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A glance backwards: An analysis of youth resiliency through autoethnographical and life history lenses

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A GLANCE BACKWARDS: AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTH RESILIENCY THROUGH
AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL AND LIFE HISTORY LENSES

A Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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May 2010

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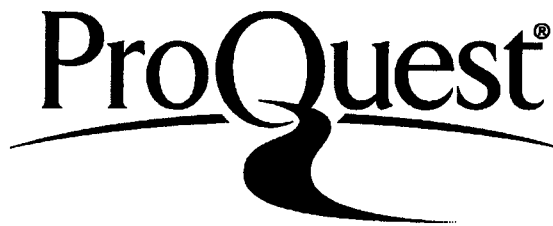
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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to all of the individuals who have believed in me (many of them long before I began believing in myself). It is with utmost humility that, I now take the time to single each of them out for the recognition that they all so richly deserve. I begin first by giving honor and praise to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. During this time of heightened political correctness, social and cultural awareness and other sensitivities, I stand proud to acknowledge that one, I love the Lord, and secondly, I have dedicated my life or whatever remains of it (for no one knows the hour and the coming of the Lord) to doing the Lord's work, and will unabashedly proclaim this until the trumpets sound (effectively calling me home).

Next, it is with much pride, honor, and gratitude that I begin thanking the individuals who have for so long been a part of my life, or expressed differently, were exercising guidance and providence over my life course long before I myself ever came into consciousness. First (and Mom I hope that I do not offend you), I feel that I would be remiss if I did not take the time to thank my Grandmother (Mrs. Lucinda Gordon Ford). Thanks grandma! For being there in the beginning, and for instilling in me that although I may have been small, and although many people may have thought that I was ugly (smile), to you I was someone special. This (as well as many of your early) lessons has remained with me my entire life, and in some of my darkest moments have served to reassure and otherwise sustain me.

Next, this book is dedicated to my Mother (Mrs. Joe Ella Ford). Mother (strike that), *Mama* what can I say. You have occupied so many roles in my life, and meant so much to my life that I cannot begin to fathom where I would be without you. From giving birth to

me (as well as my siblings) in the Mississippi Delta during the height of the Civil Rights movement, to your shepherding my siblings and I (all six of us, Michael, Janice, Andra, Debra, and Vanessa and myself) to the North for what you honestly believed would afford us a better life. From swiftly relocating to the South Suburban Chicago-land area after a brief stay on the near West side (upon my being robbed for my small allowance), to decisively electing to send me to live with my Aunts (Beatrice Ford McMullen and Ruby Ford Sledge) in Iowa to avoid the lure of and pressure from gangs and other criminal activity. To your standing by me when I went astray, and comforting me when it seemed that everything and everyone else had left me, thank you Mama. For caring, for teaching, for nurturing, for providing, I say thank you. Thank you! Thank you! For everything, and please know that I will always love you so very much.

Next, I would dedicate this manuscript to my Aunts (Beatrice and Alberta, as well as Roberta Gordon Montgomery and Alberta Ford Andrews). To each one of you, I say thanks for believing in me, and seeing something in me from early on. Indeed, when my peers and contemporaries were acting up, each of you generally had sage advice that always seemed to keep me on the right track. To this very day, I still marvel at how each of you would push me to do better and to be different than my contemporaries. Each of you were determined to keep me on track to see this day come to fruition. Please know that from now until eternity I will love you so very much. Lastly, but certainly not least, this book is dedicated to my Uncle Frank (Ford), my father (Ezell), and my stepfather (Joseph Taylor Jr.), who collectively taught me what I know about being a man.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I begin this section mindful of the fact that the human life is so rich and complex and involves relations with so many people under so many terms and contexts that an individual could never truly thank everyone who has inspired or otherwise impacted his or her life. Nevertheless, having reached this point in my academic career, as well as this point in my professional life, I feel that it is incumbent upon me to pay tribute (however brief) to the following individuals:

First and foremost, I would like to thank and otherwise acknowledge Ms. Deborah J. Gallagher. Deb, what can I say. You have been a mentor, you have been a friend. You have been an advisor, you have been so many things to me that there are not enough words in the English language to capture the depth and the breadth of my feelings for you. When it looked as though I was becoming disheartened by the tremendous volume of data that awaited my attention, you were there to inspire me to “pick it up” and to carry on. Conversely, when it looked as though I might slack off (or otherwise deviate from the agreed upon research schedule), you would have none of it. Indeed, you were there to “crack the whip” at a time when that is precisely what was needed.

I can honestly and truly say that you have not only been an inspiration to me, but an asset to the entire university community. Truly, in my opinion, you have done more to keep things within their rightful contexts (no pun intended) than has any other member of the university faculty or administration itself (for that matter). Suffice it to say, that I truly feel that we are all (students and colleagues alike) very fortunate to have had, indeed continue to have someone not only with your stature, but also your character amongst us. It has not only been an honor to study under your tutelage and guidance, but I can only

hope that one day I can measure up to the standards that you have set, professionally, collegially, and otherwise. Thanks! So ever much! For everything. And for fear of offending your significant other (Smile John), please know that I love you.

Next, I would like to properly acknowledge Dr. Christopher Edginton. What can I say, from your accepting me into the program on such short notice. To your extending to me opportunities (including university teaching experience) that I might not have otherwise attained as quickly, I say thanks.

More than this, I thank you for the high standards that you have set (indeed, continue to set) for each and every one of my colleagues and I within the School of HPELS. From your insistence on such things as punctuality, professionalism, integrity, hard work, and leadership, I can only say thanks Dr. E. Thanks for caring, thanks for sharing, thanks for preparing (me and my colleagues) for many of the experiences that we might expect to encounter within both our individual and collective futures.

Moreover, thanks for insisting that your students learn to think for themselves, as well as to challenge themselves. Please know that it is refreshing to see an administrator put their money “where their mouth is,” or phrased differently, to practice what they preach. You preach excellence, yet you also embody excellence! For this example, I as are the entire university community are fortunate to have crossed paths with you on our respective journeys. I thank you sir, for being there. Now, as in the past, I say thanks!

At this point, I would like to express gratitude to Dr. John Smith. Where could I possibly began? From (jokingly) sending out the alert that there was finally a student in the program who could write (you were much too kind), to providing much needed encouragement during my presentation at the American Educational Research

Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, to teaching (my colleagues and) me the importance of remaining open to all possibilities and to know that inquiry is a necessary component in our drive towards, search for, and (if we are fortunate or astute enough—as it is generally always open to interpretation) ultimate apprehension of knowledge. Suffice it to say sir that you have embodied a sort of guardian angel presence in my life during these past few years, and for that I am eternally grateful.

More than this, I thank you for insisting that my colleagues and I learn to seek out knowledge and other epistemology for ourselves rather than relying on others (namely the powers that be, that in actuality don't be) to provide answers and discernment for our own lives. It has been, and will continue to be a joy of mine to contribute not only to the growing body of research known as resiliency, but also carve out my own interpretations, including the neo-modern construct of transcendence. To you sir, again, I say Thanks!

I would next like to thank Dr. Michael Blackwell. To begin with, I would mention my appreciation for your offering me my first graduate position at the university. From my vantage point, this was a blessing on multiple fronts. Not only did this afford me an opportunity to gain experience as an administrator within higher education, but also to observe up close someone (with similar cultural traditions) performing tasks that have been and indeed in many instances continues to be off limits (or certainly restricted) to them. In a sense, this gave me not only the opportunity to “do it,” but also to see how it is properly done. This, I believe, will only serve me well as I go forth with my career.

Moreover, I would like to thank you for your selfless decision to allow me (strike that) recommend me for a higher and otherwise more demanding position within another department. This I might add is very refreshing as it is rare that we see someone exhibit

such altruistic motives. Finally sir, I also thank you for serving on this committee as your presence in no small way provided a sort of calming presence for me. I say it once, I say it again, thanks for everything.

Next, I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Rodney Dieser. As the foremost “qualitative” person within the department, it seemed a natural fit that you should serve on this committee. However, because of a “personality clash” that occurred between us early within my program of study, I have to admit that I was unsure whether or not you would agree to serve.

Nevertheless, I am happy to report that not only did you serve, but you did so sir with honor, distinction, and grace. Please know that I truly believe that you are not only an asset to the department, and to the university, but to the broader research community as well as the nation at large. Although I am sure that you will always have a strong spot in your heart for your native Canada, in this limited sense (during your tenure at the University of Northern Iowa), Canada’s loss is America’s gain. I thank you sir.

I move next to Dr. Clemens Bartollas. As one of our nation’s foremost experts on the plight of inner city youths, your tenure here has brought tremendous repute to the university at large. Indeed, it is because of some of the work that you have done documenting the realities of the lives of these youth that I was inspired to pursue this topic for my dissertation. Thus, it was with great humility that I requested your service on this committee, and it is with great honor that I have enjoyed working with you to see this manuscript come to fruition.

More than this, I thank you sir for impressing upon me that I myself had a story to tell, and secondly, that I feel at liberty to tell it. This I must say sir was very reassuring at a

time when I needed it most. In a sense, your presence was akin to that of an instructor in drivers education. Your mannerisms expressed to me that, “Toney, you already can drive the car, I am merely here to observe you driving and to evaluate whether or not you have met minimum qualifications.” With your approval of the final document, I guess I have my answer. Thank you sir! For inspiring me to believe in me and my own abilities.

