years and make it big in the rap game. I was the same way. I
was determined to do what I had to do which was finishing my GED, getting a
couple certificates and skills. I was determined not to go back, just keep going
towards it.

Even though DH faced these many challenges, he became resilient and established a
newfound sense of purpose which has created a mindset of optimism and belief that he
can and will find success. DH believes that he is on a mission to accomplish all of the
goals that he perseveres.

TH’s completion of his GED has given him a newfound sense of purpose and the
self-respect, empowerment, and confidence to find future educational and employment
success as he continues to be resilient during his path of further positive educational
opportunities. TH stated that he sees himself in five years as “being in the career field” he
has chosen. TH explained that in ten years he will be “working and with [his] family”
and in twenty years be “retired and enjoying [his] life.” TH shared:
I never thought I would be there. I never thought I would be able to excel. It’s really good. I just hope, you know, my son, I want him to know that I tried. I don’t want him to do anything that I did. It’s bad enough that his parents are not together, but I still don’t want him to go through what I went through. He looks so innocent, and I want him to be happy. I think that’s what any parent would want for their children.

TH’s newfound sense of purpose has given him a fresh perspective on life; the heart to share his progress with others, respect, and self-determination. This includes his child who he wants to have a better life than the one he experienced as a youth, and further, earn the respect he has received by becoming resilient and completing his GED. TH’s newfound sense of purpose has guided him to be a respectful, empowered and resilient father in order to overcome obstacles in both his and his son’s lives. TH stated:

I agree with what Maino is saying about how he’s been through the struggle. I relate to the rap because I have had not had much, including living two years with no lights, no nothing. Finally, to start succeeding, doing what I need to do in life and starting to see positive outcomes makes me believe that I’m on my way to the top. I relate to the song because I have overcome adversity and keep going, taking every challenge head on and not giving up.

TH believes his newfound sense of purpose enables him to overcome adversity and persevere in a positive direction in his life. He is excited about his future and wants his past experiences to be a guide to his future success, while continually being resilient.

PG’s completion of his high school diploma has given him a newfound sense of purpose and the self-respect, empowerment, and confidence to find future educational
and employment success through his resilience. PG sees himself “owning a couple of houses and opening a barber shop” in five years. His entrepreneurial spirit, similar to DS, is part of his future plans in the next five years. PG shared the importance of his high school diploma and need to determine the next steps in his life. PG pushed on towards his completion, as he wanted to take a different step in his life. PG stated:

To tell you the truth, it’s just about having a high school diploma. It’s not like all your trouble is going away; you are just taking one major step in your life. Now that I got a high school diploma, I just need to take it a little bit further now. That just encouraged me to take it to the next level by having my high school diploma.

Finding a job and taking care of my mom is the next level right now.

In ten years, he hopes to be “married with a family” and working in the trade of plumbing. PG shared, “I want to go to trade school for plumbing, but I guess I’ll have to wait on that because right now I got little bigger priorities to take care of.” With the completion of his diploma, PG still wants to fulfill the responsibility of taking care of his mother. PG has a newfound sense of purpose that is now about empowerment, respect, determination, and resilience towards all of his future accomplishments. PG stated, “The rap relates to me because I finished high school because at one point I fell down and felt like I would not finish high school. But, I got that little motivation to finish school.”

Through his motivation and resilience development, he has completed his diploma and hopes toward many future successes.

The participants’ reflections on the past and present have led them to a newfound sense of purpose upon the completion of their high school diplomas or GED. They see their lives as headed in an upward direction and working towards the many dreams that
they now have the ability to attain. Their newfound sense of purpose has changed their behavior and assisted them in becoming confident, empowered, self-respected and further understanding their self-identities, as they continue to succeed beyond their completion of their high school diploma or GED.

