Exploring Blackness as a Site of Resilience in Street Life Oriented Young Black Men Living in the Inner-City

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EXPLORING BLACKNESS AS A SITE OF RESILIENCE IN STREET LIFE ORIENTED YOUNG BLACK MEN LIVING IN THE INNER-CITY

By

André L. Brown

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING BLACKNESS AS A SITE OF RESILIENCE IN STREET LIFE ORIENTED YOUNG BLACK MEN LIVING IN THE INNER-CITY

By

Andrae’ L. Brown

This exploratory study utilized a theory-driven, participatory-action research design and qualitative methodology to explore Blackness as a site of resiliency for street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city. The goal of this study was to gather naturalistic data and provide a critical analysis of some of the experiences of Black men and the processes which they undergo in developing, connecting to, and utilizing their Blackness as a source of strength, enabling them to make meaning of their lives and overcome adversity. This project drew on phenomenology by investigating experiences and the ways individuals understood experiences to develop their worldview.

Sites of resilience represent the physical and/or psychological spaces that help Black men cope and/or become resilient. Psychological sites of resilience represent the ideological, value and/or belief systems that are intrinsically connected to the physical spaces deemed resilient. Physical sites signify the geographically bonded and diasporic places or spaces where young Black men congregate to bolster personal levels of resiliency (Payne and Brown, in press).

Data collection occurred during one-hour semi-structured interviews. Thematic genograms (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Shellenberger, 1999) and ecomaps (Hodge, 2000; Large, 1992) were completed from data gathered in the interviews. Participants were identified by the following criteria: 1) self-identified as being street life oriented; 2) within the last year participated in street life activities to survive physically (e.g., gang
activity, fighting/assault or economically impoverished position. Participants were seven African American males; aged eighteen to thirty years old, mean age twenty-four years old. These men lived within the same ward of an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. None of the men reported being married. Two of the participants were fathers. Five out of seven of the respondents reported a history of incarceration. Regarding educational status, two participants completed some high school, three completed high school or a high school equivalency, and two participants completed some college or courses beyond high school.

Participants endorsed Blackness, spirituality/religiosity, family, the “block”, and psychological safe places as sites of resiliency. This dissertation explores each of these sites, clinical implications and future research within an Afro-centric framework.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who has supported me throughout every endeavor.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Manhood... Scholarship... Perseverance... Uplift...

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Audrey C. and James T. Brown, who have provided me the support, strength and courage to remain committed to obtaining my personal goals within the framework of helping my people. Your example of love and commitment to the betterment of the world has been my inspiration.

I would like to thank my siblings Angie, Debra, T.L., Tina, Michael and Sabrina, for raising me into the man and brother that I am today. I would like to thank my nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews for being my lifeline and energy source. I do what I do so that the world can be a better place for all of you. Even though I am not around as much as I would like to be, when I am with you, you fill me up. I can’t wait to see how we change the game.

I want to thank all of those who supported my research and assisted me through this process. My research team worked diligently to make sure that this was the best product that it could be. We struggled, sacrificed, and persevered together in order help give a voice to those who have been silenced. Our work extends far beyond these few pages. To the participants in this study, your contributions are immeasurable. This is just the beginning. Your stories are representative of millions. “The first shall be last and the last shall be first”- let’s get ready to lead.

To my many mentors who believed in me and spoke my life into existence before I could imagine what the world had to offer. I thank you. You fought with me side by
side throughout the madness that I call my life. Your work and lives have paved the way and made my road wider. All I have to do now is do what you said I could. No problem.

To my dissertation committee: Drs. Almeida, Eppler, Hernander, Matsui and Massey, I thank you for supporting and challenging my ideas beliefs from conception to fruition. You have made me a better thinker and scholar. This is just the beginning. I have so much more work to do.

The hardest part of obtaining a doctoral degree is not the coursework. The struggle is in managing your life outside of the classroom. I would like to express my undying love, respect and admiration to everybody who has picked me up from the side of the road, held my hand, paid a bill, given me food and shelter, and encouraged me.

Thank you.
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Introduction

African Americans have been socialized to recognize, negotiate, and navigate in the white-dominated society of the United States from birth (hooks, 1997). Within this context, African American adolescents have been challenged to become and remain psychologically and socially healthy in midst of failing school districts, discrimination in employment, economic disparities, racial profiling, increased health risks, poverty, high mortality, below-average life span, and oftentimes invisible and more sophisticated forms of racism (Booker, 1998; Jones, 1997; Madhubuti, 1991; Noguera, 1996; Schoenbaum & Waidman, 1997; Woodard, 1957). Given the many contextual levels and systems with which these young men must contend, a framework more inclusive of these factors is needed to understand the experience of African Americans in the United States.

Using a theory driven, participatory action research design, this study explored Blackness as a site of resilience in street life oriented Black men living in the inner-city. Hearing young Black men’s voices may help researchers bolster current resiliency theory, since Blackness as a site of resilience has traditionally been overlooked in street life oriented men by traditional resilience literature. Thus, the goal of this research was to gain a greater understanding of how young Black men used their Blackness as a source of strength to make meaning out of their lives, overcome obstacles and face adverse circumstances. This project utilized participatory action research which was based on collaboration, empowerment, and centralizing the experiences of people who are marginalized (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Much attention has been given to the negative outcomes of African American adolescents with little understanding of the experiences and motivations behind their
actions (Dyson, 1997; Payne & Brown, in press; Utsey, Bolden, & Brown, 2001; Wyatt, 1999). I believe that it is imperative to reformulate the conceptualization of resilience in this diverse group, to demystify the stereotypes and myths associated with Black youth and to make a concerted effort to gain a realistic perspective of their present situation. The findings of this study contributed to the research and literature in resilience, ethnic identity, and developmental theory.
CHAPTER I

Background

Young African American men have provided a key example of a sub-group, which has been in dire need of adequate refraining. In developing a framework to view resiliency, the investigator asked the question, “How does the inner-city young adult Black male establish resilience in the face of his social dislocation?” Researchers have posited that African American males have developed particular modes of adaptations to endure life in the inner-city because of their particular life circumstances (Franklin, 1999; Gordon & Song, 1994; Wilson, 1987, 1996). With the accumulation of adverse living circumstances come particular ways of overcoming social dilemmas.

Johnson and Leighton (1995) presented evidence suggesting that Black men, especially those who are young, poor, and live in ghettos, may be victims of genocide. Genocide, defined as the destruction of a group, was not limited to physical violence. Staub (1989) emphasized that genocide was not limited to killing, but included creating the conditions that psychologically and materially destroy or diminish people’s dignity, happiness, and capacity to fulfill basic material needs. Johnson and Leighton (1995) further set the parameters, stating that mere discrimination and/or even oppression were not enough to qualify as genocide, but the actions or conditions must threaten or undermine the very existence of the group targeted. They stated that if creating or tolerating a famine was genocide, then to create the destructive life conditions which impact young Black men was also genocide. Hence, incidents of high infant mortality rates, limited access to adequate health care, crushing poverty, failing schools, and crime-
racked neighborhoods containing toxic waste were recognized as affecting the daily existence of poor Blacks. Consequently, the Black male, if he intends to survive, must find ways unique to this population to establish resiliency to these mitigating circumstances (Majors & Billson, 1993; Wilson, 1996). Oftentimes, the enormous and overwhelming circumstances that many Black men experience goes unrecognized, and their living situations are minimized. Hence, using a traditional framing of resiliency makes it extremely difficult to understand, assess, and identify how resiliency is exhibited in this population.

This research utilized the theoretical framing of resiliency, which I co-authored and developed with scholar/researcher, Yasser Payne, entitled: *Sites of Resilience: A Reconceptualization of Resiliency for Young Black Men Living in the Inner-City*. In this chapter, we discussed the historical and contemporary perceptions of African American men. Secondly, we provided a critique of the four problematic assumptions which have grounded traditional literature on resiliency for inner-city Black men. Traditional literature assumed 1) a middle-class and upper-middle-class orientation, 2) an ahistorical stance 3) an individualized perspective that often holds the person solely responsible for development of resiliency, and 4) a refusal to consider the overall social structural impact of economic conditions in the lived experiences of these men. Hence, traditional models of resiliency made it difficult to adequately recognize and assess resiliency in Black men.

After providing a critical analysis of the existing literature on resiliency and its application to Black men, Payne and Brown (in press) submitted an alternative conceptualization entitled, 'Site of Resiliency'. This conceptualization embodied at least four assumptions. First, the development of resiliency was recognized as a function of
"relational coping" or processes (Fine, 1984). Second, resiliency should be analyzed in relation to the person's socio-cultural background. Third, resiliency cannot be observed independent of an historical perspective. Fourthly, and most notable, this conceptualization is centralized on an understanding of how the Black male organizes his thinking and experiences around resiliency.

In addition to providing a conceptual framework for resiliency, we explored three sites of resiliency for young Black men living in the inner-city. Sites of resiliency consisted of two dimensions: 1) physical properties and 2) psychological properties. Physical sites represent the geographical bonded and diasporic places or spaces where young Black men congregate to bolster personal levels of resiliency. The psychological sites represented the ideological, value and/or belief systems that are intrinsically associated with the physical spaces deemed resilient. The sites of resilience explored were 1) ethnic identity, 2) religion/spirituality, and 3) street life. The sites identified in the text were only three examples of sites of resiliency. We recognized that the sites were not mutually exclusive, but may develop simultaneously and influence each other synergetically. In addition, one site may be more salient at a particular time in an individual's life; however, that does not mean that other sites are nonexistent. Payne and Brown (in press) also highlighted that the sites of resiliency analysis may be applicable to other communities, subgroups and individuals beyond inner-city Black males.

Research Questions

Several questions were used to guide this study in an effort to examine Blackness as a site of resilience. In order to understand the respondents' conceptualizations of Blackness as a site of resilience, it was important to first identify how street life oriented young
Black men living in the inner-city defined Blackness and identified criteria for having a healthy sense of Blackness. Second, it was critical to determine how street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city defined resilience. Third, after establishing whether the men used Blackness as a site of resilience, the researcher wanted to understand how they used it as a site of resilience. Fourth, I wanted to understand the interactive and relational process of how these men developed their Blackness.

Fifth, after determining the process of developing Blackness and resilience, it was critical to examine where young Black men living in the inner-city go to nurture, develop, establish, and express their Blackness. Finally, it was important to explore what and where are the sites of resilience that the respondents expressed or demonstrated their resilience that may not be observed by the larger community.

Significance of Study

This study investigated how street life oriented young men narrate the intersection between Blackness and resilience. This project was significant because of its unique perspective and methodology. This project utilized Participatory Action Research (PAR) which, drew upon the precepts of emancipation and liberation articulated by Freire (1970). Freire argued for a system of education emphasizing learning as an act of culture and freedom. He stressed the formation of a critical consciousness which allows people to question the nature of their historical and social situations. This methodology assumes that sustainable empowerment and development must begin from the concerns of the marginalized and is committed to action with full collaboration between the participants and researcher. Using a PAR design empowers the community by providing access to the research via their participation, provides training for community members in research,
and presents findings in a manner that is easy to understand and applicable (Ford, 2001; Marshall & Roseman, 1999). Furthermore, this research project utilized an African Centered Perspective as the framework for analysis and interpretation of the data gleaned from an African American population.

Another noteworthy point is that the theoretical framework and research protocol was developed by African American males in an attempt to provide relevant and pertinent research about the experiences of their cohort. The primary investigator developed and co-authored a theory of resilience. This theory, developed by Payne and Brown (in press) is relatively new and prior to this dissertation has not been empirically validated. This exploratory study provided naturalistic data as the first round of research for the Sires of Resiliency theory. This conceptualization of resilience is comprehensive and takes into account the multiple intersections found in communities - the histories, genders, developmental states, ethnicities, and environmental context in which the population is embedded.

Additionally, my analysis added to the current body of research regarding resilience, particularly the experiences of street life oriented Black males living in the inner-city. Much has been written about the negative aspects of African American males living in inner cities, yet there remains a paucity of literature about the strengths and resilience of African American men. This research provided an opportunity for young inner-city Black men to fully verbalize and express the intricacies of their experiences in their own words, from their points of view and in their contexts. This study also centralized the perspectives of a historically marginalized group. The participants'
interpretations and experiences were the cornerstone of the investigation and data analysis. As such, this research has the potential to reverberate on several levels.

The findings of this study, viewed in conjunction with a growing body of research that challenges the status quo and traditionally disempowering theories and research, may influence public policies regarding education, violence prevention, and juvenile justice. If existing social structures utilize the research and literature on the experiences of this at-risk and targeted population, they will be better equipped to support and provide services appropriate to young street life oriented Black men living in the inner-city because they will be able to negotiate the multiple oppressions which this group faces. This research will also benefit researchers and clinicians who provide services to this population by providing data that challenges them to rethink their framing of Black adolescent development, Blackness, resilience, and street life. Most importantly, this research enlightened and empowered members of the communities from which the study was conducted.

Key Terms

To continue a discourse on Blackness as a site of resilience, it is important to have a clear understanding of the key conceptual terms used in the context of this project. I will briefly describe the main concepts of this proposal as indicated in the title: Exploring Blackness as a Site of Resilience for Street life oriented Young Black Men Living in the Inner-city. More extensive explorations of these concepts will be provided in subsequent chapters.

Participants of the study were comprised of street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city. The young Black men in the study were from the ages of eighteen
to thirty. Street life orientation refers to an ideology; a way of life that has grown or evolved from particular socio-historical and economical roots of oppression for young Black men. Across space and throughout time, many of these gentlemen would learn how to use and negotiate their daily life through the codes, norms and ideologies associated with this lifestyle/ideology/worldview, literally, as a means for survival (Payne & Brown, in press). The street life oriented Black men were identified by the following criteria: 1) self-identifying as being street life oriented; 2) within the last year participated in street life activities to survive physically (e.g., gang activity, fighting/assault) or economically; and 3) live in an inner-city or economically impoverished position.

Resilience signifies how individuals utilize their personal strengths, fortitude, sense of agency, personal and cultural history, the interaction of their multiple identities (i.e., gender, class, race, sexual orientation) and the resources of larger social systems (i.e., family, community, ethnic group, religion) to organize and create meaning around feeling good, satisfied or accomplished. In addition, it represents how young Black men develop effective coping strategies and choose to survive in relation to what they perceive to be adverse circumstances in their lives. This framing of resilience does not use preconceived criteria or set of measurable outcomes to determine what is resilient or not. Explicitly, it is my position that all Black men living in the inner city are resilient. Resiliency is determined by the values, criteria, and measures which each individual deems pertinent in determining one’s individual and communal fortitude within one’s own context. This framing of resilience can be applied to family systems and communities in its various presentations. To reiterate, this conceptualization of resiliency takes into account a cultural contextual perspective that includes analyses of culture,
class, social location, race, gender, and sexual orientation (Almeida, Woods, & Messineo, 1998; Blankership, 1998; Gordon & Song, 1994) and frames the experiences of inner-city Black men.

The term *sites of resilience* represents the physical and/or psychological spaces that help Black men cope or become resilient. Psychological sites of resilience represent the ideological values and/or belief systems that are intrinsically connected to the physical spaces deemed resilient. Whereas, physical sites signify the geographically bonded and diasporic places or spaces where young Black men congregate to bolster personal levels of resiliency (Payne & Brown, in press).

This study explored how Blackness was used and developed in the life of Black men. *Blackness* was conceptualized from an Africentric perspective and refers to the sense of Africanity that is inherent and connects all people of African descent. An Africentric perspective utilizes the history, culture, philosophy, and collective experiences of African people as a frame of reference for organizing one's approach to reality-survival and understanding the world (Kamoun, 1998). Within this context *Blackness* is a self-concept comprised of four major aspects: 1) Genetic Blackness- the inherited basic biological makeup of all Black people in the world; 2) Cultural Blackness- acquired through the socialization function of traditional Black institutions (Black family, Black church, and Black community); 3) Psychological Blackness- refers to Black awareness and Black consciousness; 4) Spiritual Blackness- refers to the feelings of unity, oneness, collectivity, togetherness, and rhythm that Black people feel with each other (Williams, 1981).
Chapter II

Literature Review

Traditional Accounts of Resilience

This section explores assumptions of traditional models of resiliency. Before an alternative conceptualization of resiliency is provided for the young adult inner-city Black male, traditional models of resiliency will be reviewed. It is important to deconstruct these perspectives to alert the investigator of the assumptions that are often reified. I propose that an expanded model would capture resiliency appropriately in the young inner-city Black male.

Resiliency stemming from research on life stress, risk, and child psychopathology was not explicitly studied until the 1970’s (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995). Garnezy and Nuechterlein in 1972 are credited with the earliest resiliency study, “In-vulnerable Children: The Fact and Fiction of Competence and Disad- vantage” (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995). Since this resiliency benchmark, traditional psychology models or theories have been critiqued for being static and grounded in a vulnerability/deficit perspective (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995; O’Leary, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Although current resiliency theories or models contain conceptual improvements, there are still sufficient concerns to address. Resiliency theories or models often are a) value laden, b) middle or upper-middle class oriented, c) individualized and d) operate in the here and now. By default, such a framing of resiliency allows only specific persons to be perceived as resilient. Young, inner-city Black men, for instance, constitute one of the United States’ subgroups that do not fit neatly in traditional conceptualizations of
resiliency. Put simply, traditional resiliency models, more times than not, ignore the particular socio-cultural and historical experiences of being young, Black, male, and poor.

The models that I review were proposed by Freitas and Downey (1998) and O'Leary and Ickovics (1995). Freitas and Downey (1998) proposed a dynamic resiliency model to move through Mischel and Shoda's Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS) theory. They used the CAPS model to explore resiliency on two levels: a) psychological mediating units (e.g., values and competencies) and b) psychological mediating units or factors fair in relation to the person's context or immediate environment. They specifically argue that, their "...findings call for a dynamic conceptualization of resiliency that can account for the ways children cope with stressors vary across domain, development, and context" (p. 263). Also, they profoundly alerted us to the potential danger of deeming someone or a group resilient by pointing out that samples may vary in terms of being classified as resilient or non-resilient, depending on the indicator or outcome measure(s) used. They also noted that it was imperative for researchers to understand the "values" and "goals" of the population they are investigating. Freitas and Downey stated:

In areas of concentrated poverty where conventional means of achieving self-worth (e.g., productive employment, quality education) are mostly absent, achieving the respect of others, often through violence or intimidation, is widely valued by adolescents. Thus, the goal of not being disrespected may be more likely to be peer sanctioned in economically disadvantaged areas; however, family and societal institutions such as schools may promote incongruent goals such as to go to college. (p.271)

Although Freitas and Downey (1998) conceptually enhanced notions of resiliency, much of their model remains grounded in traditional assumptions. First, the
CAPS model they used emphasized a contextual or environmental understanding of resiliency. However, the emphasis they placed on context does not take into account a socio-historical perspective. For instance, if an investigator is interested in examining persons or groups from economically impoverished environments they may, according to the CAPS model, explore notions of resiliency in relation to the environment without any concern for how the environment or context evolved. A socio-historical perspective would be useful because it would allow the investigator to pin down patterns of resiliency across time, which leads to an informed understanding of patterns of resiliency in the present. By having a clear understanding of the history of performance, one could measure the current manifestations against the highs and lows within the cycle and context particular to the individual or community being measured.

Second, their model places too much responsibility on the individual. According to Freitas and Downey (1998) the individual is ultimately responsible for developing his or her resiliency by agentically and/or independently discovering means to establish it. For instance, the responsibility of the community or taking account of the effects of larger social structures (e.g., government, education, police harassment, economy, family) are not discussed in relation to the development of the individual's agency and/or non-agency. A model that does not incorporate an approach to understanding the greater effects of larger social structures on developments of resiliency or non-resiliency does not adequately explain the various lived experiences of resiliency (e.g., communal-resiliency, familial/African-centric oriented resiliency). As a result, their argument for dynamic perspectives of resiliency is weakened. Put simply, this argument does not adequately take into account the diverse or multiple lived experiences found within an
inner-city environment. Their model inadvertently homogenizes the multiple lived experiences, thus, denying the variation that is witnessed in the inner-city.

Third, Freitas and Downey’s (1998) model dichotomizes resiliency. By this, they mean some people have resiliency while others do not. For the investigator or practitioner, it then becomes the task of either getting the individual to recognize and use one’s agency or falter in the face adversity, thus, being considered non-resilient. However, the difference between those persons who demonstrated low salience or a low degree of resiliency and those persons who were labeled “maladaptive” or non-resilient still remains unclear and subjective. If it is argued that resiliency varies in the person, then what is the difference between someone who is non-resilient and someone who is demonstrating a low degree of resiliency? What are the real differences between the two groups?

Fourth, they argue that resiliency can be characterized in terms of positive vs. negative or maladaptive vs. adaptive outcomes. It is my contention that it is dangerous to impute judgments or values upon resiliency because the question then becomes: Under whose criteria is an individual’s behavior considered maladaptive or negative? I posit that all people are resilient. Determining resilience should not be judged by the outcomes and values that I deem relevant. Instead, a more accurate assessment of resilience occurs if individuals articulate, frame and measure resiliency according to their own criteria. For example, an individual may exhibit a higher degree of resilience in one area, while demonstrating a lesser degree of resilience elsewhere, nevertheless, the person is still resilient. If the sites of resilience valued by the observer were neither valued nor important by the observant, then that individual would not be regarded as resilient. Yet to
identify this person as non-resilient would be an inaccurate assessment. In actuality, the individual was not assessed within a framework, system, and context in which their competencies and resiliency could be accurately measured.

To illustrate further I utilize Freitas and Downey (1998) example of “Rudy.” In their study, Rudy was a hypothetical person living in the ghetto. They proposed that Rudy demonstrated delinquent behavior when he decided to sell drugs in lieu of having a high intellectual capacity. Although they argued that behavioral outcomes were context-specific, thus in part justifying why he sold drugs, they regarded his behavior as delinquent or maladaptive. It is my position that Rudy’s decision to sell drugs is an example of his adaptive means to survive in his context. Thus, his behavior was not necessarily unhealthy. Perhaps, this individual is demonstrating his ability to be resilient. This may have been the best decision to make considering all of the options and possible consequences. The behaviors should be interpreted within a context that recognizes intersection and impact of the larger systems of oppression impacting the individual.

O’Leary and Ickovics (1995) proposed a model for women that moves beyond the discussion of resiliency. They argued that traditional discussions of resiliency operate from vulnerability/deficit models. More specifically, O’Leary and Ickovics (1995) noted that vulnerability/deficit models were more concerned with how people falter in the face of challenge as opposed to understanding how they flourish in spite of difficult circumstances. O’Leary and Ickovics (1995) used the term thriving with the intent of inculcating a paradigm shift regarding resiliency. Thriving is defined as, “the effective mobilization of individual and social resources in response to risk or threat” (O’Leary

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and Ickovics, 1995, p.122). They argued that thriving conceptually moves beyond the return to equilibrium (i.e., homeostasis) following a challenge.

According to O'Leary and Ickovics, a homeostatic model of resiliency captures half of the story by being focused on the individual's return or bouncing back from adversity. More specifically, a homeostatic model's assumptions based on the state of equilibrium exists for all persons in that there are no overwhelming challenges to be endured. At some point, challenges emerge in the individual's life, thus causing one to fall from a state of equilibrium. Subsequently, (in the case of the person who rises from this low or non-resilient state) resiliency is achieved once the person is able to circumvent existing adversity, thus returning to a state of equilibrium. It is at this point that O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) argued for a conceptualization of thriving. They believed that the person contending with adversity responds in one of three ways. The three responsive means are survival, recovery, and thriving. Briefly, survival is demonstrated when the individual simply lives without any attempt to return to equilibrium and/or flourish beyond equilibrium. In this case, the person is not motivated to reroute one's life. Instead, one is subsumed by the adverse challenge. The traumatic event is perceived to be so devastating that the person demonstrates behavioral outcomes that are often characterized as helpless or hopeless. If the person achieves recovery, then he or she is able to move past a state of existence or survival regarding the traumatic event. O'Leary and Ickovics's (1995) notion of recovery is analogous to a return to homeostasis. Here the person is able to recover from the traumatic event and to move back to a prior state of satisfaction. Thriving is proposed to capture how the person uses a traumatic experience to catapult the individual beyond recovery or a return to equilibrium. In this instance, the
person reshapes the disturbing experience and gleans from it a constructive lesson. It is this redefinition of self, meaning making, and new interpretation, that allows for the process of thriving to occur.

O’Leary and Ickovics’s (1995) model, although revolutionary, still operated from some traditional assumptions. First, they argued that the person, when presented with adversity, responded in one of three possible ways. He or she may respond by surviving, recovering or thriving. I would argue that the person’s response to adversity is immensely complicated. The human experience is dynamic, comprised of a multiplicity of responses not a single solution. Also, in their model survival, recovery and thriving appear to occur in a stage-linear fashion. The model is based on the assumption that survival must occur for recovery to take place, and recovery must occur to observe thriving as an outcome. Second, the model captures the benefits of social challenges by focusing on thriving. To explain the benefits of social challenges the model is focuses on single life events to explain the demonstration of thriving. The human experience is more dynamic than this. For instance, the young adult, inner-city Black male may be experiencing myriad social challenges (e.g., instances of police brutality, the omnipresence of racism, a poor education, unemployment). In this case, the challenges are at the forefront of his life. Perhaps conceptualizing traumatic events as few and far between is indicative of more privileged lifestyles (i.e., middle-, upper-middle, and upper-class lifestyles). In the aforementioned example, the Black male has to simultaneously address multiple traumatic events if he is to establish his resiliency. Inherent in their conceptualization is the assumption that resiliency is a function of the here and now. There is no discussion of how patterns of resiliency have been passed on or used across time among particular
groups within particular communities. I contend that what may be observed as resiliency in some communities would not be observed as examples of resiliency in others.

In summary, traditional accounts of resiliency often set the criteria and define what is resilient. In traditional literature, individuals who consistently experience social failures (e.g., dropping out of school, unemployment, incarceration) are examples of people who are less and/or are non-resilient. Also, resiliency tends to be dichotomized (Carver, 1998, Frietas & Downey, 1998; Garmezy, 1991; O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1995; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). Although there are discussions of how resiliency varies in the person, there are no explanations on the difference between a demonstration of a low degree of resiliency and persons who are non-resilient. I suggest everyone is resilient. Consequently, I call attention to the need for adequate framings of resiliency. If researchers and theorists are to capture and accurately frame resiliency across communities, we have to be cautious in how we investigate it, and depending on the model used, any number of groups can be characterized as resilient or non-resilient. In other words, different indices of resiliency will influence the outcomes for individuals. Researchers must understand that the framing of resiliency is deeply tied to the investigator’s value system. I propose that all conceptualizations of resiliency take into account the intersections found in communities and intersections must recognize the particular experiences, histories, genders, developmental states, ethnicities and environmental contexts. In subsequent Sections, this study explores these intricacies in more depth.

*Alternative Conceptualization of Resiliency*
The young, inner-city Black man is in dire need of reframing in regards to resiliency. The investigator has to ask the question of how does the inner-city young adult Black male establish his resiliency in the face of his social dislocation? I argue that the young inner-city Black male, because of his difficult circumstances, has developed particular modes of adaptations to endure life in the inner-city (Franklin, 1999; Gordon & Song, 1994; Wilson, 1987, 1996). With the accumulation of adverse living circumstances come particular ways of handling social dilemmas. In some instances, the approach to the handling or perceptions of social dilemmas may be split by gender within an inner-city community (Fine & Wise, 1998; Wilson, 1996). Also, there is a need to make explicit the importance of understanding early adulthood in the Black male. Young adulthood for the Black male is a crucial developmental period, stage that has attached to it a uniquely enormous amount of social complexity. Researchers have argued that the experience of adulthood for inner-city inhabitants may begin during the early teenage years (Burton, Odeidallah, & Allison, 1996). During this period, the Black male is generally regarded as a "man" (as are most men of the world), and to be self-sufficient. He is expected to be a provider or financially stable (Bowman, 1989; Spencer, 1995; Wilson, 1987), emotionally sound, and may be observed as a developing elder within his community. As he moves from the formal atmosphere of a secondary education, he is now expected to make responsible choices for himself (Bowman, 1989). However, as he enters this world of adulthood, he may find that larger society is not strongly receptive of him (Franklin, 1999).

During this period, the inner city Black youth begins to critique society, particularly in relation to his perceived successes and failures as a Black man (Parker &
Kleiner, 1977). For instance, he may wonder why and/or how his population is more apt to encounter specific kinds of social discrimination and for the first time begin seriously thinking about issues of homicide, depression, suicide, poverty, unemployment, and education. He may think about these social dilemmas with some sincerity because there is a legitimate chance that he may be struggling with these issues. While there may not necessarily be a specific battle with depression, a personal struggle may emerge with understanding how and why these social issues are prevalent throughout his community. Consequently, the Black male, if he intends to survive, must find ways unique to his population to establish his resiliency (Majors & Billson, 1993; Wilson, 1996). Wilson (1996) asserted, “ghetto-related behaviors often represent particular cultural adaptations to the systemic blockage of opportunities in the environment of the inner-city and the society as a whole. These adaptations are reflected in habits, skills, styles, and attitudes that are shaped over time” (p. 74). In the simple terms, resilience is a positive adaptation to adversity (Waller et al., 2002).

I propose a more contextual definition of resiliency. For this author, resilience represents how individuals utilize their personal strengths, sense of agency, personal and cultural history, the interaction of their multiple identities (gender, class, race, sexual orientation), and the resources from larger social systems (family, community, ethnic group, religion) to organize meaning around feeling good, satisfied or accomplished. It also represents how Black men develop effective coping strategies and choose to survive in relation to what they perceive as adverse circumstances in their lives.

Furthermore, this conceptualization holds at least four assumptions. First, the development of resiliency is recognized as a function of "relational coping" or processes
(Fine, 1984). The person's ability to be resilient develops as a function of complex processes (e.g. community, family, day-to-day experiences) as opposed to observing resiliency as mostly internal processes. Second, resiliency should be analyzed in relation to the person's socio-cultural background. Third, resiliency cannot be observed independent of an historical perspective. An historical analysis should account for perceptions of the subgroup the individual belongs to, and the context or community as well as patterns of resiliency across time for the subgroup in relation to his or her community. Fourthly, this conceptualization begins with understanding how the Black male organizes his personality to think about resiliency (Franklin, 1999). Understanding his criteria for resiliency is crucial to assessing his resiliency. It is imperative for the professional or scholarly expert to relinquish his "god's eye view" on human behavior and allow him (the Black male) to be the "master" or expert of deconstructing his experience.

Through a discussion on adolescent resiliency, Levitt, Selman and Richmond (1991) proposed that psychoeducational programs and researchers should explore how adolescents make meaning of risk-taking and at -risk behaviors. Particularly in cases where adolescents are deemed "deviant", their subjective experiences are often observed as tainted, disturbed or misguided, thus usually never seriously considered. Levitt, Selman, and Richmond (1991) argue that personal meaning is defined through accepting the person's belief system regarding their resilient or non-resilient behavior. Dieser, Sapyta and Suh (1998) assert that it is dangerous to impose our universal stamps of what are good and bad health outcomes. They propose that in addition to the investigator's analysis of what is resiliency, a study should include the person's subjective account of
resiliency. More specifically, they note that investigators should account for what they refer to as the individual’s subjective well-being. The concept of subjective well-being suggests that the individual’s personal definition and account health or resiliency be taken seriously. Their appraisal of who one is, how one feels, and what makes one feel satisfied is considered legitimate. In response to Ryff and Singers’ (1998) target article, Diener, Sapyta, & Suh (1998) stated,

Ryff and Singer seem to mean by health a universally good life that can be objectively verified by scientists. Thus, they follow in the footsteps of Abraham Maslow in their search for universal and objective characteristics of mental-health that are free of particular cultural values...the value of subjective well-being is downplayed...Subjective well being is a person’s evaluation of his or her life. This valuation can be in terms of cognitive states such as satisfaction with one’s marriage, work, and life, and it could be in terms of ongoing affect (i.e. the presence of positive emotions and moods, and the absence of unpleasant affect) (p.34).

If we allow ourselves to accept the inner-city Black, man’s personal organization and definition of resiliency, then perhaps we can better understand his world. The impoverished Black male has always been told what is wrong with him. Traditionally, the social sciences have never allowed for his accounts of the problem, nor how he responds to it. Instead, as a result of the inability to resist the temptation of making meaning for him, we inappropriately frame his lived experiences. Nonetheless, with regard to the importance of subjective well being, Diener, Sapyta, and Suh (1998) further contend:

Inherent in the concept of subjective well-being is that people have diverse values, goals, and strengths. Thus, we allow people to decide whether their lives are satisfying based on their individual values, goals, and life circumstances... Each of us would probably prefer, however, that we decide on the degree of importance of these characteristics in our own life, and that they are not dictated to us by experts. If a person is satisfied with her life, she probably has the characteristics that she deems important (p.35).
Furthermore, in listening to the young Black man’s personal accounts, it will be easier to place his behavior in a socio-historical context. His explanation could potentially serve as the conduit to understanding him in relation to the larger society. Listening to his story and how he navigates through society will help put his plight in perspective. In some instances, the economically impoverished Black man may be what some characterize as misoriented or misguided (Wilson, 1990). However, in allowing the inclusion of subjective well-being in our analysis, then perhaps we would learn that in some cases his “misorientation” might be the very thing holding him in place and function as a source of resiliency. In other words, imposing subjective values of what is good and bad may be more harmful than helpful. The drive as psychological experts should always be to place his behavior in a socio-historical context, particularly if certain observed behaviors are found to be prevalent as opposed to isolated instances. As researchers, we should resist the oversimplification of labeling his behavior as a function of the here and now. This inability to take into account his subjective well-being may be a poignant example of our misuse and/or abuse as psychological professionals. Ouellette and DiPlacido (2001) offered insight on the notion of imposing value systems on the lives of others:

The intricacies of how negative health outcomes are defined also holds for the positive outcomes that have been simply assumed as good and desirable…One needs to ask, however: Positive and enhancing according to whom, in what circumstances, and when?…The job is not to make the research enterprise value free but rather to find ways to keep researchers ever-cognizant of the value judgments that are being made. (p.186-187)

A reconceptualization of resiliency should take into account a sociological perspective that includes race, sex and class (Blankenship, 1998; Gordon & Song, 1994). Such a theoretical perspective aptly frames experiences of resiliency specific to inner-city
Black men. With specific regard to social class, it serves the interests of maintaining and supporting a capitalist economy that young Black men do not become resilient in the traditional sense (Gordon & Song, 1994). Many are needed to fall short of the mainstream benchmark of success so that others can prosper socio-economically. As a result of his historical experiences in the United States, the Black male is a prime candidate for filling in the needed slots at the bottom rung of the economic ladder since he is already largely feared and demonized.

Wilson (1990) stated that there was a relationship between poverty and wealth that influenced the determination of criminal behaviors. In this analysis, poverty in the United States has been a crime committed against African Americans. Poverty represented the “deliberate, viscous robbery, exploitation, and extortion of the labor, wealth and resources of the African community by the European/White American community” (p.89). Conversely, the exposure to wealth, the wealthy, and the material and social benefits associated with it through direct and indirect experience served as a source of criminality.

Scholarly communities are quick to charge the impoverished Black male with being at fault for his inability to economically thrive, thus labeling him non-resilient. Within this framing, perhaps the majority community is equally to blame for the black males’ “non-resilience” because his so-called inability to economically thrive relies on the mainstreams populations’ prosperity. Gordon and Song (1994) say:

Some behavior and conditions appear to enable individuals to compete more efficiently than others. However, competition to succeed may be the insurmountable problem, since if a competition has winners there must also be losers. Seeking to better understand how some members of the population at high risk of failure succeed despite the odds, and examining what has worked for them, may not provide meaningful solutions to the
broader problem of mass underdevelopment and failure in the low-status populations of society. Many African Americans are struggling to succeed, and are failing, but many are struggling only to survive. Moreover, in a society such as ours, structured so that many must fail in order that a few succeed, even orchestrating the life conditions and experiences of all persons to improve the likelihood of success would not eliminate failure. There is not room at the top of society for everyone. (p. 41-47)

Also, I would be remiss if I did not mention that in addition to the larger social critique of why he is poor and/or non-resilient, the Black Male is also his worst critic (Feagin, 1975; Hoschild, 1995; Hunt, 1996; Klugel & Smith, 1986; Weis, Fine, Shepard, & Foster, 1999). Although the Black male generally is consciously aware of the contributing social factors to his socioeconomic plight, he is still more apt to hold himself most accountable (Weis, Fine, Shepard, & Foster, 1999) In terms of causes of poverty and understanding resiliency in relation to the Black male, it is imperative to recognize that this is a complex notion.

In summary, the construct of resiliency should be understood through the inner-city Black males' personal account and its relationship to social class and the notion of "success" in the United States. Such an extremely complex and multidimensional analysis has been referred to as the interface between the personality and social structure (Ryff, 1987). Understanding resiliency through a systems approach as well as the personality will provide a comprehensive explanation that is past due.

Blackness as a Site of Resilience

Although the functions of African American ethnicity/Blackness goes beyond the warding off of racially hostile experiences (Bowman, 1989), Blacks have, nonetheless, relied upon their heritage or ethnicity to enhance the psychological wherewithal needed for racist encounters. In the earlier 20th century, DuBois, through his discussions of
double-consciousness posited that Blacks use their ethnicity to navigate the world and endure the racist climates of traditional institutions such as colleges, corporations, the legal system and communities. I argue that many Black men from the inner-city develop resilient factors by drawing on what it means to be 'a Black man' who lives within the dynamic African American community, present and historical. Spencer (1995) argued that as a result of the "societal inconsistencies" which Black males experience, some "superficially" use their "cultural identity" to deal with these inconsistencies.

The superficial use of cultural identity for Spencer meant the use of one's ethnicity to subdue or quell social difficulties motivated by racist factors, by those who do not maintain an in-depth understanding of their ethnic heritage. Spencer's discussion demonstrated one of the practical functions of ethnicity. Although the Black male, in this case, may not be well-informed of his people's historical and present cultural standing, he still knows it exists and thus draws upon it. Spencer offered an example of wearing a Malcolm X hat without having a legitimate understanding of Malcolm X's legacy, to illustrate how one superficially uses cultural identity.