Moving on, I would now like to thank Dr. Samuel Lankford. Sam, what can I say? You were there at the beginning, you were there at the end. You were there for my first class, and as fate would have it, you were there for my “final exam.” Indeed, perhaps more so than any other faculty member, you have been in the unique position of observing my progress within my program of study within the program. At any rate, I certainly had more courses with you than with any other professor.

Along the way, you have occupied many hats. From teacher, to advisor, to committee member. You have had the *distinct* vantage point of not only observing my course, but evaluating it as well. From a personal perspective (having received your approval of this manuscript), more so than any other member of this committee, I feel that you would be in the best position to evaluate whether I am worthy of such honors that this degree bestows. Ultimately, your vote of approval validates that I have. I say to you sir that I am grateful. Not only for your approval at the point, but for your guidance, advice, and instruction along the way. Who would have ever thought that a research stream during the first semester would evolve into a research topic, ultimately leading to a successful research project? You did sir! Again, for that, I say thanks, and please know that I am eternally grateful.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Susan Hudson. I would first like to begin by saying that in many ways, you have been a role model for me. I can yet recall my first class with you, when after being late for the second consecutive class, you pulled me to the side. Without malice or other pretensions, you kindly let me know that this was unacceptable. While empathizing with the fact that my job assignment was clear across campus, you impressed upon me the fact that this was a matter of two things that were in conflict, my schedule and my priorities. If I could find away to align the two of these, I could solve my dilemma. I spoke to my supervisor, and was able to alter my schedule, and the rest of the semester went by without further incident.

This story is important for a number of reasons, yet for the sake of brevity I will attempt to narrow it down to this. Although circumstances dictated that you leave the committee prior to its completion, please know that in no small way, your insights and contributions have shaped its outcome. As the previous Co-Chair of this committee, you were instrumental in charting this ship on its proper course, and absent your steady hand at the helm, it is unlikely that I could have arrived at this venture at this time. More than that, I say thanks for embodying the image of professionalism, and for encouraging your students to do likewise. Please know that as I go forth with my academic and professional endeavors, I will always owe a debt of gratitude to you. Thank you so ever much.

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AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL AND LIFE HISTORY LENSES

An Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

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May 2010

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate youth resiliency employing dual methodologies, auto-ethnography and life history research respectively, to reveal how two middle-aged adults (one African-American, the other Caucasian) achieved resiliency; and most importantly, how their experiences and insights might inform ongoing efforts to promote youth resiliency. This research project was a follow-up to a previous study (involving four African American participants – two males and two females) conducted to determine the roles that schools and communities play in promoting youth resiliency.

Offering insights into the usefulness of extended research, Herr and Anderson (2005) captured the essence of my decision to conduct a follow-up study here:

Doctoral students may be able to capitalize on class projects that require a pilot study or ‘practice research’ as part of the course requirements to begin their action research. In addition, doctoral students may have room in their program for an independent study or two. These spaces allow for the kind of ongoing piloting where each separate piece of the research conducted over a series of semesters is actually part of the whole (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.105).

Although participants [from the previous study] were able to succeed despite a negative life trajectory, it yet remained inconclusive whether personal attributes and environmental factors were equally effective in enhancing youth prospects. Additionally, because the previous study was conducted among African-American subjects only, I thought it probative to inquire as to whether findings would be consistent across demographic or socioeconomic boundaries.

The story that emerged was of each participant's strength, illustrating how each individual persistently engaged in the world around them in order to negotiate, and ultimately transcend their immediate circumstances. This study reaffirmed the need to

talk openly about youth across demographic and socio-cultural divides, with the results offering implications for educators, students, and future research.

Findings suggest the need for educators to know students holistically as well as personally, including familiarity with all aspects of a student's identity. If all youth are expected to attain resiliency (or as I prefer transcendence), then classrooms should become environments where personal attributes are enhanced, rather than stymied, with all youth being afforded opportunities for meaningful participation. In summary, this study validated the need for all [not just some] stakeholders to assist all [not just some] youth in channeling their respective strengths in meaningful and productive ways.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many youth of today face a host of negative influences in their lives – substance abuse, gang affiliations, teenage pregnancy, and school violence, among many others. Despite these and other hardships, some youth are able to persevere and become productive community citizens in the nation. Why is it that some youth can thrive despite these inauspicious beginnings while others cannot? Prior to beginning this study, I believed that some insight might be found in a growing body of research concerning resiliency.

A developmental psychological perspective that began in the 1950's (see; Gleuck & Gleuck, 1950; Hartmann, 1958; and Anthony, 1974) resiliency theory is based upon the premise that a biological imperative for growth and development exists in the human organism and unfolds naturally in the presence of certain environmental characteristics (Rutter, 2007; Werner & Smith, 1992). Since its inception, resiliency (particularly youth resiliency) has been studied by a number of researchers (Brennan, 2008; Hurtes & Allen, 2001; Prescott, Sekendur, Bailey & Hoshino, 2008; Richman & Fraser, 2000; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston & Smith, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992).

Some proponents contend that youth learn resiliency best when they reside in environments that (1) offer caring and supportive relationships, (2) hold high expectations for behavior and attitude, and (3) provide opportunities for meaningful participation (Benard, 1991, 1997, 1998; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007). Others believe

that children who survive risky environments benefit in large part from their strong self-confidence, coping skills, and abilities to avoid risky situations (Bowman, 2006; Klau, 2006; Lohman & Billings , 2008; Rodman, 2007).

Some researchers would characterize the resilient child as one who works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well (Garmezy, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). Others describe resiliency as, “children who somehow are “invulnerable,” stress resistant, hardy, ego-resilient, and invincible, in spite of severe stress and adversity (Benard, 1991, p.2). For the purpose of this study, resiliency is defined as the capacity to regain personal power and develop a strong core sense of self in the face of poverty, severe family hardship, and community devastation (Benard, 1998; Ford, 2008; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007).

Youth are generally considered resilient when they are able to rely upon apparently innate characteristics to fend off or recover from life’s misfortunes. Relying upon intrinsically human characteristics in seeking to explain the efficacy behind this approach, some proponents submit that we are all born with an innate capacity for resilience by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, sense of autonomy, and a sense of purpose (Bernard, 1998; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).

Through continued study of resilient youth, we acquire opportunities for exploring, examining, and otherwise observing the effects that certain factors may have upon the *positive* development of our nation’s youth. Research indicates that there would appear to be either some characteristic(s) that resilient youth possess that others don’t, or some

treatment, asset, opportunity or other advantage that they have been able to access in realizing successful life outcomes notwithstanding the presence of otherwise (high risk) environmental factors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate youth resiliency employing dual methodologies, auto-ethnography (Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000, 2005; Ellis, 1991, 1994; Ellis & Bochner, 1992, 2000; Hughes, 2008; Luitel, 2003; Purdy, Potrac & Jones, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2005); and life history research (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Tierney, 2000), to reveal how two middle-aged adults (one African-American, the other Caucasian) achieved resiliency.

Towards this end, this study was designed to explore what participants believed were the origins or contributors to resiliency in their own lives; what sources of strength and encouragement they drew upon to strengthen and guide them as they negotiated their ways from youth to adulthood; how their understandings of their own experiences compare and/or contrast with traditional (e.g., younger) resiliency subjects; how their experiences compare with each others', and most importantly, how their experiences and insights might inform ongoing efforts to promote resiliency among youth from economically disadvantaged and/or underprivileged backgrounds.

This research project was a follow-up to a previous study conducted (involving four African American participants – two males and two females) to investigate the roles that schools and communities play in promoting youth resiliency (Ford, 2008). Among the findings contained in this earlier study is that, although some individuals were able to

succeed despite a projected life course of negative outcomes, it remained unclear whether internal (e.g., personal) and external (e.g., environmental) factors were equally effective in enhancing youth prospects for avoiding troubled or even tragic adult lives.

Findings also suggested that within each domain one of the key determinants appeared to be that youth with high expectations were more likely to meet with successful outcomes. Data from the previous study indicated that youth with positive beliefs regarding their future (i.e., promise of success for attending college or attaining a certain career) were much less likely to engage within delinquent behavior that might otherwise compromise that possibility.

Similarly, the findings indicated that youths who believed that adults cared about their futures were themselves likely to feel good about such prospects. Three of the four participants in the previous study reported being motivated to some degree by the optimistic expectations of adults. In contrast, the lone participant who reported not being affected by the expectations of adults generally recalled having very little expectation regarding his future prospects.

Meanwhile, it was inconclusive whether deficiency of one or more determinants can be offset or neutralized by prevalence of other determinants. Likewise, it remained unsettled whether other factors (in addition to those generally cited by the resiliency literature) also significantly contribute to youth resiliency, and if so, to what extent.

In summary, there was a need for further study to explore the consequences of internal and external influences identified in the youth resiliency literature and whether these influences are equally effective in shaping the life course. Additional research was

also needed to determine if certain determinants are better indicators of resiliency in early versus late childhood. Similarly, further inquiry was necessary to investigate whether determinants of resiliency are evident across broader segments of the population (e.g., across demographic and/or socioeconomic lines).

Significance of the Topic

The educational importance of this research project is twofold. First, this project adds to the growing body of research on youth resiliency. I was initially drawn to this topic by the prevailing claims that resiliency research was distinguishable from traditional studies involving the conception of “at-risk” youth, in that whereas the latter has centered squarely on a deficit model advancing enduring images of pathology and hopelessness, the former emphasizes an approach that centers on constructive potential and hope.