Summary of Findings

Each theme expressed the aspects of resilience in Black males in the study that includes: (a) accountability to caring adults, (b) his diploma as a symbol of a rebirth, and (c) a newfound sense of purpose emerged, as the participants shared their experiences. Accountability to caring adults represented the participants’ responsibility to self and others for their past and present actions while re-enrolled in school. Caring adults held the participants accountable for the actions by setting high expectations. The building of positive relationships and support systems was a major part of the resilience they developed and showed. The theme, diploma as a symbol of rebirth represented how participants changed their actions and personal views on education, the negative experiences they encountered as a dropout, and re-enrolling, which led to the completion of their diploma. Diploma as a rebirth represents a fresh start in their educational future. A newfound sense of purpose includes the participants believing in themselves, showing positive moral thinking, gaining self-respect, and finding educational success. By completing their high school diploma or GED, the participants now feel empowered and respected, enabling them to make better choices in life that are enhancing their masculinity, popularity, and self-confidence.

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the findings of the characteristics of Black males who re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED. Chapter 5 will
discuss the implications of the findings, limitations, recommendations, and provide an overall summary of the research study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Implications of Findings

The purpose of this study sought to better understand resilience development in Black males that re-enroll in an urban school district and complete their high school diploma or GED. Furthermore, the study identified resilient attributes that Black males developed and utilized when re-enrolling in school or GED programs. Chapter 5 will begin with a discussion of the theoretical and research implications, following with recommendations, study limitations, and lastly a conclusion.

Theoretical Implications

This study explored the aspects of resilience that Black males who re-enroll exhibit when faced with diverse social challenges such as incarceration, dropping out of school, and academic difficulties in school. This study expands on resilience theory and gives a closer examination of Black males school, home, and street life, including analysis of the many challenges and obstacles they face as students in the educational system, and further, their will to succeed. The study filled the void in existing research, in that, current research asserts resilience theory as the everyday ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children; in their families and relationships; and in their communities (Masten, 2001). Past research findings on Black males resilient attributes include having positive teacher/student relationships and supporting each other in school, creating and sustaining a positive self image, being persistent, sites of resilience development, and family and community support (Cooper,
This study explored the aspects of resilience in Black males that re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED. Berliner et al. (2008) believes that the process of re-enrollment has recently gained the interest of educators and researchers, especially in urban school districts where Black males may drop out and re-enroll back into their high school or a GED program. It is important for students to understand the process of re-enrolling and educators supporting students through the challenges of finishing their diploma. Resilience sheds light on the educational system by providing a conceptual framework for Black males who gain empowerment to succeed while facing adversity during their high school experience. Urban school districts can use the resilience framework to improve upon Black males’ mental, social and emotional health, as they support Black males to re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED.

Research Implications

The current study extends the research on resilience as Black males face different and/or similar stressors as their White or Hispanic urban counterparts. As Kilmer et al., (1998) noted in their study, Black participants identified specific stresses faced in their urban schools and neighborhoods, but demonstrated resilience at a higher rate than their White urban counterparts when overcoming the obstacles. Participants in the study faced many challenges including family turmoil (e.g. separation, illness), poverty, or grieving over a loss, but was able to overcome these obstacles by using their resilient development as a fundamental tool to succeed in their lives. Resilience was also the tool used by Black male participants in the current study to attain positive outcomes as they faced adverse
situations such as dropping out, incarceration, and academic difficulties. In this current study, caring adults were contributors to developing Black male resilience and served as critical support systems as they completed their high school diploma or GED. Similarly, Kilmer et al. emphasizes support of family members and other caring adults as a vital aspect to the success of Black males completing their high school diploma or GED. Additionally, Kunjufu (2000), Gibson (2002), and Wilson (2009) acknowledge Black women as having a positive influence on their children by portraying and encouraging attributes such as, strong family beliefs, spirituality, setting academic, personal, and family goals, being emotionally warm, and serving as an ongoing support system. In the current study, Black males’ perceived family, in particular mothers and grandmothers, as positively influencing their lives and the re-enrollment process. Participants described how their mothers’ supported them and pushed them toward developing their resilience and accomplishing the positive outcome of completing their diploma. The re-enrollment back to school was the academic push that their mother or grandmother expected from their son or grandson knowing and believing they could accomplish their positive educational outcome of completing their degree.