Furthermore, not only does one's ethnicity allow for social navigation through racially hostile or unfriendly climates, but, more specifically, ethnic identity functions, in part, to protect African Americans from inevitable day-to-day stressors (Bowman, 1989; Cross, Strauss, & Flagen-Smith, 1999; Franklin, 1999). One of the key functions of Black identity is its ability to buffer (Cross, 1991; Franklin, 1999). Buffering filters or minimizes the "sting" of anticipated racist encounters. Buffering is a mechanism used by African Americans for what they perceive will be a negative experience (Cross, Strauss, & Flagen-Smith, 1999). The community of the inner-city, young adult Black male may
in and of itself serve as a constant reminder of blatant and indirect encounters of racism. I argue further that the inner-city Black male, in part, identifies with his Blackness to offset the cruel realities present in his community.

Researchers have also proposed code switching to be a function of ethnic identity (Anderson, 1990; Franklin, 1999). In this case African Americans will alter their language and/or bodily behavior to make the person(s) they are addressing feel more comfortable. However, it is important to note that, unlike buffering, the code switcher desires to make the other party feel comfortable with the intent of increasing his (Payne & Brown, in press) social position (Franklin, 1999). Anderson (1990) in the following excerpt offers a detailed example of code switching by Black men when among police.

Young black males often are particularly deferential toward the police even when they are completely within their rights and have done nothing wrong. Most often this is not out of blind acceptance or respect for the "law," but because they know the police can cause them hardship. When confronted or arrested, they adopt a particular style of behavior to get on the policeman’s good side. Some simply “go limp” or pointy ask, “What seems to be the trouble, officer?” This pose requires a deference that is in sharp contrast with the youth’s more usual image, but many seem to take it in stride or not even to realize it. Because they are concerned primarily with staying out of trouble, and because they perceive the police as arbitrary in their use of power, many defer in an equally arbitrary way. Because of these pressures, however, black youths tend to be especially mindful of the police and, when they are around, to watch their own behavior in public. (p. 196)

Franklin (1999) argued that racial identity is at the heart of what he has coined invisibility syndrome. Black men who use their ethnicity as a catalyst to function day-to-day may realize that mainstream society is not as rewarding or tolerant of ethnic pride, thus, rendering the Black male to a state of cultural invisibility. African American ethnic pride is often demonstrated through clothing, braids or hair locks, walking mannerism,
speech, readings, discussions on Blackness or any of the like. Also, African Americans have developed what has been called a "sixth sense" to detect less salient racial encounters (Majors & Billson, 1993). The sixth sense enables the individual to recognize the subtle assaults. An enhanced sixth sense potentially increases the chances for developing the invisibility syndrome, unless the person has the support and racial savvy to negotiate the situation. When the individual is neither supported nor developed the wherewithal, he or she may position himself or herself to confront the problem, remove themselves from the situation, or are dismissed and overlooked by the perpetrators.

Franklin (1999) believes that there are seven dynamic factors that characterize ethnic invisibility: a) no recognition, b) no satisfaction, c) no validation, d) no legitimacy, e) no respect, f) no dignity, and g) no identity.

Within the African American community, the Black male's racial pride is respected or reinforced as partly a buffer to social injustices. There he can relish in his Blackness and use his experiences with his culture (good and bad) to move through society. For many Black men, using their culture as a lens to comprehend life is a necessity in managing race-related stress (Franklin, 1999). Moreover, for Black men who primarily stay within their inner-city community, a sense of Black consciousness in part functions to make constructive meaning out of a faltering community. Phrases like "I am Black and I am proud" or "Black is beautiful" are often shouted in sincere love or appreciation and in protest at block parties, community parades, organizational meetings, within private spaces, on the "block," or other similar intra-community social affairs (Caplan, 1977). Within a community that supports and fosters ethnicity and Blackness, there is an inverse relationship to the seven factors that lead to the development of
invisibility. Those factors can be turned on their heads and reused to bolster resiliency (Franklin, 1999).

Caplan (1977) offered another example of inner-city Black men drawing upon their ethnic identity to become more resilient. Caplan argues that Black male militants and rioters demonstrated higher levels of racial pride in comparison to non-Black militants and rioters. Black male rioters and some militants obviously cause destruction to the community; however, many do so in response to perceived racial frustration. Although they are considered destructive within the community Black militants and rioters because of racial frustration rely upon factors attached to their ethnic heritage to persist and resist. Their militancy are indicators of racial pride as opposed to self-hatred (Caplan, 1977). Caplan stated, “Marx (1967) reported that militants prefer Negro newspapers and magazines, are better able to identify Negro writers and civil rights leaders, and have a more positive appreciation of Negro culture than non-militants” (p. 317).

Street life

In discussing street life, I have no intention to glamorize street life or justify those who engage in illegal activities. However, it is useful to understand how such a lifestyle evolved with regard to Black men. Black men who lead a street life are expected to be regularly active in “gang” involvement, spend much of their time on street corners or on the “block” as well as participate in illegal activities to get an income. Also, Black men who involved in street life are expected to demonstrate a mass rejection of mainstream society, thus primarily investing much of their time within a street culture as opposed to other areas such as the church or N.A.A.C.P. The activities of street life are obviously
broader than the aforementioned states. However, I use the above criterion as a working
definition of street life. Researchers have proposed that street life and/or "deviant"
behaviors associated with street life (e.g., gang involvement, "chillin' on the corner,
illegally obtaining income, physical violent behavior, substance abuse), are, at best, forms
of negative and maladaptive coping, vulnerability to adversity and/or unhealthy responses
to challenging day-to-day occurrences (Bowman, 1989; Freitas & Downey, 1998;
Garmezy, 1991; Spencer, 1995; Zimmerman et al., 1999). It is my position that an
alternative view may be necessary.

It is has been argued that an emphasis on coping or resiliency should include an
analysis of the benefits of stressful or high-risk situations (Aldwin, Sutton, & Lachman,
1996). I believe young adult, inner-city Black men who involve themselves in behavior
associated with street life do so partially as a means to establish resiliency. There is a
danger in presuming resiliency only exists when it is classified as a positive outcome or
under positive circumstances. To exclude potential sites of resiliency because they are not
attached to the characteristics of a positive outcome ignores the complex functions of
resiliency. Furthermore, this presumptuously suggests that certain value systems should
prevail while other value systems are regarded as inaccurate or inappropriate. Research
within recent years has alerted us to the dangers of this logic (Gordon & Song, 1994;
Massey, Cameron, Ouellette & Fine, 1998; Ouellette & DiPlacido, 2001; Diener, Sapyta
& Suh, 1998). Gordon and Song (1994) stated,

The point is that the conditions we label as resilience, resistance, invincibility and so forth are relative, situational, and attributional. Thus, the assumed meaning of the construct may have greater significance for the researchers who define or investigate it, than for the person or persons who experience it. If you think I am a 'loser,' and I think I am a 'winner,' whose classification is to apply? (p. 31)
In exploring inner-city street life as a site of resiliency it is important to briefly discuss this in relation to resistance. What some may deem as deviant behavior may be more accurately framed as acts of resistance, which, in part serve to bolster resiliency in the young Black male (Caplan, 1977; Kelley, 1994; Parker & Kleiner, 1977). Kelley (1994) used the term infrapolitics to describe how resistance inconspicuously serves as a vital function for the Black working class in the early and mid part of the twentieth century in the fight for civil rights. Kelley (1994) described infrapolitics as, “The daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movements...[the] political history of oppressed people cannot be understood without reference to infrapolitics, for these daily acts have a cumulative effect on power relations” (p.8).

Kelley offered examples of Black working-class infrapolitics, and explained they caused problems with White bus drivers and customers particularly at the end of weekend nights after social activities. Kelley suggested that members of the Black working-class would intentionally disturb White passengers, bump into White bus riders, and/or demand their appropriate change (when it was expected that they take back whatever change they received). Also, Kelley posited that demonstrations of infrapolitics were witnessed among the working class through how they dressed in nontraditional garb they could find to party all night in clubs. What could be deemed as rebel rousing when in a context of resistance is reframed as civil disobedience or a demand for equality.

Blanket assumptions, or quickly casting behavior as delinquent, deviant or violent may in fact be misinterpretations of conscious oriented behavior. It may be more accurate to frame some instances of socially undesirable behavior as acts of resistance, which
factor into the notion of resiliency for Black men in inner-city communities. In appropriately contextualizing or framing street life behavior we are better equipped to understand how Black men who lead a street life organize meanings of resiliency.

The Black family is critical in assisting Blacks in the United States through their social turmoil (Burlew, Banks, & McAdoo, 1992; Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2000; Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1995; Kelley, 1994). In many instances, a strong sense of camaraderie is demonstrated for Black men through a new and/or extended family found on inner-city streets for Black men. This new and/or extended street family can, in many instances, work like traditional families and help Black men feel adequate, respected, and accomplished. The behaviors and attitudes associated with street life may in result in psychological and/or physical outcomes that inhibit the optimal functioning of the community and self. Although socially undesirable, Black men who engage in street life oriented activities have found innovative ways to endure life (Parker & Kleiner, 1977; Wilson, 1987). It is extremely valuable to recognize the innovatively adaptive mechanisms used by inhabitants of the inner-city. Wilson (1987) said:

… Aspects of ghetto behavior described as pathological in the studies of the mid-1960’s were reinterpreted or redefined as functional because, it was argued, blacks were demonstrating their ability to survive and even flourish in an economically depressed and racist environment. Ghetto families were portrayed as resilient and capable of adapting creatively to an oppressive society. (p.9)

Furthermore, research has found inner-city African American men to endorse many of the same values supported by Whites in the United States (Wilson, 1996; Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1995; Hochschild, 1995). Some of these values include education, a nuclear family and non-violence. However, in many instances this traditional value system is impractical. Wilson (1996) asserted,
Outsiders may observe their overt behavior and erroneously assume that they regard this illegitimate income as rightful. Thus, in some cases, ghetto related behavior might not reflect internalized values at all. People are simply adapting to difficult circumstances. The more often certain behavior such as the pursuit of illegal income is manifested in a community, the greater will be the readiness on the part of some residents of the community to find this behavior 'not only convenient but also morally appropriate.' They may endorse mainstream norms against this behavior in the abstract but then provide compelling reasons and justifications for this behavior, given the circumstances in their community. (p.70-71)

I do not mean to present ethnicity and street life as potential sites of resiliency that are static and operate independently of one another. With regard to resiliency (as well as other constructs), the human personality is more complex than this. I explicitly propose that it is feasible for a Black man to draw on multiple sites of resiliency in the inner-city. For instance, it is possible for the inner-city, young Black male to be a member of the 5 Percent Nation (a Nationalist religious organization), be involved in street life as well as maintain a heightened level of Black consciousness. In this example all three of the sites are used together with the intention or enabling resilient factors is the inner-city Black male. These would be considered the multiple uses of gathering places (Franklin, 1999).

It is my position that it is unusual (not impossible) for the Black male to have only one site of resiliency. In addition to observing how multiple sites intertwine, the sites of resiliency should be understood as fluid processes that vary and change over time. Put simply, the sites of resiliency present today may not be the same ten years. Also, present and forthcoming sites of resiliency become more or less salient at different points in one’s life. For example, if the inner-city Black man draws on street life and ethnicity as his primary sites of resiliency, it is important to recognize that today street life could have been more present or salient while his spirituality could have been less relevant.
However, over time, his spiritual site of resiliency may become more prominent as a result of a concerted effort or need to develop this site.

Furthermore, sites of resiliency are just not present in inner-city, young Black men. Instead, Payne and Brown (in press) suggest from their research they are developed by most communities and/or subgroups. Nonetheless, in dealing with the Black male, it is important for researchers and/or service providers to recognize prevailing sites of resiliency, particularly since the Black male has been historically mischaracterized. Put simply, where are the varied and numerous spaces that Black men learn to be resilient?

African-centric Framing

The history of scientific racism and the use of Eurocentric psychology as a form of oppression for people of color has been well documented (Burlew, 1992; Fanon, 1963; Houston, 1990; Jones, 1980, Richards, 1997). This psychological system exists to maintain oppression justify the mistreatment of others. I assert that the intrinsic bias of an Eurocentric paradigm does permit the experiences of the oppressed to be recognized. It is only when the experiences of the oppressed are considered within a cultural context that a true understanding of their experiences is created gleaned. Once seen in relationship to a series of other forces, from a position of liberation, are the behaviors once thought as pathological or a sign of mental illness then be defined as reactions to an oppressive and dominating system (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1970; Utsey, Bolden, & Brown, 2001).

Recognizing the uniqueness of the Black experience and the historical misrepresentation of the psychological functioning of Blacks when using a Eurocentric standard, researchers point out the need to relate Black behavior only to Black norms (Clark, 1965; Baughman, 1971; Barnes, 1972; Baldwin, 1981; Parham, White, & Ajamu,
1999; Utecy, Bolden, & Brown, 2001). Taking into consideration that the worldview of
the researcher impacts the framing of the research, Africentric researchers contend that it
is improbable that a researcher not imbued with Black culture would have the perception,
psychological sets, and other predispositions that would allow for an Africentric
interpretation of the data (Azibo, 1988; Houston, 1990; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985).
Azibo (1988) pointed out that the advances in African personality theory highlight the
lack of knowledge and understanding which traditionally trained non-African therapists
and the “conceptually incarcerated professionals” (p.220) possess and underscores their
need for compensatory education. Azibo (1998) also stressed the necessity of an
Africentric perspective for Black researchers stating, “Otherwise, without the Africentric
conceptual system the Black researcher can fall prey to conceptually arresting
psychology of oppression inherent in Eurocentric conceptual dominance… The Black
researchers ideation, beliefs, and concepts would probably be constrained to Eurocentric
(p.222).”

During the 1960’s, with the outgrowth of the U.S. civil rights movement, Black
scholars, scientists, academicians, and practitioners began developing a body of
knowledge which challenged mainstream psychology (Richards, 1997). In the United
States, this genre initiated what is now considered Black Psychology. Black Psychology
was marked by the emergence of African American psychologists, the introduction of
alternative theoretical paradigms, the study of culture and race psychology, and revealing
some clear distinctions between Black behaviors and White behaviors (Houston, 1990;
Richards, 1997).
There is a growing awareness that existing theories and research in psychology do not consider the unique experiences of people of color, women, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals within their cultural context (Almeida, 1994, 1998; Carter and McGoldrick, 1991; Katnbon, 1998; McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989; Futerotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001; Richards, 1997). One explanation is the faulty assumption that Eurocentric psychological theories and research can be uniformly and blindly applied across a variety of cultural groups (Azibo, 1998; Houston, 1990). Regarding, the images and perceptions of African Americans, the biologically inferior Negro image was replaced with the damaged Negro image and maintained by research, theory, and practice. These representations ascribed a non-differentiated universal psychology character to all African Americans as determined by white behavior, and disregarded the existence of any genuinely autonomous African American culture, while focusing exclusively on African American males (Richards, 1997).

The historical as well as current paradigm for human psychology in the Western world reflects middle-class, male, heterosexual, and Caucasian or European ancestry. This limited framework of human functioning has remained the baseline from which the rest of the world has been measured. With such an erroneous conceptualization of normality, mental health, and course of development, only those possessing the aforementioned characteristics could be considered healthy (Akbar, 1985; Almeida, 1998; Burlew, Banks & McAdoo, 1992).

Houston (1990) identified this framing as flawed and proposed that the apparent discrepancy between the psychology of Blacks and Whites lies not with the fundamental axioms, but with their relative applicability. He stated that people of African origin have
experienced and are still experiencing— a common stimulus that differs qualitatively and quantitatively from those of other peoples of the world. The shared experiences result in a mediation of challenges that manifest in ethnically distinct behaviors, by which one must constantly adjust to the world as it is perceived. The cumulative effect of resultant overt and covert behavior produces values, standards, customs, and traditions that eventually become racially singular. Subsequently, this uniqueness is demonstrated through a) learning, b) perception, c) motivation, d) personality development, and e) an overall worldview that serves to differentiate between the psychological characteristics of the displaced people of African descent and other cultures (Ani, 1994; Houston, 1990; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999). Moreover, when considering the African genesis, followed by the experience of slavery and subsequent oppressions, the environmental impingements on Black Americans has resulted in a neo-culture distinctive from that of the Eurocentric norm (Ani, 1994; Houston, 1996; Kambron, 1998; Parham, 1999).

The goals of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) provided me with a clearer picture of how to negotiate the infusion or interjection of a Eurocentric paradigm and Black populations. The ABPsi goals contain the proposal that Black psychologists and those working with Black populations attempt to: 1) promote constructive understanding of Black people through positive approaches to research; 2) develop an approach to psychology that is consistent with the experiences of Black people; and 3) define mental-health in consonance with newly established psychological concepts and standards regarding Black people.

Another ABPsi objective is to develop theories and methodologies for the scientific study of behavior and consciousness of people of African heritage with a view
towards improvising their life conditions (Houston, 1990). The ABPsi mission explains that instead of limiting discussions and debates concerning the nature of psychology (behavior or consciousness) that the synchronous relationship between consciousness and behavior should be explored. Through subsequent discussions of behavior, the level of consciousness at which the behavior was performed, coupled with the meanings, significance, and impact of those behaviors should be critically analyzed in a context (Azibo, 1988; Houston, 1990; Myers, 1993).

If a new paradigm of analysis and interpretation is being proposed, I submit that a new standard for research with Black populations be employed as well. Azibo (1988) provided a structural framework for emic (within-cultural) research for personality, clinical, and social-psychology research to be applied to African Americans. It is critical that researchers recognize that “the Black personality is a race specific or genetically grounded construct which 1) is fundamental to individual and race maintenance and 2) which is manifested in behavior via the conscious, psychological operations of the individual” (Azibo, 1988, p. 221). It is at the conscious level that individual differences in the Black personality are observable. Azibo asserted that research must attend to the product of psychological Blackness as well as the process of how it is developed. Product oriented Black personality research is functional in nature. It elucidated the role of Africentricity in psychological functioning by addressing the overt and covert effects of psychological Blackness on Black behavior. It seeks to answer questions like: Of what benefit is Africentricity to Blacks?

Azibo (1988) presented the theory-driven steady state approach to facilitate product-oriented Black personality research. This approach is utilized when Black people
constitute all, or at least a substantial part, of the participant in the study. In this approach, Black personality plays a significant role in virtually all aspects of Black social and psychological functioning and is assessed and incorporated as a major variable in the research. This unambiguous approach maintains the integrity of the research in centralizing the Black personality in the discussion. The approach has three steps: 1) constructs used in researching the Black personality are selected only from theoretical positions about psychological Blackness, 2) instruments conceptually derived from the constructs are used to assess Africanness in the sample, and 3) data collection is completed and hypotheses are tested. This is the framing of my proposed research.

I further posit that in addition to utilizing an Africentric framework for theory and research, the overarching framework should be based in a psychology of liberation and a critical critique. The traditional conceptualizations and techniques aimed at addressing the deleterious effects of racism and oppression experienced by African Americans have been a part of the problem. They have added to the status quo by encouraging the oppressed to adapt an oppressive social structure (Bulhan, 1985; Ivey, 1995). Instead, there should be a culturally relevant approach to theory, counseling, and research based on consciousness raising, and a collective action toward self-determination (Almeida, 1998; Akbar, 1996; Kambon, 1998; Fanon, 1963; Utsey, Bolden & Brown, 2001).

In chapter 1 co-authored by with Shawn Utsey and Mark Bolden (2001), we provided a sociohistorical context for the experiences of African Americans in systems of oppression and a contemporary analysis of the remnants of slavery and white supremacy. We proposed that through a liberation psychology the humanity of the oppressed can be reaffirmed, and they can begin to combat the racism which once plagued their lives; in so
much as they can develop new coping mechanisms against future onslaughts of oppression and white supremacy. Couching an Africentric framework within a psychology of liberation enables African Americans to draw upon their Africanity for self-preservation, self-determination, and ultimately, liberation.

Utey, Bolden and Brown (2001) outlined a psychology of liberation from a Faroan perspective:

Efforts toward the liberation of African Americans must be directed at changing causes, not just a reduction in associated symptoms. Moreover, healers seek to help the oppressed empower themselves to solve their own problems as opposed to fostering dependency and powerlessness (Freire, 1970). Instead of encouraging the individualization of oppression-related syndromes, healers must push for a collective action among the oppressed that has as its goal the deconstruction of the oppressive social order (Bulhan, 1985; Wilson, 1998). Essential to the deconstruction of the oppressive social structure is raising the awareness of oppressed persons regarding the nature and consequences of their oppression, including the historical and societal context of White supremacy and domination (Comas-Diaz, Lykes, & Alarcón, 1998; Freire, 1970).

A psychology of liberation is not focused on the immediate and private distress of individuals but on encouraging members of oppressed groups to view their predicament as a collective experience requiring a collective response (Bulhan, 1985). Individuals are helped to understand how collectivism, interdependence, and intersubjectivity are the natural order of human behavior (Kambon, 1992, 1998; Myers, 1993).

It is my position that researchers begin to view and interpret the attitudes, beliefs and core values of individuals within their historical and contemporary contexts. Analysis must be conducted within a context that supports and affirms the worldview and orientation of the population being studied. More specifically, all efforts must be aimed towards total liberation. Accordingly, an analysis of Blackness and the Black personality development of young inner-city Black men should be conducted within an Africentric
paradigm. An Africentric paradigm provides a set of conceptual categories and properties that have been gleaned from the evidence generated by traditional African culture, and its correspondent worldview (Myers, 1993).

* Africentric Theories of Blackness/Black Consciousness *

There are several Africentric scholars who have outlined their framings of African/ Black Personality. Within their conceptualizations, they have developed models of the origins of Black consciousness, its development, functions, and how it is manifested when it is not fully functioning. In this section, I present a synopsis of Africentric models of Black personality development/ Blackness as proposed by Myers (1993; Myers et al., 1991), Nobles (1991), Akbar (1991; 1995), Kambon (1998) and Williams (1981). This review is followed by my critique of the Africentric models. My critique highlights some of the discourse in Black psychology and the inherent biases which exist within Africentric frameworks.

* Myers’ Optimal Theory *

Myers (1993) proposed a model of identity development based in Optimal Psychology. This model is referred to as the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development (OTAID). Optimal theory is a framework and conceptual system which originated among Black people who would likely be labeled African descendants. The optimal theory/worldview was described as optimal because it was structured to yield maximally positive experience in a holistic way. It is couched in a holistic worldview. Its ontology implies that reality is inseparably spiritual and material. Individuals are unique manifestations of the spirit; therefore, self-worth is intrinsic and independent of external
criteria. The epistemological assumption is that self-awareness is the basis of all knowledge (Myers, 1993; Myers et al., 1991; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991).

Within optimal theory, the purpose of being is to gain self-knowledge, and consequently identity development. Myers et al. (1991) stated, "...self-knowledge is the process of coming to know who and what we are as unique expressions of infinite spirit. With this knowledge, individuals can integrate all apparent aspects of being (e.g., age, color, ethnicity, and size) into a holistic sense of self. In addition, self-knowledge includes full awareness of relationship to the ancestors, the yet unborn, nature, and community" (p. 57). It is the process of gaining a fuller and deeper understanding of the true essence of self. In order to fully understand this concept, people of African descent must accept that each is an individual and a unique expression of infinite spirit. As people become more aware of whom they are, the actual process of learning about who they are becomes their focus and purpose for existence. Once this occurs, external knowledge loses meaning, and the focus remains on gaining a greater self-awareness.

Myers et al. (1991) continues by stating, "Applying optimal theory to identity development provides a unifying system for understanding and conceptualizing the identity development process and describes the effect of oppression on self-identity" (p.58). The process of identity development occurs in a predictable sequence, but the time individuals spend in a given phase may vary widely because of factors such as zeitgeist (a specific time period) or environment. Identity development is seen as a continuous process of interaction between individuals and the sociocultural environments that they encounter. The OTAID model leads to examining peoples' worldviews or relationships to the universe, not just their attitudes. Worldview is seen as the essence or
substance of an individual's views that are lived and may be influenced by observation, examination, reflection, discussion, and conclusions. Within this framework, the self is not fragmented (race, sexual preference, gender); hence, individuals draw upon their multiple identities as opportunities or means to self-knowledge. Through the process of self-knowledge, self-discovery, and self-acceptance, fragmented individuals begin to view themselves holistically. The model is neither linear nor categorical, but rather reflects an understanding of the essence of the individual and who one is at a particular moment (Myers, 1993; Myers et al., 1991).

Myers (1993) suggested that racism, sexism, rigid sex-roles, and other forms of oppression have been detrimental to the Blacks as individuals and within family contexts. Oppression is seen as self-alienating and yielding a fragmented sense of self. The environmental restraints from the psycho-social and physical environments shape how the individual perceives the world. Depending upon where an individual is on the OTAID schema, oppression may serve a useful function. It may provide the opportunity to emerge into a more complete and true awareness of self (Myers, 1993; Myers et al., 1991).

Myers et al. (1991) highlighted the seven phases of OTAID. The phases begin at Phase 0 to indicate the absence of conscious awareness. The phases are as follows:

**Phase 0: Absence of Conscious Awareness** - "It is." Individuals lack awareness of being. This absence of self-knowledge is generally associated with inferiority. Developmentally, people do not yet formulate a sense of self as separate, but rather possess a sense of innocence. All life is accepted without judgment.

**Phase 1: Individuation** - "The world is the way it is." Individuals lack awareness of any view of self other than the one to which they are initially introduced, and they rarely assign particular meaning or value to any aspect of their identities. Family values solidify personal identity. Individuals may lack awareness of the part of self that is devalued by others. To the extent that certain aspects of
individuals’ identities may be reinforced by society, they may be less likely to move from this phase.

**Phase 2: Dissonance** - "I’m beginning to wonder who I am." Individuals affectively explore those aspects of self that may be devalued by others. This experience triggers conflict between who individuals believe they are and false images of self as inferior. Feelings of anger, guilt, confusion, insecurity, isolation, or sadness may accompany the encounter with the devalued sense of self. Consciously or unconsciously, individuals may internalize sociocultural values upholding the negative self-definition.

**Phase 3: Immersion** - "I focus my energy on people like me." Individuals fully embrace others like themselves who are devalued. This acceptance enables people to learn about and appreciate the devalued aspects of themselves. Individuals may "immerse" themselves, directly, vicariously, or both in the culture of the devalued group. As a part of the group, individuals may feel excitement, joy, pride, and a sense of belonging. Negative feelings regarding the perceived dominant group, including anger, distrust, and rage, may exist. Individuals may withdraw from, ignore, or reject the dominant group and its norms and values.

**Phase 4: Internalization** - "I feel good about who I know I am." Individuals have effectively incorporated feelings of worth associated with the salient aspects of self, resulting which results in an increased sense of security. The salient part of self is recognized as just one of several components of self-identity. With this expanded perspective, individuals can be more tolerant and accepting of others without threatening the sense of self.

**Phase 5: Integration** - "With my deeper understanding of myself I am changing my assumptions about the world." Individuals’ sense of self has developed into a stronger point of inner security, so that relationships and perceptions of others reflect this degree of inner peace. Individuals’ sense of community have deepened and expanded to more people because criteria of acceptance go beyond appearance. A conceptual switch is beginning to occur. Individuals begin to understand the true nature of oppression as reflecting the nature of one’s worldview. All people can oppress or be oppressed, depending upon one’s assumptions about one’s self and relationships to others.

**Phase 6: Transformation** - "It is I." The self is redefined toward a sense of personhood that includes the ancestors, those yet unborn, nature and community. Individuals have experienced a shift in worldview based on the realization of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things and are empowered to define their realities based on spiritual awareness rather than external circumstances. They have gone deeply into a holistic understanding and appreciation of their cultures and their histories, unifying with all humankind and with all life. The universe is understood as orderly, rational and personal. Increased understanding of the role of negativity in experience makes growth possible and the
developmental process of life harmonious. All forms of life are accepted and valued for their contributions to the greater good as a whole.

Wade Nobles' Theory

Psychologist Wade Nobles (1991) also proposed a model of African/Black Personality development. His approach asserted that the basic core of the African personality is the Black self-concept. The Black Self-concept derives from the nature of the African worldview with an emphasis on Oneness with nature, Interdependence, and Oneness of Being. Noble’s African Self-concept is a “We’ness self-concept”, as opposed to an “I’ness self-concept”. The I’ness concept, which is central to European thought, presents awareness of self as unique and separate. Within the Black self-concept framing, the individual becomes conscious of his/her existence only in the context of one’s racial/ethnic group. Subsequently, one’s self-definition is dependent upon the corporate/collective definition the racial group (Floyd, 1996), i.e., the corporate-self (Kambo, 1998; Nobles, 1991).

The interdependence of the individual and to a group consciousness is referred to as the Oneness of Being relationship and within the African worldview; this translates to an extended definition of the self. The Oneness of Being is predicated on man/woman being an integrated and indispensable part of the universe. The ability for man/woman to be is because of one’s historical past as well as what one anticipates to be part of their historical future (Nobles, 1991). This interconnected relationship is based in an understanding of the African conception of the self, which is the belief that I am because We are, and because We are, therefore I am (Mbaĩ, 1970). Within this symbiotic relationship, “the collective consciousness ‘transcends’ the individual consciousness, and the individual consciousness ‘extends’ to include the collective consciousness” (Kambo, 1998).
Nobles suggests that African self-concept extends into the collective consciousness of African people.

The major components of the African Self-concept in Nobles' model encompass awareness of the self in the following terms: 1) one's historical past; 2) one's future/collective spirituality-consciousness; and 3) one's physical and collective self (i.e., individual and group self-concept). In this model, the African self-concept develops from the evolutionary production of African consciousness across the aforementioned three dimensions of experience (Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1991).

Nobles asserted that a discussion of the African self-concept cannot be held without recognizing the effect of African peoples being dominated, oppressed, and subjugated by European peoples. Nobles points out that any deviation from the African self-concept that may be observed in African people is a distortion of their natural state under European oppression. The example he uses is Africans living in the Americas. The domination and imposition of the European system of reality has caused psychological confusion among Black people. This confusion, according to Nobles, is based on the fact that the Euro-American tradition denies the African person his/her historical roots or the grounding of self within a social, spiritual and historical context of one's ethnic/racial group (Kamron, 1998; Nobles, 1991).

Na'im Akbar's Theory

Na'im Akbar (1991) developed an African-centered model of psychotherapy in which spiritual development is central to human development. According to this model, the core of African personality is Divine Substance -- a spiritual base/foundation having universal origin. In Akbar's theory, it is the African consciousness that forms the Black
personality. The African personality is based on the African worldview and is defined by and reflects Nature/Natural order. Akbar further contended that the spiritual substance reflects a deep inner-sense of Self that reaches back before the intuitions of the European mind and unites the African person with everything else in the universe (Akbar, 1984, 1991; Kambon, 1988; Queener & Martin, 2001).

The Divine Substance, or spirituality, in the Black personality is both conscious and unconscious. The Divine Substance is always active; it can be distorted but not destroyed. It must be conscious in order for Black psychological functioning to be considered effective. Awareness of the Divine core of the personality creates the awareness of self that enables a person to act in terms of one’s own enhancement, affirmation, and preservation (Akbar, 1984, 1991; Kambon, 1988).

In addition to identifying the nature of the African personality, Akbar (1991) creased a system to classify the mental disorders of African Americans extrapolated from the perspective of universal mental health. According to Akbar, mental illness is the result of a lack of balance between the different components of the self. The community of self is comprised of different components -- motors, senses, emotional ego, memory, reason, conscience and will. Queener and Martin (2001) further explained:

Motors are instinctual behaviors that move an individual toward pleasure or away from pain, senses are used to communicate with the external world, the emotional ego protects the individual from harm by responding to people and events on an affective level, memory retains experiences to learn and grow from past encounters, reason organizes and completes information experiences. (p. 114)

Accordingly, an individual must acquire self-knowledge in order to maintain or regain balance. By acquiring this self-knowledge, the individual decreases the external voices and begins to listen to the inner voice that connects the individual to his or her
Creator. An increased self-knowledge results in self-acceptance, self-help, self-

Akbar developed an Africentric system of classification for mental disorders that
occur for people of African descent when they experience limited self-awareness as a
result of oppression, racism, and colonization. The four disorders include: 1) the alien-
sself disorder, 2) the anti-self disorder, 3) the self-destructive disorder, and 4) the organic

People suffering from the alien-self disorder are represented by Africans who
have at the conscious level become alienated from their natural African orientation
through their internalization of a European worldview. They are oriented toward
materialistic goals and their self-worth is based upon the accumulating possessions.
These individuals deny the socioeconomic and historical realities of race, racism, and
European-supremacy oppression by striving to emulate the behaviors that reinforce an
European worldview. According to Akbar, individuals falling into this category have
assimilated into a lifestyle that, at its core, is alien to them and their natural African self-
consciousness. The result is that they end up living in a “no-man’s land,” unable to gain
acceptance by those whom they attempt to be like and unwilling to seek the acceptance of
those who are like them (Akbar, 1991; Kambon, 1998).

People of African descent classified with the anti-self disorder manifest similar
characteristics to the alien-self disorders, but also display both overt and covert hostility
toward Africanity and all that is associated with it. These individuals are psychologically
estranged from their natural selves, have internalized a European worldview, and are
explained, “The personal rejection of self for the purpose of becoming like the aggressor results in a form of psychological perversion which is at best only damaging to the African American community and at worst could be the instrument of destruction of our communities” (p.346). Relevant examples of these individuals would include Black politicians who make decisions to further their careers, policemen who beat Blacks out of vengeance, and businessmen who sacrifice their communities for profit. Akbar states that the apex of self-rejection is illustrated by choosing marriage partners from the alien group, i.e., selecting Europeans as mates. The mate represents the extension of oneself and a statement of who one is may be reflected in the identity of that person. He further proclaims that there is nothing inherently self-destructive in choosing an outer-group marriage partner, but when that partner has historically demonstrated being self-destructive, then this partnering is indicative of anti-self disorder (Akbar, 1991).

The third mental disorder within Akbar’s schema is the self-destructive disorders and refers to African behaviors that represent faulty and destructive attempts to cope and survive under the unnatural conditions of White/European supremacy domination. People with the self-destructive disorders are viewed as the most direct victims of oppression. These individuals have chosen personally and socially destructive means to alleviate immediate wants as a result of having doors to legitimate means of survival blocked. Pimps, pushers, prostitutes, addicts, alcoholics, and other conditions that are regarded as detrimental to the self and the community typify this. These individuals are neither necessarily anti-African nor fully alien to Africanity, but rather represent the direct victimized states of “survival-at-any-cost” and the “dog-eat-dog” mentality obscurely defined in personally destructive terms. The negative-destructive behavior may
be directed either against self or against other Africans in general (Akbar, 1991; Kambon, 1998).

Lastly, Akbar identified the typology for individuals who suffer from organic disorders. Organic disorders refer to dysfunctional behaviors by Africans that are the result of neurological, physiological and/or biochemical dysfunctions that have cultural oppression underpinnings. Viewed within this framing, the deprivation of material resources like proper nutrition, exposure to biochemical health hazards, proximity to landfills, and an adverse reaction to drugs which result in the onset of mental disorders occur as a consequence of European supremacy oppression of Africans. This group includes the severely mentally defective, the senile, ones with organic brain disorders, and most of the commonly recognized forms of schizophrenia (Akbar, 1991; Kambon, 1998).

Kambon’s Theory

Kambon (1998) proposed that the driving force of the African personality is the dynamic of African spirituality which is comprised of communalism and collectivism. “This deeply rooted African Spirituality acquires consciousness through experience, and this consciousness functions to direct, maintain-preserve, and fortify itself in the fulfillment of its inherent or genetically programmed thrust (propensity) toward African affirmation-empowerment, self-determination, and preservation” (Kambon, 1998). The African self-extension orientation (ASEO) and African self-consciousness (ASC) are the two major constructs of the model.

Kambon (1998) illustrated the functions of the ASEO and ASC:

More specifically, the ASC is made up of four components: 1) awareness/recognition of one’s (collective) African identity and cultural heritage; 2) general ideological and activity priorities placed on African survival, liberation and proactive/affirmative development; 3) specific activity priorities placed on (collective) self-knowledge and self-affirmation, i.e., Africentric values, customs, institution-building; 4) a posture of resolute resistance/defense against “anti-African/anti-Black” forces and threats to African survival in general.

In Kambon’s model, the ASC thrusts the personality system in the sociopolitical/ideological direction of African affirmation, survival maintenance, and self-determination. Under normal and natural conditions, the ASC and ASEO functions as a unified and undifferentiated system. It is possible for distortion and differentiation between the ACS and ASEO to occur when forced to function under unnatural environmental-experiential conditions. While functioning in a distorted state, the unconscious thrust toward affirmation remains true; it is the conscious surface level manifestation that reflects the distortion.

Within this context, African personality disorders occur through the pathological process of European-centered indoctrination of Africans. The indoctrination process
refers to "the intense, pervasive and prolonged condition of cultural oppression of Africans in America by Eurocentric cultural domination of the institutional infrastructures of the society (including the encroachment on the African family and community's natural self-affirming functions)" (Kambon, 1998). As a result of the European cultural oppression of African people, the European self-consciousness overcomes the ASC. The psychological and/or psychopathological condition resulting from this process is referred to as cultural misorientation.

The culturally misoriented are African Americans subscribing to an individualistic orientation, expressing anti-African/Black behavior, manifesting self-depreciating or self-destructive tendencies, who are exploitative and/or hostile to other African Americans. These individuals have a dominant European self-consciousness, and have internalized and promote the European survival thrust in their everyday psychological functioning and behavior, even at the expense of African survival. Cultural misorientation can range from a minimal, to a moderate to a severe disorder. Each stage signifies an increased propensity toward an Eurocentric framework. In order to minimize the impact of the cultural oppression and to develop strong and healthy ASC, Kambon (1992, 1998) proposed that African children be nurtured and socialized in African-centered environments or African-centered social learning/developmental space that involves the practice of African cultural rites, ceremonies, celebrations, and the reinforcement of African-centered values.

Robert L. Williams Theory

Williams (1981) referred to the basic core of Black personality as the Collective Black Mind. He used the term, "We/Us/1," to best characterize the African self-concept as
the core of Black personhood. WEUSI is the combination of the English terms, “We, Us, and I.” WEUSI has three distinguishing qualities: 1) Blackness, 2) Collectiveness, and 3) Naturalness (Kambon, 1998; Williams, 1981).