Edwards, Mumford and Serra-Roldan (2007) has contended that resiliency research offers a new perspective (*i.e., lens*) through which to study youth development. From this vantage point, resiliency research represents a paradigm shift from a *pathological* perspective to one that endeavors to explore positive attributes of youth. Rather than focusing on youth who exhibit destructive behavioral problems or other risk factors, they have chosen instead to focus on youth who have been able to acquire certain “protective factors” in overcoming otherwise *projected* negative life outcomes.

A closely related approach is *Positive Youth Development*. This approach is centered on the premise that individuals need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence, a time of rapid growth and change. Proponents of this approach would rely upon the quality of the environment, the available supports, messages, and opportunities

young people find in relationships, environments, and experiences in their lives for enhancing youths' prospects for positive progress and development (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007).

Bradshaw, Brown and Hamilton (2006) asserted that, because adolescence is a time when youth are very impressionable, receiving positive and or healthy messages from adults is vital to their making mature and/or otherwise responsible decisions. According to these researchers, key determinants include positive messages to adolescents; safe and structured places for teens to study, recreate and, socialize; strengthened relationships with adult role models; literacy, competence, work readiness and social skills; and opportunities to serve others (Bradshaw, Brown & Hamilton, 2006).

Another related theory is the *Developmental Assets Framework*. Similar to resiliency theory, this strength-based approach contends that the traditional *negative* perspective of first identifying deficits and pathology (e.g., focusing upon specific factors that may make adolescent lives more difficult; see Short & Russell-Mayhew, 2009) before offering aid contrasts sharply with resiliency research and the emerging positive youth development (PYD) model. Key determinants include youth retaining positive and healthy relationship with adults; youth engaged in and contributing to community; youth are healthy and socially competent; youth are successful in school, and prepared for successful adulthood (Edwards et al, 2007; Krovetz, 1999; Mannes, Roehlkepartain & Benson, 2005; Nissen, 2006).

Additionally, this project has made an important methodological contribution to resiliency research by employing qualitative methodology that has made use of both auto-

ethnography and life history research approaches with adult participants who [appear to] exhibit most of the hallmarks of resiliency. From this vantage point, both approaches would seem to hold promise as investigative tools of the qualitative researcher. Finally, drawing upon the mature, and insightful narratives of adult participants has offered distinct advantages for gaining complex, nuanced, and deeply contextualized understandings about how resiliency is nurtured in schools and communities across the nation.

Preliminary Discussion

Benard (1991) defined “at risk” as, the high risk for developing certain disorders—children growing up under conditions of great stress and adversity such as neonatal stress, poverty, neglect, abuse, physical handicaps, war, and parental schizophrenia, depression, alcoholism and criminality” (p. 2). Similarly, Garmezy (1991), who described “at-risk” within the context of environmental determinants, referred to the phenomena of youth exposed to or residing in a *potentially* high delinquency areas or neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, among the criteria used to classify youth as “at risk,” the United States Government cited the presence of any of the following:

- single parent households;
- availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs;
- history of domestic violence in household,
- history of juvenile delinquency;
- contact with either the juvenile or criminal justice system
- residing in economically depressed metropolitan statistical area (neighborhood);
- residing in high crime area;
- attendance at under performing schools, and
- falling at or below 120% of the Federal poverty guidelines based on family size, etc. (General Accounting Office, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, I have elected to define “at risk” as, “the presence of or high probability for developing certain disorders—as indicated by youth growing up under multiple adverse and otherwise stressful conditions including but not limited to poverty, neglect, abuse, physical handicaps, war, parental dysfunction, depression, alcoholism, delinquency, and criminality.” Consistent with these parameters, I have selected two participants (one Black, the other Caucasian) who would fit this profile.

As indicated above, this study blended auto-ethnographic and life history approaches for conducting this inquiry. Directly stated, in keeping with the auto-ethnographic aspect of this project, I elected to serve as one of the two participants in this study. This approach was chosen for two key reasons. The first reason, which will be discussed in more depth in chapter three on methodology, honors the recognition that in qualitative inquiry there is no ostensive, formal, or thought-to-be separation between the researcher and the researched or the “knower” versus the “known” (Smith, 1993a).

In a related vein, the second reason for this choice is that selecting myself as a participant placed my own role in the research squarely before me, thus confronting me on an on-going basis with the question of how my own experiences, values, culture, language, and so on has (or will) shape the outcome of this research. Again, I will elaborate more on this decision in the methodology section of this manuscript.

Similarly, I selected myself as a participant based upon the fact that although I was born in a two parent household, I resided primarily with only my mother from the age of nine until adulthood. Also, throughout my youth, my family generally resided below the

federal poverty guidelines. Moreover, from the age of nine until the age of 17, I resided in Chicago, Illinois (a high crime) metropolitan area.

Meanwhile, the other participant was selected because of the prevalence of alcoholism and domestic violence in his home, as well as the fact that his family was headed by a single parent for a significant portion of his youth. Having established that prospective participants conform to aforementioned definitions of “at risk” youth, I decided that each individual would likewise qualify for participation in this study.

Within resiliency literature, a number of researchers have opted to utilize prospective research designs which are developmental and longitudinal in scope (DiRago & Valliant, 2007; Garmezy, 1991; Watt, Anthony, Wynne, & Rolf, 1984; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). From this vantage point, I believed that assessing children at various times during the course of their development might be instrumental to gaining a better understanding of the nature and extent of the risk factors involved in the lives of youth.

Along these lines, this project (although not a longitudinal study), relied upon comparison and contrasts between participants across multiple stages of the life cycle (infancy, early youth, and late adolescence) in hopes of gaining insights into the role that personal, socio-cultural, and demographic factors may have played in their respective development, or phrased differently, contributed to their resiliency.

Preface

One of the relevant assumptions within the resiliency literature is that, as long as appropriate resources are extended, youth otherwise characterized or otherwise labeled “at-risk” are able to avoid or overcome detrimental life outcomes. A similar recurring

hypothesis is that the presence of certain personal attributes, in combination with protective factors (see; Clayton, Leukefeld, Donohew, Bardo & Harrington, 1995) in the school and community, also play a prominent role in whether or not youth will ultimately become resilient.

If we accept the basic premises of youth resiliency, including the contention that all individuals have the power to change, we must also acknowledge that certain factors help to contribute to this transformation. Accordingly, I decided to conduct inquiry into the significance of certain determinants in fostering youth resiliency. I approached this study with the acknowledgement that the development of each participant (through recollections of their youth) must not be simply contingent on my position as researcher. But rather, through working in concert with my participant, I hoped to be able to transform our recollected narratives into a manuscript that [thoroughly] deliberates upon the basic tenets of the resilient profile.

In Chapter 3, I decided to first briefly introduce the participants of the study – myself (the researcher) and Douglas O’Connor (pseudonym used to protect anonymity). My intent was to compare our individual and collective experiences. The objective was to alert the reader that, as our respective histories played out, our stories and experiences would intersect to provide a multidimensional lens through which to explore the resiliency concept.

A wide range of questions were placed before both of us. Some were rather general in that both Douglas and I engaged the same questions. Other questions were uniquely structured in response to the distinctive nature of our responses. Ultimately, our individual experiences were captured and presented in what I consider to be a compelling narrative about resiliency.

This research project emerged from the perspective that resilience research provides a valuable vehicle for informing competency-affirming, proactive practices for cultivating resiliency in underprivileged young people. As well, the use of auto-ethnography and life history research methodology has helped to sustain the perspective that the personal narratives of participants' lives not only gives voice to them and their experiences, but also offers the singular advantage of providing multifaceted, deeply contextualized conceptions about the meaning of resiliency.

In a sense then, this research was meant to serve a liberatory function by steering a course away from a traditional framework of deficiency or pathology and toward one of hope and possibility. As I began this study, a couple of questions remained foremost in my mind. What factors, circumstances, or relationships offered the greatest support for the prospects of our nation's youth? Similarly, how can schools and communities assist families with facilitating a sense of strength and wholeness among young people facing such daunting odds?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review portion of the research study accomplishes several purposes. First, it shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the one being reported in this dissertation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). Also, it relates this study to a larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Moreover, it provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study, and a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings (Miller, 1991).

In this review, an analysis of [relevant] literature was conducted to appraise the usefulness of resiliency theory in explaining positive youth development. Specifically, the purpose here was to explore the significance of resiliency theory in explaining the role of families, schools and communities in promoting positive youth development.

This second chapter has begun with a general overview of the concept of youth resiliency. This was followed by a discussion of the relevance (i.e. importance) of resiliency theory to the research field. Along the way, some of the basic tenets of resiliency theory were explored, including the reliance upon protective (i.e., both internal and external) factors to help explain the efficacy behind the resiliency approach. Additionally, some of the promising strategies currently employed to enhance youths' prospects for resiliency were investigated. Towards this end, an examination of some recent studies that have utilized the chosen methodology (specifically, auto-ethnography and life history research) used in this study was also completed.

Resiliency as a Theory

As stated in Chapter 1 (p. 1), resiliency theory is based upon the premise that the biological imperative for growth and development exists in the human organism and unfolds naturally in the presence of certain environmental characteristics (Richman & Fraser, 2000; Rutter, 2007; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Rutter et al., 1979; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). Some proponents maintain that children learn resiliency best when they reside in environments that offer caring and supportive relationships, hold high expectations for behavior and attitude, and provide opportunities for meaningful participation (Benard, 1991, 1998; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007). (See Figure 1.)