The current study also extends the research that forming positive relationships that demonstrate support can serve as a key motivational aspect when building resilience in Black male students in the educational setting (Davis, 2003; Kunjufu, 2002; Porter, 1997). Black males who re-enrolled and completed their high school diploma or GED felt that their core experience was inclusive with specific caring adults in the educational setting. Even though the participants faced many adverse scenarios, caring adults helped guide them to the completion of their diploma and encouraged the development of their
resilient behavior. Relationships were also formed with transition counselors who assisted incarcerated Black males in completing their high school diploma or GED (Feinstein et al., 2008; Todis et al., 2001). Research on transition counselors is extended in current findings, as Black males’ resilient behavior was encouraged and supported by transition counselors who served as significant support systems. Transition counselors’ in correctional facilities connect the current study with past research as each continually assist Black males with their academic work, job readiness skills, re-entry into their communities, and completion of their diplomas (Todis et al.).

The current study also extends the research on Black males’ sites of resilience development, which includes the streets, as discussed by Payne (2006). Similar to Payne’s study, high school Black males in the current study saw the streets as part of their resilience development due to the various challenges they faced with the criminal justice system, impoverishment at home, and also involvement in illegal activities; all while being dropped out of school. Resilience development occurred in both studies as Black males recognized the streets as a place of bonding, building respect, community support, and self-efficacy growth; all leading towards their re-enrollment and completing their GED or high school diploma.

Recommendations

The review of the literature and the findings of the study suggest that there is a need for further research. The participants shared that the process of re-enrollment along with their will to find success was needed to improve their lives and that continual assistance should be there for other Black males. Berliner et al., (2008) assert,

Assessing the magnitude of reenrollment and the characteristics of students who
vanish from and then reenroll in the education pipeline will provide critical information to policymakers about how well schools first retain students and then graduate them after they return (p. 2).

When analyzing the positive significance of caring adults on Black males’ resilience, policymakers may want to establish re-enrollment programs for incarcerated Black males who drop out of high school. Model outreach programs have already been established in Des Moines, Iowa (Des Moines Public School District, 2009) and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, (James, 2008) in order to further Black male resilience. These programs consist of school, home, and community support teams that visit Black males and other males at their homes and in jails to encourage those who have dropped out to re-enroll into a GED program or high school. Students who receive information on the re-enrollment process in this way are more likely to re-enroll and complete their diploma. Berliner et al. (2008) state, “A more complete and accurate description of re-enrollees is needed to shape policies and practices that enable students to reenroll and improve graduation outcomes” (p. 2). This program connects to the theme, accountability to a caring adult, by including a transitional counselor (Todis et al., 2001) who works with the students on an ongoing basis and holds them accountable and sets high expectations for their re-enrollment and completion of their diploma; all demonstrating the significance of adults in Black males developing their resilience (Feistein et al., 2008).

When analyzing Black males newfound sense of purpose as one aspect of their resilience, it is evident that it’s important to establish and/or review an Individual Social and Academic Plan (ISAP) upon entering the ninth grade, which should clearly state future goals, academic strengths and weaknesses, a plan for academic improvement,
attendance issues and a realistic timeline for completion. Neild et al. (2008) discuss the importance of passing ninth grade and improving attendance to decrease the probability of dropping out. As demonstrated in this study, the ISAP would be developed by the student with the assistance of a caring adult such as the high school or transitional counselor in the GED program described (Kunjufu, 2002; Payne, 2006; Todis et al., 2001). These adults would not push students out of high school, but rather support them socially, emotionally, and academically during their time in or out of high school (Gotbaum, 2002; Stearns et al., 2006). Future goals include Black males desire to attend college or to go into the workforce. The academic plan would also include specific parameters and services that should be implemented, such as additional tutoring after school, small class sizes, peer mentoring, service learning, and state-mandated, as well as GED test prep. This should be a major part of the re-enrollment program component and should guide the students to their goals while re-enrolled and after completion of their diploma, as shown by the success of the participants in this study (Berliner et al., 2008).