Blackness is the most predominating feature of WEUSI and consists of four major aspects: genetic Blackness, cultural Blackness, psychological Blackness, and spiritual Blackness. WEUSI serves as the storehouse for the basic Afrotypic traits. Genetic Blackness refers to the basic biological makeup and identification of Black people throughout the world. Genetic Blackness is inherited and evidenced by skin and neuro-melanin.

The second form of Blackness, cultural Blackness, is acquired through the socialization thrust or function of traditional Black institutions, e.g., Black family, the Black church, the Black community, historically Black colleges and universities, and barber shops. Psychological Blackness refers to Black awareness and Black consciousness. Williams proposes that although all people of African descent have psychological Blackness, it must be developed and cultivated through a process of Black cultural-specific socialization called “Afroizing.”

Fourthly, spiritual Blackness is best conceptualized by the concept of “soul.” This refers to feelings of unity and oneness with other Blacks. It is the sense of collectivity, togetherness, and unified rhythm that Black people feel in general with each other (Kambon, 1998; Williams, 1981).

Another distinguishing feature of WEUSI is collectiveness, which is separate for the connectedness of spiritual Blackness. Collectiveness refers to the common or shared Africanity among Black people. Collectiveness is a deep part the Black nature at all
levels (individual, group, community, nation, world). Collectiveness also indicates the value placed on pulling together and working toward common goals.

The third feature of WEUSI is naturalness. Naturalness represents the purest unadulterated forms of Black behavior and function such as: a) Black-specific behaviors; b) unlearned Black behaviors such as unity, commonality, spirituality; and c) rhythm. Within this framework, it is unnatural for Blacks to engage in "disempowering" behaviors. However it is natural for Blacks to engage in empowering behaviors such as forming families, groups, organizations, and networks (Kambon, 1998; Williams, 1981).

Critique

Much of Africentric psychology and its models were initially developed based on a preponderance of observational research and qualitative measures. Qualitative research methods have been critiqued as not having the scientific rigor of quantitative data (Patton, 1980, 2001). Although, observational research and qualitative data analysis are valid and appropriate, more empirical data establishing the validity of the Africentric paradigms are needed. Africentric researchers have been encouraged to conduct empirical studies to validate theories, establish norms, and assess the applicability of theorized concepts on a variety of populations (Azibo, 1988; Houston, 1990; Jones, 1991: Kambon, 1998, Utsey, 1998; Utsey & Fosnototto, 1996). Despite the lack of research to validate Africentric models of development, Africentric researchers have begun developing scales and other assessment tools to capture the complex and multidimensional experiences of African Americans, which are based on solid scientific methods. Africentric psychologists recognize their research undergoes greater scrutiny and attempt to include
critical components that are lacking within Eurocentric psychology, such as culture, class, gender, and race (Richards, 1997).

I also contend that Africentric psychology promotes an idealized sense of Africanity and an idealized sense of African culture. Many of the presentations of identity development and healthy functioning, although attainable, may have not existed in the manner which they are presented. For example, not all Africans value collectivism wholly and deny the drive for individual attainment and financial rewards at the risk of hurting their brethren. Undoubtedly, the encroachment of Europeans and the demolition of African culture has devastated the psychological functioning of African people and their descendents (Ani, 1994), however, the idealized sense of Africa and African culture gives the impression that there was no dysfunction, disorder, or lack of mental-health in African peoples prior to the European contact. This idealized perspective and sense of Africanity does not fully recognize the totality of the human experience nor does it provide a forum for a critical analysis of African culture.

Africentric/Black psychologists have done an excellent job of developing a framework and conceptualization of the African personality and worldview designed to treat and cultivate the Black psyche and spirit. Despite best efforts to develop a psychology that reflects the experiences of Black people and negates the assumptions and falsehoods proposed by Eurocentric psychology, they remain limited in their attempts. In order to move Africentric psychology to the forefront of Black thought and become more applicable to the communities for which it is designed, they must incorporate a psychology of liberation that includes a critical analysis of power, patriarchy, gender, and sex role stereotypes. These inclusions will begin to address the heterosexist assumptions,
homophobic, classist, sexist, and gender oppressive views present in current Africentric literature.

An example of the aforementioned limitations is the inherent homophobia and gender biases that exist within the literature. The theories are based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. This ‘heterosexual assumption’ further marginalizes those who are not and offers them protection only if they remain closeted (Almeida, 1994; Herek, 1990).

Throughout the discourse, Akbar (1991) maintained a limiting view of sexuality. Akbar theorized that alien-self disorders occur with an alarming frequency in professional- and middle-class African American communities. More apparent was the increased prevalence of homosexuality and other alien sexual behaviors in all segments of African American society. According to Akbar, such individuals have assimilated into a lifestyle that is alien to their true African selves. Akbar (1991) expounded:

The African American homosexual is another example of alien-self disorders. The severity of his confusion about his identity (etnic and interpersonal) has penetrated to his confusion about his sexual identity. He has usually been raised to deny his own masculine disposition because the assertiveness which characterizes boyish emergence was viewed as potentially threatening by the dominant culture and by his confused family circle. The similar feminine pride is associated with Caucasian images of beauty which frustrate the girl’s search for identity. They are both encouraged to restrain their natural dispositions which merely generalizes to their sexuality resulting in disorder which perpetuates a pattern disruptive to normal family functioning...Another variation of this theme is the boy who becomes delinquent because of his refusal to accept such restraint and rather than relinquishing his masculine identity as does the homosexual he defines his masculinity by aggressive rebellion, excessive and precocious sexual activity, criminality, etc. (p. 344)

I propose that Akbar’s (1991) analysis of homosexuality, lesbianism, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and prostitution are homophobic, completely void of a
power and gender analysis and it ignores the context and the overarching framing of patriarchy. Much of Akbar’s analysis is represented in other Africentric literature and these views coincide with the global systems of classism, gender oppression, and homophobia that impact all people everyday.

Akbar presented homosexuality as recent phenomenon, a growing epidemic and trend in the African American community. I hypothesize that this recent trend of “growth” may be indicative of an increase in gay pride and a decrease in closeted gays and lesbians. It may also be a result of increased tolerance in younger generations and education about homosexuality that has created safer environments. Additional factors may include obtaining gay-rights policies and more out gays and lesbians holding positions of political and economic power serving as role models for younger generations.

According to Africentric psychology, one ponders whether Black homosexuals and lesbians can have a healthy, developed, and equally functioning ethnic and sexual identities? My initial presumption is a definite yes. Black gays and lesbians can have equally functioning ethnic and sexual identities. However, according to the scholarship and discourse among many Black psychologists leads me to a different conclusion. Through discussion and personal correspondence with several Black psychologists, homosexuality is considered either a result of oppression or an internalized perversion that has infected the Black psyche. The position grounded in 1960’s dogma and still prevalent today in many Africentric circles is that if a Black man or women is gay, they are not aiding in the cause of nation building. Consistent with the philosophy of resilience and ethnicity, the prevailing notion is that the Blacker one gets, i.e., the more entrenched
one is in Black culture and in adopting an Africentric worldview, the less homosexual. Hence, Black gays and lesbians’ purposes for existence are completely denied and dismissed. Within this context, then a Black man’s woman cannot be fully Africentric and gay/lesbian at the same time. Black identity trumps sexual identity, and one has to choose which one is more pressing for the survival of the race (Carبدو, 1999). This negates the complexity of samanitiy and the dynamics of personhood and renders their experiences non-existent (Carبدو, 1999).

The Africentric models tend to further marginalize those who are invisible. Some discussions may conclude with an examination of the experiences of the most vulnerable individuals on the lower rungs of the oppression of hierarchy, children of color (Almeida, 1994). More typically, the discourse is focused on the invisibility of young, poor, Black men. There is no doubt that this subgroup is worthy of attention given the daily global assaults they constantly endure (Franklin, 1999; Majors, 1986; Payne & Brown, in press, Utsey, Holden, & Brown, 2001). With the emphasis on this population only, heterosexual Black men occupy privileged victim status in the racial discourse (Crenshaw, 1999). Crenshaw (1999) pointed out the dual effects of intentional sexism and functional sexism that occurs by having Black men constantly maintain the privileged victim status:

Intentional sexism here refers to political or legal efforts by the Black liberation movements that are intended to subordinate Black women’s experiences or that are based at least in part or explicit patriarchal notions of gender. Functional sexism denotes the racial attacks that primarily attack Black male racial subordination as a means of eradicating Black racial subordination. This male-centered strategy could result from the perception either that Black men’s cumulative experiences with white supremacy, particularly in the context of the criminal justice system, render them “endangered” in a way that Black women are not or that
Black women's experiences with racism are a subset of Black men's experiences with racism. (p.6-7)

Even when a formal discourse of invisibility is presented, the most marginalized individuals still are invisible, as illustrated in a series of articles appearing in the Counseling Psychologist (1999). Parham (1999) offered a response/critique of Franklin's (1999) article on the invisibility syndrome and racial identity development. Parham (1999) expanded and highlighted the context of invisibility and its application and manifestation in all people of African descent, African Americans, and Black men in particular. Parham (1999) proposed that invisibility should be recognized as a global phenomenon and identified four areas of expansion for Franklin's model. The expanded areas included: the awareness of spirituality; the understanding of high-risk behaviors on the part of African American males in particular; an analysis of an individual's source of validation (external and internal sources); and expanding the concept of invisibility to include the experiences of women. Even in the expanded model, Parham (1999) did not mention African Americans who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered. In order for invisibility to be truly expanded and understood, the story and plight of those most invisible and disenfranchised must be incorporated into the collective agenda.

Much of the Africentric literature is also void of a critical gender analysis. Criticizing the impact of gender is essential as the research and theory in Africentric psychology continues to develop. Without a critical perspective and gender analysis, the field is positioned to replicate many of the biases which Black and feminist psychologists and researchers have charged Eurocentric psychology with perpetuating.
Including a feminist critique is vital considering so much of the attention to date has focused on the study of masculinities within an Africentric framework. As previously mentioned, a core concept inherent in Africentric psychology is self-definition (Nobles, 1991). Nobles (1991) pointed out that one’s self-definition was dependent upon the corporate definition of one’s group. If Black men continue to define Black manhood using their own definitions without deconstructing, analyzing, and transforming their experiences, beliefs and values, they have the potential replicate the traditional norms (Green, 1998) instead of expanded norms of masculinity (Foss, 1998). Green (1998) stated,

Different males are subject to these normative pressures in varying degrees depending on their age, race, ethnicity, geographical region, occupation, education and family and peer group’s ideas and practices about gender relations. Also, some of these norms are mutually contradictory, and attempts to conform to them are often destructive to the self or others. (p. 85)

Incorporating a transformational feminist framework provides a level of analysis, which has not yet been centered in Africentric circles. When men attempt to define masculinity, it has typically yielded a ‘new language’ to define and promote the same behavior. Feminist scholars have shaped the discussion of manhood by examining manhood, gender oppression, racism, and sexuality. Ignoring this wealth of knowledge undermines the efforts of Africentric scholars wanting to expand the framing.

A discussion of masculinity is required when viewing, assessing and interpreting the behaviors and attitudes often times exhibited among inner-city Black men. Green (1998) identified the traditional norms of masculinity as: 1) suppression of emotional vulnerability; 2) avoiding feminine behavior; 3) primacy of work role; 4) independence;
5) aggression; 6) roughness; 7) striving for dominance; 8) provider/protector for others; 9) treating sexual partners as objects; and 10) homophobia. These attitudes and behaviors contribute to the maintenance of patriarchy, gender oppression, and sexism. Not only do they limit men's abilities to maintain healthy and supportive relationships with women, they limit the emotional connectedness needed to develop bonds with other men. Consequently, a traditional and limited framing of masculinity is counterproductive to healthy Black personality development and liberation.

Font, Dolan-Del Vecchio, & Almeida (1998) presented expanded norms of the male role which include: 1) expanded emotionality; 2) embracing femininity; 3) balancing work and family life; 4) embracing relatedness over individualism; 5) valuing collaboration; 6) maintaining flexibility; 7) valuing shared power or relatedness; 8) relational attitude toward sexuality; and 9) overcoming heterosexism/homophobia.

The expanded norms are more representative of the complex values inherent in the African personality. Nevertheless, there are great social pressures and systematic restraints that keep many inner-city Black men entrenched in a stance consistent with the traditional norms. When assessing young inner-city Black men, it is important to note that many of the behaviors and attitudes they present may not be a reflection of their true feelings and attitudes. Oftentimes, they are forced to posture and express themselves with the codes of the street and their street life orientation in order to maintain status and street-credibility (Anderson, 1990; Majors, 1986). Street life is violent, aggressive and uncompromising in the sense that signs of sensitivity are viewed as weakness and are then exploited.
I argue that accurately assess the experiences and attitudes of young inner-city Black men, researchers/clinicians must create a space where they can express their vulnerabilities and articulate their true selves. Furthermore, their behaviors must be interpreted within the contexts of their lives. For example, there is utility for street life oriented inner-city Black men to suppress their emotional vulnerabilities, avoid feminine behaviors, demonstrate independence, aggression and toughness, and serve as providers/protectors for others in order to survive. Not contending with these issues will yield an inaccurate and shallow assessment.

African-centric psychology is rooted in the belief that spirituality is the core of the African personality (Mbiti, 1970) and it supports the cultivation of the spirit through physical and psychological practices that affirm one’s well-being or “soul”. For many African Americans, the Black church has been this space (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2005; Tinney 1981). It is important to explore the notion that traditional framing and presentations of religion to African Americans is not necessarily valued and utilized among street life oriented young Black men.

Christianity in its initial presentation to African people, was an attempt to “tame the savages” and spread the rationalist ideology of imperialism and oppression (Snowden, 1970; Van Leeuwen, 1960). During the colonization of Africa, Europeans recognized that spreading religion provided an opportunity to convert and add membership and wealth to the church. In the process of the genocide and mentucide (i.e. mental oppression and destruction) religion was used to indoctrinate and then to justify slavery, oppression and segregation (Ani, 1994; Carter, 1991; Cene, 1991; Kambon, 1998; Sailey & Behm, 1995; Snowden, 1970; Woodson, 1933).
Despite the noble efforts of Black religious institutions to change the oppressive legacy, the church has sustained being places of liberation. Instead, they have been used to maintain the status quo and reinforce the stereotypes and norms of the dominant culture through sexism and heterosexism (Dyson, 1997; Greene, 2000; Carbadlo, 1999; Payne and Brown, in press). Most Black religious institutions articulate a more developed race politics, however, their critique of gender inequality, heterosexism, homophobia and community and domestic violence is grossly lacking.

Many times the leadership and its congregation are void of any critical pedagogy, gender and power analysis, and promote a healthy Black personality only within the strict confines of their doctrines (Green, 1998; McCall, 1997; Dyson, 1997; Carbadlo, 1999). The perpetuation of these oppressive views is perpetuated in the Black community. One wonders if spirituality can be promoted and cultivated within a system that has not fully purged itself from its oppressive underpinnings?

An example of the kind of community-oriented input and critique needed to maintain integrity, develop pertinent research, theory, and practice relevant to an Africentric perspective emerged from the annual State of the Black Union public forum entitled, "The Black Church: Relevant, Repressive, or Reborn?" (Smiley, 2003, February 8). Broadcast journalist, Tavis Smiley convened prominent Black spiritual leaders, scholars, and parishioners to begin an internal review of their practices and policies. Topics included financial and sexual misconduct, their views on the poor, the political and economic mission of the church, the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the impact of the Black Church's sexist and homophobic views. He examined these topics from an historic and contemporary perspective. It was the general consensus that the church has not
fulfilled its charge as a liberator and safe haven for all members of the Black community. Many street life oriented Black men have come to this same conclusion. Nevertheless, they still have a strong sense of spirituality and they acknowledge religious institutions spiritual practices to remain connected to their Blackness.

In conclusion, the Africentric personality development theories have provided a framework in which Black personality development can be analyzed and assessed. They continue to develop a psychology that reflects the experience of Black people and challenges the bases of European psychology. Limitations of the framework include promoting an idealized sense of Africentricity and African culture and being void of a critical analysis of power patriarchy, gender, and sex role stereotypes. It is my contention that theory, practice, and assessment of the Black personality must be conducted in an Africentric framework based in liberation psychology with a transformational feminist critique. A modified conceptualization will best appreciate and account for all of factors of the Black experience.

CHAPTER III
Methodology

Introduction

This exploratory study utilized a theory-driven, participatory-action research design and qualitative methodology to explore Blackness as a site of resiliency for street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city. The goal of this research was to gather naturalistic data and provide a critical analysis of some of the experiences of Black men when developing, connecting to, and utilizing their Blackness as a source of strength.
to make meaning of their lives and overcome adversity. In addition, this project drew on phenomenology by investigating experiences and the ways individuals understood their experiences to develop a worldview. This research explored the meanings of concepts or phenomena that groups share (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Sprekle & Moon, 1996).

Qualitative methods provide the best means for analysis of the variables that intersect to develop resilience in young Black men living in the inner-city. In qualitative analysis, the researcher looks for patterns of interrelationships between many categories rather than the sharply delineated relationship between a limited set. The goal of qualitative analysis is to gain access to cultural categories and assumptions according to how members of the culture construe the world. This methodology does not focused on generalizations, i.e. discovering how many, and what kinds of people share a characteristic. It provides framework to delve into the complexities of processes in a very detailed and extensive manner (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; McCracken, 1988).

Furthermore, qualitative research includes context as an essential component of research and addresses the researcher’s process of self-awareness and self-reflection. Through qualitative research, voices that had been silenced can be heard and lives that were marginalized can be brought to the forefront. These goals were accomplished by using the participants’ interviews to capture the meanings of their stories, folk wisdom, and common sense (Morrow, Rakhsa, & Costaneda, 2001). The aforementioned factors illustrate that to justly investigate resilience in young Black men a qualitative methodology must be employed.
Grounded Theory

This research project was not purely grounded-theory research but rather a theory-driven research design. This study used the Sites of Resiliency theory, which I co-authored with Yasser Payne (Payne & Brown, in press), to guide the research. This project provided the opportunity to gather naturalistic data to further develop and refine the theory. Grounded theory is developed from data collected and analyzed systematically and recursively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sprengle & Moon, 1996). Grounded theory is also referred to as the constant comparative method. The purpose is to develop a conceptual model (or theory) grounded in data. This inductive analytical process involves a constant interplay between data collection and data analysis. Ultimately, data is collected, analyzed for emergent theoretical categories, then is systematically looped back into the collection of data and analyzed further for interrelationships and meanings. The grounded theory emerges once the information and data gleaned are corroborated and new patterns or categories no longer emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1980, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Identifying the sites of resiliency theory from the outset enabled me to explore and assess the domains identified and focus on data collection and analysis. Emergent themes validated, disconfirmed, and enhanced the understanding of ethnicity and resiliency in street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city.

Participatory Action Research

This research project utilized a participatory action research (PAR) design. PAR aims to explore and address specific problems within a program, organization or community. The research becomes part of the change process. By engaging people from
the community to study their own problems and to develop their own solutions (Pattee, 1980, 2001), the PAR team opens up multiple perspectives and provides additional viewpoints and interpretations throughout the data collection and analysis process. PAR teams are often comprised of researchers, members from the community, and members from the targeted participants (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003).

The PAR research team used in this study was comprised of: 1) the primary researcher, 2) two undergraduate psychology and two doctoral student researchers, and 3) one street life oriented young man (the PAR member will be referred to as “Archie”). (See Appendix A for brief descriptions of PAR team members).

In selecting graduate and undergraduate students to join the PAR team there were several criteria. First, I assessed their ability to participate in a long-term project. Other criteria for inclusion were dedication to learning and engaging in participatory action research. I also assessed their commitment to understanding the experiences of street life oriented Black men. When negotiating their involvement, PAR members were told that the duration of the project was approximately two years and included trainings, data collection, dissertation defense, disseminating findings to the community.

In order for community members/participants to join the PAR team they had to meet the following requirements as participants which included: 1) self-identify as being street life oriented; 2) have participated in street life activities in the past twelve months to survive physically (e.g., gang activity, fighting/assault) or economically; and 3) live in an inner-city or economically impoverished area. In addition, participants had to express a sincere desire to learn research methods and gain a better understanding of Blackness and their experiences as Black men.
Prior to beginning data collection, I anticipated adding more community/participant PAR members to the team. As the data collection and analysis process began, one member of the community joined the PAR team. This community PAR team member was given the pseudonym of "Archie." I will provide more insights into how Archie became a member of the team in a later section. Several other participants indicated an interest in joining the PAR team, but resolved their contributions would be best utilized after the data was collected and prepared for dissemination to the community. We agreed that this was an appropriate strategy. Another factor that impacted, recruitment of PAR members was the respondent's ability to make long-term plans due to the threat of arrest. During the ten months of data collection and analysis at least three of the participants were arrested and jailed.

The development of the PAR team began by having individual training sessions for approximately three months. One-on-one training included teaching PAR members how to utilize the library for searches, data entry, and orientation to qualitative research methods. During this time, the PAR team was provided readings designed to increase their awareness and sensitivity to the community being studied as well as the Sites of Resiliency theory (Payne & Brown, in press) (see Appendix B for suggested readings). The one-on-one interactions enabled me to build rapport with the team members. I addressed questions and concerns regarding their research skills and the overall focus of the project. It also provided an opportunity for me to assess their abilities and their best use as team members.

PAR team members also attended Research Methods training. The research trainings consisted of four, two-hour sessions designed to introduce team members to
research methods in psychology. Team members developed an understanding of the methodology and its utility for the study. The trainings were co-led by the primary researcher and other experienced PAR researchers. It was our goal to provide training and to develop team members in qualitative methods and PAR design where they could confidently transmit the information to other researchers with confidence (see Appendix C for research methods training agenda).

Throughout the training, it was emphasized that each PAR team member was a valuable and a respected researcher. A professional and collegial atmosphere was created. The notion that PAR members possessed expertise and were important to the process was underscored by hosting the training sessions in the boardroom of a major social-justice institute in New Jersey. Refreshments were provided.

Recognizing the possible impact of personal and philosophical assumptions held by PAR members, researchers engaged in a series of exercises designed to promote transparency and to develop the reflective perspective necessary for this study. Throughout the training, members engaged in a series of discussions and writing exercises designed to assist them in creating a brief personal history. This approach challenged and guided team members to stress and outline their assumptions and articulate how their worldviews framed their understandings of working with the population. Personal biographies included an exploration of race, class, sexual orientation, education, personal and professional expectations, and assumptions about the research population. The personal histories made transparent the PAR members’ personal agendas, objectives, and potential gains (see Appendix D for primary researcher’s personal biography).
The research team also discussed the expectations and responsibilities. Members' responsibilities included: 1) data collection, 2) analysis, 3) literature reviews, 4) writing contributions, and 5) presentations. Compensation was another topic of discussion. The student researchers agreed that the experience gained through the training and research would be partial compensation. Additionally, I agreed to support their research efforts by serving as a research consultant and mentor on undergraduate projects and doctoral dissertations. The community member negotiated monetary compensation. We discussed general terms but did not finalize the arrangement until I obtained dissertation funds. The final contract stated that Archie would receive $25.00 per participant solicited, $10.00 per transcript coded, and $20.00 per FAR team meeting attended (see Appendix E for consultant contract).

To ensure the integrity and consistency of the project, our team members participated in all phases of the research. Throughout the project, their voices and contributions were acknowledged. For instance, Archie was instrumental in framing the design of the project, participant selection, data collection, data analysis and dissemination of information to the community.

I first met Archie in 2002 at a participatory action research training workshops facilitated by, scholar Yasser Payot. The training workshops were developed for both Mr. Payne's and my research teams. Archie was a member of Mr. Payne's team. During the training, Archie became familiar with my research goals and objectives. Through a series of conversations, he offered to serve as a community liaison and to assist me in gaining access to the street life population. Archie gained research experience by working
on other projects and was confident that the prior inroads made could benefit me. I remained in contact with Archie as I developed the research design.

Upon defending my dissertation proposal, I contacted Archie to negotiate the terms of his role as participant and research consultant, and participatory action research team member. Once data collection began, Archie and I modified his agreement. Our initial arrangement did not include compensation for coding data. He brought this to my attention, and we agreed to an additional ten dollars for each transcript coded.

Archie’s contributions to the study were immeasurable. His knowledge of the intricacies of his community and his ability to navigate through this neighborhood were critical to the completion of this project. Archie assisted me in developing realistic goals and strategies for sampling. For example, during a brainstorming session, he pointed out that advertising the project with flyers was a guarantee that I would not receive any participants. He emphasized that the level of distrust people in his community have for outsiders would be only heightened by a “flyer” seeking street life oriented Black men. Furthermore, he hypothesized that no self-respecting street life oriented Black man would disclose his status to a stranger unless he was assured that the purpose was legitimate and that the researcher had altruistic motives. Subsequently, I did not utilize flyers as a recruitment tool.

Several PAR members attempted to solicit participants from other areas but were unsuccessful. Archie identified respondents in his community by going to homes, social gathering places in the community, and creating an interest in the project on the streets with individual recruitment. In addition, the six of the seven interviews were conducted in Archie’s home. We agreed to conduct the interviews there because his home was
located in the community. Furthermore, his home was non-threatening, gang-free zone/
mutually respected, and comfortable. The apartment layout permitted to interview one
participant in the living room, while the others waited with Archie in his bedroom where
they were entertained with music, videogames, and conversation.

As the only community/participant PAR team member, Archie played a
significant role in the analysis and coding process. His contributions were heightened
because of his status as the only community member. From his position, he highlighted
the underlying meanings, nuances, and inferences in the data that were less obvious to
other team members. His familiarity with the community and the participants enabled
him to provide context, such as personal and community histories. While analyzing, he
articulated what the data suggested, in his words, and provided critical analysis of what
they meant to him as a member of the community. Oftentimes, his explanations reframed
for the other PAR team members the interpretations of the behaviors, language used and
attitudes expressed in the interviews. As a team, we discussed that Archie, like other PAR
members, brought a particular set of values, assumptions and biases to the project. With
this in mind, we were engaged in continuous dialogue attempting to reach consensus. The
PAR team worked intensely to solicit comprehensive interviews, accurately code and
analyze the data, identify themes as they emerged, and provide interpretations that best
represented the experiences and stories of the participants.

Another component of PAR is to disseminate research findings and implications
of the study back into the community. Community participation in transmitting
knowledge is empowering to both the community and the PAR team members. Relaying
this information is achieved via workshops, presentations, and trainings to local,
community, religious/spiritual, and professional organizations. The PAR team and other respondents agreed to develop a program of disseminating information post-doc. The PAR team referred to the sharing of data as an “empowerment project”.

Peer Debriefing

Throughout the data collection process, the PAR team engaged in peer debriefing. This process served several purposes for the primary investigator and the research team. In peer debriefing, we expressed concerns, frustrations, and provided a sympathetic listening space for personal catharsis. We examined issues that pertained to methods, legality, and ethical considerations. The task of the team was to make sure that I, the primary investigator and interviewer, was fully aware of my posture and process. Notes were taken to monitor patterns and serve as a resource for future projects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness

Marshall and Rossman (1999) posited that the primary instruments in qualitative studies are the researchers themselves. My presence in the lives of the participants was fundamental to my accessing and interpreting data. The PAR team was equally impacting, despite their direct level of contact with the participants. As a result, it was important to address the potential ethical dilemmas and interpersonal dynamics that could influence the trustworthiness of the study.

Trustworthiness refers to the degree and level of confidence to which results can be trusted and are valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four measures to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative data research. In the section below, I discuss how this study met the criteria for effective qualitative data research.

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Credibility refers to increasing the probability that reliable findings and interpretations are produced based on the research design, participants, and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, maintaining prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and triangulation developed credibility. These activities remained consistent throughout the study. I already explained how observation, peer debriefing, and triangulation bolstered trustworthiness. I also demonstrated my three year prolonged preparation for this research; since conceptualizing and developing the sites of resilience theory in 2000. I also established supportive relationships with community members and leaders in the targeted research community. I provided services, wrote, and made presentations on the proposed population. These experiences demonstrated my commitment to the population, and I was engaged enough in the community to detect and take account of distortions that might appear in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In a qualitative study, transferability is equivalent to external validity in quantitative research. The standard for external validity is that the presumed casual relationship can be generalized across different types of people, settings, and times. The goal and objective of the qualitative researcher is to obtain the widest possible range of information and include it within the descriptions of context the population studied. My aim was to abstract and present data particular to a specific population, setting, and time in a manner that allows subsequent researchers to make their own comparisons and transferability judgments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2001; Sprengle & Moon, 1996). In this study, acquiring enough depth and detail for potential comparisons was obtained by utilizing various data sources, adequately describing the participants and their contexts, maintaining in-depth journals and notes.
using the criteria for street life oriented men cited earlier in the text, and conducting in-depth interviews. Moreover, I provided thorough descriptions to provide a platform for comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability refers to the researchers accounting for and acknowledging how their personal influence and situational factors may impact the research process. Similarly, confirmability concerns whether the study is both reliable and valid, and not based on subjective measures. These criteria are met through creating a system to maintain objectivity among the researchers and by developing an auditing system (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One way of attending to neutrality, transparency and objectivity was by completing the personal biographies. The personal biographies included the researcher’s assumptions, reasons for engaging in the research, and a brief personal history.

Another measure of ensuring objectivity throughout the data-collection and analysis process is through reflexive journals and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Each PAR member maintained a reflexive journal that included feelings, reflections, observations, personal challenges, interpretations and experiences with the participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggested utilizing an auditing process. In this project, the PAR team engaged in an auditing system at every step of the process. From the outset, as articulated in the research and design, the aim of the PAR team was to ensure that auditing occurs at each level of data collection and analysis.
Qualitative Data Collection

Data collection in grounded theory involves various methods. Traditional collection methods include in-depth interviewing, participant and non-participant observation, and document analysis. The trustworthiness of the findings in grounded theory increases as multiple sources of data, methods of analysis, and investigators are involved throughout the collection and analysis process (Marshall & Rossman, 1998; Patton, 1980, 2001). In an effort to increase the validity and reliability of this study, I utilized multiple data sources. Data in this study was gleaned from semi-structured interviews, genograms, ecomaps, and field notes.

Semi-structured Interviews

Data collection occurred during the semi-structured interview. The duration of the interview averaged one hour. All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher. Through the course of the interview, I asked questions and compiled information in a manner which enabled me to complete a thematic genogram (McGoeyrick, Gerson, & Shellalberger, 1999) and ecomap (Hodge, 2000; Large, 1992). Participants were notified before the first interview that follow-up interviews might be required to ensure the accuracy of information. After coding the transcripts, the PAR team agreed that the data reached saturation and decided that follow-up interviews were unnecessary. Follow-up interviews were not necessary because the teams felt as if the interviews were thorough, the interview questions were fully answered, and no substantial information would be gained or clarified by another interview.
Prior to the interviews, the PAR team was concerned about the primary researcher's ability to connect with the respondents and their willingness to disclose and be forthcoming. Another concern included maintaining contact with the respondents after the initial interview, in an effort to encourage full participation and engagement and remain connected to the project after the first interview, we dispersed compensation for participation over two sessions. Participants were slated to receive a monetary compensation of $20.00 for the initial interview and $10.00 for the follow-up interview. No follow-up interviews were conducted, but the money was distributed shortly after we coding was completed. Six out of the seven interviews were held in the community PAR member's home. The seventh interview was completed in the respondent's home per his request. All interviews were audio and videotaped. The audio tapes were transcribed for data analysis. The videotapes served as back-up for the audiotapes. In addition, the videotapes were reviewed by the PAR team as a way to monitor interviewing techniques and gain a better understanding of the participants by viewing their mannerisms, affect, and their interaction with the primary researcher.

The semi-structured interviews focused on ethnicity and resilience as the primary domains of inquiry. The interview protocol was emergent, i.e., the interview progressed based on the themes that arose from interviews that were not included in the original structure (see Appendix F for the final interview protocol and Appendix G for the initial interview protocol). The goal of the interview session was to create an atmosphere that the participants' perspective on the domains of interest and lived experiences unfolded (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I recognized that sites of resilience were not isolated and exclusive. As an experienced interviewer, I ensured that other domains were explored and
probed as they arose during the interview. The interviews were structured in such a manner that the diversity of the participants’ experiences emerged. I attempted to generate contexts in the interviews, so that interviewees made connections in the conversations about themes, contexts and personal experiences.

In order to enrich, add reflexivity, and create a conversational atmosphere in the interview, I used techniques such as paraphrasing, summarizing, clarification, and probing throughout our time together.

**Genograms**

Thematic genograms (O. Silvastoin, personal communication, 1982, per R. Massey) were conducted with each participant during the interview. A genogram is a format for drawing a family tree that records information about family members and their relationships over at least three generations. Genograms display family information graphically in a way that provides a quick picture of complex patterns and events that may be significant. It is an excellent tool to map and highlight any legacies which occur within the familial system (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Shellenberger, 1999). For the purposes of this project, I tracked for themes of ethnicity, street life, and resilience. The genogram was nonobtrusive and equivalent to taking notes during the interview. The goal was to have a framework for tracking themes and gathering data, rather than provide a detailed family history. In some instances, I sketched the genograms during the interview and used it as a tool to facilitate the discussion. In other interviews, the genograms were completed post-interview while viewing the transcripts and audio and videotapes.

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Ecomap

In addition to the genogram, I constructed an ecomap (Hodge, 2000; Large, 1992) for each participant. Ecomaps were tangible assessment tools that provided a graphic depiction of a participant's relationships to critical ecological systems. They also showed the flow of energy between systems, whether the relationships were supportive or unhelpful. Reviewing relationships through an ecological lens showed the balance and adjustment between the individual, family, their environment, and how other systems impacted these entities. It also illustrated where resources or systems were needed but absent, and pointed out conflicts and stressors. Ecomaps were also useful in helping the researchers identify external support and nurturing systems. The systems identified were formal or informal (Hodge, 2000; Large, 1992). The ecomaps constructed utilized several symbols: 1) solid lines represented strong connections, 2) dotted lines represented weak connections, 3) lines with slashes represented stressful connections, and 4) arrows indicated the flow of resources or support.

Field Notes

In addition to the interview, genogram, and ecomap, the primary researcher and the PAR team members kept field notes. Field notes are an important source of data in qualitative research. Field notes are the observational records, detailed, non-judgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been witnessed (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). We documented and described interactions and marked the interviewee's body language and affect, in addition to his words. Keeping a diary of notes detailing the research process also provides analytic insights. This data provided clues to focus and be more strategic in
collecting data and assisted in identifying important questions for subsequent interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

**Debriefing**

All participants were offered debriefing throughout the interview. Prior to the interview, I reiterated that participation was completely voluntary. I stressed that if the participant stopped at any point during the interview and appeared to be in distress, debriefing will be provided at that point. At any point, if they were unable to continue, participants were given the opportunity to reschedule or chose to withdraw from the research altogether. All participants were given the names of local mental-health facilities as well as the names of individual and family counseling services with whom they could follow-up at their own discretion (see Appendix H for community contacts). Participants were provided names and contact information of the primary researcher, the researcher’s mentor as well as the director of Seton Hall University’s Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects in case other questions regarding the research or researcher arose. The information was located on the research consent form. At the conclusion of the interview, the participant debriefed with the interviewer and I answered any lingering questions, as well as reiterated issues of confidentiality.

I also attempted to follow-up with the participants the next day and in subsequent weeks after the interview to monitor their immediate wellness. It was difficult to maintain contact with some of the participants after the interview because I was not located in the community, and they were often transient. However, the community PAR member maintained contact, provided feedback, and disseminated pertinent information to participants.
Transcriptions and Feedback

At the completion of the interviews, the primary researcher and PAR team transcribed the audiotapes verbatim for analysis. Once this process was completed, participants were notified and given the opportunity to correct or amend their transcripts. None of the respondents chose to review their transcripts. Several of them stated that they were confident that the community PAR member would ensure the accuracy of the transcripts.

Demographic Data Sheet

The research proposal indicated that a demographic data sheet would be used to gather descriptive participant information. The demographic data sheet contains basic information such as age, ethnicity, highest education level achieved, and participation in street life. After the conducting the first interview, the PAR team agreed that the demographic data sheet was intrusive and heightened anxiety in interviewees, inhibiting the ease of developing rapport. Consequently, we agreed not to use a demographic data sheet. It was most advantageous to build as much rapport as possible prior to soliciting histories of street life activities, education, and family.

We concluded that the focus of the interview should begin and remain on blackness and resilience and that other personal information would be extrapolated gleaned from the content and context of their stories and from direct questions during completion the genograms. Relevant information was gleaned during the interview without the demographic sheet.
Qualitative Data Analysis

The content analysis was conducted in four phases. The first phase included *attending to the experience*. This process of listening to the participants' stories while being aware of my own biases and assumptions was served by keeping a log to monitor my own reactions to the interviews. The next phase, *telling about the experience*, involved the participants' interpretations of their experiences and how they were told to me. This interaction is the meaning-making process between the researcher and participants. This was accomplished in the PAR team meetings by reviewing and discussing the interviews prior to coding the data. The community PAR member represented the voices of the interviewees. *Transcribing and analyzing data with the research team*, is the interpretative practice in which the transcriptions are encoded and categorized, and similarities, patterns, and differences in the stories of the participants are identified. Lastly, there is the *reading* phase, which consists of compiling the research team's interpretation(s) of the stories (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1980, 2001; Reissman, 1995, 1994).

After the interviews and transcriptions were completed, the PAR team continued to develop coding categories to find a set that fit by coding the data according to the criteria established by the team. After individual researchers finished the transcripts, we then compared our codes as a team. If the transcripts were coded differently, the researchers presented the rationale for their coding until the team reached a consensus. Next, the team identified themes and overall trends in the data. We searched for relationships and identified gaps in our findings. The PAR team then engaged in discussions and dialogue to determine whether outliers fit into any identified categories.
or occurred with enough frequency to constitute developing new categories and emergent themes. Saturation occurred when there was an abundance of data that emerged consistently among participants and the PAR team concluded that further interviews would yield more examples of the same without much variance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Only those categories agreed upon by the PAR team were included in the final findings. After the themes were identified, the research team tested hypotheses and organized/reduced the data for analysis of trends and common themes. This process involved cross-checking findings and conducting a matrix analysis, which meant grouping the data according to themes and creating a template to analyze the data. Finally, the information was synthesized and integrated into one explanatory framework (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 2001).