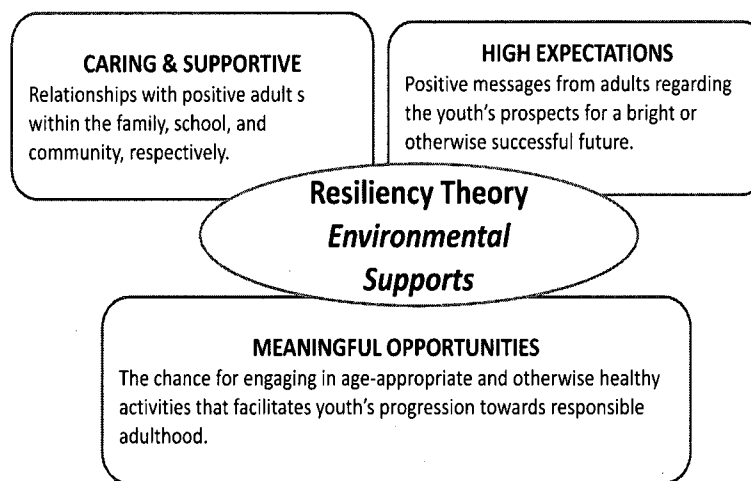


Figure 1. Environmental supports associated with Resiliency Theory (Adapted from Benard, 1998).

Conceding that requisite support must come from the community, school, and home environments, others (Anthony, 1974; Felsman, 1989; Harvey, 2007) contend that youth must retain certain personal attributes if they are to be able to develop sufficient

resiliency to succeed within their life endeavors. Similarly, some believe that children who survive risky environments benefit in large part from their strong self-confidence, coping skills, and abilities to avoid risky situations (Jones, 2006; Vera & Shin, 2006).

Yet others (Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Berndt & Ladd, 1989; Botkin, Elmandjra & Malitza, 1979; Demos, 1989) believed that resilient youth generally retain personal attributes such as social competence, problem solving skills, sense of autonomy, and sense of purpose, which helps them to escape projected negative life paths. Specifically, Benard (1998) offered the following characteristics common to resilient youth:

- Sense of autonomy – Capacity for acting independently and with sense of control;
- Social competence – Ability to respond to others and elicit responses easily
- Sense of purpose – Ability to set goals and maintain optimistic worldview ; and
- Problem solving skills – Ability to think through challenging situations

(see Figure 2).

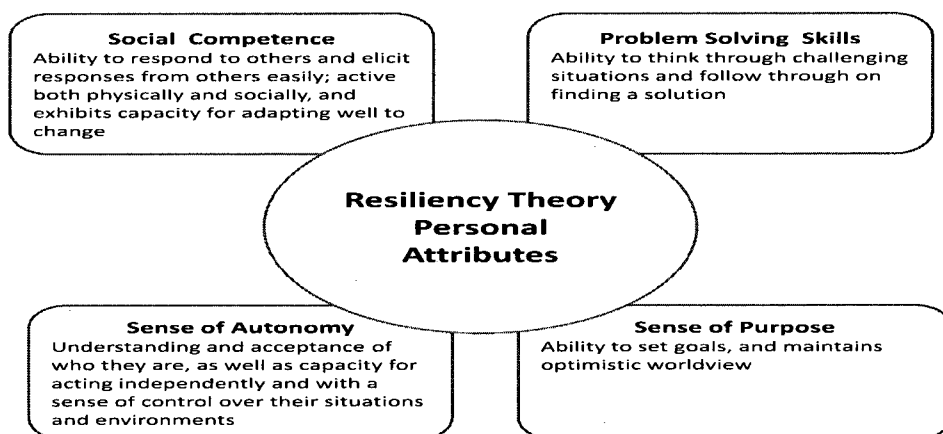


Figure 2. Personal attributes associated with Resiliency Theory (Adapted from Benard, 1998).

The Appeal of Resiliency Theory

A crucial point, perhaps the most distinctive appeal of resiliency theory (prior to undertaking this research) was that it appeared to represent a more optimistic outlook than does more *traditional* research on youth. Whereas the traditional approaches might opt to focus on studying individuals who have exhibited dysfunctional and otherwise aberrant behavior, resiliency proponents generally stress that much more efficacy exists in studying youth who have been able to overcome projected negative life outcomes.

This distinction (I believed) was the key to a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of positive youth development; in that (according to the literature) resilient youth offer a sort of window or roadmap for understanding how youth transcend negative life factors to achieve productive and/or successful life outcomes. Because consensus generally exists regarding the problems common to youth, resiliency researchers have come to contend that it is of marginal benefit at best to continue to focus entirely on youth exhibiting such dysfunctions.

Alternatively, by focusing on successful (e.g., resilient) individuals, (theoretically) one may begin to gain clearer insights into what might actually work, as resilient youth have to a large extent confirmed through their life experiences that individuals can indeed escape negative circumstances and subsequent life outcomes.

Consider the litany of dysfunction associated with adolescent youth. From experimentation with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, to sexual promiscuity, to propensity for violence, to vandalism and so on, conventional wisdom might suggest a strong propensity on the part of adolescents to engage in such conduct. However, the

counter argument might be that the majority of adolescents do not engage in these behaviors.

In a study conducted by the Iowa Governors Office of Drug Control Strategy (2006), youth reporting use of tobacco consisted of 12 % of females, and 15% percent of males respectively. Conversely, the point could be made that over 88% of females and 85% of males indicated no such use. Similarly, whereas 22% of both males and females between the ages of 12 – 18 reported some consumption of alcohol within the past twelve months, the counter argument might be that over 78% of these youth reported no use of this substance.

Would it not be just as (if not more) advantageous to examine the positive factors contributing to youth who appear able to abstain than it would be to disproportionately focus upon youth exhibiting behavioral problems or otherwise high-risk behavior. Expressed differently, it may be more worthwhile and useful to explore why the majority of these youth don't so behave rather than perseverate on the question of why some deviant or delinquent youth do what they do.

Over the past few decades, a number of prominent educational researchers have probed the issues surrounding youth resiliency (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007; Rutter & Maughan, 2002). Consistent among many of their findings is that schools and communities (among other stakeholders) can and should promote resilience in order to help youth overcome negative life outcomes. Rather than focusing solely on youth who purportedly exhibit behavioral problems or other risk factors, resiliency researchers have

chosen instead to concentrate on youth who have been able to acquire certain “protective factors” to avoid otherwise *projected* negative life outcomes.

Protective Factors

One of the recurring hypotheses within the resiliency literature is that the presence of certain personal attributes, in combination with protective factors (Werner, 2000) in the school and community, also plays a prominent role in whether or not youth will ultimately become resilient. Chavkin and Gonzalez (2000) contended that, resiliency theory identifies protective factors present in the families, schools, and communities of successful youth that may be missing in the lives of troubled youth.

According to these researchers, five key protective factors are supportive relationships with caring adults, student characteristics such as self-esteem, motivation, and acceptance of responsibility; family factors such as parental support and involvement with school; community factors such as youth programs; and school factors such as academic success and pro-social skills training. Meanwhile, these factors can be further characterized as falling within two distinct elements – environmental supports (external to the person) and personal attributes (internal to the person).

Environmental Supports

Caring and supportive relationships. One of the recurring themes within the resiliency literature is that the building of resilient people is a long-term process of healthy human development based on nurturing, participatory relationships that are grounded in trust and respect, and that reach toward valuable goals. Some researchers have long contended that

a caring and supportive relationship remains the most critical variable throughout childhood and adolescence (Demos, 1989; Rutter et. al., 1979).

Seita (2005) found that whether young people thrive or fail is dependent upon the social system(s) within which they interact. The quality of this interaction is directly related to the quality of the total interpersonal environment. While the importance of adults connecting with young people cannot be overlooked, the role of communities, schools, and mentors in positively impacting the lives of adolescents, particularly those who reside in dysfunctional family settings also needs to be considered.

In situations where such relationships are not available within the home environment, Brown (2004) contended that schools and communities should seriously consider implementing activities such as mentoring which has been shown to enhance youth prospects for adaptability and which effectively insulate youth with inner strength that helps to shield them against future hardships. According to Brown, with appropriate environmental support young people are better equipped for dealing with hardships. By learning to transform harsh experiences into personal strengths, youth most at risk of continuing a life of dysfunction can overcome incredible odds.

High expectations. Another of the recurring themes is that receiving high expectations from adults involved in their daily lives is also vital to helping youth to be able to follow through or otherwise make good on their future goals. Research into why some children growing up in poverty still manage to be successful in school and in young adulthood has consistently identified parental *expectations* as a contributing factor (Benard, 1991, p. 7, quoting Williams & Kornblum, 1985; Clark, 1983). Benard goes

further to stress the importance of high expectations in impacting youth prospects for success by drawing attention to a study conducted by Mills (1990):

An attitude expressed to a youth that, “you have everything you need to be successful -- and you can do it!” played a major role in the reduction of several problem behaviors. Including substance abuse, in this disadvantaged community. (p. 7)

Similarly, a number of researchers have long maintained that schools that establish high expectations for all kids—and give them the support necessary to achieve them—have incredibly high rates of academic success (Edmonds, 1986; Levin, 1988; O’Neil, 1991; Rutter et al., 1979; Slavin, Harwelt & Madden, 1989). According to Benard (1993), “recent research on successful programs for youth at risk of academic expectations is a critical factor in reducing academic failure and increasing the number of college-bound youth” (p. 11).

Moreover, the community itself, through the preservation and influence of cultural norms is also regarded as a potential contributor to youth prospects for success. Two cultural norms appear salient to the discussion of protective factors in the community. The first is that in cultures that have as a norm the valuing of youth as resources (contrary to them being regarded as problems), youth tend to be less involved in all problem behaviors (Kurth-Scal, 1988). In this regard, adult expectations, including those of community stakeholders, exert a positive influence on the subsequent thoughts and behaviors of children.