Employment opportunities for the re-enrolled students within the school might also be included in the ISAP. Due to pull out factors such as pregnancy, marriage, childcare, employment, and other family reasons (Stearns et al., 2006), students would be able to receive financial support to assist them through the adverse situation they are facing. This would also include a payment system for attendance, grades, accountability, and completion of diploma. In addition, students would be held accountable and receive these grants from the time they re-enroll in school, up to the completion of their diploma. Grants would be state funded and gifts would be obtained from local businesses and community members. To receive the grants, students must also participate in career
development sessions, financial literacy classes, a class on home ownership, participate in service learning projects in the community, and open up checking and savings accounts to improve their financial wealth and some of the disadvantages and personal stress they may encounter at school, home, and in the streets (Attar et al., 1994; Kilmer et al., 1998; Payne, 2006). This IASP would also be established for Black male students in the elementary level and continue with them through middle school and high school to assist in engaging students and improving their academic experiences as a student (Kunjufu, 2002; Redditt, 2005). Further, a class that focuses on the transitional experience from elementary to middle school will be part of the program as well. This class would prepare students for the challenges of middle school including scheduling, social, and emotional support, and academic preparation. Furthermore, in middle school, Black males would take a high school experience class that would teach them about required state exams, earning high school credits and their grade point average. Improving schools so all students experience a fair and equitable educational system would be a major improvement for many districts (Cooper, 2000). Once the students enter high school, they would be assigned a college preparatory class that would discuss the fundamentals of entering college and the supports needed to be successful. Providing classes that offer transitional support of the many challenges faced from elementary to middle to high school is supportive of Black males resilient development and academic success.

In addition, based on the findings, policymakers may want to consider establishing a transitional policy that will assist incarcerated Black males who complete their high school diploma or GED in order to have a fresh start in the employment and social arena (Todis et al., 2001). This government funded transitional policy would
support local businesses with tax incentives and financial support by hiring Black males who re-enroll and complete their GED or high school diploma after being incarcerated. This fresh-start policy would connect with the current research that shows Black males expressing that their diploma is an accomplishment and a re-birth for them. Vacca (2004) asserts, “Effective education programs are those that help prisoners with their social skills, artistic development, techniques and strategies to help them deal with their emotions. In addition, these programs emphasize “academic, vocational, and social education” (p. 298). The policy would further encourage additional funding for the creation of jobs or continual educational opportunities for Black males who transition out of prison. This could also include assisting these males in owning their own homes and supporting their families. Employment or college acceptance would be a significant part of the policy for these Black males. These males would also serve as role models in their community, such as to younger Black males, when sharing information about earning their diploma despite difficulties. This policy could encourage schools across the nation to assist the younger generation of Black males who would be mentored across the contexts of school, home, and street life. Deep discussions would be shared on the past life experiences faced by Black males before and after re-enrolling into high school or a GED program. All students could be eligible for any of the recommendations; however, particular attention would center on Black males. Employment and community involvement would be clear opportunities that would encourage Black males to participate after incarceration (Vacca).
Study Limitations

The research study had three limitations which impacted the study scope and outcomes. First, the study included a small sample size that included four Black male participants from an urban district who dropped out, re-enrolled, and completed their high school diploma or GED. The small sample size used may not accurately reflect the opinion or views of resilience held by a wider population who drop out and re-enroll. By using a small sample size, the research may have lost additional descriptive words or codes which would have been gained by receiving further experiences of a larger sample. Thus, while the study findings are unreflective of the larger population, the small sample size did allow the researcher to gain further insight on the participants’ experiences in greater detail, as the study sought to explore the daily experiences of Black males and the resilience they showed as they completed their diploma.

Second, a methodological limitation arose in that only one round of interviews was held with the participants. Additional rounds of interviews and forms of data collection on the participants may have led to more in-depth information on their experiences during the period when they dropped out, re-enrolled, and completed their high school diploma or GED. This information may have expanded the themes and outcomes of the study.

Third, the study was completed in the district where the researcher is presently employed. As the Program Administrator of the district’s alternative program for long-term suspended students, the researcher’s status may have caused the participants to be general in answering questions based on past experiences with authority figures in an educational setting. Understanding who and when to trust due to their past endeavors
may have made it difficult for them to share their deep experiences. However, due to the principals, program administrators, and counselors knowing the researcher, the benefits of the researcher’s inside status outweighed any perceived limitations. While the school and transitional counselor knew the researcher, access to participants was encouraged, and relevant information was shared due to the trust established among the participants. The researcher’s status served as a greater benefit rather than hindrance, which allowed for easy access and discussions with the participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand resilience in Black males, specifically to identify essential aspects of their resilience that have allowed them to re-enroll in school or GED programs. The four Black males in this study possessed the characteristics of resilience and earned their diplomas while facing many challenges. In addition, resilience may have huge implications for Black male students who want to return to complete their high school diploma or GED program. As they receive support from a parent, uncle, aunt, teacher, counselor, or administrator, urban school districts can use the resilience framework to promote Blake males’ student achievement, which may lead to college completion, financial stability, and an increase in family and community involvement.