The next step included triangulating the data by validating the information against at least one other source. This was done by comparing new information to another interview, literature, and/or observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2001). Recognizing how critical this process is to establish credible data, we utilized various types of triangulation. The research team employed the following types: 1) data triangulation by using a variety of data sources via multiple interviews, research, and theory; 2) investigator triangulation by using a research team to provide different perspectives; 3) theory triangulation by using multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data; and 4) methodological triangulation through using multiple methods i.e. genogram, ecomap, interviews, and observation (Patton, 1980).

I developed a template for coding the data (see Appendix 1 for coding template). The template identified the core areas being explored, the domains, and codes. My
research system was flexible, anticipating that domains would emerge and contract during data collection and analysis. Codes were developed by taking the first letter of the core area, followed by the first three letters of the domains. For example, the code Bdef represents Blackness definitions.

**Confidentiality**

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants were given pseudonyms and were referred by them throughout the text. Measures of confidentiality were revisited throughout the process. PAR team members were reminded and encouraged not to discuss the results of the study with anyone outside the research team until the results were published and formally presented to the community. In addition, all research materials were kept in a locked box, in a secured and monitored room, maintained by the primary researcher.

**Participants**

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>History of Incarceration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1- Archie</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2- Monte</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Completed High School</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3- Brian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Completed High School</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4- Antoine</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5- Terrence</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6- Tristen</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7- Lavar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Completed High school</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study included seven street life oriented young Black men who lived in an inner-city community in northeastern United States (see Table 1). Street life oriented
Black male participants met the following criteria: (1) self-identified as being street life oriented, (2) participated in street life activities to survive physically (e.g. gang activity, fighting/assault) or economically within the last year, and (3) lived in an inner-city or economically impoverished area.

All of the participants lived within the same ward of a community in the northeastern United States. The participants’ ages ranged from eighteen to thirty years-old. The mean age of participants was twenty-four years-old. None of the men reported being married. Two of the participants were fathers. Five out of seven of the respondents reported being incarcerated at least once. Regarding educational status, two participants completed some high school, three completed high school or a high-school equivalency, and two participants completed some college or courses beyond high school (see Table 1 for demographic information).

The smaller sample size was not chosen to represent a certain part of the world, but rather to provide an opportunity to delve into the complicated character, organization, and logic of the culture being explored (McCranken, 1998). For the purposes of this study, it was more important to work longer-and with greater care-with few people than more superficially with many.

In the proposal, the term young men described men within the age range of sixteen to twenty-three. After conducting the first interview, I began to re-think the proposed framing of age minimums and maximums as a criterion for young men in this dissertation. I proposed this to the PAR team, and we held a series of discussions on the notion of age as it related to the street life population. It was proposed that age was oftentimes irrelevant among street life oriented men. In regards to lifestyle and position
(status), when engaged in street life activities, it did not matter if a young man was
fifteen, twenty, or thirty-five years old. Involvement and engagement in street life and
personal histories that indicated their status, "wright," and how "official" they were more
than chronological age. Street life oriented men interacted and engaged in street life
activities regardless of age. At any given time, an adolescent may interact with older men
for extended periods depending on the task. Furthermore, an outside observer may not be
able to distinguish them according to style of dress, language, and mannerisms. If a
distinction were to be made, it would be along the lines of experience.

Additionally, the team determined the level of insight and reflection might not be
obtained from individuals who were still going through adolescence as compared to men
who were slightly older. Those in their mid-twenties may be better able to speak about
their familial histories and provide insights to trends in the community. Archie also stated
that limiting the population strictly because of age would further reduce the already
limited pool of participants. After an extensive discussion, the team resolved that the age
requirement initially proposed was a superficial boundary and was neither descriptive of
the population nor indicative of the experiences we wanted to study. Instead, we sought
young men who provided the insight and experience warranted by the study.

Selection Procedures

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling procedures, which is a
strategy to learn and understand something about certain select cases without
generalizing. The concept is based on the preconceived set of criteria that originate from
the researcher's guiding assumptions and questions. This approach is also used to manage
the trade-off between the desire for in-depth, detailed information about cases and the
need to be able to generalize about the population (Patton, 1980, 2001; Sprenkle & Moon, 1996).

In addition to selecting typical and diverse cases from the community, I also sought to identify critical cases. Patton (2001) stated:

Critical cases are those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things...While studying one or a few critical cases does not technically permit broad generalizations to all possible cases, logical generalizations can often be made from the weight of evidence produced in studying a single, critical case. (p.102-103)

The data collection process for this study pended on the primary researcher and PAR team’s ability to engage individuals who have not traditionally been included in research in a manner that guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. With this in mind, it would have been ill advised and counterproductive to post fliers and employ massively public recruitment efforts. Instead, we made contact discreetly via personal connection.

First, I notified the PAR team that I was prepared to begin soliciting potential participants. They began to follow-up with community leaders and to recruit potential interviewees. After a few weeks of soliciting participants through various sources, the only team member who was successful in securing respondents was Archie. As previously stated, Archie had access to a street life population and pre-screened several potential interviewees. Subsequently, he identified all of the participants used in the study.

Once Archie identified a potential respondent, I was briefed on the person and the team deliberated on their appropriateness for study. Upon deciding that the individual provided insights and a unique perspective that contributed to the exploration of the topic, we set up an appointment to meet formally. Upon meeting the potential participant, the
purpose of the study, the researcher's background, and the rights as participants were explained. This exchange also provided the participant the opportunity to interview me.

I also discussed how confidentiality was protected and explained duty to warn. I clarified my role as a mandated reporter by explaining, "The aim of this research is to explore your sense of Blackness and resilience and not to detail and document your criminal history. However, if through the course of the interview, you were to share that you were directly connected to a crime, committed in the past or planned for the future, that has an identifiable victim, I would be obligated to report that information to the proper authorities. Similarly, my duty to warn applies if you make any threats to harm yourself or someone else." This statement also appeared on the consent form and was read prior to each interview. If the respondent agreed to participate at that point, I scheduled an appointment for their interview. Consent was obtained prior to the interview (see Appendix J for informed consent forms).

Participants Profiles

To offer a better understanding of the rich experience of the data collection process, I will provide brief descriptions of the men who participated in the study and pertinent insights into their mindsets.

Archie - Participant One

"Archie" was a thirty year-old African American who was born and raised in an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. He was the oldest of nine siblings. His father has six children born to six women, and his mother bore three children. Archie was also the father of two children, a boy and a girl. Archie graduated from a local vocational high school. At the time of the interview, he shared an apartment
with his sister and nephew (see Appendix K for Archie’s genogram and Appendix L for ecomap).

Archie revealed through the thematic genogram and interview that his family exhibited what he considered a high level of Blackness. Growing up, he was raised to be a “strong Black man” in as much that his family emphasized and valued extending a helpful hand to others in need. Archie identified his paternal grandfather and mother as family members who exhibited higher levels of Blackness. Although both gave similar messages about responsibility, unity, and pride, his mother was more nurturing and tolerant in her approach to teaching and expressing her Blackness. On the other hand, Archie described his grandfather as being more passionate, aggressive and angry in his commitment to Black people and the preservation of Black culture. Archie stated that he learned through his grandfather’s example how to take care of family and have self and racial pride. Archie’s grandfather was an entrepreneur and he encouraged Archie to aspire to be his own boss. Most importantly, Archie was taught to develop his leadership abilities and apply them at work and in his life. Archie described his grandfather as being the family historian, constantly educating younger generations about slavery and other familial experiences. Archie found himself serving in a similar capacity as he passed on messages of self-reliance, discipline, and communalism to his children.

Monte—Participant Two

“Monte” was an eighteen year-old African American male who was born and raised in an impoverished inner-city neighborhood in the northeastern region of the United States. Monte was the oldest of three sons born to his mother; he and his brothers do not share the same father. Although his parents were not in a long-term, committed
relationship, Monte said that he was connected to both his maternal and paternal relatives (see Appendix M for Monte’s genogram).

Monte dropped out of public high school and enrolled in the Job Corps. Monte stated that he was on a “path of destruction” prior to enrolling in the Job Corps. He noted that his mother had a history of drug involvement and described himself as being born into the drug culture. He recalled selling drugs at a very early age and being in a constant struggle for survival throughout his life. At the time of the interview, Monte felt that he was beginning to be positive and was proud of his achievements. He was optimistic about his future, which included obtaining a high school equivalency degree and exploring different traits (see Appendix N for Monte’s ccmp).

Monte had an understanding of his family’s history within a social context. He pointed out his family background was rooted in the Deep South and that his paternal grandmother “old enough to be a slave”. He also explained that his maternal grandmother had a good understanding of what it meant to be Black and she had to negotiate the racial politics of growing up in a very hostile environment. She also shared her wisdom with and she was very wise. Monte added that his grandmother, great-aunt and mother taught him that Black people should stick together and focus their efforts on supporting and promoting Black culture. From his familial interactions and subsequent discussions, he believed that most Black people harbored intense feelings of anger towards Whites.

Archie invited Monte to participate in the study while he was outside on the block. Archie explained the nature of the project and that he would be compensated for his participation. Monte was eager to participate in the project based on the strength of his relationship with Archie. After agreeing to be a respondent, Monte asked Archie some
clarifying questions: a) who was the lead researcher, b) the location of the interview and c) the type of questions to be asked. Archie suggested to the PAR team that Monte’s interests in the research may have been spiked because he had previous experience as an interviewee and found that experience to be agreeable.

Upon arriving at the interview cite, Monte and “Brian” [Respondent 3] were in the home sitting on the couch. After brief introductions, Archie and I began to prepare the room for the interviews. While setting up the room, I engaged Monte and Brian in a dialogue about sports, news, and the events of the day in an attempt to build some rapport. We then began to discuss the purpose and goals of the research project in detail. I provided some background information about myself, my interests, and the process of developing the research study. I then distributed the consent forms. I reviewed the confidentiality statement and explained that the video and audio tapes were for research purposes and would be seen and heard by my research team in an attempt to best understand their experiences.

Monte was informed from the outset that the interview was confidential but wanted assurance upon seeing the audio-video equipment in the interview room. He pulled Archie to the side of the room and expressed his concerns regarding confidentiality. Witnessing this, I re-explained the confidentiality clause in the consent form to Monte and Brian. After all questions were satisfied and they confirmed their participation in the project, Brian was asked to move to the waiting room while Monte completed his interview.
Brian - Participant Three

“Brian” was a twenty-five year-old African American, born and raised in an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. Brian shared that his mother died of AIDS and that he did not have a relationship with his father. Brian was the middle of three children; he has a brother (age 27) and a sister (age 23). Brian reported having no children, but he was the proud uncle of six nephews and three nieces. He shared an apartment with his girlfriend (see Appendix O for Brian’s genogram and Appendix P for ecomap).

Brian viewed his life as a challenge and a struggle for survival. He felt that he was constantly engaged in a fight to maintain his personal integrity and his economic and physical security. Brian found it difficult to speak to the global struggles of Black people because he was so intensely engaged in negotiating the daily hassles and challenges of street life. At the time of the interview, he had been incarcerated nine times. Brian anticipated being detained after a court hearing regarding a recent parole violation. A few weeks later, Archie noticed me that Brian was back in jail. The PAR team decided to place the compensation he would receive for the follow-up interviews toward his commissary at the county jail.

Brian was invited to participate in the project three days before the scheduled interview date. Brian was very resistant and responded to Archie saying, “No, I don’t want to tell my business.” Brian then inquired about the race of the researcher and asked Archie if I was a White man. Brian’s anxiety immediately lessened after learning that I was Black. They then engaged in a conversation about their distrust for White people, especially when they are in an investigative role. Upon learning of the earlier discussion,
I asked Archie the basis for Brian's apprehension toward working with White people. He simply stated, "They White." He continued by explaining that the overwhelming consensus of the Black members of his community was that Whites were not trustworthy and as a result met with great skepticism. He said that the community believed that their suspicions were valid based on their interactions with Whites in the past.

After the initial conversation, Archie was still uncertain of Brian's involvement in the study after their initial conversations. Archie then invited Brian to come to his home on Saturday to survey the situation and to evaluate me for himself. If he felt comfortable, he could agree to participate at that time. Archie later recalled that Brian's suspicion was heightened until meeting me. Archie said, "He [Brian] had concerns about both the project and the person doing it because if you were White he wouldn't have done it." His skepticism was apparent to me in our early interactions as well. When I arrived in the home, Monte and Brian were sitting on the couch. As we set up the room, Brian interviewed me. He inquired about my personal and professional history. He also asked me why I chose this topic and what were my future life goals. Brian finally agreed to participate after I satisfactorily answered his questions.

After agreeing to participate in the study, Brian wanted to listen to Monte's interview. He wanted to get a feel for the questions and be prepared to provide his best effort. As he sat intently on the couch, I asked him to step into the other room and explained that his presence might make it uncomfortable for the interviewee, it would break the confidentiality of the content of the interview, and could influence Monte's responses. He agreed and moved to the next room.
Antoine-Participant Four

"Antoine" was a twenty seven year-old African American male who was born and raised in an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. He was the eldest of three children. He indicated that he was estranged from his father (age 48) and paternal relatives. Antoine also reported that his mother died of health complications associated with having HIV/AIDS. She was forty-eight when she passed away. Antoine was the father of seven children born to three women. His eldest son's mother died at age twenty-five. Antoine did not disclose the cause of death. His sons were age eleven, six, three, two, and one month. His daughters were five and four-years-old. Antoine was currently in a relationship with the mother of his five year-old, two year-old, and one month-old children (see Appendix Q for Antoine's genogram and Appendix R for ecomap).

Antoine disclosed that he began selling drugs at age thirteen in order to help his mother who was struggling financially. He felt very connected to and supported by his maternal family. They cared for him as a person, but did not always agree with his choices to be involved in street life. Antoine pointed to his uncle as an example of a strong Black man whom he felt worthy of emulating. Antoine's uncle was viewed as a positive influence because he came from a poor/working class family background and worked hard to become a successful businessman, owning several businesses. He used his financial success to create a better life for his family. Antoine articulated feeling very connected to the struggles of Black people and worked towards the betterment of his race. Moreover, he felt that his motivation and mission in life were to provide economically and emotionally for his children.
Archie invited Antoine to participate in the study while visiting Antoine’s home. After hearing the purpose and goals of the project, Antoine was unsure if he met the participant criteria. Antoine committed to “going straight” within the past three months. Antoine began to restructure his life and rearrange his priorities. He shifted his focus from street life activities to childrearing and maintaining a healthy relationship with his partner. Archie encouraged Antoine to participate, saying his contributing to the study could provide an excellent opportunity to express himself and to highlight the shifts and changes that he made during his life.

Additionally, he could articulate his experiences and those of others like him. He was told that his being engaged with street life over the last year qualified him as an interviewee. In order to solidify participation and relieve some of Antoine’s anxieties, Archie provided some personal information about me and disclosed that I was not White. Archie stated that he felt compelled to do so because race was a primary concern for the other participants. He felt it unnecessary to withhold that information, especially if that was the deciding factor for his participation. He shared the same information with subsequent interviewees.

While conducting the genogram it became apparent to me that Brian and Antoine were half brothers, sharing the same mother. I made the connection when I realized that Antoine fathered the same number of children as Brian had nieces and nephews. Initially, I was disappointed because I did not want to interview siblings, but wanted to maximize the variance of the respondents’ experiences. As the interview continued, it became apparent to me that Antoine and Brian were more different as street life oriented Black men than they were similar as brothers. They looked different, spoke differently,
attributed different influences to their experiences, and had different life goals. Antoine was trying to be a better parent and partner, and earn money through legal means. He was insightful and altruistic. Conversely, Brian was completely engaged in his personal struggles and the daily hassles and grind of the streets. He was committed to pursuing street life activities regardless of the risks. Ironically, Brian identified Antoine as an individual who exhibited a high sense of Blackness. Brian respected Antoine’s ability to remain fulfilled and satisfied in the midst of poverty and struggle. These were qualities that Brian felt that he lacked.

After the interview, I asked Archie how he conceptualized including brothers as participants. He recounted the sequence of events, stating that Brian did not initially agree to participate. With this in mind, he asked Antoine to participate and he agreed. On the first day of interviews, Brian came to the site and felt comfortable about the project. At that point, Archie thought he would have strained his relationship with Antoine if he resented his offer, subsequently, undermining the integrity of the project. Additionally, Archie knew that their experiences varied extensively and represented two distinctive segments of street life-orientation and Blackness. Furthermore, both men were extremely compelling personalities and intriguing characters.

**Terrence - Participant Five**

"Terrence" was a twenty-four year-old African American male who was born and raised in an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. He has two brothers, age twenty-six and eighteen. Terrence reported having a large extended family. His father (age 49) was the eighth born of thirteen children and his mother (age 44) was the fifth born of eight children. Terrence was honorably discharged from the
military after four years of service. He said that the military was the most challenging and rewarding experience of his life (see Appendix S for Terrence's genogram and Appendix T for ecomap).

Terrence reported having a very close and supportive relationship with his mother and stepfather. Terrence characterized his family as having a street life orientation; having a history of being involved with drugs, guns, and violence. Terrence's identified his stepfather as an inspiration. He taught Terrence to take responsibility for his life choices and to navigate street life. He also passed on the importance of cultivating his Black identity and being a resource to family and community. Terrence's maternal family had a history of violence. Terrence viewed his mother as the epitome of resilience. She endured many hardships throughout her youth and fought to create a family that was nurturing and supportive. Terrence retold her story, stating that she was raised by relatives after her mother was killed by her brother-in-law. Her father retaliated and was incarcerated for attempted murder of his wife's killer. Despite his mother's difficulties, she managed to create a family that was filled with support and love.

Archie approached Terrence while he was outside with friends in his housing community. After hearing the purpose of the project, he agreed to participate with little persuasion.

During the interview, Terrence stated that he did not have to sell-drugs for his survival because his parents always provided the basic necessities for him. He continued to explain that he did not enter street life for survival, but continued in street life for his survival. One of Terrence's primary hustles included gun sales. He became entrenched in the gun trade and gained substantial influence rather quickly as a middleman. Because of
his heavy involvement in the arms trade as a middle-man he was not in a position to simply walk away.

Furthermore, I recognized that Terrence represented a position that many Black men living in inner-city communities held. His parents were working-class poor, meaning that they both held jobs, but still lived in impoverished communities. He recalled always having clothes and shelter, but many of his friends and neighbors went without necessities, and their homes were filled with violence and drugs. Hence, the local culture supported and encouraged involvement in street life because of 1) limited access to legal forms of income, 2) the necessity to be connected to other individuals who were street life oriented for protection and safety, 3) the need to develop and protect one’s reputation for street-credibility, and 4) promoting a glorified lifestyle of gangsterism. Despite the options Terrence had, he still felt compelled to become involved because it was a part of his life trajectory and lineage. Terrence held the dual status as both a taxpaying and a street life involved citizen of the community. He felt a sense of responsibility to teach and educate his siblings and other young men how to navigate street life while developing and maintaining a positive Black self-image, and utilizing their talents to search for a way out of street life. Terrence regarded himself as an elder statesman of the community and example to others of how to utilize their strengths in order to survive stifling environments.

Tristen - Participant Six

“Tristen” was an eighteen year-old African American male born and raised in an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. Tristen came from a large family and he credited this for his sense of connection to Black people. His
mother was the ninth born of eleven children and his father was the sixth born of seven children. Tristen was the eldest of three children born to his parents. His sister was sixteen years old and his brother was fifteen. His father had one son (age 22) and two daughters (ages 21 and 19) from a previous relationship. His father was a postal worker and also worked as a part-time security guard at a military base (see Appendix U for Tristen’s genogram and Appendix V for ecmap).

Tristen stated that he felt very connected to Black people and Black culture. He associated blackness with strength and was descriptive of the Black race. He believed that all Black people shared a bond because of the common experiences shared from originating from Africa. Tristen stated Blackness was cultivated through being around and feeling connected to Black people. Likewise, he felt that it was the obligation of successful Black people to give back to the community. Tristen also believed that his greatest expression of Blackness was to be true to himself and follow his intuition.

After coding the first five interviews, the PAR team agreed that we needed to interview a younger participant. We felt that the experiences of the youth were critical to our analysis and wanted to ensure that they were included. Archie stated that he had several younger people in mind and attempted to schedule the interview. While spending time with a friend, Archie remembered that one of his friends had a younger cousin (Tristen) who met the requirements for the study. Archie mentioned the idea to his friend and told him to call him when Tristen was available. A couple of days later, Archie spoke to Tristen on the phone. Initially, Tristen did not want to participate, but agreed after being told that he would be financially compensated for his time. Tristen was concerned
about the recording prior to the interview, but his anxiety was alleviated after the confidentiality statement was explained in detail.

Lavar: Participant Seven

"Lavar" was a twenty-six year-old African American man who was born and raised in an impoverished inner-city community in the northeastern United States. Lavar’s father had a history of incarceration and was a recent parolee. His mother died in 2003 of lung cancer. She was his primary caregiver. Lavar had a twenty-two year-old sister from his mother and father, and a twelve year-old sister born from his father. Lavar lived in an apartment with his twenty-two year-old sister and two year-old nephew. At the time of the interview, Lavar was unemployed (see Appendix W for Lavar’s genogram and Appendix X for ecomap).

Lavar was a realistic, yet optimistic young man who prided himself on his ability to turn adverse situations into positive outcomes. He felt that his resilience and the subsequent successes and achievements were reflective of his strong sense of Blackness. One of his motivations was the death of his maternal grandmother. Lavar believed that she would be disappointed and her legacy dishonored if he did not attempt to fulfill all of the dreams that they shared for his life. Similarly, Lavar believed that perseverance through oppression and racism contributed to him being a proud Black man with a strong will and great resolve.

Lavar received many positive messages about Blackness from his parents and maternal grandmother. He described his father as wanting him to learn from his own mistakes and to take responsibility for his behavior. Lavar expressed great admiration for Black woman. He revered their ability to remain strong and confident in the face of
scutiny from society and the undue burden of being the backbone of the Black community. He saw the women in his family as examples of strength. His mother encouraged educational attainment and family cohesiveness. Lavar’s maternal grandmother provided an historical context for the Black experience, often times referring to slavery and lynching in the south. She taught the importance of taking care of and protecting family and creating supportive and nurturing relationships within the community.

Archie asked Lavar to participate in the study, and he agreed without reservation. Lavar thought the project to be a great way to provide an opportunity to express himself and to help his community. Lavar rescheduled from an earlier interview. On the day of the interview, he was unable to come to the predetermined interview site because he was caring for his nephew. We conducted the interview in his home instead.

At the conclusions of the interviews, the respondents felt excited to participate in the project. Several participants stated that they were going to continue the conversation about Blackness with their friends and families. When offering them the financial compensation, several participants refused the money stating it was not necessary because they enjoyed the process, mental stimulation, and the challenge to ponder and articulate their experiences.
Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

The goal of this research was to gather naturalistic data and provide a critical analysis of some of the experiences of Black men and the processes which they undergo in developing, connecting to, and utilizing their Blackness as a source of strength enabling them to make meaning of their lives and to overcome adversity. The findings in this chapter reflect the data collected by the primary researcher through use of a participatory-action research design and a semi-structured interview process. Participants in the study were selected through purposeful sampling. Each participant was selected and pre-screened by the primary researcher and PAR team members on their meeting the prescribed selection criteria. The participants in this study were comprised of seven street life oriented young Black men who (1) self-identified as being street life oriented, (2) participated in street life activities within the last year to survive physically (e.g. gang activity, fighting/assault) or economically, and (3) lived in an inner-city or economically impoverished position. All the participants lived within a four-mile area of the testing site, within the same ward of their city. The participants were interviewed at a mutually agreed upon setting. Six participants interviewed in the first participant’s home while the seventh interview was conducted in his home. The findings in this chapter include and a cross-case analysis of the prevalent themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

Contextual Themes

The semi-structured interview guide was designed to assist the respondents in articulating their understandings, experiences, views, and conceptualizations of
Blackness and resilience. This study was a theory-driven qualitative analysis; the PAR team developed interview questions to explore areas/domains proposed in the Sites of Resiliency theory (Payne & Brown, in press). The core set of questions developed prior to data collection remained consistent throughout the interviews. However, additional questions were used to clarify the responses of each interviewee based on the individual's particular styles, use of language, and understanding of the concepts.

The following sections are organized into three major categories and are referred to as domains. The three domains that emerged from the data were: 1) conceptualizations of Blackness, 2) exploring additional sites of resilience, and 3) economic influences. The conceptualizations of Blackness domain was comprised of several sub-sections and reflected the themes that emerged from the respondents' articulations of their framings of Blackness. First, the participants provided their definitions of Blackness. By defining Blackness, they also described the differences of how they experienced and related to different people of African descent. They also provided an analysis of a) how they perceive themselves to be viewed by others, b) the differences in Black and White worldviews, and c) their suspiciousness of White people. Next, the participants illustrated how they used Blackness as a site of resilience. In using Blackness as a site of resilience, the participants discussed code switching (Franklin, 1999) as a tool to navigate through the world. In addition, they provided examples of how they used their Blackness to assist them overcoming the sense of vulnerability that they experienced on a daily basis.

This section is followed by a discussion of how respondents developed and expressed their Blackness. The participants described how they viewed their environment by discussing the sense of connectedness and community they experienced. Furthermore,
the participants posited that their connections to their communities were indicative of their levels of Blackness. Critical to the discussion of levels of Blackness, was the participants descriptions of what they considered to be sell-outs in their communities, as well as the interactions between sexual orientation and levels of Blackness.

The second domain involved exploring the potential physical and psychological sites of resiliency as proposed by the sites of resiliency theory. The sites of resilience identified by the participants were spirituality, family, the block, and psychological safe places. This section contains a description of the sites and their functions. The third, and last domain was a discussion of the influence and impact of economics in the lives and communities of young street life oriented Black men. This chapter also includes a cross case analysis of themes in the form of a table (see Table II). The cross case analysis identifies the major themes, provides a participant quote to capture the essence of the theme, and the researchers’ reactions.

*Conceptualizations of Blackness*

**Defining Blackness**

In order to explore Blackness as a site of resilience, it was necessary to understand how the respondents conceptualized Blackness, in their own words. Conversations regarding Blackness are oftentimes presented either metaphysically or metaphorically; as the interviewer, it was my intent to assist the respondents in deconstructing the concept of Blackness in a way that would capture their definitive statements and the subtle experiential nuances. Defining Blackness was the most challenging segment of the interviews. Many of the participants struggled to find the words to describe the concepts, feelings, and inner experiences associated with being
Black. Some of the participants provided definitive answers while others discussed various components of Blackness over the course of the interview. The definitions of Blackness were clarified through examples, personal anecdotes, and family histories. Participant responses were used as points of reference to explore the various aforementioned domains throughout the interviews. As previously noted, several researchers have conceptualized Blackness on four dimensions: genetic Blackness, cultural Blackness, psychological Blackness, and spiritual Blackness (Ani, 1994; Kambon, 1998; Myers, 1993; Myers, et al, 1991; Nobles, 1991; Williams, 1981). An analysis of participants' descriptions of Blackness revealed they were consistent with the discussed domains. In fact, the definitions provided incorporated several domains.

Monte, for example, described Blackness as the essence of life for Black people and as part of an ancestral linkage. He stated, “Blackness is a way of life. It is life. Like, it's what was here before I got here... it stands out more... it started way before my generation. Like, it was brought to me, I was just brought into it.” This statement highlighted psychological, genetic, and cultural Blackness.

Archie articulated the genetic and cultural components of Blackness. For him, Blackness described and reflected people of African descent, their connection, skin color, and expressive style. Blackness also reflected a sense of racial and cultural pride.

Ultimately, Blackness was what made him who he was. Archie stated [Blackness is:]

My people. My Race. Black is how I talk. How I wear my clothes. How I carry myself. How I defend myself. Not changing that for anyone... how you live... I say it's blood and skin color. I consider it more skin color, like it's easier to identify when I look at someone to see that they are Black... I can look at a person if they are dark skin or fair skin, I consider them Black and the way they talk and carry themselves and where they come from determines to me how Black they are... Black is to me anyone, you know what I’m saying, who don’t deny they race for no one. Who

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understands where they come from and as a people where we need to go. That’s what I consider to be Black.

Lavar and Monte both highlighted the pride that they associate with Blackness at a personal and cultural level. In describing his experience, Lavar stated: “How I define Blackness…it’s a very powerful word…you should be proud to be Black…I think it is a positive word for Black people. Blackness is a part of our culture…in a sense the essence of being Black is the enjoyment, I guess you can say just being proud.”

Monte provided commentary on the cultural significance of Blackness:

Black is a beautiful thing. Being Black don’t mean you are not capable of doing certain things. To me being Black is being who you are, yourself. Like: intelligent, knowing your whereabouts, or your surroundings.
Blackness…it’s my culture. Who I’m around all the time. Who I be around. Who I talk to. Blackness is like just my people. That’s how I see it.

Monte, Archie and the other respondents viewed Blackness as an integral part of their beings. Blackness was not indicative of a portion of their identity, but was more reflective of who they were as individuals and a collective.

Variations among Blacks

The participants acknowledged that Blackness was a binding force and was the collective consciousness of Black people. Within that framing, they recognized there was variance and intra-group differences in the conceptualizations of Blackness amongst Black ethnic groups. They spoke of the hierarchy that they perceived to exist in Black communities whereby members of one ethnic group felt that they were better than, or purer than, another ethnic group because of their birthplace, migration story, and possible race mixing. For example, Archie recalled encounters with Africans from the continent who believed that he was either less Black or impure because of the possible White
lineage that may have "diluted" his African heritage. Similarly, he encountered Jamaicans who became belligerent when they were mistaken as African American. The PAR team discussed this phenomenon and recognized that there remains a sense of one-upmanship among marginalized people and people who share limited resources within a capitalistic society. The prevailing assumption is that one ethnic group can position itself in the eyes of mainstream society as being more desirable and less threatening by belittling, pointing out the flaws, and distancing themselves from other oppressed people. Instead of uniting, they fight to preserve the limited resources received. The PAR team determined that if likeminded community members put aside their ethnic distinctions and focused on bolstering and combining their strengths and resources that they could systematically address issues that impacted the entire group. Such issues would include failing school systems, dilapidated housing, police brutality and strategies, and growing violence.

Beyond ethnic differences, interviewees also recognized intra-group variance among Black people according to economic and social status. Differences were also evident in their attitudes, behaviors, and goals. Terrence highlighted these differences when he stated:

As a people, Black people ... we are, I would say one of the most hardest people to figure out ... because there are so many different sides of Black people. Like for example you can take a kid that grew up from the slums, you can take a Black kid that grew up from the suburbs ... ; you know they have similarities, but they are different. It's all different types of missions with Black people. You got stone cold-hearted thugs or whatever; you have, you know, college kids, or whatever. They are alike in as many ways as they are different.

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Blackness as Viewed by Others

Participants further defined Blackness within the context of their experiences and the daily hassles that they endured as young Black men in a White capitalistic society. In doing so, they articulated awareness of the perceptions of mainstream society that characterize Black men as uneducated, uncontrollable, and second-class citizens. Subsequently, they oftentimes found it difficult to connect with, share, and describe their experiences of racism and discrimination with members of other ethnic groups who were not similarly impacted. Not impacted in the same manner. Because of an inability to share their experiences, participants felt isolated and disconnected from the larger culture. On the other hand, had a greater sense of connection to other Blacks who were faced with similar challenges, domestically and globally. Despite stereotypes and negative experiences, participants defined themselves in positive and self-affirming ways.

Terrence provided an analysis of his perception of White America's view of Black people when he asserted:

A White person would describe Blackness as something negative...selfish, maybe, maybe violent...I don't think they would have too much good to say about our Blackness because some of the pain we feel is because of them...But the overall history of it, they don't see us as being very smart people. They see us as lower than them no matter if we got more money than them or what. They always feel that they are better...Some White people would describe us as being selfish when we get to some spot where we feel that we don't like to help each other as maybe other cultures do. They think we violent. They couldn't have us at like a business party; they think of us as not having manners. They think of us as dumb, like we're not intelligent people. They wouldn't describe our Blackness; they wouldn't appreciate us as much.

This viewpoint was consistently shared among the respondents, who articulated that they felt that others outside of their race and social location neither understand, valued, nor appreciated them. They also believed that others did not understand how they
expressed themselves. Researchers (Ani, 1994; Houston, 1990; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999) have suggested that the covert and overt behaviors of people of African descent produce values, standards, customs, and traditions that are unique to their experiences. Interpreters of these experiences who are not astute in the behaviors of Black people may find it difficult to understand these experiences without viewing it through the contextual and perceptual lenses ascribed to by the observer. The participants were cognizant that other people may not understand them because of their social locations, privileges, and varied experiences. In turn, the respondents oftentimes perceived mainstream society hostile towards them, and felt economically and socially disenfranchised.

Diverging Worldviews

Participants further deconstructed the concept of Blackness while also providing a critique of White culture. Specifically, some of the participants proposed that Blackness was the anti-thesis of Whiteness. According to them, the underlying differences between Blacks and Whites were attributed to diverging worldviews. Several participants stated that Whites held a worldview that focused on capitalism and individualism while Blacks emphasized communal connectedness and perceived group survival as equal to success. Researchers have also supported that the diverging African/Black and Eurocentric/White worldviews are the basis for different perceptions and orientations amongst groups (Ani, 1994; Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990; Kambon, 1998; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999).

Terrence explained the conflicting worldviews as being a result of character differences between Blacks and Whites and because White culture did not have a common uniting experience to bind them together as White people or with Blacks. Referring to this Black/White dichotomy, he explained:
Somewhat it’s character. Cause if you look at a White man’s character it is totally different than a Black man, you know. We come from two totally different backgrounds. We have different morals. We indulge in different things. It’s different, you know. You can take ten Black people, and they all are gonna relate somewhere. You can take ten White people and it’s gonna be a mess, you know. It’s gonna be a big mess. So that depicts Blackness; attitude, persona, struggle, pain, love.

Terrence supported this notion via an example that described his inability to subscribe to the social stratification system that forms the underpinnings of capitalism. He asserted:

Capitalism for one. I could never see, like you specifically designing something that would keep people in poverty, to keep people hungry, starving, homeless. I couldn’t see a Black person designing something like that knowing that it’s gonna hurt another Black person. I can see that they [White people] would do something like that. I can’t see a Black person designing a nuclear bomb that could take out the whole world, but I could see them do something like that, ‘cause they did something like that. In a sense they have no regard for human life.

The disconnect Terrence felt from Whites was partly a result of his inability to grasp and incorporate White morality and value systems. This was evidenced by his position on capitalism, which he viewed as a tool of oppression. He seemed somewhat puzzled as he tried to understand the “whys” of oppression, domination, and subjugation and Eurocentric worldviews. During the interview, I observed several participants having visceral and affective reactions varying to understand their experiences within a Eurocentric culture. Oftentimes, they reacted by then shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders in disbelief and disappointment.

Suspiciousness of Whites

Consistent with their perspectives that Blacks and Whites have diverging worldviews, all of the participants held what they considered a healthy and warranted
suspicion of Whites. Some participants were suspicious of White people who reminded
them of negative experiences with Whites from their past, while others generally
distrusted White people. Their personal experiences and history led them to believe that
Whites, and the dominant mainstream society, continued to enroach, commoditize, and
benefit from contemporary Black culture despite their overt disdain for the people.

Achebe described the cultural siege:

They could try to walk like us and talk like us and dress like us, but they
will never truly and fully understand it, everything we do. You know what
I’m saying. We the lowest people on the totem pole, but every culture,
every class, they want to emulate us...They don’t want to be Black ‘cause
at the end of the day you not gonna get no job, you gonna be judged, lazy,
whateva...they want to look like us, that’s why they go get the tans...They
do everything that Black people do except really be Black. And then we
constantly evolving. We change the way we talk. We change the way we
dance. We constantly changing because everything we call theirs they
contaminate it and try to make it theirs or make their own version of that,
and, once they do that, we don’t want it no more. Like Ebonics, originally
we gonna talk another kind of way ‘cause they can’t do that. Rap music.
Everything we do or try to put a stake or claim on ‘cause they want to
emulate it. That’s a constant struggle, to adapt or to evolve, to stay away
from the White man ‘cause they want to try to figure us out. They want to
know our next step [big idea or trend] before we make it. We can’t let that
happen... ‘cause if we don’t stay one step ahead, it’s over.

Monte provided another nuance to the conversation. Monte believed that some
Whites could embrace and enjoy Black culture for altruistic reasons. He believed that an
individual raised in the Black community and taught to respect Black culture could
express and define themselves within an African worldview and promote Black cultural
norms and values.

This point brought about much debate among the PAR team. Some members felt
that it was possible to work with “good White folk” while others remained more
skeptical. The skeptics held fast in their positions. They acknowledged that Whites and

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Blacks could work together for the good of the community, but they constantly questioned the motives of Whites because of their history of abandoning and changing the agenda to protect their interests, and capitalize on the oppression they created. PAR members who supported working together recognized the exploitative practices of Whites but emphasized assessing the motives and merits on an individual basis.

To summarize, participants described Blackness as the central organizing principle and core of Black people and culture. It was Blackness that connected all Black people of African descent together throughout the Diaspora. According to the participants, people of African descent were born with a sense of Blackness that has been nurtured and developed throughout their lives. Blackness was described as a way of life and state of being. Being Black also meant being truthful and authentic in attitudes, behaviors, and interactions in the world. Blackness was defined as a set of values and cultural norms distinctive to itself. Blackness was oftentimes in direct conflict with a White worldview and an entity that was sufficient and that did not need validation by external sources. Blackness provided a framework to make meaning out of life. The participants also described Blackness as having a wide range of variance among Black people, but felt all Black people have an innate sense of Blackness that connected them.

*Blackness as a Site of Resilience*

The second domain that emerged was Blackness as a site of resilience. After the participants deconstructed their conceptualizations of Blackness, the interviews shifted to identify whether the participants utilized their Blackness as a site of resilience and if so, exactly how it was utilized. The majority of the participants stated that their understandings of Blackness, Black culture, and the pride that they embodied as Black
men were both sources of strength and sites of resilience. Seeing their Blackness as a site of resilience enabled them to persevere through the very difficult and discouraging life challenges they regularly faced. The participants’ framing of pride and self-worth was consistent with the optimal worldview that suggests self-worth is intrinsic and independent of external criteria (Myers, 1993; Myers, et al., 1991; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991). These men felt that they overcame obstacles that would have crushed other non-Blacks from more privileged communities.