Another relevant cultural norm is that of society’s expectancies surrounding certain delinquent behaviors. According to the longitudinal research of Long and Valliant (1989), cultures that teach children how, when, and where to drink tend to have lower

rates of alcoholism than do those that forbid children to drink. On the other hand, this scenario may have the unintended effect of “socializing drunkenness.”

According to Peter Bell (1987), drunkenness, although illegal and/or immoral, nevertheless in many ways becomes socially acceptable by a large segment of the community. From this vantage point, local citizens have a major role to play in effecting expectations and subsequent behavior (either positively or negatively) of their youth, depending upon whether the young people either embrace or reject such behavior. Perhaps a starting point might involve collaborative efforts aimed at changing community norms. Some researchers who have resolved to examine the recurring failure of school-based prevention programs have concluded the following:

Social norms about chemical use are a reflection of the community. Thus the community is a fertile, powerful, and necessary environment for changing norms. If substance abuse problems of youth are to be reduced, community-based prevention programs must also challenge adults to reflect on their own patterns of chemical use. (Benard, 1991, pp. 16-17, quoting Griffin, 1986).

Griffin (1986) seemed to go further by asserting that prevention cannot be a task assigned by the community to the school and focused only on youth. According to him, it must remain a shared responsibility among all stakeholders. In this sense, the message that resonates loudest and most clearly to youth is not the one typically seen in traditional prevention programs in the school, but that is implicitly communicated through the values and actions of the larger community in which many of these at-risk youth reside.

Opportunities for meaningful participation. Another recurring theme is that the building of resilient people is dependent upon youth being afforded opportunities for meaningful participation. According to The Creative Partnership for Prevention Initiative:

Building resiliency is not something that adults do to or for youth. Rather, it is the process of providing a caring environment, creating opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities, offering positive alternatives for free time, and helping young people make a successful and healthy transition into adulthood (United States Department of Education, 1998).

Biggs and Colesante (2000) described an approach to urban youth leadership development which affirms urban students' *educational aspirations* and fosters identification with academic and pro-social concerns. Conducted in collaboration with the *Albany Institute*, this study sought better understanding of the dynamics regarding the correlation between students' positive characteristics and their involvement in school and community activities. According to these researchers, by extending to youth opportunities to participate in the democratic decision making process, predictable outcomes such as increased social responsibility, as well as enhanced cognitive and moral development, is possible. Findings would seem to indicate that students find especially rewarding their relationships with adult mentors.

In a study conducted by Hall (2007), an after-school City School Outreach program captured the attention of high school male students by offering them a physically and psychologically safe environment to talk about issues they faced. Students attending the program used various forms of creative written expression (i.e., poetry, spoken word, and hip hop) to document and share their lived realities as minority youth. In the process, these youth developed a variety of coping strategies to assist them in transcending adversity in their environment.

According to Hall (2007), educators desiring to serve as a source of resilience in the lives of minority youth must make a concerted effort to acknowledge and appreciate

differences and commonalities that exist among African American, Latino, and European-based mainstream culture. Findings suggested that when adolescent males of color retain a strong sense of cultural pride and awareness, they are able to construct a healthy self-concept that assists them in navigating and resisting negative psychological forces in their environment.

Similarly, Allen, Cox, and Cooper (2006) conducted a comparative study to ascertain the difference in the development of seven resiliency skills between youths participating in an outcome-based camp and youths participating in a traditional camp. According to these authors, traditional human service professions (i.e., recreation, public health, and education, etc.) are being asked to increase their services in addition to evaluating their contribution to the youth and communities they serve. Findings suggested the need for more purposeful programming strategy by which outcomes are clearly identified, program experiences directly developed targeting the proposed outcomes, and an evaluation conducted to determine achievement of the outcomes.

Personal Attributes

In addition to environmental supports, some researchers (Anthony, 1974; Botkin et al., 1979; Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Berndt & Ladd, 1989; Demos, 1989; Felsman, 1989; Harvey, 2007; Jones, 2006; Vera & Shin, 2006) believe that youth also must retain certain personal attributes if they are to develop sufficient resiliency to succeed within their life endeavors.

Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994) found that children who survive risky environments do so in large part because of their strong self-confidence, coping skills,

and abilities to avoid risky situations. Such youth are generally considered resilient in that they appear able to fend off or recover from *projected* life misfortune.

Another key determinant is that youth with high expectations for their future are more likely to be able to overcome an otherwise life of projected negative outcomes. Caldwell, Wiebe, and Cleveland (2006), examined the ability to envision future certainty (an individual's perception of future stability, manifested as the likelihood of certain life outcomes) to explain variance in delinquency and school adjustment, while controlling for economic, neighborhood, and family factors among a cross-sectional sample of 1422 male and 1562 female African American adolescents drawn from *the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health* (1998; see Bearman, Jones, & Udry, 1998).

Three kinds of future certainty were examined: future life certainty (e.g., life expectancy), marriage certainty, and college certainty. In hierarchical multiple regression analyses, *future certainty* and family functioning were found to be stronger predictors than economic and neighborhood variables such as neighborhood disorganization and family socioeconomic status. Future life certainty and expectations of attending college were stronger predictors of lower rates of delinquency among males than females. In this regard, youth with high expectations for attending college were much less likely to engage within delinquent behavior.

Spoth, Randall, and Shin (2008) conducted a longitudinal study to explore partnership-based family competency training to determine the effects on academic success in a general population. Specifically, they examined indirect effects of the Iowa Strengthening Families Program (ISFP) on school engagement in 8th grade and academic

success in the 12th grade through direct ISFP effects on intervention-targeted outcomes--parenting competencies and student substance-related risk--in 6th grade.

Following examination of the equivalence of the measurement model across group and time, a structural equation modeling approach was used to test the hypothesized model and corresponding hypothesized structural paths. Significant effects of the ISFP were found on proximal intervention outcomes, intermediate school engagement, and the academic success of high school seniors. Findings suggested an important role for parent or family competency training in children's social-emotional learning and related school success.

Working with (Sub)populations

Whereas traditional studies generally focus on youth from mainstream neighborhoods, communities and school, within resiliency research, the emphasis is oftentimes directed towards young people residing within certain (sub)populations. In many instances, these youth present with issues not commonly associated with adolescents not otherwise regarded as at-risk.

Abeley (2009) advised that children born into poverty in the United States are at higher risk for a number of non-resilient outcomes. Utilizing an in-depth qualitative method grounded in sociological theory, she conducted life-history interviews with 48 educationally resilient African American adults who were "at risk" children to better understand the factors that facilitated respondents' social mobility. According to her, although existing research has done a good job of identifying the protective factors, more work is needed to help us discern the processes that contribute to positive outcomes.

Kincheloe and Hayes (2007) examined the maligned students who populate urban schools and found a talented group of resilient young people who deserved the support of the larger society. In seeking to develop new ways of teaching based on a discernment of and appreciation for the plight of these youth, they explored ways that some students are often undermined. These researchers' reliance upon a pedagogical framework of optimism and respect seems to be in direct contrast to policymakers who have generally used the fear of the poor, non-white, and immigrant "city kids" studied to insinuate racist and class-biased social and educational agendas.

Davis and Thompson (2004), asserted that fifty years after the "Brown" decision, it is time to examine whether society has supported middle level educators in creating schools where young adolescents living in poor communities do indeed attend schools that are socially just, diverse, democratic, and culturally relevant. These researchers examined the significance of race and identity in the development of young adolescents and explored the impact of attending middle level schools with little or no attention to the issue of diversity. The authors looked specifically at the demographic shifts in student population post-"Brown" and determined how these shifts have affected the creation of high-performing middle schools.

Another issue that Davis and Thompson (2004) explored was identity development in young adolescents who attended "de facto" segregated middle schools. Along the way, these researchers also examined ways that middle level educators in one segregated middle school are helping students develop positive self-identities and resiliency in order to achieve their dreams. Findings suggested that a major challenge for stakeholders

seeking to foster resiliency among youth appears to be in motivating educators to work to create middle schools that truly are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable.

Olesen (2007) employed life history research to explore alternative frameworks for learning and theorizing. According to her, concepts such as subjectivity and experience play pivotal roles in not only language use, but also language socialization. Findings tended to suggest that educators must themselves learn to tap into the emotional aspects of learning in order to motivate youth to learn to play the “learning game.”

Similarly, some such as Morrison and Allen (2007) have outlined specific actions that teachers can take to promote the healthy social and emotional development of their students. Their recommendations appear to be conceptually grounded in risk and resiliency theory and in the recognition that environments (as well as individuals) hold risk and protective possibilities.

Sutherland (2005) contended that, within the context of schooling, resiliency refers to the ability to thrive academically despite adverse circumstances. In this study, the relationship between academic resilience and students’ collateral learning was explored in 20 students of Cree ancestry. The individual resilience of each student was examined by identifying protective factors for school leaving within the micro system of each student's ecological framework.

Students' perception of family and peer influence on individual attributes toward schooling was ranked. Towards this end, the participants in this study were asked to

reflect on their learning strategies through the use of critical incidents. The relationship between collateral learning and resiliency was also explored.

This study found that students possessing a greater number of protective factors were more likely to learn science in a way described by collateral learning theory. Responses to critical incidents indicate some Cree students hold at least two sources of knowledge to explain some science concepts and therefore may adopt a collateral learning strategy. The importance these students place on earned or experiential knowledge is evident in the interviews. Educators might find it helpful to consider this collateral learning perspective when designing curriculum and or other programming tailored to meet the needs of specific cohorts or populations.