Some Black males show the strength of resilience to overcome all obstacles to successfully complete their diploma and move beyond the negative outcomes of not obtaining their high school diploma or an alternative certificate. Black male students who create a positive response from adults and peers, while seeking the needed assistance to meet their individual present and future goals, can find success (Wayman, 2001). Being
a resilient student means having increased motivation to succeed and to serve as a self-starter, along with a supportive family member or teacher (Peng, Wang, and Walberg 1992).

In this study, Black male participants were in their twenties and either dropped out once or twice upon completion of their diploma. The support from caring adults in the school setting was vital in preparing and assisting them toward their completion of their diploma (Kunjufu, 2002). Thus, other Black males will also continue to struggle as obstacles such as poor educational opportunities, incarceration, social injustices, and racism are consistently present in society. However, the researcher’s recommendations for educational policymakers at both the state and federal levels to take immediate action on this national crisis were guided by the aspects of resilience that the participants’ exhibited as they completed their diplomas.

Black males in the study were able to re-enroll and complete their high school diploma or GED program with the support of many people across the context of home, school, and the streets. The re-enrollment process may strengthen the economy of our nation and the world, as it is imperative that the cycle of Black male academic failure cease. Important supporters were Black families, educators, community members, and school and transitional counselors, who assisted Black males in building their resilience. This study has shown that Black males can find success in their lives and can complete their high school diploma or GED. As a nation, we must stride to see Black males graduate and have long successful lives with their families, friends, and community members. Beyond the economic issues, it’s a humane issue that must be solved for the good of all people.
References


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Appendix A

St. John Fisher College Consent Form

Resilience: Factors that influence Black males to re-enroll back into high school or a General Equivalency Diploma Program

Jerome Watts, Ed.D. Candidate, Executive Leadership
(585)259-9604 (cell) Email: jlw03565@sjfc.edu

Dear Candidate for Study Participation:

Currently, I am completing my doctoral studies at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. The main focus of my study is Black males and the factors that influence them to re-enroll in high school or a General Equivalency Diploma Program, rather than examining the process of dropping out.

As part of the process, the researcher will be conducting two 30-45 minute interviews with those who have found a way to re-enroll to pursue their high school diploma or GED diploma. Participation is voluntary and participants may stop at anytime during the interview process, which has been approved by a review board at St. John Fisher College. You are encouraged to participate in this opportunity to voice your experiences.

Data collected during the interviews will be audio taped, transcribed by a transcriber, and coded by the researcher. This information will be included in the final dissertation of the researcher. As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

In conclusion, I hope that you take the opportunity to impact many young Black males in your community and the nation. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Jerome L. Watts
Doctoral Candidate
St. John Fisher College
Please check below if you are 18 or older and whether or not you would like to participate in the research study.

I am 18 or older and would like to participate in the research study.________________________
I am 18 or older and wish not to participate in the research study.________________________
Appendix B

Demographic Information Form

Pseudonym Name:______________________________________________
Pseudonym School:____________________________________________

Current Information

Name:________________________________________________________
High School/GED Program:______________________________________
Current Grade/Level:___________________________________________
Email:________________________________________________________
Employer:______________________________________________________

Other Information

Parent(s)/Guardian with whom you reside:________________________
Elementary/Middle Schools Attended:______________________________
Number of times you dropped out of high school:____________________
Number of times you re-enrolled in high school or a GED program:____________
Why did you drop out of school and why did you re-enroll?________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Interview Protocol-Student

All questions were framed in youth discourse

1. Tell me a time when at school you felt good about school, doing what you had to do and being respected by the people around you? (probe for enjoyment of school setting and life circumstances)