Terrence recounted utilizing his conceptualization of Blackness as a site of resilience to understand how his social location influenced his life. Terrence believed that people should recognize the challenges and obstacles that an individual had to overcome in order to accurately quantify the magnitude of their achievements and success. He explained:

Being Black, I am overprotective of my Blackness. It’s me. I’m Black. I love being Black [no matter] how hard I have to try to do or accomplish something that’s gotta be done and me knowing how hard it’s gonna be to get it done... [For example, let’s take] a Caucasian kid. Me having a harder life than him and being able to do the same things that he can do, you know it’s a big plus for me. Like, wow! I did this enduring all the negativity. He didn’t have to endure negativity as he came up. It’s like a big accomplishment for Black people to do certain things.

Lavar also expounded:

The way I use [my Blackness] is in the way I probably express myself. When I hear negativity and when I am around other cultures, I stand up and let them know how proud I am to be Black. This is never gonna change. You gonna like me... I was proud to be Black because I hang around a lot of Black people, and I seen it everyday. I seen what some families go through... If the kids can’t help themselves and they need the grown-ups to help them and the grown-ups wanna focus on getting high... I’ve lived around certain situations like that. Things like that make me appreciate my Blackness even more because I know when I hear somebody say, “I was hungry last night,” or “this person in my family stole this,” I know what that’s like. He, we shouldn’t be stereotyped.
Everybody should be respected equally. I couldn’t say, I’m more Black than you because you grew up in a White neighborhood and I grew up in a Black neighborhood. You’re Black, I’m Black.

Lavar’s statements illustrated how his cultural, genetic, psychological and spiritual Blackness contributed to his identity development, which assisted him in making sense of the contradictions within his community and daily life. He held a strong sense of genetic and cultural Blackness, which was demonstrated by his sense of kinship to Black people. Lavar’s self-identity was married to his identity as a strong Black man, and it was his ideal to perpetuate this image. At the same time, his experiences of living in an impoverished community with all of its ills (drugs, violence, poverty, crimes) shaped his view of Black people and the Black community. Through interacting and living in both a Black and White world, working in an economic system comprised of both illegal and legal incomes, valuing family while acknowledging the detrimental qualities of certain members as well as a critical understanding of position in the world contributed to his identity development. This enabled him to understand, protect, and project an image of Blackness and connection to his people because he knew and understood the intricacies and contradictions of his people. He worked within multiple settings and environments without compromising himself and without having to justify his connection to both the positive and negative elements of his experiences. From his perspective a poor person, a hungry person, a person who uses drugs and steals were more than their actions. To reduce and describe an individual by one part of one’s identity and experience, although it may be most prevalent at the time, would constitute denying the totality of the person as a complex and multi-faceted individual. Lavar developed the various dimensions of his identity through his entrenchment in Black family, culture, history, and his experiential
learning. He developed an understanding of his multiple identities as a man, brother, son, uncle, leader in his family and community, educator, social commentator, worker, and person who engaged in street life activities. He oftentimes, struggled to negotiate the often-conflicting roles.

Blackness was utilized as a site of resilience by helping the participants maintain optimistic attitudes despite limited economic resources, familial challenges, and health and educational disparities. They did so by organizing their lives and making meaning out of the implicit contradictions that were supported and ascribed to by larger society. They utilized their multiple identities to assist them in negotiating and navigating through their communities in a manner that allowed them to remain both psychically safe and psychologically sound. For example, as young men they were forced to mediate the demands of financially supporting their families in impoverished communities, during economic recessions, without adequate professional training. As a result, they developed a critical analysis of the socioecopolitical factors which impacted both their inner-city neighborhoods and the larger society. They also developed adaptation skills necessary to adjust to their temporal environments. Their conceptualization and frameworks for Blackness, coupled with support from and involvement in the Black community, contributed to understanding the world in a way that promoted a higher quality of life compared to the men in their community who were unable to cognitively and affectively address the contradictions set before them. The process of how the respondents evolved their worldviews was consistent with how Myers viewed worldview development. She argued worldview development was the essence or substance of an individual's views that are lived and may be influenced by observation, examination, reflection, discussion, and
conclusions. From this perspective, individuals draw upon all of their multiple identities as opportunities to gain greater self-knowledge (Myers, 1993; Myers et al., 1991). A further review of the literature revealed that this process was supported by additional research, theory, and personal accounts (Anderson, 1999; Dyson, 2001; McCall, 1997; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999; Payne & Brown, in press).

At the time of the interview, Tristen and Brian felt that their Blackness played a lesser role in assisting them in overcoming obstacles. Hence they did not actively use or overtly acknowledge Blackness as a site of resilience; Tristen and Brian were heavily involved in street life activities. At the time of the interviews, Tristen was less engaged and believed that education and learning a trade was his way of changing his circumstances. Brian was consumed with his personal struggles and his primary focus was supporting himself financially through street life activities. The PAR team discussed this discrepancy and hypothesized that Tristen and Brian’s underutilization of their Blackness as a site of resilience neither negated nor diminished Blackness as a site of resilience. Their positions highlighted the notions that multiple sites may exist simultaneously and that individuals may utilize various sites at different times of their lives (Payne & Brown, in press). This data highlighted the importance of viewing individuals in an historical context in order to assess their utilization of site. At the time of the interview Tristen viewed education and Brian used street life as sites of resilience and both placed less emphasis on their Blackness. Tristen and Brian recognized that their Blackness may have helped them, but could not quantify how much. Blackness was a more salient site for the other respondents.
Code Switching

The participants provided another example of how they utilized Blackness as a site of resilience. They suggested that their Blackness helped them navigate the environment by using code switching. Code switching is a term coined by researchers to describe the uncanny ability for Blacks to interpret and react to their changing environment seamlessly (Franklin, 1999; Parham, 1999). Participants provided examples of their resilience of experiences by adjusting to a situation by remaining flexible and able to relate to the different types of people in their communities. Monte best exemplified this when he stated:

If I'm in the hood [neighborhood, community], it [code switching] help[s] me get through my way [be] 'cause I know people and they act just how I act. But if I'm somewhere else, it might have to change. At a different place, at a different time, it might have to change... I see my niggas and help them get through things too, at times. Like, I ain't never been locked up, they tell me stories and examples and that help me to know to go that way.

Like Monte, Brian utilized code switching to help him relate to different people in his community, adjust to different situations, and navigate the social thicket. Brian explained:

I see people struggle with being Black 'cause they try to fit into this and that. I feel as though that's being a part of Black... Like Black people can be in different groups. They playing ball right here, that person could jump in and play ball with this group of people. And it's a group of people right here; they all working on computers or something. If he a computer [guy], he could go over there and be with them and lead a whole different type of life doing that and go to this corner. It's a group of gangbangers, he could slide pass them and say 'peace dog' and they say 'peace dog,' back to them. Nah [do you know what] I'm sayin. Then a White person come up to them like "peace" and then they get jumped on basically. That's s, nah I'm sayin.
Code switching remained an important tool that the men used on a daily basis. Participants were aware of the perceptions that people had in their social circles. Because of their street savvy, the participants developed the ability to discern and uncover the underlying motives of people quickly. They knew how to interact in various realms and their talents to be chameleon-like enabled them to present a superficial side/image of themselves in order to "pass through" or "get by" challenging situations, e.g., going out on the block, being incarcerated. On the other hand, as evidenced by participation in this study, they possessed the skills to engage with others in a genuine way. The difficulty associated with code switching was that the respondents had few places where they felt they could be their true selves. For the most part, they felt the "world" only saw fragmented pieces, or snapshots, of street life oriented Black men. The participants suppressed aspects of their personality because of the roles and stereotypes which they felt were placed on them by larger society and certain sectors of their community in order to survive and negotiate their environments. The world rarely got a chance to see the fully actualized or optimally functioning person (Myers, 1998). For example, few people knew that Archie has worked with major researchers, has begun to write a novel, and wants to be a sportscaster. Likewise, Lavar is a history buff and wants to pursue a career as a teacher or a social worker. For the most part, the expressions of their true selves and talents have been limited to their families and close friends. The difficulty for the respondents has been to negotiate their personal growth within a larger socioecopolitical system, which neither affirms nor promotes their continuous development. Despite this challenge, they demonstrate their resilience by finding creative ways to express themselves and by aspiring to develop into their ideal person.
Vulnerability

Consistent with the notion that street life oriented Black men use their Blackness to mask and protect themselves, a theme of vulnerability as being an integral part of their experiences emerged. The respondents rarely described having an opportunity to either express or gain support and comfort for the emotional and physical vulnerability that they felt as young Black men. The participants often described being unsupported, disrespected, and unprotected as young black men living in impoverished inner-city communities. Despite their emotional and physical susceptibility, the participants revealed that they used their Blackness as a site of resilience to ward off the feelings of isolation and exposure. As vulnerable as they were, they still demonstrated resilience.

Tristen described the conflicting feelings of being exposed and being self-reliant. He stated, “I don’t got no like secret powers or nothing like that. Just be me...No skin color or nothing will ever protect you from anything. You gotta protect yourself.” Other participants echoed Tristen’s sentiment; however, they added that Blackness did provide them with the personal resolve and internal fortitude to cope and endure hardships that they could not withstand of their own volition. Monte proclaimed, “We killing ourselves. Now if a Black man can kill a Black man and a White man can kill a Black man, you can’t trust nobody, right. So, it’s not really helping me, but it’s like probably helping me be a stronger man than what I should be.

Monte’s statements illustrated how his conceptualization of and connection to Blackness contributed to his resiliency. Monte recognized his role as an undervalued victim in a cycle of violence. Initially, he alluded that Blackness had menial influence, but immediately acknowledged that Blackness provided him an intangible quality that
gave him strength, support, and contributed to his drive to persevere beyond his own personal will power.

Blackness gave the participants a sense of power, pride, self-respect and self-esteem that secured and anchored them. For these men, Blackness was equated with individual and collective strength, courage, and defiance in the face of oppression. Terrence asserted, “Black people are not gonna be stepped on or walked over.” Brian illustrated the interaction between his sense of Blackness and how it enabled him to strive towards obtaining his goals. He stated:

I see it as being strong. I’m not gonna down my race. Like, I see it as being strong ‘cause being Black, we been through a lot…Me…I been through a lot…like, I don’t give up like real easy. [I’m] like, “fuck it!”…I be like, “let me try this again, let me see if I can do this again.” Know what I’m sayin. I feel like that’s a part of my Blackness, too. I feel as though I just can’t give up on this.

Terrence’s unwillingness to lose hope for his people, accept failure, and defer his dreams was an example of his resilience. All the participants shared this same attitude. For them, to fall and wallow in sorrow or disappointment would have been in conflict with Blackness. During the debriefing, several participants stated that the interviews were the first times they had shared their experiences with anyone outside of their families and that there should be more opportunities created for them to express themselves; it relieves the burden of resolving their feelings of isolation.

In summary, participants viewed Blackness as a site of resilience, a source of pride, strength and courage used to overcome obstacles and to navigate the challenges that young Black men living in the inner-city faced daily. The influence of Blackness and its prominence as a site of resilience had different meanings according the respondents context and history. Blackness was defined as the central organizing principle of Black
people and of Black culture. Blackness was a set of values and distinctive cultural norms that sometimes conflicts with the values promoted by the larger mainstream society. Moreover, Blackness was conceptualized as a way of life, a sense of truthfulness, and a way and state of being. Blackness framed an approach to making meaning out of life. Participants acknowledged that Blackness helped them navigate their environment by code switching. They also stated that Blackness gave them a sense power and pride that served as a buffer to the sense of vulnerability and lack of protection which they experienced.

Process of Development

Upon defining Blackness and identifying it as a site of resilience, we began investigating how Blackness and resilience were developed and cultivated in the lives of inner city street life oriented Black men. For many of the participants Blackness was synonymous with strength and indicative of resilience. As with the other themes, the process of how Blackness and resilience developed was deducted from examples.

Archie said he learned what it meant to be a resilient Black man through conversations with family members. Archie and the other respondents proposed that being “resilient”, “strong”, and “Black” were closely similar adjectives used to describe what they perceived to be a Black man. Archie recalled being raised in an environment where adults continuously provided political, social, and cultural context. He was also pulled aside and given directives by adults when specific lessons needed to be taught. Archie recalled a powerful dialogue that he incorporated into his mantra of manhood; other respondents claimed receiving similar directives as well. Archie recited the message:
...to be a strong Black man, try not to lie, let anyone walk over you, and don’t look for hand-outs. Be your own man... Stand on your own, take care of your own self in this world, nobody gonna do for you like you do for you. If you see a Black person down and need help, extend that hand. It could be you one day.

When describing the process of developing Blackness, the participants used ‘Blackness’ and ‘resilience’ interchangeably. The PAR team understood this as reflective of how the terms were used and presented to the participants during their upbringing. The interviewees stated that the term “Strong Black Man” was used throughout their lives to describe resilience, Black masculinity, and manhood. To be regarded as a “man” in the Black community, the premise was that one must be both physically and psychologically able to endure the hardships that most Black men face in a White-dominated society. In addition to this, the participants were expected to protect and care for their families and equate resiliency with their ideas of manhood and Blackness.

Terrence provided a critical example to describe the process he underwent to develop resilience. Terrence’s resilience was shown by leaving his community and obtaining his goals in a different environment. While a student in college, maintaining a 3.6 grade point average, his life was threatened. At the time of the incident, Terrence lived at home with his parents and traveled daily to school. He also held a job at the mall. Terrence recounted the experience:

While I’m coming home or whatevz, look what I’m surrounded by, and I found myself getting into negativety. Even though I was doing something positive, I was getting into negativety, and one event changed my whole way, like I gonna get up outta here get away from the streets... I got off the bus, and I was chillin with some of the felas. We had a couple of drinks, it was a Friday night as a matter of fact.. I’m on my way home, and another guy approached me, and just off of the people that I hang with. [He said] “Don’t you hang with ‘Rocky’? So, now let me tell you what your crew did to my boy.” They, so called, pulled a gun out on his boy and shot him, and he had a burser (gun) on him, and he was telling me like, I got my...
burner right here. And he put the gun to my head, and I was so scared, but I didn’t show it to him. I was hurting. Like wow, he could take my life right now. All just because of the people that I hang around. I wasn’t shooting at his boy or know how it ever went down, but, just because I was from that area or around those people, I could of seen ‘tookin’ out. And I told him, I was scared to death, but I was like, “If you gonna do something, then do it.” I was like, wow, that might have been the last words. I was gonna go out like a soldier, though. He was like an older cat too. He was like, “I’m I am going to let you breathe. I’ma let you breathe, little man.” I was like, wow. I was walking home, I sat down by myself. When I got home and I’m like crying, I’m dying inside. I just knowing that my life could have been taken away. I spoke to my mother about it. I dropped out of school and a few weeks later I was in the military. I thought, if I can leave my surroundings, maybe I can focus more on school and life, so that’s why I left.

Terrence’s moving and emotional story highlighted the struggles that many young street life oriented Black men encounter as they attempt to make changes in their lives. Terrence decided to join the military, not out of any sense of patriotism for his country, but in reaction to a personal death threat in his community. Ironically, he believed that he was safer in the military than in the streets of his neighborhood. His choice was a commentary on the intense violence and frequency of assaults young inner-city men regularly face. He also demonstrated resilience by channeling his fear to make a choice that promoted “safety” and an opportunity to provide for his family.

Terrence drew upon several sources of strength, or utilized several sites of resiliency, to persevere through his adversity. Terrence was the consummate “code switcher.” He was a college student by day and an “alleged shooter” and victim by night. Education was another site of resilience through which he found solace and excelled academically and used it as a means toward a better life. Terrence used his family as a site of resilience as he gained support, calmed his fears, and made a rational life decision instead of retaliating. He used the military as a site as well. The military was both a safe
haven, as well as as institution where he developed work and life skills, increased his social networks, matured, and provided for himself and family economically.

In this instance context is critical to analyzing Terrence’s actions. If viewed in isolation, Terrence’s decisions would lead observers to varied reactions. Firstly, he demonstrated resiliency by graduating high school and entering college. One could then view entering the military was both signaling a failure and an act of resilience. It could be viewed as a sign of failure because he entered the military after dropping out of college. On the other hand, he chose to enter a socially accepted arena to gain acceptance and protection while displacing and sublimating his anger, rage, fear, and violence.

Brian provided another example of how he developed and conceptualized resilience and Blackness. He admitted that he was constantly in a battle to remain focused on positive things and not to engage in what he considered negative or destructive behaviors. At times, Brian was able to obtain his goals and at other times he fell short. He struggled to better himself, but acknowledged that he had to do things on his own terms, his own way. Brian appeared to have resigned to always being involved in street life in some capacity. He lived by a street-code in which his individual desires were mediated by reciprocity and consequences. He accepted the fact that justice would eventually be served at some point and he was willing to take the consequences for his actions. With that in mind, he articulated his struggle in this manner:

Basically I don’t listen to nobody! I see it as I might take heed to what they saying, but I’m doing what I wanna do, regardless. I don’t go by rules or nothing; nah [know what I’m saying]. I make the rules. N I guess that’s part of my experience of me, being me... When I say being me, I do what I want to do. I listen too. I know right from wrong. I know if I go out there and I hit somebody in the head with a stick, there is consequences behind that. Either somebody gonna come hit me in the head with a stick, or I’m a be prosecuted for it. You feel me. I’m be arrested or something, you
know. But other than that, yeah, I do whatever I’m gonna do. I just know right from wrong... I just be sometimes, I just go with my flow. Like I said before, I don’t like to listen ‘cause I feel like, like I know this already. They say don’t go out there and do this, or don’t go out there and do that ‘cause this might happen to you, know. I’m saying, “I know that already.” Just like I gotta challenge that to see if I can make it that way... I see it as basically what I told you before, man, earlier, like I do what I want to do; it’s a part of my Blackness. So, if I feel like something holding me back from doing what I want to do, I try harder at it; nah I’m saying. I try harder to go against that. I’m a try harder, harder, harder, until I made it ‘til I feel as though like I satisfy myself.

In the previous examples, Terrance and Brian approached and responded to hardships in ways consistent with their definitions and conceptualizations of Blackness and resilience. Both men felt unprotected and vulnerable. Motivated to protect themselves and maintain their personal integrity, they differed in the arenas in which they chose to demonstrate resilience. Terrance chose to assert himself in the military while Brian affirmed himself by becoming more involved in street life.

Brian’s statements brought about much debate amongst the PAR team. Some members questioned how his comments could indicate resilience. The question posed was, “How do people negotiate individual survival and resilience while maintaining and supporting the structure of the community at large when actions may compromise the overall integrity of the community?” From a sites of resilience perspective it is critical to first understand how the individual organizes his world. In Brian’s case, he viewed himself as a man who needed to live a lifestyle that was street life oriented. He stated being aware of possessing and developing a street life orientation from his youth; compared to other participants, his focus on preserving and building the Black community was less. He believed that it was his role to provide for himself and his family. His view of the world was not based on what some would interpret as
sociopathy or criminality. To the contrary, Brian’s statements were an articulation of his reality. From his vantage, he has always struggled to do well, but was engaged in street life for survival. Once his actions helped him protect and provide for himself and family, he completely engaged in this lifestyle. Street life was just one the mode of survival he chose to exploit and where he succeeded at. Upon becoming successful, by his standards, Brian used street life to assert himself and to demonstrate his resiliency.

Brian’s brother, Antoine, attempted to utilize sports and education as sites of resilience, as means to move him out of his social location and to assert himself in the world. At the time of the interview, Antoine did not want to engage in street life activities and was attempting to work a mainstream job. Conversely, Brian was still fully engaged in street life and was prepared to take the consequences associated with his life choices. Some PAR members viewed Brian’s history of incarcerations as evidence of his failure and inability to maintain himself. Others viewed his incarcerations as acts of resilience because he went to jail and was released while many of his peers obtained new charges while incarcerated and/or died in jail. Brian’s street life orientation dictated that he live by the street codes, which differed from many of the PAR members. From this example, we could ascertain that reciprocity, justice, and communism in the streets may diverge from the conceptualizations ascribed to by non-street life oriented individuals. The PAR team concluded, that within Brian’s context and worldview, he identified himself as resilient in some areas and not as resilient in others. It was our goal to understand his worldview and conceptualization of resiliency based on his criteria. At that point, we could use his criteria to assist him in assessing and critiquing his life.
Moreover, it was critical that Brian and other men who shared his position were apart of the Black community and serve a vital role in maintaining a sub-culture which exists and is not often talked about. With this in mind, what same may describe as conflicting individual and community goals become far less contradictory once the values which street life oriented men ascribe to are viewed as viable and legitimate and are regarded similarly to middle-class values.

To bring this discussion back full circle, the emergent themes suggested that Blackness and resilience developed from an ongoing process throughout the lifespan in the context of the lifecycle of a multigenerational family system. By developing their Blackness and resilience they expanded upon, became entrenched in, and incorporated a worldview that made meaning out of their lives and experiences and enable them to overcome adverse circumstances. This perspective was developed through key interactions within their families, communities and others social systems. Messages about resilience and Blackness were transmitted through family, interactions with other cultures, along with their own personal and internalized conceptualizations. Blackness was transmitted intergenerationally, developed and nurtured through interactions, and direct and implicit messages within the family and the larger Black community.

*Expressions of Blackness*

Previously stated, participants tended to struggle to define Blackness. However, it was less challenging to articulate how they experienced, witnessed and expressed Blackness. Interviewees asserted that they expressed Blackness by their mere presence and their abilities to ‘be.’ They felt as if they embodied Blackness in their beings, and everything they did was an expression and derivative of their Blackness. For example,
Tristen stated that he expressed Blackness by, "Just being me. Just going around everyday doing my usual. Not letting anything or anybody stop me from doing what I'm doing."

Monte stated that he expressed Blackness through "being." Monte expanded his definition of "being" to mean remaining true to self, living his life with integrity, having pride in his culture, maintaining a healthy self-identity and racial identity, and not being ashamed of his social location. A review of the literature proposes that being is a central feature of the Blackness and the Black / African self-concept (Kambon, 1998; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999; Williams, 1981). Monte went on to say:

I express my Blackness as who I am Mr. Monte...I say my color and the way I dress. That's what makes me more Black as like another person. I see my color...Far as my skin tone, like as far as being Black, I can't change my color and my skin tone or nothing. So I'ma be Black for the rest of my life. So, that's the way I express being Black. That's how I see it, my color and the way I act...as far as White culture, my actions are way different than them.

Brian highlighted his experience stating,

I express my Blackness like through rapping, through ball playing. Through everything in life, I'm expressing my Blackness; I'm showing my Blackness...Like, my style is one of them...Look, I wear my clothes like two or three days, you feel me. They be like, "Damn! What the fuck nigga!" I be like, "I'm Black!" nah [know what] I'm saying man, "I can do the shit"...my walk. my talk. The way I carry myself, that's a part of my Blackness.

Archie reiterated that the intentional defiance of and resistance to the dominant culture that many Blacks have conveyed as an expression of cultural pride, resilience, and Blackness as well. A review of literature also supports that militancy may oftentimes be viewed as an act of resilience, particularly for people of color and the oppressed (Anderson, 1999; Cleage, 1968; Cross, 1991; Stryon, 1967). Archie states:
I don’t bend for no one. I don’t bend. I just try to be me. I feel like, once you bend over, it’s hard to stand up straight again. So I must walk around and stand straight. Black is how I talk, how I wear my clothes, how I carry myself, how I defend myself. Not changing that for anyone. Although respondents viewed their individual and collective expressions of Blackness as involving an internal process with outward manifestations, they also realized that their behaviors were being interpreted within a hostile sociopolitical climate as evidenced by racism, stereotypes, lack of opportunities, and feelings of disenfranchisement. Their experiences with these factors contributed to their defiance and undying assertion of self, which was another expression of Blackness.

Lavar provided an example of how his misinterpreted actions and expressions have caused him emotional and financial distress. He stated:

One thing I don’t like about this world still, racism... it is still a big issue. I feel that we have the same responsibility to express ourselves as being Black as one that is White or Hispanic. Sometimes they look at appearance, like somebody might come in... I might come in, hair is braided...right there from the door, they label me before they get to know me, “Oh he’s from the streets.” They don’t know that some people that braid their hair [because] it’s a part of their culture... it’s the way they express they Blackness. So, I don’t like when somebody is quick to judge without getting to know a person.

Although many of the participants recognized that their expressions of Blackness would not be viewed as being socially acceptable and mainstream, they wanted their individuality to be respected and valued. Lavar provided an illustration of the variance of expression among street life-oriented Black men. He casually suggested:

Some people express themselves in a violent way. Some people express themselves in a tone of voice that’s respectable. Some people express themselves in a way that’s not acceptable. Some people express themselves in actions without saying any words. Some people hold it in. Some people don’t express themselves.
Several participants posited that many street life oriented Black men expressed Blackness through a street life orientation. Monte's experiences lead him to explain:

Most people say all our Black people on the corner selling drugs, gangs. That's my only way of showing, that's how they express it, like drugs, money, guns, the only way I see. They express they way by being on the streets more. Being in the streets... Alright, some people work, that's another way of expressing it. Some take care of their kids, that's all, and most likely, everybody else is in the street.

Participants were clear that street life was neither the only way to express Blackness nor the most desired means to survive. Anderson, (1999) emphasized that for many people with a street life orientation living in the inner-city, their choices are more reflective of their current situation and available options rather than their over all value system. The respondents recalled witnessing their family members expressing Blackness through things like positive attitudes and high moral character. They viewed many of the women in their lives as exemplifying Blackness through unselfish and undying devotion to their children and in uplifting their families. Monte's described his mother's experience as, "She bust her ass like going to work, like taking my brother to school, like taking care of family, making sure we as one sticking together and are not being selfish and greedy."

In summary, Blackness was expressed in tangible and intangible forms. Tangible forms were exemplified through style of dress and hair, music, and the use of language. Examples of intangible expressions of Blackness were exhibited thought attitude, rhythm, and being. Participants also suggested that Blackness and resilience could be expressed through street life and acts of militancy and political and economic resistance. Furthermore, the participants stated that resilience, internal fortitude, and perseverance were expressions of Blackness. Participants claimed that freedom of expression was
critical to Blackness. For the participants, individuality, in relation to Black expression, meant asserting oneself in a manner that was true to, and consistent with, the person’s experiences and station in life. Regardless of how they make their ways through the world, they believed that their choices were representative of just one orientation or style, and should not be judged as positive or negative by others. Instead, their expressive styles of Blackness should merely be respected and understood as their modes of interacting.

**Connectedness and Community**

As the respondents continued discussing Blackness and resilience, another theme emerged. The respondents spent a considerable amount of time describing a sense of connectedness as critical to Blackness. Furthermore, they differentiated levels of Blackness by individual’s having a higher or lesser level of connectedness. In regards to a sense of connectedness that all Black people share Antoine concluded: “...some [Black] people might not share something personal, but they all share the same thoughts, the same situations that occur.” Most of the participants were connected to the historical and contemporary struggles of Black people and integrated those experiences and formed a functional outlook to life. Tristen expanded on this connection:

They start back in ancient history or slavery. The fight for your freedom, that’s why Martin Luther King Jr. means a lot to not only the Black community, but the community in general. He was one of the causes for freedom. That freedom of speech, freedom to say what you want...not worry about being...punished for it. I mean you are free, and we struggled a lot for it. I mean look at the communities we live in; they are low-class to poor communities. They don’t really expect a lot of people to make it out of these situations. That’s why we be glad to see young people go to college and graduate from college ‘cause they don’t really expect that from the neighborhood we live in. I mean, I grew up rough. I grew up struggling. My mom damn near sometimes...we didn’t eat. We were poor, but I didn’t say just because I’m Black that was happening. It was a struggle. Black people are the never-ending struggle. No matter how hard you try, you just don’t get anywhere. You don’t want to make excuses.
be, at the same time, what's true is true. We were brought up as slaves and finally now that was ancient history. What my ancestors went through, they did it for me.

The sense of connectedness and the symbiotic relationship to Black people that the participants described was initially fostered in their nuclear families. Their close familial ties and ideals of family were their training grounds and introductions to Black culture. Archie, one of the older participants, became reflective and provided his analysis of the noticeable shifts which occurred in the Black family and in the larger community. He stated:

Our generation, we had a sense of family, some kind of community. So, when the drugs came in between my generation and the younger generation, we needed to come to some kind of common ground. Like a lot, I had it rough too; I understand your problem. I can relate. What we need to do is find something that you like to do, whether it be your school, sports, anything that they can make a living doing.

In the midst of the imploding of many of the political, economic, social, and educational structures in their communities, the majority of the participants proposed that it was their connections to, and understanding of, the struggles of Black people that empowered them to make sense of their lives and cemented the value of connectedness to family and community. Brian asserted that he was aware of the plight of other Blacks, but found it too difficult to address those issues. Instead of addressing problems globally, he harnessed all of his energies and focused on the survival of himself and family. The pressure that some of the participants felt to maintain themselves while creating change in the community was very intense. Antoine illustrated how it was necessary for him to use an interpretative lens while processing his experiences with other Black men so that he could tolerate micro aggressions and subtle assaults which he posed. He stated:
I'd rather hear another brother curse at me before White people 'cause I know he [is] going through the same thing I'm going through. He been through his own [struggle], but when I hear another brother curse at me, I laugh that off 'cause somewhere down the road he gonna go through what I'm going through. Or he's going through the same thing now.

Participants found strength through community connections, histories, triumphs and the hope that situations and circumstances could eventually change for the better. They also contextualized their behaviors and roles as street life oriented Black men as both independent choices and byproducts of their social location in society. Archibald provided a more in-depth analysis of the state of the Black community when he said:

Yeah, [sense of] community and Blacks... it's a big thing, probably not talked about a lot or looked at as far as [actually calling it] a community, but yeah that's what it is... Well it's a good and a bad thing. There is a Black community, and we [are all] aware of the jealousy. If I think you have a little bit more than me... it tends to make people jealous. So that destroys the community from within, but there still is a sense of community. Some people outside of it, they may not see that they are working for the common goal. They may not know it at the time, but that's what they are working towards... We split. Some of us are understanding the struggle and are trying to work together, and then you have the savages who just don't care. They are "me first." So, you have a lot of "me first" in the Black community. Everyone wants it to be better, and they want to see crime rest, but they don't want to take the initiative or be the first person to start it. Everyone is waiting for someone else to start the Revolution. Nobody wants to be the leader. They waiting for somebody else to lead or to start it.

To reiterate, the participants proposed that their sense of connection to their Blackness and the Black community enabled them to make sense of the world around them. Additionally, it was their affinity for Blackness that shaped their perspective to interpret, understand, and remain committed to promoting and preserving Black culture.

The connection to Blackness and the shared experiences of Black culture is an integral component of psychological and cultural Blackness (Williams, 1981).
Levels of Blackness

In the same vein, interviewees stated that all people of African descent possessed and expressed Blackness. Interestingly, they proposed that Blackness could be classified along a continuum based on an individual’s connection to Blackness and Black culture. For them, Blackness was not ‘either/or’ or ‘binary’.

Participants recognized that some of the behaviors exhibited by individuals within the community were not aimed towards the betterment of the community. Archie’s use of the word “savage” highlighted this distinction. Archie provided clarity on the use of the term “savage” and expanded:

The ones I call savages, they [are] not really savages...You call them savages because they been through so much as far as no parents, parents died or mom’s as addict and everybody knows, it’s not a secret. As far as everybody might not have it good, but they probably just had it the worst as far as people growing up. So, when they get older, they tend to have the crab mentality, “it’s me first, it’s me before anything” because they so used to not having. So, when there is something to be given out or when it’s something to be made, they will be the first ones in line because, where they come from, nothing ever lasts. So, that’s where savage come in because they worry about themselves first. They know that a lot of them live in a lifestyle where they living, selling drugs on the streets, they are not promised tomorrow. So, we live everyday to the fullest. So, if that means smoking, drinking, hanging out with your friends bonding, you live every day as if it’s your last because you are not guaranteed tomorrow. You could die. They could lock you up. That’s just what it is.

According to Akbar’s Africentric classificatory system for mental disorders, Archie’s description of “savages” would fit the criteria for the self-destructive disorders. The self-destructive disorders refer to the victims of oppression who exhibit faulty and destructive behaviors in attempt to cope and survive (Akbar, 1991; Kambon, 1998).

Within the respondents framing, Black people with higher levels of Blackness were those people who stayed connected to Black people and their struggles, and gave
back to the Black community. Black people with lesser levels of Blackness were those who lost their connections to Black people and their struggles, and did not give back to the community. Furthermore, levels of Blackness were mediated by an individual’s context and interpretations of experiences. Similarly, context and interpretations were influenced by interactions with families and the Black community.

“Sell-outs”

The participants stated that a person’s level of Blackness could also be determined by an individual’s level of love, appreciation and affinity for Blackness and Black culture. Blacks with higher levels of Blackness were viewed with much admiration and respect. While Blacks with lesser levels of Blackness were regarded as “sell-outs.”

Sell-outs were conceived as those who lost their connections to Blackness, Black culture, and the struggles of Black people. Sell-outs were considered to be at the bottom of the social ladder in the Black community. These individuals meet the criteria for alien-self disorder according to Akbar’s classification system (Akbar, 1991; Kamboh, 1998). These individuals have assimilated to a lifestyle that is foreign to them and have become completely unfamiliar to their natural African self-consciousness. Archie best summarized the interaction between the sell-out and lack of connection with the community:

Well, they are a sell-out; it’s not their fault, but they are a sell-out by their parent’s choice. If they don’t come back to the hood, like, if they still have family that’s in the hood and they don’t come back to visit, or hang out, or act like they are better than them ‘cause they are living a little better, or they have a little bit more things, we consider them sell-outs... I hear a lot of Black people say, once a person made it, they get a little success, a little money, they forget where they come from. They don’t want to help another person out. That’s the worst I ever heard a Black person talk about another Black person who made it. The one who don’t give back or try to help out, that’s the worst I ever hear a Black person be... When you don’t
do none of that and you don’t even try, you are probably the worst person. The only thing I say that is worst than a sell out is someone who hurts a child.

The respondents challenged the stereotypes held by many middle and upper-class Blacks and Whites regarding what constitutes a sell-out. The PAR team provided a critical analysis on this point. The PAR team acknowledged that a stereotype and assumption among middle and upper middle class Blacks and Whites is that poor people and street life oriented Black men would consider people who are educated, speak standard English, work daily, and dress conservatively to be sell-outs, but this assumption is faulty on several levels. First, it assumes that poor people and street life oriented men do not want to be educated, speak well and maintain mainstream employment. As if they value poverty and lack of opportunities. Secondly, the assumption by those with wealth is that they are despised because of their social location. Actually, they are revered and often looked at as role models, until it becomes obvious by their interactions, comments and attitudes towards the less fortunate that they do not want to associate with them. Simply put, they do not attempt to uplift others. The commentary on the sell-out is not about what they have, but more about how their worldview is anti-African.

**Sexual-orientation**

As we continued to deconstruct the levels/continuum of Blackness, I asked the participants if there was an interaction between an individual’s level of Blackness and one’s sexual orientation. All of the participants stated that there was not an interaction between levels of Blackness and sexual orientation. They believed that sexual orientation neither enhanced nor diminished/negated an individual’s level of Blackness. The participants’ conceptualizations of Blackness and homosexuality contradicted much of
the literature that suggests that homosexuality was an indication of a lesser sense of Black consciousness and Africanity and undermined healthy Black male development (Akbar, 1991; Baruti, 2003; Carabado, 1999). Perhaps Trigen best summarized the collective position when he stated, "Like I said, if you Black, you Black. Nobody can change it. If you gay you gay...but you still Black." Although sexual orientation did not diminish levels of Blackness, participants articulated that sexual orientation might influence an individual expressed Blackness according to their personal style. Monte asserted his viewpoint in this manner, "...Like being gay, they express it in a Black female way. So, I see it [their expression of Blackness] as the same thing, it's just that they go by it in a feminine way instead of as a straight [heterosexual] guy way. They try to go about it as a Black girl, than as a Black male."

The participants' conceptualizations of sexuality and Blackness were mediated by being connected to Black people and their struggles, and their contributions to the Black community. Hence, participants demonstrated an understanding of the experiences of gay men as it related to their struggles as Black men. Terrence asserted, "I would say that there can be a gay person that has been through just as much as I've been through and see things the same way I see it and they're in touch with their Blackness just as much as I am. So I don't see where sex plays a role in your Blackness or your ethnicity." Similarly, Brian provided his take on the matter when he animatedly proclaimed:

A Chinese mother fucker can be gay! What I mean to say is that because he's Black, that doesn't have nothing to do with him being gay...if there were two brothers and one was gay...they could have the same mother and father; they could have the same genes...they both just as Black. It's just that he got his way of life and he got his way of life.

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Lavar further situated his perception of the Black gay male in the inner-city, while underscoring his heterosexuality. He said,

I don’t think you deteriorate the level of Blackness by what he chooses to be sexually. I think you still have to give him the same amount of Blackness as you would give a straight [heterosexual] man, but, in reality, he won’t get the same respect as a straight [heterosexual] man for the simple fact that he’s gay. OK, I don’t discriminate. Like I said, I don’t have anything against gay people or any kind of other people, but I really do feel it’s not a difference because, if he’s appreciating his Blackness, no matter what he does with himself, I think it’s gonna stay. There is still gonna be a high level of Blackness because he’s still a Black man in his community. Whether he’s straight [heterosexual] or gay, he’s still gonna face the same problems as I am, and I’m the straight [heterosexual] man. He’s still gonna have to go through some of the same things that I went through because he’s gay. Might change his sexual preference, but his Blackness is still there.

Perception was a key element for street life oriented Black men. Participants emphasized a need to protect and project an image of unadulterated masculinity.

Consistent with the majority culture, street life oriented Black men believed that any sign of weakness could have dire consequences. In fact, during the interviews, when illustrating points, a few of the participants used derogatory language to describe weak or shallow men. For example, when describing a situation where his Black Southern cousins were being bullied by a White child, Tristan offered his solution to the problem, “I believe as soon as I would have seen him put his hands up, he would have been knocked down”. He argued street credibility was a guise of toughness and eliminating any sense of weakness. He stated,

They say [referring to cousins], ‘Cause they get intimidated too quick ‘Cause they let anybody push them around and anything. You can’t do that... ‘Cause you learn not to let nobody push you around here. ‘Cause you might as well say you in fucking NY... You walk around here, you let someone push you around or something, it’s like you go to the county (referring to county jail) or something, and they find that out, they turn you into a dyke [another inmate’s property].