Wang (2006) conducted a study to explore the impact that modern social history is having on women's history in China. According to this researcher, national (i.e. Chinese) history has generally been men's history. Accordingly, women (as a subgroup of the general population) have generally been ignored in relation to their political, economic, and social position in society. Findings indicated that changes in attitudes regarding women's role in larger society will lead to more prominent roles for women in general; which in turn will enhance women views of themselves, as well as their contributions to the larger society.

Consistent with this, educators and stakeholders within the American educational landscape might consider traditional American history and its effect upon ethnic minorities and other disenfranchised or otherwise unprivileged subgroups. Although African Americans and other subgroups have made substantial contributions to American

society, many students (African American or otherwise) are unaware of the impact that some of these subgroups have made. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that in many classrooms around the country, teachers themselves are unaware of many of these historical facts.

Ceja (2004) conducted a study that reportedly provided a Chicana student's perspective of the role of parents in the development of college aspirations. Qualitative interviews with Chicana high school seniors shed light on the different ways these students perceive and come to understand the manner by which their parents influence and shape their educational goals and aspirations. Given the current composition of the Hispanic population according to U.S. Census data, the findings of this study highlight the pertinent role of parents in the development of educational aspirations of these youth.

Gomez, Rodriguez, and Agosto (2008) utilized life-history methods to investigate the family, school, university, and teacher education experiences of three Latino teacher candidates in a large, Midwestern, research-oriented university in the United States. Their study offered insight regarding the effect that university social experiences (including teacher education classes and field experiences) have upon Hispanic males. According to these researchers, these young men often felt misinterpreted in interactions with others within the university community, particularly with white females. Other findings suggested a strong desire of participants to make personal connections with youth and families they teach.

Ultimately, the authors offered suggestions for how teacher educators can be more responsive to prospective male elementary teachers and teacher candidates of minority

backgrounds. Specifically, in seeking to reduce the friction that minority youth may face while assimilating into mainstream culture and institutions, a greater and renewed effort aimed towards fostering cultural diversity should be of high import for decision makers and other key stakeholders. Not simply slogans or lip service, but genuine efforts should be led by promoting awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences.

Finally, although the majority of resiliency literature appears to focus on adolescent youth, a number of researchers have begun studying younger children. Fontaine and Green (1995) examined the prevalence of violence and its impact on young children as a critical risk factor leading to dysfunctional behaviors and problems. Risk-and-resiliency theory was reviewed within a model that facilitates the development of functional adaptive behaviors. Findings indicate that schools are comprised of tremendous resource(s) for fostering resilience in children who are at risk of exposure to violence.

Promising Strategies

Resiliency is generally defined as the capacity for individuals (i.e., youth) to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social competence despite exposure to adverse circumstances within their daily life. Recurrent themes include common experiences of youth such as success in a group/team experience, an encouraging teacher or special friend, and a strong drive to be self-determining.

If, as Danziger and Waldfogel (2000) contend, the human capital (i.e., youth) of a nation is the primary determinant of its strength, then data describing the processes affecting child development is of vital import to both public and private stakeholders.

Programs and/or policies promoting positive youth development thus become essential to society's capacity for enhancing the economic sufficiency of future generations.

In attempting to apply the *generally accepted* determinants of resiliency, the initial area of focus might include efforts aimed at ensuring that all youth are able to enjoy relationships with responsible and caring adults (e.g., particularly the school environment). Although schools themselves are not the only venue whereby youth interact with adults, this is, however, the domain that educators and others involved with education have more within their control.

During the past decades, a number of stakeholders (i.e., recreation, public health, and educators) have been asked to increase their services (outputs) and document (via program evaluation) their contribution to the people and communities they serve. These professions (focusing more towards age-appropriate programming, than simply amusement and diversion) are generally regarded as key contributors to the positive development of youths.

Bradshaw et al. (2006) examined contemporary perspectives on positive youth development in light of multidisciplinary life-course research regarding the development of serious behavior problems. Strategies were provided for applying the youth development perspective and life-course research to clinical interventions for court-involved youth.

Schiller (2008) explored how drama affects self-esteem, student motivation and success, and pro-social behavior in at-risk students. According to Schiller, drama affords at-risk students an opportunity to express externally what is transpiring internally. In this

sense, it places students in a leadership role, whereas they might not normally be chosen as a leader in a traditional academic school setting. As self-esteem is enhanced, this process allows for transference (*through enhanced prospects for the future*) of this attribute into classroom endeavors to support academic success in other subjects.

Findings indicated that the use of drama to teach social skills to public middle school students labeled “at-risk” is powerfully effective in contributing to the social, emotional, and physical development of many of these youth.

Others such as Sanlo (2005) have begun examining gay and lesbian issues, particularly as these relate to risk and or resiliency. They pointed out that while some colleges and universities acknowledge the presence of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB)--or sexual minority--students on their campuses, few institutions gather and maintain data on the numbers or needs of sexual minority students. As a result, many sexual minority students in higher education tend to be invisible; therefore, their presence and experiences are known only anecdotally. This article proposed to examine the lives and experiences of sexual minority college students to provide an understanding of the students' language, behaviors, and stressors, and how those areas affect students' academic achievement and success in college.

Benard (1997) outlined a model for applying concepts from resilience research to education, prevention, and treatment. Focusing on caring relationships, high expectations and positive beliefs, as well as opportunities for participation, she suggested how these concepts can guide practitioners in creating more powerful interventions and in fostering positive development for all youth. The question thus becomes -- how might educators

and schools contribute towards this end? Strategies enhancing resilience might include school-level approaches to teacher support and staff development. With these new skills and other resources, teachers can then work to foster resilience by teaching to the students' strengths, showing them that they have innate resilience, which in effect provides a foundation for growth opportunities.

Further, self-assessment on the part of teachers can have the effect of equipping them with the discernment necessary for fostering self-evaluation by students. In school districts around the country, the resiliency approach can be used in classroom experimentation that focuses on the growth of particular students. As teachers come to believe in urban youth, they strive to inspire or otherwise enable youth towards healthy development and other successful outcomes.

One prospective strategy could involve a return or re-emphasis on what was initially begun by Dr. Carter G. Woodson (considered the father of African-American history) as far back as 1916 when he founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and began publishing the *Journal of Negro History*. In 1926, he created "Negro History Week" to highlight the contributions of black Americans to their nation and the world. His objective -- to highlight the "hidden History and culture" of the African American people and, through this special observance, help all Americans to appreciate their ethnic roots and develop a mutual respect among the races. (Woodson, 2007).

By 1976, Dr. Woodson's association (renamed the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History) called for an expansion of the celebration to comprise the entire month of February; allowing for more time for celebrations, programs and special

observances (Woodson, 2007). By providing youth throughout the nation with vivid examples of the contributions of African Americans to the achievement of America itself, educators could in many instances spur African American youth towards greater personal esteem as well as enhance cultural sensitivity among youth of all ethnicities. This, in turn, might ultimately lead to more positive future prospects for all Americans to the extent that it inspires something of an epiphany about the realization that different does not necessarily mean deficient.

Zhao (2008) conducted life history research to examine the effect of teacher attitude and motivation on teacher's work commitment, identity and performance. According to this researcher, exploring the motivational aspect of becoming and being a teacher through this methodology provided a venue for capturing meanings and understandings of teaching in their respective contexts. Utilizing narratives of participants' experience, this life history approach shed insight on why some teachers do what they do. Findings suggested that individual's rationales for becoming teachers (of English) are a reflection of social and psychological factors.

Accordingly, teachers must conduct examinations into their own background and experiences to identify assumptions, beliefs, and values, as well as cultural contexts in which they grew up which have the propensity for informing their understanding of schooling and students. In an effort to explore this process's usefulness as a data gathering instrument, Sleeter (2008), began researching her own family history. Along the way, she described the process she used for researching family history, including a discussion of self-excavation through critical life history. According to her, self-

examination is particularly important as a part of learning to teach students who are culturally different from oneself. It is also crucial to address institutionalized inequities that permeate students' lives both inside and outside of school.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) would construe this as maintaining “informed perspectives on development and learning which provide the necessary framework for understanding students, designing appropriate learning activities, and justifying pedagogical decisions and actions” (p. 1018). Utilized in concert with communication with various stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, and administrators), this approach holds promise for working with multicultural youth.

Through continued study of resilient youth, we acquire opportunities for exploring and otherwise observing the effects that certain variables may have upon the positive development of our nation’s youth. There would appear to be either some characteristic(s) that resilient youth possess that others don’t, or some treatment, asset, opportunity or otherwise advantage that they have been able to access in realizing successful life outcomes notwithstanding the presence of high risk environmental factors. Finally, further study of this topic held promise as far as providing insight into the roles that schools and communities (in partnership with families) can play in fostering resiliency among our nation’s youth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Quantitative/Qualitative Research Approaches

To a highly significant degree, educational research has generally been grounded in the empiricist tradition (commonly called quantitative methods) and as such is distinguishable from other forms of scholarship such as those studies grounded in the humanities (Goquen, Knight, & Tiberius, 2008; Smeyers, 2008; Wooley, 2009). In quantitative research, one typically looks for a distribution of variables (how many are there with this or that characteristic) and for causal explanations, which can be of a deductive-nomological kind, incorporating universal laws, or be of an inductive nature, which employ statistics (Koslowski, Marasia, Chelenza & Dubin, 2008; Lombrozo, 2009; Ringer, 2006). Comprised under its own set of laws, quantitative research offers an explanation either in terms of an argument (a logical structure with premises and conclusions governed by some rule of acceptance), or as a presentation of the conditions relevant to the occurrence of the event and a statement of the degree of probability of the event given these conditions (Griffiths & Tannebaum, 2007; Lombrozo, 2007).