2. Who supported you and worked with you at school? (probe for gangs, family, support staff)

3. If you are tight with the family or your boys in your life, where do you ball, hang out, or what do you like to do? (probe for family, community, school)

4. Were you ever going off in a basketball game, talent show, or some other school event that made you excited and proud about showing off your school? (probe for enjoyment of school, being the man, identity)

5. Tell me about a time when you went off in school on a teacher or administrator. What was it like? (probe for classroom, school, emotions)

6. When did school start to become challenging? (probe for suspensions, relationship with teachers, behavior, academic ability)

7. What happened to change your ideas on school? (probe for fights, suspensions, friends, social, emotional, academic)
8. Tell me about the day that you finally said enough is “enough” and dropped out of high school. Who was involved and what did you have to do in order to drop out of school? (probe for Push or Pull out)

9. How did you feel when finally out of school and chilling?

10. Tell me a story of a time when you were chilling during that time out of school?

11. What lead you to come back to school? What role did family play in influencing you in re-enrolling? What did you have to do to re-enroll in school and who supported you during the process? (probe for necessary forms or parent guardian permission, returning to former school)

12. In what way was re-enrolling in school easy? In what ways was it hard? (probe for ways the district/school encouraged or discouraged re-enrollment)

13. Now that you are back in school, what challenges (probe for transportation, lack of support, time, children) have you faced since re-enrolling into the district or GED program?

14. Now back in school, what is up with your education? What is the best part about attending school and getting your degree? (probe for college, having a good job, supporting his future family and himself)
Appendix D

“All The Above” by Maino and T-Pain

Chorus [T-Pain]:
Tell me what do you see
When you looking at me
(woooahhhh)
On a mission to be
What I’m destined to be
(woooahhhh)
I done been through the pain and the sorrow
The struggle is nothing but love (nothing but love)
I’m a soldier, a rider, a ghetto survivor
And all the above
All the above (x7)

Verse 1 [Maino]:
Listen
Really what do you see
When you looking at me?
See me come up from nothing,
To me living my dreams
I done been to the bottom,
I done suffered a lot,
I deserve to be rich,
Headed straight to the top
Look how I ride for the block,
Look how I rep for the hood,
I get nothing but love now
When I come through the hood
Getting this fortune and fame
Money aint going to shame
The new benz is all white,
Call it John McCain
How the hell could you stop me?
Why in the world would you try?
I go hard forever,
That’s just how I’m designed,
That’s just how I was built
See the look in my eyes?
You take all of this from me,
And I’m still gon’ survive
You get truth from me,
But these rappers gon’ lie
I’m a part of these streets
Till the day that I die
I wave hi to the haters,
Mad that I finally done made it

Take a look and you can tell
That I’m destined for greatness

(Chorus)

Verse 2: [Maino]

It’s easy to hate,
It’s harder to love me
Ya’ll don’t understand,
Ya’ll quickly to judge me
Put your foot in my Nikes,
Picture you livin’ my life,
Picture you stuck in a cell,
Picture you wasting your life,
Picture you facing a charge,
Picture you beating the odds,
Picture you willing to bleed,
Picture you wearing the scar
Thank you for making me struggle,
Thank you for making me grind
I perfected my hustle,
Tell me the world ain’t mine
You’ve been seein’ me lately,
I’m a miracle baby
I refuse to lose
This what the ghetto done made me
I put that on my father
Tryna hope for tomorrow
When I think that I can’t,
I envision Obama,
I envision the diamonds,
I envision Ferraris
If the world was perfect,
All my ***** behind me
Ain’t you happy I made it?
That I’m making a statement?
Take a look and you can tell
That I’m destined for greatness

(Chorus)

Verse 3 [T-Pain]:
Now if you come to the spot (spot)
All the way from out on the block (block)
I hustle hard cause it’s all the same (they know)
And you know that grind don’t stop (stop)
Just ’cause I rose to the top (top)
And everybody knows my name (Maino)
Still grindin (still grindin),
Still hustlin (still hustlin)
No more pain (no more pain),
No more sufferin (no more sufferin)
To my ladies and my shorties and my thugs,
Just start dancing and shine in the love