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Participants noted that context and environment contributed to their interpretations of behaviors when assessing levels of Blackness. As documented in literature, researchers have suggested that cultural context is vitally important to interpreting behaviors and attitudes (Almeida, 1994, 1998; Burlew, Banks & McAdoo, 1992; Houston, 1990; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Their commentaries were not solely based on class distinctions, but rather on the connections or disconnections from the voices, ills, and plight of Black people. Participants cited several public figures to whom they ascribed higher or lesser levels of Blackness based on their perceptions via media and personal experiences. When asked to give an example of a people who symbolize a higher level of Blackness, several participants pointed to Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Jesse Jackson. Both ministers were acknowledged for their long-time fight for civil rights, highlighting the struggles of the oppressed, standing up for what they believed in and promoting unity in Black people. Moreover, participants identified and connected with people whom they shared kindred experiences, particularly those with a street life orientation or a message of resistance. Terrence added:

Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Benjamin Banneker, Harriet Tubman--Blackness, that's Blackness right there. They went through and overcame; and their lives are really big and inspirational. First and foremost, he [Malcolm X] came from the bottom, from the straight gutter, and he had his share of years where he's done some terrible things and crimes, whatever. He is called, paid his debt to society... but he realized there was something better, you know, there was something more than the streets. He came up outta that, you know. I really admire him for that.

Conversely, Monte referred to the professional golfer Tiger Woods as a “different type of Black person,” as compared to Sharpton and Jackson, because Woods speaks more about his individual efforts and ambitions. He explained,
... For example, Tiger Woods. He doesn’t consider himself in, being more as a White man than as a Black... Mostly the way he talks, his movements like that... in interviews, how he be doing. When you see him on TV, like how he talk... I’m not saying what type of words come out his mouth. I’m talking about how he carry himself mostly. He carry himself as being more on the other side of his culture... Like mostly downgrades Black people. I heard, right, most interviews he downgrades us, but it’s still making himself look good because he got both sides with him. So everything he does, he says, he still making himself look good.

Likewise, several participants compared and contrasted their views of members of their communities who gained monetary success, yet their commitments to the community were perceived as different. Tristen critiqued hip-hop music producer Lil’ Blaze (pseudonym) and National Basketball Association player Rodney “Fly” Ferguson (pseudonym):

I don’t really feel him [Lil’ Blaze] like that. He ain’t from [city] like that. But he could do more for the other DJs around here that could rap. He didn’t put nobody down. He up there working with H.O.G.S. (music label) and junk... I see that as he thinking about himself right now. He ain’t trying to give back to these other rappers. He thinking about himself, about himself only... If I was like that and I had all that money, shit, I at least fix up something in the hood. Rodney Fergson fixed up Horton Park. He could at least fix up these housing projects or something. He ain’t do shit.

In conclusion, a key component in defining Blackness was connectedness. Participants stated that all Black people were bound together by their ancestral connections to Africa. They expressed having a concomitant bond with all people of African descent across the Diaspora despite the differences and conflicts that were residuals of oppression. Participants articulated that their conceptualizations of Blackness were predicated on a sense of connection to Black culture and the Black community. Participants identified the Black family as the focal point of their Black identity development and connection to Black culture.
Connectedness, first fostered in the family, was then extended to local communities and finally expanded to all Black people. The participants believed that the interdependence and centrality of the Black family was a major component of Black culture that was worthy of being preserved. They noted that kinship bonds were extremely difficult to maintain because there was an undercurrent of strife, dissension, and frustration in the Black community.

Participants discerned higher or lesser levels of Blackness based on an individual's connectedness to the struggles, ills, and plight of Black people and Black culture. Furthermore, the participants did not think that sexual orientation was an indicator of a person's level of Blackness; however, sexual orientation may influence how one expresses Blackness.

A comprehensive analysis of the interviewees' descriptions of connectedness and levels of Blackness was consistent with the collective consciousness (Kambon, 1998; Mbiti, 1970; Nobles, 1991) that enabled Black people to relate to each other in a manner that goes beyond individual differences. Researchers described this concept as the African self-concept (Nobles, 1991). The African self-concept describes how people of African descent become conscious of their existence only in the context of their people. African self-concept is the evolutionary production of African consciousness across three dimensions: 1) one's historical past; 2) one's historical future/collective spirituality-consciousness, and 3) one's individual and group self-concept. The African self-concept is developed within context, recognizing the effect of domination, oppression and subjugation of African people by European people (Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1991).
Exploring Additional Sites of resilience

After exploring Blackness as a site of resilience, it was our intent to assess additional physical and psychological sites. At this point, the objective was to explore the sites that were proposed in the sites of resilience theory (Payne & Brown, in press) while identifying potential sites as they emerged from the data. The sites of resiliency theory involved proposing that street life oriented young Black men were utilizing Blackness, spirituality/religiosity and street life as sites. In addition to Blackness, the participants identified spirituality/religiosity, family, the block (street life) and psychological safe places as psychological and physical spaces. The following sections will provide insights into how the aforementioned spaces function and develop as sites of resilience.

Spirituality/Religiosity

Participants identified religion, spirituality, and the physical institutions in which they were practiced, i.e., Black churches and mosques, as sites of resilience. At the time of the interviews, none of the participants reported being actively involved in a religious organization. However, a few of the participants reported occasionally attending services. Despite their personal involvements and commitments to spiritual evolution, the participants acknowledged the importance and power with being spiritually connected and honoring the tenets of their particular faiths. Tristen illustrated this point when he described interacting with various religious affiliations, particularly Five Percent Nation (a sect of Black Islam) and Christianity:

Well, I don’t know nothing about the 10 percent [referring to the Five Percent Nation], but I was brought up around Christians, but I wasn’t never feeling church either. My grandmother just made me go. [Now] I’m just on my own and shit. Everybody in the world try to tell you what to do. I can’t follow that... Just listening to it, being in the sermon. You be listening to him, and you get bored, bored. You see other kids over there
going to sleep. Why not go to sleep. That’s why it was so boring. Can’t never stay awake in my church, talk you to death.

Despite not fully or completely engaging to the ministries of some spiritual institutions, participants provided examples of how the Black church was a source of personal and communal sustainability. Coming together in one place, for one purpose, to serve God, fostered the support. They also developed relationships with others, focused on moral and spiritual development, and were notified of significant events affecting their lives. Literature on the Black church also supported the participants’ assertions of the utility of the church and other religious institutions (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2000; Cone, 1991; Payne and Brown, in press). Terrence drew parallels to his experiences in Black and White churches and concluded that Black churches were better able to suit his spiritual needs. He said:

I’ve been to Caucasian churches being in the military and churches back home, and it’s just like, wow! Our preachers and our pastors touch on some really deep subjects. What’s going on in our neighborhoods and things like that and relates them to things in the Bible. Whereas Caucasian churches, they just, they praise God totally different.

In conclusion, the theme of spirituality and religion and the participants’ connections to their spirituality reflects the concept of Divine-substance, which implies that spirituality in the Black personality is both conscious and unconscious. It is a belief of collective self-consciousness that cannot be destroyed and is always active, even when operating under distorted conditions (Akbar, 1991; Kambo, 1988). The participants’ demonstrated an awareness of the divine core. However, they did not articulate a process of cultivating the spirit to maximize their connection to their Creator and a greater sense of self-knowledge. According to Akbar, 1991; Kambo, 1998; Queener & Martin, 2001,
increasing this connection may result in greater self-acceptance, self-help, self-discovery, and self-preservation.

**Family**

The participants also identified the Black family as a site of resilience. The family was recognized as a site where resilience was demonstrated and Black identity developed. Despite some of the difficulties and limitations of their experiences growing-up, participants believed that Blackness, emotional and physical support, and self-affirmation were fostered within the contexts of their families. It was within their families interviewees developed an understanding of their inherent Blackness and the connection and commitment to Black culture. They stated resilience and ideals of Blackness were passed on intergenerationally through the knowledge of the histories and legacies of their families. By witnessing the life examples of family members, and through implicit and explicit messages and lessons, they gained an understanding of the socio-political ramifications of their Blackness and maleness in the world. Moreover, they gained insights into how to navigate through the world as Black men from their families. Familial closeness, the insights, support, and skills the participants gained were demonstrated in individual exchanges, parties, family reunions, weddings, Sunday dinners, going to church, holiday gatherings, and funerals. The function and utility of the family as described by the participants was also supported in literature on the roles of family (Billingsly, 1968; Innan, Rawls, Meza, & Brown, 2002; McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1998; Walsh, 2003).

As the participants described the relationships in their families, they spoke highly of, and cherished the support of, the females in their families, particularly their mothers.
and grandmothers. Participants viewed their lives as extensions of the resilience and strength demonstrated by these women who persevered through overwhelming circumstances and often with limited support from their male partners. Participants believed needs and care of children took precedence over the occasional maladaptive and dysfunctional behaviors of the adult caregivers in their families. They cited several incidents when families were in upheaval and other family members nurtured protected both children and adults. This network of support, taking up the roles of primary caregivers, occurred during times of unemployment, drug addictions, and incarcerations.

As participants internalized their familial experiences and conceptualizations of Blackness and resilience, they felt obligated to share their knowledge and experiences to future generations. Each family had its distinct culture and conceptualization of Blackness, resilience, unity, support, and goodness that shaped how the participants viewed others. Lavar illustrated how Blackness and resilience were fostered within the context of his family:

Number one, God directed me back. And number two, it's the blessings of my mom because she knows how smart I am, and she don't want to see me in school not doing what I'm supposed to do, then saying later, 'I should have did that.' She drives me. Sometimes I needed that extra push 'cause I would just relax and not get stuff done... And having my grandparents around me to show me examples of what my uncles came out to be; "Oh, you don't want to be like such and such; he didn't finish school. Instead, you wanna [want to] be like your uncle over here." So me seeing that pushed me even harder, like, I wanna succeed... It was God and my mom who taught me that. My father yeah, but my mom, she really taught me because she finished herself, and she didn't want to look back and say we had the opportunity. There was no reason we shouldn't finish. I have a younger sister, then my mom pushed me, and I pushed my little sister. So, it was like a chain reaction. I'm four years older than her. Now to look there on the masterpiece and see her diploma and mine makes me feel proud.
The family served as the model for racial and ethnic socialization (Anderson, 1999; Billingsdy, 1968; Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2000; Hernandez, 2002; McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1988; Walsh, 1982). Family members oftentimes reframed and reinterpreted negative racial experiences that could be used as life lessons in Black pride and resilience. Participants provided stories of how family members took devastatingly painful and traumatic events and turned them into teaching moments. From their earliest recollections, the racial socialization process began even prior to their understanding and experiencing racism and discrimination, interviewees were taught to anticipate the hardships that they would endure and they were prepared with internal fortitude and a template to address and mediate the insidious effects of racism. Participants mentioned that whenever Whites assaulted them, their parents did not have to teach them what racism and discrimination was, but reminded them of what they knew and encouraged them to utilize the skill sets they developed.

Archie recalled the nuggets of wisdom his mother provided after he was verbally assaulted with racial slurs by a White man who attended his little league baseball game. He recounted his story:

She was like, there is gonna be a lot of people in this world that’s not gonna like you. They won’t even know you or take the time to get to know you, be yourself. Be you as a person! Be Black. Don’t deny it. Don’t make excuses for it. That’s who you are. This is where you come from. Be proud of it. Stand by what you believe in. If I want to play baseball don’t let that man or whoever called you a nigger stop you from playing baseball. Don’t let him change your mind or how you see things or people because he has a different opinion of you and your skin color.

Archie stated that the discussion with his mother stood out in his mind for the rest of his life, setting the tone of how he interacted with White people and others in hostile situations. Terrence provided an example of how his mother helped him gain an
understanding of the complexion differences in his family. Their conversation shaped his understanding of intraracial differences and discrimination. Terrence recalled: "I just recently got some color since I grew up, but I always thought I was different from them. For real. You know, "Mom, why you so dark?" She would be like, "You know we are all Black; it's just that you are a shade lighter." Although the exchange was simple, the impact was far-reaching, such that it influenced his sense of belonging in the family and framed his perception of skin color on racial identity.

Each of the participants identified several people in their families who exemplified and embodied a positive or strong sense of Blackness and resilience. Participants pointed out people based on their support and commitment to helping others during critical times, the struggles that they endured during their lives, their commitment to education, and other personal criteria. Archie provided an example of his mother who demonstrated Blackness through, "her attitude and the way she carries herself, her persona." The participants further noted the variance in the support that they received from their family members ranging from developing a healthy racial identity to negotiating their involvements in street life. For example, Terrence learned endurance and survival by way of the struggles, hardships, and violence endured by his mother. He explained:

For me, my mother gave me the best life any mother could give a child. We've been through our ups and downs. We've been through our trials, but no matter what my mother kept pushing. She's one of the strongest individuals I know... Her struggle, her pain, her suffering, and all the things that she's endured, negative and positive. To, you know, come up out of the situations, because my mother's side of the family, they were poor, and my grandfather he got locked-up for killing his brother-in-law... Yeah, and my grandmother was shot to death when my mother was seven. They were at a party, and some words exchanged. She got into an argument with my mother's aunt's husband, and they were all drank, so
my aunt's husband pulled out a gun and shot her, and she died, and the family split up. All the kids split up or whatever, and like my mom and my aunt used to tell me, my mother's aunt, which is my grandaunt, she would cook dinner or whatever, and her kids would get the good things and my mother and my aunt would get the bad things, secondhand things. So those are tough times, I mean clothes and things like that. I mean they didn't have anything growing up.

On the other hand, Terrence gained a different type of support from his stepfather. As he put his experiences in context, Terrence became shocked as his stepfather's influence became more pronounced. His stepfather's support and nurturance were specific to the circumstances that he negotiated as a young Black living in an impoverished neighborhood. His intervening was crucial because Terrence was a product of a family entrenched in street life behavior; most prevalent violence and drugs, and he believed that his involvement was inevitable. Initially, his stepfather attempted to deter and protect him from the violence and drugs had been a part of their family's lifestyle for generations. However, he changed approaches upon realizing that Terrence was headed down that path. They then discussed the perils of entering the drug lifestyle and protection once engaged in street life. The life examples, lessons, and advice offered were protective, supportive, nurturing, and relational building while providing tangible skills which could be utilized to navigate through the streets.

Terrence took into consideration his stepfather's advice and made his own decisions based on what he felt was the best choice for him at the time. Subsequently, he found himself imparting similar knowledge to his younger brother. The experience of being mentored in street life by older males relatives and non-relatives was common amongst the participants. For other respondents, the conversations were not as explicit as
in Terrence's case, but centered on following their intuitions and being prepared to face the consequences of their actions. Terrence recalled:

They been together, wow, for about thirteen years. Yeah, about thirteen years. And my stepfather, he really dropped some juice on me ‘cause he's street. If you were to try to categorize street or speak about what street is, he's it. He's been there. He's done it and, wow, he was a big inspiration in my life. When it was time for me to make those decisions, whether to hustle or to do something stupid like rob someone, he was always there to be like, 'No, this is not you. It can be you if you want it to be you, but this is not you. This is wrong.' He dropped a lot of juice on me. He taught me about the streets, I've always had my ear to the streets, so I've never jumped into it knee deep, and, if he hadn't be the father that he is, I would have did the same things he did when he was younger...So, that's what I try to tell my younger brother, that's not for you. You know, don't try to hang out and do things your peers try to do. That's not you. Like I said earlier, association breeds assimilation. You are like your friends. So, if you are around negativity, most likely you're going to indulge in some negative acts. I try to tell my little brother that and I hope he gets it. He's 18...I tell the other guys, be who you are...don't front for nobody, be real with it.

Several of the participants also provided contextual critiques of their experiences of a family unit as young Black men living in the inner-city. They asserted that many young men and women have been abandoned and left unprotected by their families, leaving them to survive on their own accord. The lack of protection, guidance and love influenced their abilities to cope, make decisions, seek approval through assimilating with people who they otherwise would find detrimental and feel overwhelmed and destitute. Tristan recounted the experiences of many of his friends, when he explained:

Their friends, their outside people are more important than their family. 'Cause all their real family care about is getting high. They don't sit down with them, help them with their homework. You know, talk to them about set. That don't necessarily make them weak minded, but, if you can't get any advice from your teacher or your parents, then I guess it makes you just turn to the streets a way because everyone is just turning their backs on you...and I think that's where a lot of, some of, the kids that can't make it out of certain situations, that are not as strong minded as others. It's real hard because some kids they got to grow up with they
parents, but their parents be on drugs, so, they have to live with grandparents, then they are back and forth. They visiting their mother and then with their grandparents. So, they never have a steady guardian. They don’t have nowhere to turn to.

In summary, participants identified the family as a site of resilience. The family structure to on many different iterations and was defined in various ways. The family system was nurtured and it cultivated ideals of Blackness and resilience. The participants received messages of Blackness through overt conversations and instructions and examples. Participants identified resilience in families as their ability to endure hardships and continue to regenerate themselves and provide for the next generation. The advice and life lessons taught to street life oriented young men oftentimes consisted of strategies and insights into how to navigate and survive street life. Families were also a refuge of comfort and as place where participants could transmit the knowledge which they shared with siblings and their own children. The emergence of the family as a site of resilience provided an additional site that was not proposed in the sites of resiliency theory. This bolsters the notion that street life oriented young Black men utilize multiple sites and a vast range of resources in an effort to develop, nurture and demonstrate resilience.

**The Block**

Participants stated that their neighborhoods, blocks, and corners were sites of resilience. They proposed that the physical locations of the neighborhoods, blocks/corners, and homes served as central meeting places where they gathered and engaged in psychological processes to foster and cultivate resilience. The interviews were not focused on examining the specific street life activities in which the men were engaged. It was neither necessary nor within the scope of the study to document the specifics of illegal activities which may or may not occur while engaging in street life.
The themes that emerged from the data emphasized the relationships, attitudes and nuances of being engaged in street life activities through the psychological and physical site of the "block." Archie described the supportive interactions that occurred on the block:

It just happens. That could be in the house, outside on the street corner where we live, in the school. Wherever we all get together and that's comfortable at that time and bond. We all just get together and bond...Being together talking. Being aware of what's going on in the world and not being blind to it...Conversations where you take messages from it. [We do not] sit there and say 'you know you gotta do this to be Black and you gotta do that.' What we do is sit and talk about ways that we can help ourselves and help our people. It may not be every single time or every day, but it does come up. What would you do or what would you want to do to help your people.

Lavar stated that regardless of the venue, he enjoyed the time shared with friends because it offered him a space to be introspective and to reflect on his life. He reported, "It feels good for us to all be around and when we are all successful, we all be around and feel better about being Black." This helped him overcome the low feelings that he felt when addressing unemployment and family discourse. These interactions encouraged him to remain positive. He added:

Maybe he come to my house, or maybe I go to his house. I think we...talk about [whatever] or reminisce about some of the struggles that we been through and feel proud about it. Seeing some of the younger siblings that we got and talking to them about things, teaching them...constantly coming up with ways to better ourselves.

Brian provided another example that revealed the range of their conversations:

We talk about a lot of stuff from sports, to women, to cars. It will be shit, like political shit. Like, damn girl fuckin the fourth ward up. The councilwoman, we got to get her outta here. Like, she ain’t doing shit no better...when such and such was the councilwoman, we had recreation centers...This bitch corres, she taking the courts away, you know what I'm saying.
Being on the block and gaining support from their friends was part lifestyle and part necessity for the participants. Brian described the ongoing battle that he waged with his mother over his longing to hang out with his friends on the corner. He related his draw to the streets from an early age as a yearning for which he was willing to risk disciplinary actions. At the time, he did not know why he was compelled to be in the streets, but resolved that being with friends and walking the streets was where he felt most comfortable.

The general consensus of the interviewees was that most people do not understand why they have the desire to congregate on the block. Brian stated that interactions occurring on the street, if viewed by the untrained observer, may lead them to have a false understanding and limited interpretation of the gathering. He continued:

You might not see that these people are from a good family. You might not be able to see the majority of these people out here for a reason. You might see a person out there, like damn, he’s just a hoologist, or he ain’t out here doing shit. He might be making a few dollars to pay college tuition and shit. You may not see that riding past, like, he out there, he got no responsibilities. You might not see he just came from a job interview and he out there ‘cause the boss ain’t hire him.

It is through these block exchanges that the elder statesmen of the street life community impart their words of wisdom and express their concerns regarding the younger generation of men who are actively and at times recklessly involved in street life activities. For many, the interactions and the support gained from their cohort in the streets have been their model and example of Black manhood and responsibility. During these times, participants have taken up leadership roles to teach, listen, challenge and support their peers and encourage them to live with integrity and make positive changes in their lives. Additionally, they socialize them to the codes of the street and
acclimate them to the dangers, perils, and trials associated with the lifestyle. Participants articulated their frustrations and the sense of urgency they felt to impart knowledge to younger generations. Archie described his experience taking up this role on the block:

Sometimes it would be the older people out there with you, and they will give you advice. Telling you not to make the mistake that they did and so forth. Then you got my generation that does that for the youth, underneath us, telling them same things. Trying to keep them out of trouble. To keep them out of the game. As far as, giving them a dollar or two to go to the store, you know, or buying them something off the ice cream truck. Anything to prolong them from wanting to get in the streets and see what it is.

Similarly, Terrence described feeling frustrated when attempting to impart knowledge and provide guidance to his friends and younger brother. He noted,

Some knuckleheads will hear what I'm talking about, and they are so caught up in the streets and like they'll walk off, you know...they look at me as being real... I was talking to my younger brother, my younger brother gets caught up in this whole timelight here, you know, a street image...He's trying to be categorized as far as the streets because he wants to be known as the thug. Known as the hustler. I'm telling him, look, why don't you be who you are, don't let the streets depict who you are. Be who you are, you know, if you are known as a pretty boy, and all you do is hang out with the ladies and have a good time, then that's who you are...He's 18, and he's old enough to know. He's not built from it and I keep telling him you don't have it in you.

At the end of the day, Brian stated that despite his best efforts to dissuade his brother from becoming involved in street life, the decision rested with him. It was a choice that he had to make as a man and then be prepared to accept the consequences of his actions.

Interviewees asserted that their time spent together with friends on street corners, in homes, corner stores, and parks afforded them the opportunities to learn about life, Black culture, and provided an update for the daily activities and trends in the community. Their being together enabled them to remain connected. Additionally, their
relationships fostered camaraderie within a social network of peers that they respected and relied upon for survival. As members of street life communities, participants gained personal, emotional, and financial support and were able to receive a greater understanding of their lives and clarity of their roles in their communities. The participants asserted that a considerable amount of time was given to analyzing the social, political, and economic climates of the communities and brainstorming strategies to help themselves and their people (i.e., community building). Respondents also stated that the corner was a site where they engaged in street life-oriented activities.

Psychological Safe Places

Another theme which emerged was the identification of psychological sites of resilience. This domain was proposed as in the Sites of Resilience theory (Payne & Brown, in press), and the data identified specific spaces. Terrence provided a thorough example of psychological sites of resilience. In his example, he highlighted both the joy and frustration experienced when gathering with the Black people in and outside of his neighborhood. First, he described his mood when attending a Black cultural event:

> Well, I go to this place, it’s in Baltimore [Maryland], during Black History Month. It’s an African American Heritage Festival. It’s nothing but Black people being Black…. It’s a big joyous event…. it just made me happy to be who I am, you know. It reminds me, like the struggle we going through, look where we at now. It reminds me of great things. Being able to have a gathering with a whole bunch of Black people where there’s nothing but love going on. There’s not gonna be no shooting, or you beefing with him, or she doesn’t like her. It’s just everybody gonna have love for each other for this moment.

Conversely, he described the frustrating attempts to connect with Black people during his casual interactions in his community. Terrence explained:

> Here it’s hard, very bad. So sports events, things at school, or whatever, sometimes it’s gonna be love. Sometimes it’s hate. Clubs, like I go to
predominantly Black clubs and it's a lot of things going on in the clubs, as far as there might be a fight or something like that. It's like not too many places or events that I've been to other than the African heritage festival. There hasn't been too many places that I've been where it's just been all love 'cause it's always been a negative outcome.

The conflict of seeking connection in the midst of strife was a common experience amongst participants. However, they identified other psychological safe places in which they felt affirmed, Tristen said, "I'd go to the Apollo. It's a lot of Black people there. I been there once...it was a nice experience. You like, see all the famous Black people on the wall...It made you feel good to be Black. It shows you that somebody is doing something in your race."

Several of the participants also found psychological sites of resilience in witnessing sociopolitical systems being held accountable, and demonstrations of Black resistance and protest. A few of the men identified the Million Man March as an event that changed their lives. Lavar provided his analysis of that momentous event:

Things like the Million Man March...Number one, it takes a lot of confidence to believe that you can get a million men to support you. Number two, I think it's very important for people to see that Black people can get together like that, 'cause you rarely see it without it being something negative. You see a lot of Black people enjoying themselves in a positive environment; I think that really you feel more proud, I guess to say you are Black.

Similarly, participants stated that they gained psychological strength when they witnessed justice and reciprocity for Black people. Participants reported feeling a sense of vindication, hope and optimism in the world whenever they heard of or saw the police being found guilty after an investigation of the unlawful beating or shooting of a Black person. They also gained psychological strength and felt a sense of connection to experiences of Black people during slavery, reconstruction, and the Civil Rights era.
After hearing and watching stories of Blacks being beaten, lynched and murdered from their grandparents, television, and readings, several respondents reported feeling despondent, devalued and rejected by the larger society. Finding himself in this state, Lavar stated that he gained strength after viewing a documentary on Martin Luther King, Jr. He reported being touched realizing that Dr. King was recognized as a global, iconic figure whose influence extended beyond the plight of Blacks in America, but was a cry to stop the oppression of all people worldwide. Moreover, he was encouraged and regained faith in White people after learning that they assisted in the struggle for Black civil rights in the United States.

Terence explained, after being assaulted on the streets he joined the U.S. military and found that to be a life-changing and self-affirming act. He proudly stated that he was in the Marine Corps for “four years, three months and fourteen days. That was the best thing I ever done in my life.” While in the military, he gained professional status working at his job in fiscal accounting. He gained confidence and increased his self-esteem and perception of himself as a competent professional by working a difficult and challenging job in which he engaged with executive officers in a collaborative manner. His work and ideas were considered valuable and integral to the mission of his team and his country. During this time, he believed that he and his work were valued in a way that he did not feel as a civilian living in his neighborhood.

In summary, the participants identified psychological sites of resilience that included historic events from which they gained strength and a greater understanding of their own experiences by their participation in, learning from and/or witnessing. Likewise, there were certain places and events in their communities that provided
psychological safe places in either the form of a physical space or the interactions that occurred in these spaces. In addition, they gained strength from the experiences of others that they learned through the study of history, personal dialogue, and television. While identifying sites of resilience in their community, participants were struck by the paucity of locations where they could congregate and have self-affirming interactions without fear for their physical safety or being harassed. Psychological safety was fostered through their communing and lifting each other’s spirits, laughing, and joking. Most of the respondents reported that their limited incomes and restricted opportunities to travel made it difficult to go to Black museums and plays. However, they found solace in going to neighborhood parks, parades, and even the corner store.

Economic Influences

The third domain that emerged was the impact of economics on the lives of street life oriented Black men. Although it was recognized that economics was a major factor in lives of inner-city Black men in impoverished communities, no specific questions pertaining to this matter were developed prior to the interviews. Nevertheless, a significant amount of the content from the interviews focused on the impact of economics and poverty in the lives of the participants. Participants commented on the sparse financial resources in their area when attempting to identify Black-owned businesses. Archie stated, “I don’t think a Black person owns a grocery store around here. I don’t think a Black person owns shit around here, probably this shit [his apartment]. Nah, I don’t think he own the Villages. ... Naq you ain’t gonna find a Black man owns a liquor store, either. Nah, no time soon.”
All of the participants surmised that their entrance into street life activities were influenced by a combination of factors, including: familial ties, personal goal attainment, having a street life orientation, a glorified understanding of street life, and survival. Thinking retrospectively, Archie concluded that much of his involvement in street life was an angry response to poverty. He attempted to obtain both the necessities and other “things” (e.g., PlayStation, a particular style of shoes), which he felt he had been denied yet was deserving of. Initially, he attempted to obtain those items by legitimate hustles like washing cars, painting, cleaning, and moving furniture. When those avenues were no longer viable and as lucrative as he desired, he began to steal and rob people in an effort to obtain a lifestyle he wanted. The complexity of the dynamics pertaining to the aforementioned factors was best described by Lavar, when he provided an analysis of how he and many of his contemporaries were introduced to street life:

All I thought about was playing sports, going to school. These days, when kids are 12 or 13 years old, they want to sell drugs. They want to play with guns. School is boring. This kind of life is fun to them 'cause this is all they know, 'cause they parents or whoever older around them showed them that. They bring that to their kids, and they never take that away. So that's all they know. I seen my father messing with drugs and all that. Don't get me wrong, a lot of people in my family destroyed themselves on drugs, that made me stronger that showed me what not to do, 'cause I seen how it affected them. I didn't want the same thing to happen to me. My father, they always made sure that they taught me, but they wanted me in a way to learn from my own mistakes. To see these things for what they really are. I don't think selling drugs at 20 years old, selling drugs at any age is something positive to do. Now, I understand some people had to do it because they not blessed with the mechanical skills or the kind of skills to work or anything, so they have no alternative but to get to that. I understand in a way, but in a way they still have to try to succeed positively. That's a negative. And it's a lot of people that get drawn to that because they see money, especially the younger kids. They see the jewelry. They see the clothes. They see fine girls that these guys that have a lot of money get.
Participants compared their childhoods to that of other children in their neighborhoods to illustrate the intensity of their struggles. For example, Antoine stated that he engaged in street life oriented behaviors and began selling drugs to assist his struggling single mother go through some extremely "rough times." He recalled, "I was out in the street selling drugs basically to help my mother who was struggling with me, my brother and my sister, 'cause she couldn't hardly take care of all of us. That's the only thing I could turn to 'cause I was too young to work at the time."

Several participants also provided examples of how street life oriented men used their money to support the less fortunate in the community. They proposed that, if it was not for money and necessities obtained through street life, many of the individuals and families in their neighborhood would not have any other means of providing food and shelter. Lavar commented on his personal struggle to remain positive and drew parallels to the hip-hop rapper Jay-Z. Jay-Z, who used money generated from illegal activities to finance his rap career, is now heralded as one of the most influential and financially successful rappers of all time. Mainstream society recognizes him as an entrepreneur, and his legal business ventures include owning a distillery, clothing line, record label, and being a partial owner of a National Basketball Association basketball team.

Archie discussed the impact of the actions that men in his neighborhood take and the role he plays as a model for his family:

You know the rapper Jay-Z. He had said this one time, when he was growing up, like all the drug dealers in his hood, they all got offense because of a girl [drug dealers received attention from girls]. He said the reason why it made a lot of people want to be like that [have flashy cars, money and female attention] is because that is the first sign of success they saw. They were the first ones that even made it that far, even though they did it in that way [illegally]. It really made me think like that too. You see, it's a lot of people that sell drugs that do positive things with
the money. It’s a lot of people that help families that’s starving. That goes to taking care of people without mothers, that can’t buy clothes for their kids. Some of them have heart. Some of them don’t. Some of them are greedy with the money. Some of them say, “Oh, I don’t have it,” you know. Some of them, you could need a dollar, and I could have five thousand in my pocket. [they say] “I don’t have it,” you know what I mean, and you got some that will help. My son is hungry, your son is hungry, here, without hesitation because it’s for the kids. They live better than we did. You know what I’m saying. I don’t want my nephew to go through half of the things I have or things I had to see at a young age because it could have affected me in a way if I let it. I was strong about it. If you gotta favorite uncle, you don’t want to hear your grandmother and them telling stories, “Oh your uncle, he stole my money out of the pocketbook.” That makes me don’t appreciate him as much. To be like, oh I always wanted to be like my uncle, now I see he’s a negative person. So, the more I be around him, that could rub off on me. So, I see from the door, like I don’t want my nephew, I don’t want to be one of those uncles where he look and see me on the street. I want to be as positive as possible.

Participants also recognized that street life had consequences and their engagement in it may be short-lived because of the high risks associated with the lifestyle, namely incarceration or death. Terrence reflected:

I would say we are losing so much Black youth, and it’s crazy. Just here in [city] alone. Last week . . . we’ve lost six people, shot and killed, gang related, most of them. Others were just shot just because, and it hurts. It hurts. I mean one of my friends that I grew up with, he was killed, and I went to his funeral, and I was: just thinking man we are losing so many good people. We have rocket scientists out here and out there hustling right now. And its sad to say that they might never get show the world their talent. I just, it’s nothing more than, if I could just talk to the young guys and let them know. I don’t know what no one does. If you sell drugs, that’s what you do, but . . . the thing, the reason why people in our community don’t never make it out of their community because they don’t know that it’s so much more out there. It’s so much more. I mean if a Black kid wanted to go to college, he could go to college no matter how broke he is.

Faced with the options of death and incarceration, Monte decided to return to trade school and limit his involvement in street life oriented activities. He reflected on his choices and ultimate decision stating, “I know the drugs and the hustle; it ain’t always
gonna be there. I'm trying to get my life back together 'cause I know that once I turn a
certain age, like all these options not gonna be there for me.'"

In conclusion, participants asserted that several factors influenced their voluntary
and involuntary involvements in street life. Factors included lack of access to the
mainstream economic marketplace, access and exposure to street life oriented activities
by friends, family and environment, and a desire to move from poverty to a position of
wealth. The low-economic status of living in impoverished communities also shaped their
views of the appropriateness of the measures and options that they were able to take in
order to ensure their economic and physical futures. Moreover, the lack of opportunities
was coupled with inadequate educational and skill training.

Conclusions

The findings in this chapter provided insights into how street life oriented young
Black men living in the inner-city conceptualized Blackness as a site of resilience.
Blackness was defined as the core and central organizing principle of the existence of
Black people and of Black culture. Blackness was as a coherent process, a set of values
and cultural norms distinctive to itself and oftentimes in contrast to the values upheld by
the larger mainstream society. Blackness was the connecting link that bound all people of
African descent together on an unconscious level regardless of location, ethnicity, and
segregatory practices of oppression. Moreover, Blackness was conceptualized as a way of
life, an approach to making meaning out of life. Furthermore, it described a state and way
of being. Respondents acknowledged that there were variations in how people of African
descent viewed and conceptualized Blackness based on their cultural backgrounds and
experiences.
In addition to providing their definitions of Blackness, the respondents provided an analysis of how others viewed them. They perceived that mainstream society oftentimes viewed them negatively and disparagingly. Respondents proposed that they were oftentimes judged by individuals in mainstream society who did not have an understanding of Black culture and how they express themselves. Additionally, they felt that their worldview as Blacks differed from Whites. Diverging worldviews coupled with a perception of being misunderstood and misinterpreted led the respondents to have what they considered a warranted suspiciousness of Whites.

The participants viewed Blackness as a site of resilience. The men stated that Blackness was a source of pride, strength and courage used to overcome obstacles and to navigate through the challenges and difficulties that young Black men living in the inner-city faced daily. They described Blackness as serving as a buffer against the onslaught of micro aggressions which they faced. in addition, it provided a lens through which they were able to navigate through and make meaning out of the world. The respondents also provided examples of how they utilized their Blackness as a site of resilience via code switching and giving them strength despite the vulnerable positions which they occupied.

The participants proposed that Blackness and resilience were developed through an interactive process that occurred across one's lifespan. Through the process of developing Blackness and resilience, they expanded upon, and incorporated a worldview in which they made meaning out of their lives and experiences thus enabling them to overcome adverse circumstances. This worldview was transmitted intergenerationally and developed and nurtured through key interactions within their families, communities and other social systems.
In order to explicate the Blackness concept, participants explored how they expressed the notion. It was expressed through styles of dress and hair, music, the use of language, attitude and being. Furthermore, the participants stated that resilience, internal fortitude, and perseverance were expressions of Blackness. Participants further argued that freedom of expression was critical to individual and cultural Blackness.

A sense of connectedness and communalism were other components that defined in defining Blackness. Participants articulated that their conceptualizations of Blackness were predicated on a sense of connection to Black culture and the Black community. Participants discerned higher or lesser levels of Blackness based on an individual’s connectedness to the struggles, ills, and plight of Black people and Black culture. Individuals who were perceived as being extremely disconnected from the Black community were referred to as “sell-outs”. The participants did not think that sexual orientation was an indicator of a person’s level of Blackness; however, sexual orientation may influence how individuals expressed their Blackness.

In addition to conceptualizing Blackness, the participants identified spirituality/religiosity, family, the block, and psychological safe places as sites-of-resilience. Churches, Mosques and fellowship halls were considered sites as well. Another site, was the Black Family. The Black family served as the focal point of Black identity development and connection to Black culture. Their connectedness, first fostered in their families, was then extended to their local communities and finally expanded to all Black people. The participants believed that the interdependence and centrality of the Black family was a major component of Black culture that was worthy of being preserved.
The third site of resilience identified was the block. Interviewees asserted that the time spent together in community gathering places afforded them the opportunities to learn about life, Black culture, and provided an update for the daily activities and trends in the community. Their being together enabled them to remain connected. Additionally, their relationships fostered camaraderie within a social network of peers whom they respected and relied upon for survival. As members of the street life community, participants gained personal, emotional, and financial support and were able to glean a greater understanding of their lives and clarity of their roles in their communities. The participants asserted that a considerable amount of time was given to analyzing the social, political and economic climates of the communities and to brainstorming strategies to help themselves and their people (i.e., community building).

Psychological safe places were identified as the fourth site. Psychological safe places represented places, events, and activities whereby the young men gained strength and a greater understanding of their own experiences through their participation in, learning from and/or witnessing positive and life affirming expressions of Blackness. Psychological safety was fostered through their fellowship and ability to lift each other’s spirits, by laughing and joking.

The last domain explored was the influence of economics in the lives of street life oriented young Black men. Participants asserted that several factors influenced their voluntary and involuntary involvements in street life. Factors included lack of access to the mainstream economic marketplace, access and exposure to street life oriented activities, and a desire to move from poverty to a position of wealth. Living in impoverished communities also shaped their worldviews of what they saw as viable
options to ensure their economic futures and physical safety. Moreover, the lack of social and economic opportunities was coupled with inadequate educational and skills training.