In contrast, qualitative research involves the process of a narrative analysis, whereby an account is constructed, analyzed, recorded, and reported. From this perspective, the purpose has become not only to describe categories, but also to deal with the relationships among these *respective* categories. Generally speaking, data collected refer to how participants interpret their world, the events, people, and context through which they make meaning of their lives.

Utilizing this type of methodology, the researcher attempts to arrange events and actions by showing how they contribute to the development of a plot. The plot is the thematic line of the narrative -- the narrative structure that shows how different events contribute to a larger narrative. According to Smeyers (2008), this type of research involves an interpretive function to the extent that it goes beyond research as the accumulation of atomistic knowledge. Rather, it comes close to other forms of scholarship such as theoretical, conceptual or methodological essays, critiques of research traditions and practices and those studies grounded in the humanities.

Lincoln and Denzin (1998) characterized the history of qualitative research as being defined more by breaks and ruptures than by a clear evolutionary, progressive movement from one stage to the next. These successive periods arrive in cycles so that what is relevant today may be considered obsolete tomorrow. "Just as the postmodern, for example, reacts to the modern, some day there may well be a neo-modern phase that extols Malinowski and the Chicago school and finds the current post-structural, postmodern moment abhorrent" (p. 407).

The authors went on to express that, "there is an elusiveness to this contradictory, tension-riddled enterprise that seems to be moving further and further away from grand narratives and single, overarching ontological, epistemological, and methodological paradigms (p. 407)."

Lincoln and Denzin further articulated:

From the initial commitment of the researcher to study the world from the perspective of the interacting individual flows the progressive, but yet radical politics of qualitative research. This undertaking defines an ever-present yet always elusive center in the discourses of *qualitative* research. The center shifts and moves as new, previously oppressed or silenced voices enter the contemporary discourse. These new articulations then refocus and redefine previous ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies, including positivism and postpositivism (p. 408).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) went further by asserting that qualitative research, as a set of interpretive practices, privileges no single methodology over any other. From this perspective, as a matter of discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly, as “it has no theory, or paradigm, that is distinctly its own” (p. 5). In short, because it is used in many disciplines, qualitative research itself cannot claim to belong to a single discipline.

The multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a “bricolage or solution, and the researcher as bricoleur or Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, quoting, Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 2; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161). He or she produces a bricolage, that is a piecemeal, narrow set of practices that provide answers to a problem in a particular circumstance.

The end result is an [emergent] construction (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p.161) that changes and takes form as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle. Nelson et al. (1992) described this methodology of cultural studies as “a choice of practice that is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflective” (p. 2). “This understanding can be applied equally to qualitative research” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.3). Irrespective of which tools are to be used, the specific practices to be employed will be unknown prior to the onset of the research. Ultimately, the “choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on the context” (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2), what is available in the context, and what the researcher is able to do within these parameters.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), the research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects methodological paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material. In this regard, a research design places researchers within the

empirical world and connects them to specific settings, individuals, organizations, and other bodies of relevant interpretive material, including archival documents. The authors went on to offer that:

A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion. At the same time, strategies of inquiry connect the researcher to specific methods for collecting and analyzing empirical materials. For example, the case study method relies on interviewing, observing, and document analysis. Research strategies implement and anchor paradigms in specific sites, or in specific methodological practices, such as making a case an object of study. These strategies include the case study, phenomenological and ethno-methodological techniques, as well as the use of grounded theory, the biographical, historical, action, and clinical methods. Each of these strategies is connected to a complex literature; each has a separate history, exemplary works, and preferred ways of putting the strategy into motion. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.29)

Meanwhile, the qualitative research paradigm has its roots in cultural anthropology and American sociology (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Over time, it has been internalized by educational researchers (Borg & Gall, 1989; Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000, 2005; Dieser, 2008; Ellis, 1991, 1994; Ellis & Bochner, 1992, 2000; Gallagher, 1995, 2001; Smith, 1989, 1993a, 1993b). According to Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (1987), the objective of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), this involves the researcher immersing himself/herself in the everyday environment and/or setting of the participants.

The Investigator's Role in Qualitative Research

In electing to pursue a qualitative approach, the investigator will seek information and meanings from the participants' perspective (see Locke et al., 1987). Within this context, my role as investigator (e.g., primary data collection instrument) required acknowledgement, in so

far as it was possible, of my own personal values, assumptions, and dispositions prior to commencement of the study. By recognizing [the presence of] these variables, I would then be in a better position to afford them their proper weight or credence. By taking this approach, I gained confidence that my contribution to the setting might be useful and positive rather than self serving and otherwise detrimental (Locke et al., 1987).

In light of the premises above, one of the challenges that I (as a qualitative researcher) faced related to what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) referred to as the “crisis of representation.” This dilemma has often been phrased in terms of a false dichotomy, that is, “the extent to which the personal self should have a place in the scientific scholarly text” (Bruner, 1993, p.2). According to Lincoln and Denzin (1998), “this false division between the personal and the ethnographic self rests on the assumption that it is possible to write a text that does not bear the traces of the author” (p. 413).

In agreement with the above cited authors, I would submit that the notion of researcher neutrality could not be further from the truth, as all texts (to some extent) correspond with personal statements. The actual presentation of the issues revolves around the amount of the personal, subjective, poetic self that is in fact openly provided in the text. Bruner (1993) phrased the challenge in this manner:

The danger is putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates, so that the work becomes narcissistic and egotistical. No one is advocating ethnographic self-indulgence. The objective is for the author to revisit the text openly, in a way that does “not squeeze out the object of the study. (p. 6)

Of course, there are many avenues for returning the author openly to the qualitative research text. Some may attempt fictional narratives of the self, whereas others may opt for performance texts. Yet, others may offer dramatic readings, or transform their field studies,

interviews, or case studies into poetic texts, short stories or plays (Rose, 1993). Thus, it is expected that the qualitative researcher will (in many instances) engage in dialogue with those studied. Additionally, authors may write through narrators, “directly as a character...or through multiple characters, or one character may speak in many voices, or the writer may come in and go out of the [text]” (Bruner, 1993, p. 6; see also: Ellis, 1991, 1994; Ellis & Bochner, 1992).

Consistent with the axiom above, I remain ever mindful that my perceptions of youth development in general, and youth resiliency in particular, have been instrumental in shaping my personal experiences (or at least how I interpret these experiences) and vice versa. In general, my world view, indeed—that of others as well, has to a large degree—inevitably been guided by our own aggregate life history.

Ethical Considerations

Most authors who employ qualitative research designs also attempt to address the importance of ethical considerations (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988). Despite the fact that ethnographic research is by its very nature obtrusive, researchers generally retain an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants. Thus, the following safeguards were implemented to protect the rights of participants here:

- Research objectives will be communicated both verbally and in writing so that these were clearly understood by participants (including how data would be utilized);
- Written authorization to proceed will be received from first, the IRB Board, and secondly, the participant himself/herself;
- Research exemption and other approval forms will be filed with Institutional Review Board;
- Participant(s) will be apprised of all data collection tools and activities;

- Participants' rights, interests and wishes will be considered first regarding reporting the findings and other data; and
- Final decision regarding participants' anonymity will rest solely with participants himself/herself.

Data Collection

The qualitative researcher has several methods for collecting empirical materials, ranging from the interview to direct observation, to the analysis of artifacts and archival documents, to the use of visual materials or personal experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) Similarly, the researcher may also:

employ a variety of distinct methods of reading and analyzing interviews or cultural texts, including content, narrative, and other strategies. Faced with inordinate amounts of qualitative materials, the investigator seeks ways of managing and interpreting these documents. (p. 29)

In preparation for this phase of the study, I began from the viewpoint that my understanding of the context and role and participants could be greatly augmented by my awareness and sensitivity to many of the challenges and issues encountered by “at-risk” youth in their everyday lives. Ironically, in occupying dual roles as participant and researcher, I believed that I would also be in a good position to understand not only the questions that should be asked, but also what is being left unsaid, and why.

Data was collected from March 2009 through November 2009. This included five 90 minute recorded interviews with the participant (initial interview questions, Appendix C), four 3 hour observations of my fellow participant within his everyday settings (one—at home, one—at office work site, one—at place of business, and one-at informal site (e.g. recreation facility), and analysis of archival data (such as report cards, newspaper

articles). Finally, participants (including myself) also recorded impressions of their respective experiences, thoughts, and feelings in taped journals. Ultimately, recollected experiences of each participant (Douglas and I) was compared and contrasted in hopes of gleaning themes as well as distinctions that had presented themselves.

Participants

Toney (Researcher/Participant.) The second of six children, and the second of three boys, my early life began in a two-parent household, although later I spent significant time within what is generally referred to as a single-parent household. Born and spending most of my early formative years in the racially segregated Mississippi Delta during the heightened tensions of the civil rights era of the 1960's, my later youth and adolescence was spent growing up in mostly ethnically segregated Chicago during the 1970's. At times my youth generally seemed a period punctuated with avoiding imminent threats that always seemed to lurk just around the corner. Subsequent to a brief stint as faculty member at a mid-sized Midwestern university, I am currently Executive Director of Humanity's Hope Foundation NFP, as well as a doctoral student majoring in Leisure, Youth, and Human Services.