**Table II**

Cross Case Analysis of Themes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Researchers’ Reaction</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blackness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conceptualization of Blackness</strong></td>
<td><strong>“I was amazed to see young Black men, dressed in their street garb, looking like “thugs” and speaking thoughtful and sensitively… My bias was that street life oriented men would not think deeply. Especially, those involved in crime who would be more likely to be defensive about their actions… Andrac’ worked well with them and made them feel at ease…They did well because someone was interested in them as human beings, in what they had to say and think, and saw them in a positive light rather than a negative light.”</strong></td>
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<td>“Blackness is a way of life. It is life. Like, it’s what was here before I got here. I see it like, it stands out more. …Yes, it started way before my generation. Like it was brought to me, I was just brought into it.”</td>
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<td>“Blackness is a struggle, pain, suffering individuals. I really truly deep down believe Black people are the strongest people on the face of the earth because we have endured so much and overcome many, many obstacles.”</td>
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<td><strong>Development of Blackness</strong></td>
<td><strong>“From my parents, even when I didn’t understand, they told me about being Black. ‘You know we were slaves before in the white man’s world.’…I didn’t understand it until I got older, but I was always taught throughout my life.”</strong></td>
<td><strong>“I am still struggling with the belief that someone who sells drugs or steals or participates in any deviant behavior is resilient. I do understand that people’s situations dictate their actions; however, I believe that if these actions put someone else at harm the issue of how resilient that person is comes into question.”</strong></td>
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<td>“She was like there is gonna be a lot of people in this world that’s not gonna like you they won’t even know you or take the time to get to know you. Be yourself.”</td>
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<td>Expressions of Blackness</td>
<td>“My people. My Race. Black is how I talk. How I where my clothes. How I carry myself. How I defend myself. Not changing shit for anyone...How you live.” “Just cause you have this experience with another Black person I’m going to give you another version or another way to look at us. I’m going to be respectful, honest, I’m gonna to play my part, I’m not going to overstep my boundaries. I’m not going to let you overstep your boundaries on me, we are going to do it all in a respectful way.”</td>
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<td>Sense of Connection</td>
<td>“If they don’t come back to the hood like if they still have family that’s in the hood and they don’t come back to visit or hang out or act like they are better than them cause they are living a little better or they have a little bit more things we consider them sell outs.” “…First and foremost he [Malcolm X] came from the bottom, from the straight gutter, and he had his share of years where he’s done some terrible things and crimes. He so called paid his debt to society or whatever but he realized there was something better... something more than the streets. He came up outta that you know, I really admire him for that.” “Blacks like Malcolm X were admired and respected because after achieving some success and status, they uplifted others. He had a higher level of Blackness because he dedicated his life to changing the conditions of Black people, and lent his resources and voice to those like himself who had been silenced. in the specifically the poor, voiceless and disenfranchised.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>“…if you Black you Black “Participants neither”</td>
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nobody can change it. If you gay you gay. If you wanna be gay. But you still Black I don’t think anybody would seclude you from a relationship then."

"I don’t understand why they couldn’t be just as strong as me. That’s just their sexual preference. A lot of people can’t look past that."

identified being gay nor promoted ‘the gay experience and lifestyle’. But respected gay men on the strength that they were men who had a right to live and express themselves in peace.

Gay men remained closeted and took precautions to protect their anonymity around partnering because the message was engrained in the consciousness of the community: Live your life as long as you do not bother me, if you cross the line then it will be a problem."

**Sites of Reilience**

**Spirituality and Religion**

"As far as a Muslim, they go to the Mosque, but for me, I say church, that’s where you can go to express your Blackness at church. Sunday go to church."

"I think the Black church is another place to go because you see people together. Happy together, no one is trying to be better than anyone, everyone is in one place, everyone is together serving one cause, God."

**The Block**

"Last week we’ve lost six people, shot and killed, gang related, most of them... Man we are losing so many good people. We have rockstar scientists out here and out there hustling right now. And it’s sad to say that they might never get"

"...I struggled to make sense of what the participants were trying to say; actually he was probably saying what he wanted to say and it was I who was the one having trouble trying to understand him... Once I saw and felt their emotions, I gained a greater understanding their struggles... So much is lost when we let other people have our voices, tell our stories, our experiences. No one can tell our story as well as we can."

"As he spoke, I thought about the iconic artist Tracy Shaker. He is a hero and a symbol of the greatness, which this generation could offer. Many believed that he was evolving into the leader of this generation and"
<table>
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<th>Family</th>
<th>Psychological Safe Places</th>
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<td>&quot;...it's like a lot of men in my family and they always come to me like, whatever you do just follow your first instinct cause if you try to go the good way you fuck around and go the wrong way&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Being able to have a gathering with a whole bunch of Black people where there’s nothing but love going on there’s not gonna be no shooting or you beefing with him or she doesn’t like her its just everybody gonna have love for each other for this moment.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;It’s crazy man cause we got a lot of crack-heads, dope heads, coke-heads sitting out here and they all mothering children. Mothers of children and it’s like, jest repeating itself over and over again.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I go to this place it’s in Baltimore...it’s an African American heritage festival, it’s nothing but Black people being Black. Music is playing...it’s a big joyful event...it just made...&quot;</td>
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<td>Promoting and highlighting the value, importance, utility and functionality of the roles which street life oriented Black men undertake in the family, may encourage them to make maintaining connections to their families a heightened priority. This is particularly important with the large percentage incarcerated priority. It is important to begin to address this systemically in the prisons as well as provide services for the children and families.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It seemed beneficial to them to be able to vent their experiences and try to promote a better understanding of their neighborhoods and why they engaged in particular behaviors.&quot;</td>
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me happy to be who I am you know it reminds me like the struggle we going through... it reminds me of great things Being able to have."

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<th>Economic Influences</th>
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<td>&quot;I stole cars, sold drugs, beat people up for no reason, basically whatever I felt like doing. Cause basically at the time I was angry... Anything that was a hustle, I washed cars, paint, clean, move furniture, anything that would make some kind of money. Shovel snow. Whatever it takes.&quot;</td>
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| "As important as whether a person is or is not involved in street life and the reasons why they articulated their entrance into street life orientation. It is equally important to investigate and incorporate the individual circumstances and critical events in their life which propelled them to act."

| "Selling drugs. Basically to help my mother who was struggling with me my brother and my sister cause she couldn’t hardly take care of all of us. That’s the only thing I could turn to cause I was too young to work at the time." |
| It was ironic that we were discussing economics and criminality among poor people of color in a building named after Kozlowski, a White man, who donated money to the university. At the time, he was facing embezzlement charges. The example highlighted the impact of status, class, race, and privilege on the interpretation of behaviors." |
Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter consists of a discussion of previous literature, the evolution of the research questions, the summary of the findings, the researchers’ experiences, the contribution of the present research, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and clinical implications.

The discussion of previous literature provides a brief overview of research on Blackness and resilience. The evolution of the research questions address the primary researcher’s interest in exploring Blackness as a site of resilience and the reformulation of the research questions in the development of the study. I will then provide a summary of the most significant findings in relation to the research questions. The researchers’ experiences reveal insights into the experiences of the primary researcher and the five PAR team members.

The “Contributions to Research” section highlights how the findings of this study add to the current body of research on ethnicity, resilience, while expanding upon the sites of resiliency theory (Payne & Brown, in press). I then identify the limitations of the study and the challenges the PAR team experienced, and their strategies to address these issues. Finally, I relate the clinical implications of the findings to providing psychological services to street life- oriented young Black men living in the inner-city.

Summary of Previous Research

Researchers have proposed that African American males have developed particular modes of adaptations to endure life in the inner-city because of their particular
life circumstances (Franklin, 1999; Gordon & Song, 1994; Wilson, 1987, 1996). With the accumulation of adverse living circumstances, certain particular ways of handling social dilemmas. Traditional accounts of resiliency tend to be dichotomized and often set the criteria for what is considered resilient. In traditional literature, individuals who consistently experience social failures are perceived as non-resilient (Carver, 1998; Freitas & Downey, 1998; Rutter, 1987).

In an attempt to shift the paradigm from an analysis of isolated experiences to the exploration of the interaction of all contextual processes, researchers have begun to study the impact of various factors and several indicators have been recognized as fostering and promoting resilience. The most common factors can be summarized in three main themes: 1) personal characteristics, 2) environmental, and 3) situational context (constraints). Researchers also suggested that the most realistic view of resilience was gained when all three of these factors were considered (Barnard, 1994; Garmezy, 1991; Gordon & Song, 1994; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999).

Several theorists and researchers have challenged, and expanded on the traditional notions of resilience among the African American male by considering context. Johnson and Leighton (1995), for example, described the deleterious socioecopolitical context and plight of young, poor Black men in the United States, as sufficient for comparison with other groups who were considered in genocidal states. Wilson (1990) recognized that the conditions that individuals lived in affected those whom they associated with, their internalized perspectives, attitudes and values, their attainable resources and opportunities, and their patterns that determined whether or not they engaged in criminal.
behaviors. Despite these challenging conditions the Black male still demonstrates resilience (Majors, 1986; Parham, 1999).

Other researchers furthered the discussion on resilience as well. Garmonzy (1991) presented a socioeconomic description and perspective on Blacks in poverty and then identified the protective factors which enabled individuals to overcome their physical and social restraints and to demonstrate resilience. Barnard's (1994) review of literature provided a summary of the identified correlates of individual and family resilience. Blackenship (1998) expanded the discussion of thriving through the application of a sociological feminist perspective. This expanded perspective moved the conceptualization of resilience from the individual to the community level by incorporating the roles which race, class, and gender inequality play in organizing society.

Many men from the inner-city develop resilient factors by drawing on what it means to be a Black man living in a community within the Black community with all of the contemporary and historical challenges associated with that. Furthermore, ethnicity allows for social navigation through racially hostile climates and serves as a protective barrier for the daily mental health stressors affecting Black men (Bowman, 1989; Utsey & PonteRotto, 1996; Franklin, 1999). Researchers have proposed that street life and/or "deviant" behaviors associated with street life are forms of negative coping, and unhealthy responses to challenges (Bowman, 1989; Freitas & Downey, 1999; Garmonzy 1991). To exclude potential sites of resiliency because they do not have attached to them the characteristics of a good outcome ignores the complex functions of resilience. In essence, the historical and current paradigm for human psychology in the western world
reflects middle-class, male, heterosexual, and White values. This limited framing of human functioning has remained the baseline from which the rest of the world has been measured in relation to being considered adjusted and healthy (Akbar, 1985; Almeida, 1998; Burlew, Banks, & McAdoo, 1992).

In an attempt to better understand and analyze the behaviors of Black inner-city men, Payne and Brown (in press) submitted an alternative conceptualization of resilience. This conceptualization embodied at least four assumptions. First, the development of resiliency was recognized as a function of “relational coping” or processes (Fine, 1984). Second, resiliency should be analyzed in relation to the person’s socio-cultural background. Third, resiliency cannot be observed independently of an historical perspective. Fourthly, and most notable, this conceptualization is centered on an understanding of how the Black male organizes his thinking and experiences around resiliency. Furthermore, a conceptualization and investigation of Blackness as a site of resilience should be made from an Africentric framework.

Evolution of Research Questions

I first want to provide some context to how I developed my research question and my interest into resilience. My exploration of resilience and Blackness stemmed from many of my life circumstances. While growing-up, I received many messages about success, leadership and service, and I persevered through many obstacles and adversities. It seemed as if my life was in constant transition. My family encountered many racist, sexist, and discriminatory acts. Although the blows were devastating at times, we used our faith and pride and love for family and Black people to persevere through hardships. In my childhood naiveté, I vowed to become rich, gain power and respect, and change the
world. Throughout adolescence, I was enticed to obtain wealth through street life activities, but witnessing the death and incarceration of my peers served as a deterrent. I focused my energy on changing my station in life through education.

Upon entering college, I was given mentorship and support, an introduction to critical thought and further developed a sociopolitical framework to view the world. Moreover, I gained a greater sense of love for Black people and accepted the proposition that psychology could be used as a tool to dismantle oppression ultimately resulting in liberation. While in college, I began to reflect on my experiences growing up and was saddened to see that many of my friends were not in similar positions. I recognized how critical the negotiation of adversity and challenges is to success, life satisfaction, and overall quality of life. It also became apparent that people are not isolated entities, but rather the intersection of all systems in which they are embedded. These systems impact opportunities, resources, supports and choices. Additionally, it was revealed to me that my transformation and liberation are directly correlated to the struggle of all oppressed people.

My passion about Black people, resilience, and the study of oppression culminated in my overarching dissertation question, “How do African American males living in inner-city communities use their Blackness as a site of resilience?” After co-developing the sites of resiliency theory, it was my goal to test the proposed sites. This dissertation was the first attempt to gather naturalistic data in order to refine the theory and to articulate the experiences of a group which has been marginalized and underserved. With this in mind, I chose a methodology that ensured that the voices of the
people were represented throughout every phase of the project. I identified participatory-action-research design and qualitative methods as the best modes to accomplish this goal.

Six research questions guided this study. Questions were informed by the sites of resiliency theory that served as the framework from which the data was gleaned and analyzed. The research questions which I posed were: 1) How do street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city define Blackness? What are their criteria for having a healthy sense of Blackness? 2) How do street life oriented young Black men from the inner-city define resilience? 3) How do street life oriented young Black men use their Blackness as a site of resilience? 4) What is the interactive and relational process of developing Blackness for street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city? 5) Where do street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city go in order to nurture, develop, establish, and express their Blackness? and 6) Where are the sites of resilience that young street life oriented Black men living in the inner-city express or demonstrate resilience that may not be observed by those not engaged in street life?

The above set of questions evolved over the course of the year that I worked on the project. Initially, I proposed to answer question number two, "How do street life oriented young Black men define resilience?" This particular question was not examined to the extent as it was originally conceived prior to solidifying the research agenda. The focus shifted in part because I provided the participants a conceptualization of resilience that was developed within the sites of resiliency chapter when introducing the project in order to give some insights into the scope of the interview.

When asked by the participants, what was the goal of the research project, I described the project loosely. At the outset, I repeated the aim of the study as articulated
on the consent form which stated, “The aim of this study is to gain a greater understanding of some of the experiences of Black men living in the inner-city.” After hearing this statement, the participants would inquire about what the word “experiences” meant specifically. I provided more information, telling them that I wanted to investigate how they used their Blackness to as a site of resilience, to overcome obstacles, and navigate through adverse circumstances. I further explained that resilience in this study signified how they utilized their personal strengths and resources and organized meaning around feeling good, satisfied or accomplished. In addition, it represented how young Black men developed effective coping strategies for survival from adverse circumstances in their lives.

This information satisfied the potential interviewees, and they agreed to participate in the study. Upon hearing this, they understood and incorporated my description of resilience into their own conceptualizations. Instead of defining Blackness, the participants discussed resilience in multiple contexts with relative ease. This enabled me to spend more time exploring how they conceptualized Blackness, the process of developing and utilizing Blackness as a site of resilience, and identifying additional resilience sites.

Initially, I attempted to be as vague as possible in regards to the content of the interview in effort to not be leading, but the resistance and skepticism of the participants to the study required me to provide as much detail as possible without compromising the study. Moreover, it was important to establish rapport and develop trust with the respondents. I recognized that it would have been impossible to ask men selected because of their particular street life orientation to engage in a formal interview with a
researcher whom they did not know without providing enough information to adequately relieve their anxieties. Once, I recognized this as a necessary trade off, I knew it would not compromise the overall integrity of the project.

Through this process, initial questions evolved. After reviewing the first interview, the PAR team reviewed the objectives of the study as they related to the research questions. One of the team members pointed out that questions five and six were similar. Both questions were aimed at identifying sites of resilience. Question five focused on identifying sites where Blackness was developed, while question six queried additional sites of resilience. Subsequently, these two questions were collapsed into one: Where do street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city go in order to nurture, develop, establish, and express their Blackness and resilience? This question was a more accurate assessment of the domains that we were attempting to explore.

As a result of these modifications, the research objectives became more clear, and we focused on answering four primary questions: 1) How do street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city define Blackness? What are their criteria for having a healthy sense of Blackness? 2) How do street life oriented young Black men use their Blackness as a site of resilience? 3) What is the interactive and relational process of developing Blackness for street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city?, and 4) Where do street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city go in order to nurture, develop, establish, and express their Blackness and resilience? The research questions set the template and framework for exploration into the lives of the participants. The following section summarizes the findings of the points of inquiry.
Summary of Findings

Question One

The first question was posed in an attempt to gain an understanding of how street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city define Blackness and identified their criteria for a healthy sense of Blackness. The men articulated their experiences of being Black, which, when compiled, created a composite definition of Blackness. Their conceptualizations of Blackness were consistent with Williams' (Williams) framing of WEISU. Williams used the Kiswahili term, "WEUSI," to characterize the African self-concept as the core of Black personality. According to Williams, WEUSI had three distinguishing features or qualities: 1) Blackness, 2) collectiveness, and 3) naturalness (Kamdon, 1998; Williams, 1981). Blackness was comprised of four dimensions: genetic Blackness, cultural Blackness, psychological Blackness, and spiritual Blackness. The participants' conceptualizations of Blackness included all of these aspects.

The participants described Blackness as the central organizing principle, and core of Black people and culture. Blackness was the connecting force, the tie that bound people of African descent throughout the Diaspora together. According to the participants, all people of African descent are born with a sense of Blackness which is then nurtured and developed throughout life. "WEUSI" was reinforced and cultivated through individual understandings and framings of Blackness and their interpretations of experiences within families and other culturally affirming institutions. Blackness was described as a way of life and state of being. Being Black also meant being truthful, and authentic, in attitudes, behaviors, and interactions in the world. Blackness was defined as a set of values and cultural norms distinctive within itself. Blackness was a phenomenon
that was adequate and did not need validation by external sources. Blackness provided a framework to make meaning out of life. The participants also described Blackness as having variance in ideations among Black people. Nevertheless, all Black people have an innate sense of Blackness, and this shared experience connects them.

A key component in defining Blackness was connectedness. Participants articulated their conceptualizations of Blackness were predicated on a sense of connection to Black culture and community. Participants also identified the Black family as the focal point of their Black identity development and connection to Black culture. Connectedness was first fostered in the Black family and then extended to all Black people.

Responding to the second part of the initial question that asks what constitutes a healthy or unhealthy sense of Blackness, the participants' views of healthy Blackness shifted my mode of thinking. The respondents did not describe Blackness in terms of healthy or unhealthy. Instead, they posited that Blackness was organized and differentiated along a continuum of connectedness. People were described as having either higher or lesser levels of Blackness. These levels were based on an individual's sense of commitment and relatedness to the struggles, ills, and plight of Black people and their promotion and preservation of Black culture. Individuals with higher levels of Blackness were described as people who stayed connected, gave back to the Black community, and promoted Black culture according to their resources. Conversely, individuals with lesser levels of Blackness were described as people with a diminished sense of connection to Black culture and the struggles of Black people.

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Furthermore, in relation to levels of Blackness, respondents posited that sexual orientation was neither a mediator nor indicator of a person's level of Blackness. As stated earlier, Blackness was measured on a continuum of connectedness; hence sexual orientation neither contributed to nor detracted from their sense of Blackness. The participants suggested that sexual orientation may influence how Black men express and present themselves when exuding their Blackness. Likewise, sexual orientation may influence individuals' styles, attitudes, and the activities that they engage in. This was a critical emergence because it provides an alternative framing of the interaction between homosexuality and ethnic identity. Akbar (1991) stated that the African American homosexual is an example of alien-self disorders. Akbar posited that severity of the Black gay male's confusion about his identity (ethnic and interpersonal) penetrated to his confusion about sexual identity. The respondents focused less on individuals' sexuality but more on their commitment and connection to Black people and culture. The relationship between ethnic, interpersonal, and sexual identity is an area that would benefit from further exploration.

After synthesizing and compiling the data, I gained a greater understanding of what Blackness meant to street life oriented Black men. The definitions that the men provided were consistent with the presentation of Blackness in the sites of resiliency theory posited by Payne and Brown (in press). Their definition of Blackness was consistent with the Africentric framings of Blackness. The respondents' conceptualization was a more realistic and complex sense of Africanity, void of the homophobia and class biases against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered populations and individuals who engage in street life-activities.
Question Two

The second question addressed how street life oriented young Black men used their Blackness as a site of resilience through which they framed their worldview. This understanding of the world enabled the men to develop a cognitive map that they used to navigate through the world. When challenged and confronted by racism, oppression, and the gross disparities in economics, health, and education, young Black men drew upon their conceptualizations of Blackness derived from their experiences of being Black, and the support and lessons learned from family, friends, community members, iconic figures and histories as sources of pride, strength and courage. Strengthened by and grounded in their Black sense of self, they utilized all of their resources to overcome obstacles, negotiate difficult situations, and navigate through the thicket of life challenges which they faced on a daily basis.

The influence of Blackness and its prominence as a site of resilience varied according the respondents’ contexts and histories and the utilization of other sites of resilience. While some of the participants relied heavily on their Black identities and connections to Africanity to assist them in persevering through life, others utilized their Blackness to a lesser extent and relying more on other resources such as street life, family, and spirituality.

Often times they referred to the messages and lessons taught directly and experientially in order to develop strategies. By reflecting on the strength and resilience of others, they gained confidence, maintained their hope in humanity, and not to give up on life. They found solace in knowing that they were a part of a larger collective of Black people who have persevered through the atrocities associated with the Maafa. According
to Africentric literature, Mafisi represents the genocide of people of African descent at
the hands of Whites (Ani, 1994). On a more intimate and personal level, they looked
within their own families and believed that if the previous generations could make it with
fewer resources then they could build a life with their current skills and resources.

These findings supported the sites of resiliency theory (Payne & Brown, in press)
based on the proposal that ethnicity/Blackness was a site of resilience for street life
oriented Black men. Prior to completing this study, I hypothesized and understood how I
used my Blackness. At times, my love for Black people and my sense of Black pride gave
me great strength to withstand pressures which I knew would overwhelm me if I did not
have a sense of being related to a greater Black experience. In these cases I felt
empowered, strong, and energized enough to fight the world. At other times, I sat quietly
and thought to myself, “You will be alright. You can do it. Many others have done it
before you and you are just a piece of the chain.” In those still moments, I was my most
vulnerable. These moments were associated with feelings of hurt, frustration, and a lack
of will to engage in life. In both cases, I knew that I got “something from somewhere”
that encouraged and propelled me forward. At the time, I did not have the language to
describe the experience, but I knew that I was Black and was mandated by my ancestors
to be strong and be resilient.

Listening to the stories of the men helped me to better understand my own
experiences. Similarly, the respondents were either completely energized or found
enough strength just to get by in life. The “how this happened” question was difficult to
state concisely because the responses varied. I now understand that utilizing Blackness as
a site of resilience forces one to believe that there is a way even when there is no way.
Furthermore, it propels one to utilize all available resources when every door seems closed. Utilizing Blackness as a site of resilience propels one to find options. With this in mind therapists, researchers, parents, teachers and others who interact with street life oriented Black men can encourage, support and assist the men’s exploration and development of their Blackness as a means to promote resources, resiliency and a healthy identity.

**Question Three**

The third question asked was, "What is the process of developing Blackness for street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city?" The participants proposed that Blackness and resilience were developed through an interactive process that occurred across their lifespan. Through developing Blackness and resilience, they expanded upon, became entrenched in, and incorporated a worldview through which they made meaning of their lives that enabled them to overcome adverse circumstances. This worldview was developed through key interactions within their families, communities, and other social systems. Messages about resilience and Blackness were transmitted through family, interactions with members of other cultures, and their own personal and internalized conceptualizations. Blackness was transmitted intergenerationally and developed and nurtured messages given directly and indirectly within the family and the larger Black community.

The participants asserted that Blackness was an inherent part of their being. Blackness was a core component of personality and self that continuously evolved. The participants did not describe a time when they felt void of their Blackness, but each participant noted critical instances in their lives that may have spurred them to revisit,
become more aware of, and entrenched in their Blackness. Such instances included being incarcerated, experiencing racism, becoming aware of economic disparities, experiencing violence, and other micro aggressions.

Participants described scenarios where they were nurtured and gained strength, and subsequently resilience, from conversations with relatives—learning about their familial and cultural histories, and being inspired by others. Everyone described being aware of their ethnicity and Blackness and their internal fortitude. Whenever, confronted with adversity that challenged their racial identities, they were reminded by their families of their strength and their ability to cope and overcome difficulties. Developing a sense of Blackness was more a matter of increasing awareness about ethnic issue, and learning how to access and utilize their inherent Africanity and resilience, rather than creating an experience or worldview that was absent of a historical context and non-existent. The participants described their parents as proactive and as having the foresight to teach, expose, and acculturate the men to the trials they were destined to face as young, inner-city Blacks living in the United States. Hence, when confronted with the difficulties, the participants merely needed to be reminded of the lessons taught. As the men matured, they became more aware of the adversities of their surroundings and became more efficient in accessing and utilizing Blackness as a site of resilience. Experiences from birth enable Black people to become more aware of and better able to understand what it means to be Black and resilient as well as utilize their Blackness and resilience. I described the phenomena to team members as, “We are, and then we become better at being.”
As the themes and patterns emerged, I saw the importance of developing a sense of agency as a child. As children, many people search for acceptance and identity based on their interactions with external forces. If taught that we are good enough from the outset and all we have to do is be better people as we develop and mature, perhaps some of the frustrating experiences of youth that are regarded as typical adolescent identity development could be diminished to a point where those transitional periods could be negotiated with less tension and anxiety.

**Question Four**

The fourth question was designed to identify where street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city go to nurture, develop, establish, and express their Blackness and resilience. The participants identified both psychological and physical sites of resilience. The sites identified were Blackness, religion and spirituality, the block, families, and psychological safe places. While conducting interviews, I was struck by the openness of the participants. The interviews were intense and intimate; some of the information shared by the respondents had not been revealed to their friends and family members. Part of the openness was a result of my asking questions that were relevant to the lives of the men. Once they agreed to participate in the study, they spoke in earnest and took advantage of the opportunity to tell their stories and provide critiques of the world. At times, I had difficulty in keeping them focused on one topic because they had so much to say.

I also recognized that Black men who are often regarded as being void of any redeemable qualities, demonstrated pride, passion, received encouragement, and overcame adversities through multiple sites of resilience. The already mentioned sites
represented the spaces that were consistent amongst participants, but was not exhaustive of the psychical and psychological spaces where they go to nurture, establish, develop, and express their Blackness and resilience. The sites of resiliency theory provides a framework that allows therapists and researchers to identify and explore domains that may otherwise be overlooked.

On another note, the participants’ conceptualizations of family as a site of resiliency provided evidence consistent with the family resilience framework proposed by family systems theorists (Walsh, 2003; McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989). Walsh proposed that there were several key processes that occurred and within three domains: 1) belief system, 2) organizational patterns, and 3) communication/problem-solving. Each domain was comprised of several processes. Belief systems were made up of how the family makes meaning out of adversity, maintained a positive outlook, and were connected to and utilize transcendence and spirituality. Organizational patterns were comprised of flexibility, connectedness, and social and economic resources. The last domain, communication and problem-solving, included clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving. Walsh’s framing of family resilience provides an excellent model that can be used in conjunction with the Sites of Resiliency theory to investigate the Black family as a site of resilience.

Researchers’ Experiences

Working with the PAR team was an excellent experience. While leading the research team was one of my most challenging academic/research undertakings to date, it was also one of my richest and most fulfilling experiences. The biggest challenge was getting team members to become committed to a long-term project and topic that was not
a priority for them before this research. Moreover, team members were introduced to a
developing theory and process of working that was unconventional.

The sites of resiliency theory (Payne & Brown, in press) is an emerging
framework, and I had to present it in a manner that proved the theory to be legitimate,
while acknowledging that the research is in its nascent stages. I presented this idea to the
PAR team members, and they became committed to assisting me in developing the
theory, learning the process of research, and gaining an understanding of street life
oriented Black men in a way that they had never experienced.

I was confident that I could orchestrate the research and keep a team together.
However, one of my biggest concerns was creating an environment where team members
felt safe to express their concerns, biases, critiques, assumptions, and frustrations in a
way that they could be effectively processed and used to enhance the project. This was
imperative considering the mixed socioeconomic, educational levels, class, gender, and
philosophical orientation the various team members brought to the project. Furthermore,
my team consisted of both colleagues, and informal and formal mentees. We discussed
these challenges in an effort to bring attention to the hierarchy, and to create a
collaborative work environment. I challenged myself to be aware of the gender dynamics
by acknowledging and respecting the experiences of the women team members. I did not
want to replicate any negative experiences that they may have had as women of color
working on other research projects. I wanted to ensure that their voices were heard at the
table as loudly and with as much respect as mine.

In order to establish a collaborative and open environment, I repeatedly
encouraged everyone to use what I called “free space.” I wanted everyone to know that

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individuals would not be penalized for expressing thoughts and emotions and that it was each one's responsibility to bring whatever they each wanted to the debriefing sessions.

As for Archie, it was his job to keep all of us in line with the stated purpose of the project and to ensure that the participants' input was integrated in each phase of the project. He and I developed a relationship in which we debated, challenged, and disagreed freely with each other while remaining respectful. Throughout the project, everyone worked with each other to be honest, and we grew as a unit.

The PAR team's biggest challenge was to understand and become comfortable in acknowledging and overcoming biases about street life oriented Black men. This bias became more pronounced when having to work with members of the population.

Although the participants' street life orientations and activities were not the major foci of the interviews, team members were intrigued by the lifestyle and their own romanticized images of gangsterism. Oftentimes they focused on the behaviors and attitudes described, instead of the message being relayed. In addition to the stereotypes associated with street life oriented men, team members had to buy into a new framework for developing an objective understanding of a person based on a worldview, instead judgmental measures as using one's own value system. It was reiterated throughout the project that it was not relevant whether or not the team members agreed or disagreed with the interviewee's lifestyle because our jobs as researchers were to assist them in telling their experiences as accurately as possible. A credit to the team, they challenged themselves to accept the data as presented by the respondents and used the team processing methods to remain balanced. Subsequently, they gained a greater understanding and appreciation for the men.
The team completed a series of questions designed to assist with processing the experience. The feedback that I received was insightful and informative. I first asked the PAR team to comment about working with the research team, specifically working with me as the leader and working with a mixture of doctoral, undergraduate and community members. All of the PAR team members stated that their overall experiences were educational, challenging, and professionally and personally fulfilling. The project provided them opportunities to learn more about research and the population they serviced.

Throughout the project, I encouraged everyone to listen and try to view the world through the eyes and ears of the participants. This was a struggle for me as well. I acknowledged that I believed everyone was resilient and that it was just a matter of identifying sites for a particular person. My bias became evident as I struggled to retell the stories accurately without adding my own insights, meanings, and knowledge to respondents' statements. On several occasions, the team challenged my interpretations, saying that I was "going too deep." This meant that I was adding and implying more depth and analysis to the statements than warranted. I became better at discerning between what was said and what I wanted to hear. As my self-awareness heightened, I became more comfortable in stepping back and letting themes emerge from the data and the powerful stories of the participants.

Perhaps the most satisfying part of this experience was to bear witness to the small transformations which both the researchers and participants underwent as a result of being involved in this project. I felt a sense of accomplishment when participants saw experiences in a different way, said that they would ask their parents about family
history, or vowed to continue our discussions among our peers and children. This same process occurred amongst team members. We expressed a wide range of opinions during team meetings. Regardless of the conflicting assumptions and points, there was always an "aha" moment. Oftentimes it was phrased something like this; "I understand what you are saying. That is a good point, but I don't agree, but I get where you are coming from." For me, that was enough to move on. By consistently challenging our own assumptions we grew.

I would be remiss if I did not include an illustration of the complexities of conducting this project and working with the PAR team. At the conclusion of Antoine's initial interview, he inquired about the next steps of the project, and I gave him a brief overview. As we stood in the living room and shook hands, he refused to take the money for the interview. I insisted that he gave an excellent interview and was owed the money per our agreement. Antoine emphatically stated that he did not need money in order to help his people and refused his compensation. We then negotiated using the money to purchase pizza and sodas for everyone. I presented the option for pizza, and everyone agreed. Archie ordered the food to be delivered. Ironically, the pizza did not arrive (typical occurrence in Black, impoverished neighborhoods). Finally, Archie went to the store and bought snacks for the group.

Approximately a month later, Archie stated that he had an issue to discuss. He recalled that during a follow-up conversation with Antoine that they discussed the experience of the project. Archie notified Antoine that the first interview was sufficient and that the compensation agreed upon for the follow-up interview would be distributed even though the second interview would not be required. At that point, Antoine informed
Archie that he did not receive the money from the initial interview. Archie felt blind-
sided because he thought that the initial money had been transferred similarly as it had
been for the others. Because Archie had no prior knowledge about the exchange between
Antoine and myself, he felt uncomfortable challenging him or providing more
information. Antoine added that he did not take the initial compensation because he was
doing well at the time. However, he was no longer in the same financial position and
needed the extra money. Antoine insisted that I would corroborate his story. Archie said
that he would follow-up with me and then get back to him. Archie and I discussed the
dilemma, considering a variety of outcomes. On one hand, I felt as if I was being strong-
amed. After all, he gave the money to the group and technically, I did not "owe" him.
On the other hand, the refusal of the funds was for supposed altruistic reasons. Antoine
felt that his participation was his duty to his community, and it was an effort to give back.
Now, in his efforts to remain uninvolved in street life activities, he was securing funds
that were legitimately earned for his services. We also discussed the awkward position
that Archie was placed in as a friend, member of the community, and representative of
the research team. I did not want to do anything to undermine Archie’s credibility.
Furthermore, I did not want to undermine the integrity of the project and myself as a
researcher who was attempting to work collaboratively and build inroads in the
community. Weighing those factors, we decided to reimburse Antoine. When I sent
follow-up money to Archie for distribution, I included a letter in which I thanked each
respondent for participating in the research study. Each then signed a copy of the letter
which served as a receipt to ensure that all of the money was distributed (see Appendix Y
for follow-up letter).
I learned a very valuable lesson through this exchange. I learned the importance of maintaining excellent financial records. This was a minor incident that was easily managed because I could quickly access the money. If larger amounts of money would have been exchanged, or if I was not clear on the events of the day in question, I would have placed myself in a position where my research and motives could be negated by fiscal malfeasance. Additionally, I became more aware of the importance of keeping Archie involved in all of the details of the project. He served as the face of the project and orchestrated all of the interactions between myself and the participants. It was his role to ensure that I, as a researcher, respected and maintained a mutually beneficial relationship with the community. To compromise their trust would be an insult to the community and would indict me along with others who have committed similar offenses. This lesson was especially important to remember when working in communities who have been historically and systemically exploited.

My experiences with the men varied from the other team members. I was the only team member who interviewed the participants and non-community PAR member who visited the neighborhoods sampled. I did not have any negative experiences in the community. In fact, by the end of the project, I knew my way around the city enough to get lost and find my way rather comfortably. I became closer to Archie both professionally and personally. I also felt a connection to the other interviewees and the millions of other men whom they represented. Having the opportunity to work in such a focused manner created a bond. I was happy when I found out that one participant was paroled and deeply saddened when notified that others were incarcerated.
As for me, I became more committed to developing the sites of resiliency theory and developing treatment strategies. I felt validated that my ideas and conceptualizations were accurate and that I have developed the necessary skills to finish a project from start to finish. I felt confident that intuitions were true and my clinical skills and understanding of people enabled me to interact with a population whom many dismiss because of their fears and anxieties. Moreover, I was able to work in a way that was mutually beneficial and non-explosive.

Contribution to Research

This research provides empirical evidence that street life oriented Black men utilize Blackness as a site of resilience. The data gives insights into the process of how they use their conceptualizations of Blackness to navigate through the world. Additionally, more information was gleaned regarding the interactive process of developing Blackness and resilience. This data is critical to the development of the sites of resiliency theory because it provides practical research and examples that supports and informs the theoretical precepts.

In the original sites of resiliency theory we proposed three sites of resilience. The proposed sites were ethnicity, street life, and religion/spirituality. The findings of this study suggested that family, the block, and other psychological safe places separate from the block were additional sites of resilience that warrant in-depth investigation. In addition, to identifying these sites, this study provides information which suggests how these sites are used and developed, along with insights into the meanings associated with them. The quality of the descriptions provides texture to the experiences of the respondents. This was lacking in the original conceptualization of the sites of resiliency.
theory. With this information, we can theoretically propose sites based on experience and literature and be confident that these sites, which are often abstract, can be validated and affirmed empirically.

Furthermore, these findings suggest that street life oriented Black men view the world from an African-centered framework developed and modulated within their context based on their experiences. Hence, when discussing worldview among street life oriented young Black men, this research suggests that one must not impose a worldview developed through a middle-class, conservative, value laden, lens that discounts this population from the outset. In order to accurately articulate the worldview of this group, one must accurately assess the population and gain an understanding of how they view the world, and organize their minds around their experiences through a critical, contextual, cultural, and personal critique. Moreover, applying Eurocentric frameworks and/or ethnic and racial identity that which do not carry similar values and criteria for Blackness as the findings suggest these men subscribe to would be a futile attempt to impose an understanding suggested by the researcher or therapist. It would be a disservice to the community and an overt attempt to impart, mask and undermine the authority of the Black men being addressed.

In the same vein, findings of this study provide another perspective to the discourse on Blackness that challenges middle-class assumptions and stereotypes held and promoted by both Eurocentric and Africentric psychology. One of the most pathologizing notions is that people living in impoverished communities who engage in illegal activities for their economic and physical survival are void of morals, a sense of community, a positive ethnic identity, and Africanity. This assertion is void of context
and does not recognize the impact of social location, lack of opportunities, economic vulnerability, and roles which disenfranchised play in order to support a capitalist society (Wilson, 1990). This is not an attempt to justify an illegal or other illicit behavior, but rather highlight and better situate the information for interpretation.

In addition to providing data, this dissertation provided a template for utilizing PAR with street life oriented populations. This presentation highlighted some of the successes and pitfalls in utilizing PAR research. By far the benefits of using PAR outweighed any personal difficulties I experienced regarding time restrictions and effort. By utilizing PAR, participants and other researchers were trained and adequately compensated. Both participants and researchers learned and created positive shifts in themselves. The interviewees stated that they would continue the conversations and re-examine how they proceed in certain situations. Researchers stated that they would begin to reconceptualize how they approach and work with the population. Like several members of the PAR team, researchers and clinicians have traditionally remained within their comfort zone and talked about, talked to, talked for street life oriented Black men. We challenged ourselves to work collaboratively with the population being investigated. From a psychology of liberation perspective every effort should be used to create change and should be directly related to and transferable to the population from which the data are gleaned. These benefits may not be measurable now, but the personal connections may be seen in the careers and life work of those impacted by the process.

This research has the potential to impact several levels. The findings of this study, if viewed in conjunction with a growing body of research challenging the status quo and traditionally disempowering psychological theories and research, may influence public
policies regarding education, violence prevention, and juvenile justice. If existing social structures utilize the research and literature on the experiences of low income Black men, they will be better equipped to support and provide services to at-risk populations. The data could inform Africentric rites of passage programs, clinical therapeutic interventions, and curricula in schools for instance.

Perhaps the most basic, yet powerful, contribution of this study is that it provided an opportunity and a space for individuals who have felt marginalized and ostracized to utilize their voices in defining and articulating their experiences in an effort to help themselves and their people. This study also illustrates the humanity, vulnerability, and commitment to community within a group that has been demonized as heartless criminals. Through this research, perhaps, some of these stereotypes may be changed.

Limitations and Future Research

This research had several limitations. Despite the shared experiences of people of African descent, this research recognized that regional nuances shape experiences. This research focused on a very specific population comprised of street life oriented young Black men living in an inner-city in the northeast region of the United States. These results were interpreted with the understanding that geographical differences have nuances, which impact generalizability as well.

Another limitation of this study pertained to the lack of variance of the participants. All of the participants lived within the same ward of a city. This project was concentrated within this particular community because it was accessible. The goal to explore Blackness in Black men in an impoverished inner-city was achieved. However, these men grew up in the same environment, and their range of inner-city experiences
was limited to the same city. Similarly, two of the participants were half-brothers. Although they were raised in different households, men in different living situations may have provided a broader range of experiences. Future studies should include larger samples from a more diverse geographical area to ensure a greater range of experiences.

Another limitation was that this study did not include the experiences and perceptions of Black women. Although the experiences of women were worthy of exploration, this project did not make comparisons between males and females, but rather explored the experiences of Black males. The participation of Black women in the study was beyond the scope of this project; their stories would have made the findings more comprehensive. Future research should include the experiences of street life oriented young Black women.

Similarly, the analysis of this data was from a heterosexual perspective. None of the PAR team members and participants identified as being gay or bisexual. Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, the PAR team attempted to include gay and bisexual men. Our attempts included contacting clinical programs, shelters, and community agencies that serviced the GLBT community, as well as using personal affiliations.

The PAR team provided several hypotheses as to why it was difficult to solicit gay and bisexual men. First, the GLBT community was very cautious of engaging with researchers who have neither demonstrated their good will nor have established a connection to the community for extended periods of time. This skepticism toward the researcher was partly out of fear of exploitation and beingouted. This behavior was
similar to the experiences of the Black men in the community who questioned my racial
category prior to meeting me.

One participant stated that their sexual orientation could be questioned by
identifying closeted gay or bisexual men. He stated, "How could I justify telling you
who was gay if nobody else knew. Everybody would look at me and say, 'How is it that
you are the only one who knew that Bobby was gay?' They would ask me if I was down
with it too." Participants stated that most of their conversations did not include discussing
other men's sexuality. They believed that what a person did in his home was his business
and they respected his privacy. They stated that everyone knew the men who were cross-
dressers and transvestites, but they did not interact with them unless they were a part of
their families. Although they did not frequent the same circles, Black gays and bisexuals
were given space to live, as they desired. Similarly, there were "homo-thugs" and
"hardcore" street life oriented gay men that one would not suspect as being gay because
much of their status in their neighborhoods and physical image promoted an ideal of
socially acceptable masculinity. Future research should include gay and bisexual men. In
order to encourage participation, researchers should begin to establish inroads and rapport
in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community prior to soliciting participants.
In addition, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals on the PAR
team may bolster the researcher's ability to solicit participation.

A methodological limitation was a result of the lack of community representation
on the PAR team. Despite my best efforts to recruit community PAR members, there was
only one community PAR member. Although Archie provided excellent insights, he
could ultimately represent only a segment of the population. During meetings, he
provided information from his experiences, but could only infer based on his knowledge and familiarity of the population as to what they were alluding to in interviews. Perhaps, if we would have had a greater representation of the community on the PAR team, the analysis could have been even richer. Although the PAR team was not as inclusive as anticipated, the team worked conscientiously to challenge their biases, assumptions and values through peer-debriefings, journaling, triangulating information, and researching issues relevant to the population.

In addition, the PAR design was not fully implemented. My initial framing of the project anticipated completing the data analysis, summarizing the findings, and developing an “empowerment project” in which the information would be disseminated to the community prior to defending the dissertation. This would have ensured that a summary of those activities be included in the text. This goal was not accomplished primarily because of time restraints. Time was a barrier as well as the infrastructure of the university and doctoral program.

The current design and requirements of my particular program are neither conducive nor supportive of PAR. As is the case for most scientist-practitioner psychology programs, doctoral students are required to wear multiple hats throughout their tenure to gain a myriad of clinical and research experiences. Students are forced and trained to manage externships, internships, comprehensive examinations, a full course load, dissertation, and other research and university responsibilities. Although these activities give students a breadth of knowledge, they are not conducive for working intimately and intensely in one community over long periods of time, which is crucial for establishing relationships. Subsequently, the data gleaned from the participants do not
approach the depth of analysis, as would have been the case if I were able to focus the majority of my attention to working with one community for an extended period.

However, consistent with the principles of PAR, I increased the validity and quality of the research by including the analysis of a community member on the PAR team, established an on-going presence and relationship with the community, and trained community members and other researchers who will continue working with this population in research methods. The dissemination of the information will occur post-defense. The PAR team is developing a project that best meets the needs of the community as directed by the feedback solicited by the participants who wanted to be a part of the dissemination-of-information process.

Future research should include exploring the sites of resilience identified in this study and the domains proposed in the Sites of Resiliency theory. Further exploration would provide greater insights into the experiences of street life oriented Black men and their sites of resiliency. Participants also suggested that Blackness and resilience could be expressed through their engagement in and negotiation of street life for their survival and acts of militancy and resistance.

This study should be expanded to include women, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender populations. Increasing the sampling pool would promote a better understanding of the sites of resilience utilized among a cross-section in this community. An analysis including these populations would also center and bring to the forefront more experiences of marginalized groups. Similarly, inclusion of participants from other locations and socioeconomic status would increase our knowledge of Blackness as a site

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of resilience. Other studies would provide greater insight, so that more appropriate models might be developed that address the needs of specific populations.

Future research should also include developing a model of assessment for a site of resilience. Research should be aimed at developing a clinical model that incorporates the sites of resiliency theory and liberation psychology to assist street life oriented men and women.

Clinical Implications

Much of the knowledge from this research has clinical implications when providing psychological services to street life oriented Black men. A sites of resiliency analysis allows for, and challenges, clinicians to contextualize and historicize inner-city Black male behavior and attitudes. This research also provides findings to encourage clinicians to rethink their framing of Black adolescent development, Blackness, resilience, and street life.

Understanding the socio-cultural environment from which the client comes enables the therapist to obtain an accurate assessment of the client’s worldview and that of their family. Firstly, clinicians should develop and utilize an understanding of Blackness and Black culture that goes beyond the superficial and generic understanding of ethnicity and multiculturalism. In order to be effective with this population, clinicians must incorporate a framework for assessing a worldview that goes beyond categorically describing the attitudes of a group. Understanding worldview in this case means that the clinician must develop an understanding of how a particular individual or group receives, mediates, processes, manipulates, and understands information and environmental stimulants based on personal experiences and through the other’s eyes. If a clinician can
understand and articulate the world as the client understands and describes experiences in the world, then that clinician has truly joined with the client. At this point, the clinician can use clinical skills and training to assist the client in better understanding the perceived world and how to interact in the world to assist functioning optimally according to personal criteria. This is particularly important because much of the literature on worldview and ethnic and racial identity theory has been void of an inner-city Black male perspective and may only inhibit the rigid clinician.

Therapy with street life oriented Black men should be focused on assisting clients develop their critical analysis and critical consciousness. Utilizing psycho- and socio-education will enable this population to understand their roles in society and the impact of their socioecopolitical systems on their lives and decision-making. The better they are at developing a critical cultural critique on issues regarding race, class, economic systems, gender socialization, sexuality, sexual orientation, and masculinity, the better they will be able to cope and utilize their sites of resilience to navigate their worlds.

Consistent with developing a critical consciousness and a critical analysis, Franklin (2004) outlined twelve lessons of empowerment for Black men to learn and demonstrate their competency. He proposed that if Black men mastered the twelve lessons then they would begin to heal, regain hope, recognition, respect and integrity in an effort to overcome the invisibility syndrome. Franklin proposed that Black men begin to: 1) take an accurate self-assessment and prepare for their futures, 2) take advice from elders, 3) cultivate existing personal resources, 4) get past feelings of embarrassment, 5) gain clarity about their dreams and identity, 6) relinquish the "victims mentality, 7) distinguish what they can change from what they cannot, 8) address internal barriers, 9)
assemble supports, 10) dream, 11) take risks in order to facilitate change, and 12) reconnect to or attain a spiritual anchor. Franklin posits that if Black men, individually and collectively begin to address these areas of their lives, then can develop the strength and resources to overcome the systemic and societal barriers which continue to plague their communities.

In a clinical setting with street life oriented Black men, systematically discussing and exploring the lessons of empowerment may be an appropriate intervention. Exploring these domains may assist the men develop an understanding of their unique positions in the world, regain a sense of personal integrity by reconciling the disconnect within themselves and among their family and community. Moreover, the men can begin to reconnect with other Black men who struggle with similar issues in a nurturing and supportive manner.

In this case, effective therapy would require much more assessment and clarification instead of assumptions. This can be obtained by assessing the sites of resilience that the individual utilizes and identify which sites are most salient at particular times in a person’s life. Spending more time accurately assessing the worldview of the client promotes joining and develops a collaborative relationship between the therapist and client. The better the connection made with the client, the more leverage the therapist has to challenge and confront the client based on the inconsistencies in a perceived framework.

Therapy should be based in liberation psychology, which is focused on the physical and psychological liberation of all people and not merely behavioral changes (Utsey, Bolden, & Brown, 2001). If the underlying impetus of therapy is to assist the
client to think critically and conceptualize what individual, familial, and communal liberation looks like according to personal criteria of liberation, these all energies should be focused on creating that liberation. In the process of liberation, healing, reconnection to family, cultivation of the spirit, and adaptive behavioral and attitudinal shifts may occur.

Furthermore, all therapy should include an assessment and a framework for cultivating spirituality among Black men living in the inner-city. It is not the therapist’s role to convert clients to a particular religious orientation. However, I propose that it is the clinician’s responsibility to acknowledge and be prepared to explore spirituality as a key factor in the lives of the Black people. Not having a framework that incorporates the exploration of spirituality is a disservice to a people who believe that spirituality is central to the essence of their beings. Furthermore, cultivating the spirit is integral to their development as African people.

Therapy should also focus on utilizing family resilience to assist individuals within the familial system. Clinicians should place an emphasis on increasing and developing connections within the family and the community. Increasing connections would decrease feelings of isolation, loneliness, and promote self-esteem and self-worth. Recognizing and utilizing familial resilience also strengthens the family relationships. This is particularly important recognizing the many street life oriented Black men entered into street life to provide and support their families of origin, their children, and partners.

It is vitally important for clinicians to remain clear and aware of their personal racial, sexuality, class biases and assumptions when working with street life oriented young Black men. For clinicians to be accurate in their perceptions, interpretations, and
telling of the stories of others, they must develop a relationship with members of the community that extend beyond the sterile scientist/subject divide. Working collaboratively as co-investigators exploring and aggressively addressing a phenomenon has positive implications for both the clinician and the client. Conversely, if the population feels that they are being undermined or stereotyped, they may not confront the therapist directly because they want to act compliant in therapy and instead may respond by dismissing all future therapeutic interventions.

Further Development of Theory

The focus of this research was to explore how inner-city, street life oriented young Black men conceptualized Blackness as a site of resilience. This research was a theory-driven PAR design based on the sites of resiliency theory. In this theory, all people are regarded as resilient. It is also posited that in order to assess, measure, and identify where young, street life oriented, inner-city Black men who occupy a low-socioeconomic status go to demonstrate, develop, bolster, and express their resilience, that street life, ethnicity/Blackness, and spirituality/religiosity should be explored. Furthermore, an analysis of resilience among this population must include: 1) an analysis of the impact of race and racism, 2) an examination of socio-historical patterns or trends, 3) a study of the intersection of capitalism and resiliency, and 4) incorporate a phenomenological based analysis. These assumptions provided the guidelines for exploration and assessment in this study. They served as a framework to ensure that accurate interpretations could be made of this highly pathologized and demonized group.

With the key assumptions in place, this study investigated Blackness among the men. In the process of gathering naturalistic data, I remained open to affirming,
disproving, and refining the sites of resiliency theory. In order to control for my potential biases or zeal, as well as to ensure that the influence and analysis from the population was included, I solicited the aid of the PAR team. I also triangulated the data by discussing findings and describing the process of working with other scholars who work with this population. I also presented information and sought clarification with other street life oriented young Black men who were not participants in this study. In both cases, the overwhelming response was that the sites of resiliency theory provided a framework through which the population could be viewed experientially and cognitively. The information from this study could be influential in assisting participants in better understand their own experiences, set goals, and make life shifts. This framework provided an adequate template through which resilience can be assessed and identified in a manner that remains unobtrusive and self-affirming. Moreover, if street life oriented Black men are viewed through the sites of resiliency lens, researchers and other observers will better understand this population and observe strengths, skills, and resiliency that may perhaps be overlooked.

The findings of the study supported my initial proposition that Blackness was a site of resilience for street life oriented, inner-city Black men. They also endorsed street life, the block, and spirituality, a family and other psychological safe places as sites. This was not surprising to me because my familiarity, understanding and experience developed by working with this population of Black men lead me to these possible outcomes. Furthermore, the sites inform each other synergistically, and individuals have several sites operating simultaneously. Hence it is a safe assumption that further exploration would reveal more sites. In this theory three of what were considered the
most salient sites were proposed. Furthermore, the theory was developed while being engaged in constant dialogue with street life oriented Black men. Hence, their influence and critique was infused into the theory from its conception. It was an accurate framing because those framed were also the architects. Sites of resiliency is a theory for the people by the people. Prior to conducting the study, I did not have as clear of an understanding of “how it worked.” The “how” questions were answered as a result of this study. I can now revisit the theory and state: 1) Blackness is a site of resiliency, and then describe with more confidence how it is conceptualized and defined. I can also describe the process of development, and identify other sites within a socioecopolitical context through utilizing the voices of the men being studied.
Appendix A

Participatory Action Research Team Members Descriptions

Andréa L. Brown, Primary Investigator
M.Ed. Guidance and Counseling
Ed.S. Marriage and Family Psychology

Andréa (age 28) is a doctoral candidate in the Marriage and Family program at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. Andréa was raised in New York, until moving to North Carolina during adolescence. She describes her family's economic status as poor and working class. Andréa is a recipient of the American Psychological Association Minority Fellowship Program Mental-Health Services Training Grant and is a New Jersey Minority in Academic Careers Doctoral Fellow. Her research and clinical interests have focused on resiliency, African American adolescent development, spirituality, the Black church, domestic and community violence, and the impact of HIV/AIDS in communities of color. Andréa received both her undergraduate and master's degrees from historically Black universities, Elizabeth City State University, North Carolina, and University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Maryland, respectively.

“Archie”, PAR Team Member

Archie (age 30) is a member of the community from which participants were selected. He has assured in developing several research projects. In addition, he has begun to serve as a consultant for researchers who focus on sampling inner-city populations. Archie holds a high school diploma. He is also the proud father of two children.

Robin Duckett, PAR Team Member
M.A. Counseling Psychology

Robin (age 25) is a second year doctoral student in the Marriage and Family program at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. Robin, born and raised in New Jersey, described her upbringing as working class. Robin received her bachelor's and master's degrees from historically Black colleges, Elizabeth City State University, Elizabeth City, North Carolina and Howard University, Washington, D.C., respectively. Robin's research and clinical work focuses on the experiences of African American youth, the Black family, and the Black church.

Alexis Meville, PAR Team Member

Alexis (age 19) is a junior psychology student at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. Alexis was born in Jamaica and was raised in Connecticut. She described her familial upbringing as working class. Alexis is a student member of the New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Black Psychology. Additionally, Alexis serves as a sponsor, mentor and tutor for inner-city African American youth.
Sueli Petry, PAR Team Member
M.A. Clinical Psychology
Ed.S. Marriage and Family Psychology

Sueli Petry (age 47) is a fourth-year doctoral student in the Marriage and Family program at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. Sueli, born to Brazilian parents in Brazil, was raised in Newark, New Jersey. She describes her economic status as working class. For the past six years, Sueli has provided clinical and support services to economically impoverished African American and Latino communities in Newark, New Jersey and the surrounding areas.

Shaneah Taylor, PAR Team Member

Shaneah Taylor (age 29) is a junior psychology student at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. Shaneah was born and raised in Ohio. She described her familial upbringing as working class. She maintains a very close and supportive relationship with her mother and grandmother, whom she identifies as her primary caregivers. Shaneah is also a student member of the New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Black Psychology in which she worked actively recruiting other undergraduate members. Additionally, Shaneah studied abroad in France and the Dominican Republic.
Appendix B

Participatory Action Research Suggested Reading Materials


Appendix C

Research Methods Training Agendas

Agenda I

1. Introduction
   a. Who am I?
   b. What this is about? Project purpose
   c. Research team contact sheet
   d. What is Participatory Action Research
   e. Why you were specifically selected
   f. Implications

2. Project Budget
   a. Project expenditures
   b. Co-researcher/ Research assistant agreement

3. Small Break

4. Theoretical and Methodological Notions regarding street life oriented Black men

Agenda II

1. Review

2. 8 dimensions of Participatory Action Research
   a. What is PAR

3. Dissertation Proposal (Dissertation Defense)
   a. Abstract
   b. Methodology
   c. Appendices

Agenda III

1. Review

2. Research Ethics
   a. What is ethics
   b. Informed consent/assent
   c. Internal Review Board (IRB)

3. Methodology
   a. What is methodology?
   b. Rea a sample method section
   c. What is our methodology
   d. What is our sample (What do we need?/ Who do we need?)
   e. Review what we have to accomplish

4. Data collection strategy
   a. Snowball Technique
      i. Personal networks
      ii. Family
      iii. Friends
      iv. Social agencies
5. Three kinds of participants
   a. Grumpy, average, exceptionally nice
   b. Role playing

Agenda IV
1. Review
2. More role-playing
3. Review of data-collection sites
4. Set-up data-collection schedule and define specific roles
5. Contact system
Appendix D

Primary Researcher's Personal Biography

Andréa L. Brown, M.Ed., Ed.S.

My name is Andréa L. Brown and I am the primary research investigator. I am a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. Marriage and Family Therapy program at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. I was raised in New York, until moving to North Carolina during adolescence. I come from a relatively large family of seven children. While growing up, both of my parents worked and our economic status was poor and working class. My father was a pastor of a church and both he and my mother worked several other jobs. For example, my mother has worked as a nurse’s assistant, laboratory worker, in food services, and as a cosmetologist. I am a twenty-seven years old, heterosexual, unmarried Black male.

Throughout my academic and professional career I have worked in a wide array of settings including community mental-health agencies, residential facilities, public schools, and universities. I have provided individual, family, and group therapy, outreach, workshops, psycho- and socioeducation with ethnically and sexually diverse populations. I have also had the opportunity to provide services to people across the economic spectrum, ranging from the wealthy to those living in poverty.

Upon entering college, I began to reflect on my experiences and was saddened to see that many of my peers were dead, incarcerated, and not pursuing their dreams. I was disturbed by this and began to search for answers about why this was occurring. During this time of examination, I was opened to truths that have guided me both personally and professionally. I recognized how critical the negotiation of adversity and challenges during adolescence was to success, life satisfaction and quality of life. It became clear that people were not isolated entities but rather the intersection of all systems in which they are embedded -- these systems impact opportunities, resources, supports and choices. Additionally, I realized that my transformation and liberation were directly connected to the struggle of all oppressed people. I gained focus and purpose upon accepting the notion that I was a part of a spiritual continuum of life, expanding beyond my individual aspirations. Most importantly, I recognized that success and power were not measured by financial success, but by my ability to facilitate healing, to create social change, to develop human potential, and to promote individual and communal resilience.

My passion about resiliency has culminated in my dissertation that asks the question, “How do street life oriented young Black men use their Blackness to overcome obstacles and adversity?” I want to use the information gleaned from this study to help people transform themselves and the systems in which they are embedded. In addition, this research fulfills one of my doctoral requirements, moving me closer to completing my program and earning my degree.

My ultimate goal is to foster, encourage, and facilitate self-determination and resilience. This process requires both accountability and healing, accomplished via empowerment, mobilization, community building, and consciousness raising. I believe that change occurs when individuals, families, and communities have the capacities to make choices, exercise control of their individual and collective behaviors, and ultimately influence their destinies.

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Appendix E

Consultant Contract

Hello my name is Andraé L. Brown. I am a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. in Marriage and Family in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. I am also the principal investigator of my doctoral dissertation entitled: Exploring Blackness as a Site of Resilience for Street Life Oriented Young Black Men Living in the Inner-City. The aim of this study is to gain a greater understanding of some of the experiences of Black men and the processes which they undergo in developing, connecting to, and utilizing their Blackness as a source of strength enabling them to make meaning of their lives and overcome adversity.

I am requesting your expertise and services to serve in the capacity of participatory action research team members/consultants on this project. As members of the research team your responsibilities would include (1) assisting in the recruitment of participants in the initial and subsequent follow-up interviews, (2) pre-screening potential participants with the primary investigator, (3) providing analysis and expertise in interpreting qualitative data, (4) code transcript; and (5) participate in subsequent presentations and related to the project.

Participants in this study will include six to eight, street life oriented young Black men living in the inner-city. Young men will include participants who ages range from sixteen to twenty-three. Street life oriented Black male participants will have to meet the following criteria: (1) self-identifying as being street life oriented, (2) within the last year participated in street life activities to survive physically (e.g. gang activity, fighting/assault) or economically, and (3) live in an inner-city or economically impoverished position. In addition, this study will include heterosexual and gay men. Each participant will receive $25.00 for the initial interview and 10.00 for follow-up interviews.

The interviews will be conducted in an environment where the participant are most comfortable and able to be engaged (home, church, school, community center, university, neighborhood). The specific site can be negotiated with the participant prior to the interview. It is important to note that the interview is confidential. This means no one will be able to connect the participants same to the interview. All identifying information will be removed from the transcription and all names will be changed.

As a research team member/consultant you will receive $25.00 for each participant recruited who completes the initial and follow-up interviews. You will receive $20.00 for each research team meeting that you attend and provide your expertise and analysis and $10.00 for each transcription that you code. In addition to data analysis meetings, you may be asked to attend team training workshops without financial compensation.
If you agree to the terms of this agreement please sign below:

Participatory Action Research Team
Member/Consultant

Angela L. Brown, M.Ed. Ed.S.
Principal Investigator
Doctoral Candidate in Marriage and Family Therapy
Seton Hall University

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me (973-393-4127; Angela.Brown@agol.com) or my advisor, Dr. Robert Masse (973-761-4591; Massecyro@shu.edu)
Appendix F

Final Interview Protocol

Read to participant at beginning of the interview:

The purpose of this interview gain a better understanding of your sense of Blackness, its meaning in your life and how it is used as a source of strength to help you overcome some of the obstacles which you face as a young Black man living in the inner-city. I have a few questions and areas that I want to look at, but feel free to add anything that you think is important which I do not address.

As discussed earlier, this interview will last no longer than two hours. If you need to take a break during the interview, we can take time to pause and then return to the interview. At the conclusion of the interview you will receive $20.00 for your participation.

Throughout the interview there will be opportunities to debrief. If you begin to feel uncomfortable or distressed over the course of the interview, feel free to stop the interview, and we can discuss the discomfort and anxiety. If at any time during the interview you need to take a break or wish not to answer the questions, feel free to express your concerns. If at any point, you wish to stop the interview entirely and withdraw as a participant, you are under no obligation to continue. We will stop the interview and provide you an opportunity to debrief.

As we discussed earlier, if through the course of the interview, you were to share that you were directly connected to a crime, committed in the past or planned for the future, that has an identifiable victim, I am obliged to report that information to the proper authorities. Similarly, I am obligated to report any threats to harm yourself. Let’s Begin:

Blackness

1. How would you define the word Blackness? (When you hear the word Blackness, what comes to your mind?)
2. Do you think that all people of African descent have the same definition of Blackness?
3. How do you think non-Black people you know would describe Blackness? How is their definition similar and different from yours?
4. Do you think that all people of African descent have the same level of Blackness? How do you classify people and their Blackness?
5. How do you express your Blackness? How do your peers express their Blackness?
6. Where did you receive messages about being Black? What were the positive and negative messages?
7. Who gave you these messages? How did this occur? Give me an example?
8. Are there places that you go to build-up and reinforce your sense of Blackness? Where are these places? What do you do while you are there? What other type of people are there?
9. Are there any rituals or activities that you engage in to develop your Blackness?
10. What do you know about your family history that would give you an indication of their collective sense of Blackness?

11. Who would you describe as the “Blackest person in your family”? What qualities do they display that makes them stand out for you?

12. Do you use your Blackness to help you in your daily life? How so?

13. Do you think that your Blackness protects you from forces or people who act against you? How so?

14. Do you think that there is a connection between a person’s level of Blackness and a person’s sexual preference? Describe this link?

15. Can a straight man be just as “Black” as a gay man?

16. What are some of the similarities and differences between how you’ve seen men and women express their Blackness?

17. Is there anything about Blackness that you would like to tell me or is there anything that we did not cover thus far?
Appendix G

Initin Interview Protocol

Read to participant at beginning of the interview:

The purpose of this interview gain a better understanding of your sense of Blackness, its meaning in your life and how it is used as a source of strength to help you overcome some of the obstacles which you face as a young Black man living in the inner-city. I have a few questions and areas that I want to look at, but feel free to add anything that you think is important which I do not address.

As discussed earlier, this interview will last no longer than two hours. If you need to take a break during the interview, we can take time to pause and then return to the interview. At the conclusion of the interview you will receive $20.00 for your participation.

Throughout the interview there will be opportunities to debrief. If you begin to feel uncomfortable or distressed over the course of the interview, feel free to stop the interview and we can discuss the discomfort and anxiety. If at any time during the interview you feel a break or wish not to answer the questions, feel free to express your concerns. If at any point, you wish to stop the interview entirely and withdraw as a participant, you are under no obligation to continue. We will stop the interview and provide you an opportunity to debrief.

As we discussed earlier, throughout the course of the interview, you were to share that you were directly connected to a crime, committed in the past or planned for the future, that has an identifiable victim. I am obligated to report this information to the proper authorities. Similarly, I am obligated to report any threats to harm yourself.

Let’s Begin:

Blackness

1. How would you define the word Blackness? (When you hear the word Blackness- what comes to your mind?)
2. Do you think that all people of African descent have the same definition of Blackness?
3. How do you think non-Black people you know would describe Blackness? How is their definition similar and different from yours?
4. Do you think that all people of African descent have the same level of Blackness?
   How do you classify people and their Blackness?
5. How do you express your Blackness? How do your peers express their Blackness?
6. Where did you receive messages about being Black? What were the positive and negative messages?
7. Are there places that you go to build-up and reinforce your sense of Blackness? Where are these places? What do you do while you are there? What other type of people are there?
8. What do you know about your family history that would give you an indication of their collective sense of Blackness?
9. Do you use your Blackness to help you in your daily life? How so?
10. Do you think that your Blackness protects you from forces or people who act against you? How so?
11. Do you think that there is a connection between a person’s level Blackness and a person’s sexual preference? Describe this link?
12. What are some of the similarities and differences between how men and women express their Blackness?
13. Are there any rituals or activities that you engage in to develop your Blackness?
14. Is there anything about Blackness and how it impacts your life that you would like to tell me or we did not cover, thus far?

Street life
1. What is your definition of street life?
2. How did you first engage in street life behaviors? What was your primary hustle?
3. How have you avoided street life?
4. In your opinion, why would you say some Black men are attracted to street life (search or probe for cues of establishing resiliency)?
5. How have you seen street life portrayed through popular media?
6. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of being engaged in street life activities?
7. How does the rest of your family look upon your street life behaviors? Rest of the community? Who agrees with your lifestyle? Who disagrees with it? What is their main complaint? How do they support you?
8. If I asked (…) about your current or past street life activities, what would the person say was their biggest fear for you?
9. Is there anyone else in your family that is involved in street life? If so, who? How are the others involved?
10. What is your dream career? Why? What skills do you possess that would make you effective in that particular career?
11. Is there anything about street life and how it impacts your life that you would like to tell me or we did not cover, thus far?

Resilience
1. What word would you use to describe a person who overcomes hardship? When you hear the word resilience- what comes to your mind? (Define resilience)
2. What are some of the challenges or obstacles that you and other young men like yourself face on a daily bases?
3. Do you think you have the same kinds of chances to excel in this society as young men in other ethnic groups or classes?
4. Give me a personal example of how you have shown your resilience? Give an example of how your family has shown its resilience? How has your community shown its resilience?
   a. What is the biggest obstacle that you have had to face in you life?
   b. What helped you get through that period in your life or overcome that
obstacle? Who supported you? Where did you go?
5. What are the sources of strength in your community? What about church and school?
6. Do you think that everyone is resilient or that some people are resilient and some are not? What makes you think that way?
7. Who in your family, community, and worldwide do you think are resilient according to your criteria? What qualities make them so?
8. Is there an area in your life in which you felt as if you were that most people would not recognize as being resilient?
9. Think about the young women in your community, how are their responses to adversity similar and different from the men in the community?
10. Is there anything about resilience that you would like to tell me or is there anything that we did not cover thus far?
Appendix H

Community Contacts / Referrals

100 Black Men of New Jersey, Inc.
167 S. Harrison Street
East Orange, NJ 07018
(973) 678-6522
* Provides support and mentoring

Catholic Community Services
540 Hudson Street
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 440-7077
*Community mental-health agency

Catholic Community Services
494 Broad Street
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 596-4100
*Community mental-health agency

Institute for Family Services, Inc.
3 Clyde Road, Suite 101
Somerset, NJ 08873
(732) 873-1653
*Individual and family therapy

New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists
659 Eagle Rock Avenue
West Orange, New Jersey 07052
(973) 676-8033
* Provides referrals to Black psychologists across the state of New Jersey
### Coding Template - Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions - How individual defines and conceptualizes Blackness</td>
<td>Bdef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of development - Process of how Blackness &amp; resilience is developed</td>
<td>Bproc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria - The standard from which a person is judged or measured on their Blackness</td>
<td>Beri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels - The levels of Blackness</td>
<td>Blev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression - How individual or groups express their Blackness</td>
<td>Bexp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports - Experiences of support on a personal, family and community level</td>
<td>Bsupp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal - Personal Support</td>
<td>Bsupf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family - Family Support</td>
<td>Bsupc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community - Community Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites - physical or psychological spaces where people go to develop or be resilient</td>
<td>Bsitsph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Physical - Tangible places where people go</td>
<td>Bsitsps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Psychological - experiences, symbols, psychological spaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections - Connections to their sense of Blackness itself and/or to Black people as a collective through people and experiences</td>
<td>Bcon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Anger - Experiences or expressions of anger, anxiety, discrimination and other intense emotions that are felt or used as an impetus for change</td>
<td>Bang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of being Black - Way that being Black or understanding Blackness helps an individual have a better quality of life, negotiate, and navigate through their lives</td>
<td>Bben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience - Demonstrations, examples, and definitions of survival and resilience</td>
<td>Bres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of women - Examples of individual or group experiences of women as they negotiate life. Specific ways women express Blackness.</td>
<td>Bwon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences of men</strong> - Examples of individual or group experiences of men as they negotiate life. Specific ways Black men express Blackness.</td>
<td>Bmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences of gay men</strong> - Interaction of sexuality identity and Blackness. Examples of individual or group experiences of gay Black men as they negotiate life. Specific ways gay Black men express Blackness.</td>
<td>Bgay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transmission</strong> - How Blackness is transmitted intergenerationally or amongst peers. How Blackness is learned, taught, and consciousness raised.</td>
<td>Btrans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Messages</strong> - Messages about being Black and the Black experience transmitted directly or indirectly</td>
<td>Bmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Struggle Group</strong> - Connection to the Black experience, liberation and the hardships Blacks endure</td>
<td>Bstrg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Struggle Individual</strong> - Daily hassles and struggles of individuals</td>
<td>Bstri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Economics</strong> - Describing economic hardships, struggles, needs and mechanisms to make money</td>
<td>Beco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Pride</strong> - A sense of pride and respect gained from and/or attributed to being Black</td>
<td>Bpride</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J

Informed Consent Form for SHU Research Project

My name is André L. Brown. I am a doctoral student in the Ph.D. in Marriage and Family in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, and principal investigator of this project. This research is for my doctoral dissertation. The aim of this study is to gain a greater understanding of some of the experiences of Black living in the inner-city. Specifically, I would like permission to interview you for approximately two hours.

Street life oriented Black male participants in this study will have to meet the following criteria: (1) self-identifying as being street life oriented, (2) within the last year participated in street life activities to survive physically (e.g. example, gang activity, fighting, and assaults) or economically, and (3) live in an inner-city or economically impoverished position.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the option to stop participating in this interview at any time or decide not to answer any question. At the completion of the initial interview you will receive a $26.00 incentive. You will be compensated $10.00 for your participation in any subsequent follow-up interviews. Again, the interview will last approximately from one to two hours.

After each interview debriefing will be provided. Debriefing means having a brief conversation regarding your experience in the interview and allowing you to ask me any questions about the experience and research. It is important to note that in exploring issues related to Blackness, street life and resilience, it is possible that some feelings of anxiety or other strong emotions may arise. If this is the case, you will be able to process these feelings with the interviewer. In addition, you will be given a set of phone numbers listing nearby individual and family counseling services and community programs where you can process these feelings in greater detail.

This interview is confidential. This means no one will be able to connect your name to the recorded tape interview except for the research interviewers. All identifying information will be removed from the transcription and all names will be changed. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications and presentations. The data (e.g. tapes, transcriptions) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet, in a secured room to maintain confidentiality. Upon transcription of the interview, you will have the option to review the transcript of your interview and provide feedback and comments to your interview.

I must emphasize that the aim of this research is to explore your sense of Blackness and resilience and not to detail and document your criminal history. However, if through the course of the interview, you were to share that you were directly connected to a crime, committed in the past or planned for the future, that has an identifiable victim, I am be

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obligated to report that information to the proper authorities. Similarly, I am obligated to report any threats to harm yourself.

Results of this study may be published and may be presented to the public at the discretion of the researcher. If you would like a copy of the study or a summary of the findings, please provide me with your address, and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me, Andráe L. Brown in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University (973-761-9451; Brownau@shu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Robert Massey (973-761-9451; Masseyro@shu.edu).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2977 or 313-6314.

I agree to have the interviews audiotaped for transcription and videotaped for backup and future presentations. (Circle one)

Yes   No

I understand the researcher’s obligation to report any crime, occurring in the past or future, in which an identifiable victim is identified. Similarly, if I threaten to harm myself, the researcher is obligated to report that information to the proper authorities.

Yes

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Participant’s Signature  Date

Investigator’s Signature  Date

Thank you for your participation in this study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

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Appendix K

"Archie"- Participant One Genogram.
Appendix L

"Archie" – Participant One Ecomap

Archie (age 30)

Family, Siblings, extended family

Children

Employment

Research efforts

Commitment to education & learning new skills

Friends

Legal System

Street life activities

Church
Appendix M

“Monte” – Participant Two Genogram

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Appendix N

“Monte” Participant Two Ecomap

Friends
Family
Extended family in
Street life Activities
Monte (age 18)
School
Job Corp

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Appendix O

“Brian” - Participant Three Genogram
"Bryan - Participation Three"
Appendix P

“Brian” – Participant Three Ecomap

Diagram showing relationships between Brian (age 25) and various entities:
- Friends
- Father
- Street life Activities
- Legal System
- Mother - Deceased
- Brother's Family

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Appendix S

“Terrence” - Participant Five Genogram
Appendix T

"Terrence": Participant Five Ecomap

Terrence (age 24)

Family

Friends

Street life Activities

Education

Military

Local political connections

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Appendix U

"Tristen" - Participant Six Genogram
Appendix W

“Lavar” – Participant Seven Genogram
Appendix X

"Lavar" Participant Seven Ecomap

Lavar
(age 26)

Education

Employment

Family, sister, nephew, extended

Mother

Street life Activities

Legal System

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Appendix Y

Participant Follow-up Letter

Hello Participant,

I would like to thank you for your participation in my research project. Your contributions were invaluable in my efforts to complete my doctoral dissertation. The aim of this study was to gain a greater understanding of some of the experiences of Black men living in the inner-city.

As we discussed earlier, this interview will remain confidential. This means no one will be able to connect your name to the recorded tape interview except for the research interviewers. All identifying information will be removed from the transcription and all names will be changed. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications and presentations. The data (e.g., tapes, transcriptions) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet, in a secured room to maintain confidentiality. I must emphasize that the aim of this research was to explore your sense of Blackness and resilience and not to detail and document your criminal history.

Results of this study may be published and may be presented to the public at the discretion of the researcher. If you would like a copy of the study or a summary of the findings, please provide me with your address, and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me, Andrae L. Brown in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University (973-761-9451; Brownanr@shu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Robert Massey (973-761-9451; Masseyrc@shu.edu).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2977 or 313-6314.

I am satisfied with my interview and do not want to review my transcript. (Circle one)

Yes  No

I have received the full compensation for my participation in this project: $20.00 for the initial interview and $10.00 for the follow-up interview. (Circle one)

Yes  No

Participant’s Signature  Date

Investigator’s Signature  Date

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Oullette, S., & DiPlacido, J. (2001). Personality's role in the protection and enhancement of health: Where the research has been, where it is stuck, how it might move. In A. Baum, T. A. Revenson & I. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of health psychology* (pp. 175-194). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.


Psychology for African American Men. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.