Douglas. The third of four children born to second generation Irish American parents, Douglas (pseudonym is used throughout to protect confidentiality) was born and grew up in (mostly ethnically segregated) Chicago during the 1970's. Attending high school during a period replete with Disco and Heavy Metal, Douglas spent most of his early youth in activities that can best be described as running counter to traditional American family values (e.g., drinking with his father). Yet, by the onset of adolescence, he was

successfully navigating his life away from negative influences and towards a promising and bright future. Currently, he occupies dual roles as practicing behavioral therapist and faculty member at a mid-sized Midwestern university.

In this study, I have employed: (a) open-ended, semi-structured interviews, (b) field observations, (c) self-reflections, and (d) archival data to capture the personal narratives of resiliency of two adults who I believe, by virtually anyone's criteria, can be described as highly successful and resilient individuals. Specifically, I have relied on dual methodologies (auto-ethnography and life history research) to capture our personal narratives. Utilizing these approaches to capture our respective stories was akin to utilizing two different cameras (perhaps one 35mm, the other 50mm) to film an event. Although captured with different size film, the footage was ultimately dubbed together to comprise what I would describe as a single and otherwise compelling documentary.

Auto-Ethnography

Ellis and Bochner (2000) described auto-ethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.” (p. 739). Within the above scenario, the researcher travels back and forth, gazing through one lens after another. According to these researchers, the main thrust of autoethnography is to make “the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right”. (p.733)

Initially the observation may occur through a wide angle lens [i.e., ethnographic] focusing upon social and cultural factors. Ultimately, the researcher turns toward an

inward [personal] inquiry in search of answers. Ellis and Bochner (2000) elaborated further below:

As the researcher zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language. (p. 739)

Similarly, McIlveen (2008) asserted that “auto-ethnography is a reflexive means by which the researcher-practitioner consciously embeds himself or herself in theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation or intervention” (p. 13). He goes on to posit that autoethnography is utilized as a means of operationalizing social constructionist research and practice, and that it has as its objective the establishment of trustworthiness and authenticity. McIlveen concludes by asserting that autoethnography should be admitted to the methodological repertoire of research and practice.

Meanwhile, Peshkin (1986), describing his feelings as a person of Jewish ancestry who conducted a study wherein he [himself] was immersed within his research on a fundamentalist Christian school, provided a compelling example of the some of the challenges facing researchers attempting this type of project:

This personal exposition is not meant to insinuate myself into a study of others, in the manner of bit-part actors who insist on stepping out from the periphery of the stage where they belong, to the center where they do not, or of children who cannot bear to have their mother’s attention diverted from themselves. Given my perception of self in Bethany [the fundamentalist Christian school], it follows that in the conduct of this study I pondered not only the usual, “who are these people

and what are they doing?”, but also the unusual, “Who are these people and what are they doing to me?” In this book, I want to portray some part of the realities I observed at Bethany in a way that graphically communicates to others the feeling of being there. The “there” I present is my Bethany, not mine in the possessive sense anthropologists use when referring to the village they labored in and learned to love, but mine in the perceptual sense; it is one I saw with the help of Bethany’s adults and students. I have used no sleight of hand to conjure up the images of Bethany that follow, yet it is fair to say I took the pictures with my own camera. (p. 22)

On the other hand, relying upon Ellis (1997, 1999), Sparkes (2002a) described his own understanding of the components of the genre known as the auto-ethnographical dissertation:

These include the following: the use of systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall; the inclusion of the researcher’s vulnerable selves, emotions, body, and spirit; the production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality; the celebration of concrete experience and intimate detail; the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning; a concern with moral, ethical, and political consequences; an arrangement of compassion and empathy; a focus on helping us know how to live and cope; the featuring of multiple voices and the repositioning of readers and “subjects” as co-participants in dialogue; the seeking of a fusion between social science and literature; the connecting of the practices of social science with the living of life; and the representation of lived experience using a variety of genres—short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. (pp. 210-211)

Dieser (2008) conducted a qualitative auto-ethnographical narrative of his primary and secondary school experiences in a Catholic school system in Alberta, Canada.

According to him, auto-ethnographic research interprets a culture by producing highly personalized and revealing texts. Exploring social phenomena from a holistic perspective, he emphasized the effect of social histories upon identity development. Seeking to bring clarity and discernment to the complex web of societal and life forces that are located in schools, and in helping stakeholders make difficult decisions related to improving the

ecology of schooling, he called attention to the following forces:

educational policy, hegemonic masculinity and femininity, play and recreation, family history, family health problems, youth identity development, popular culture, care theory, socioeconomic status, extracurricular school clubs. (p. 293-294)

Although acknowledging that contemporary research now recognizes multiple interpretive communities with multiple criteria for evaluating qualitative research, Sparkes (2002a) admonished us to consider the following:

What substantive contribution to our understanding of social life does it make? What is its aesthetic merit, impact, and ability to express complex realities? Does it display reflexivity, authenticity, fidelity, and believability? Is it engaging and evocative? Does it promote dialogue and show potential for social action? Does the account work for the reader and is it useful? (p. 211)

Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 747) went further by offering a clear and meaningful reason why autoethnography is uniquely positioned to make apparent the role of the researcher. After reading Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Bochner was convinced that:

No strong case could be made that human knowledge was independent of the human mind. All truths were contingent on the describing activities of human beings. No sharp distinctions could be made between facts and values. If you couldn't eliminate the influence of the observer on the observed, then no theories or findings could ever be completely free of human values. *The investigator would always be implicated in the product. So why not observe the observer, focus on turning our observations back on ourselves? And why not write more directly, from the source of your own experience?* (2000, p. 747, emphasis added)

Notwithstanding the foregoing, some questions are frequently posed about autoethnography. What kind of "truth" does autoethnography aspire to attain? (See Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.745.) Far from being scientific, isn't autoethnography sentimental or schmaltzy; and isn't it more therapeutic than rigorous? (Ellis & Bochner, p. 746); and,

related to question 2, doesn't autoethnography run the risk of being self-indulgent, narcissistic, or egocentric? (see: Sparkes 2002a; 2002b).

In undertaking this research project, I remained cognizant of these and other considerations. For instance, I was particularly mindful of Carolyn Ellis' admonishment that "autoethnography is not easy, and not something that everyone can do well." (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738). For Ellis, "the reward is that you come to understand yourself in deeper ways" (p. 738). Isn't that the point of knowledge/education?

Similar to Attard and Armour (2005), I employed auto-ethnography to reveal thoughts, feelings and learning experienced as a developing youth. In essence, I studied myself! Starting with my personal life, I extended due diligence to my physical/somatic feelings, thought, and emotions, utilizing what Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 737) terms as "systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall" to try and understand experiences I've lived through.

Data presented here has been drawn from retrospective inquiry of environmental factors within the family, school and community and their respective impact upon my development (ways that I as a youth learned and developed). Similar to Berry (2005), I relied upon critical auto-ethnography, fieldnotes/research journaling, and student memoirs all through a theoretical lens to gain insight into learning experiences from an African American perspective; to attain what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) term as an "engaged pedagogy" as a means of recording the uniqueness of the learning experiences of African Americans. Ultimately insights gleaned from this approach was merged with data provided through life history research component to form a picture, if you will, of

the dynamics at work in the lives of at-risk youth albeit across demographic and other socio-cultural spectrums.

Life History Research

The life history method, which achieved a prominent position within the Chicago tradition of sociological research during the early 1920s, has more recently (i.e., since 1980's) been widely adopted for educational inquiries (Brooks & Everett, 2008; Denzin, 1989; Goodson & Choi, 2008; Tierney, 2000; Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985).

Although utilized above to study teacher professionalism, this approach holds promise for exploring a number of topics.

Johnson (2007) utilized this approach to study the concept of teaching for equity, or rather, the implications and limitations that an ethics of access presents to teacher education. Through qualitative analyses of 10 European American, middle-class, female pre-service teachers, this researcher employed life history interviews to trace pre-service teachers' emergent ethics toward teaching for equity and social justice. Findings suggested that *access* to diverse individuals and diverse materials was identified as a major theme in participants' understandings of teaching.

Torstenson (2007) employed multiple methodologies (including life history research) to explore the meaning and importance youths' experiences have in helping to form their self-concepts and philosophy of life. According to her, memory plays an important part both methodologically and in forming the young people's self-concepts, values and philosophy of life. In this sense, encounters, whether positive or negative, could become existential questions and lead to new choices and values in life. Findings indicated that

relations with people characterized by dialogue and reciprocity are crucial for development and learning, and the project of learning and knowledge cannot be separated from the social interpersonal project.

Meanwhile, Tierney (2000) asserted that “life history research is a term that has meant many things to many people” (p. 539). He goes on to offer a coherent description of life history research captured in the following quotes. Life history research:

- “is any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person” (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985, p. 2).
- is “a commentary of the individual’s very personal view of his own experience as he understands it” (Watson, 1976, p. 97).
- is “an attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it” (Dollard, 1935, p. 3).
- is an “account of a life based on interviews and observations” (Denzin, 1989, p. 48)

Griffiths and Macleod (2008) examined the extent to which stories and personal narratives can and should be used to inform education policy. Towards this end, they investigated a wide range of studies describable as story or personal narrative. These include life-studies, life-writing, life history, narrative analysis, and the representation of lives. According to them, “auto/biography” is used as a convenient way of grouping these categories under one term.

Griffiths and Macleod (2008) further contended that such groupings highlight the many and varied ways that personal stories [i.e., self accounts] interrelate and intertwine with the stories [i.e., personal accounts] of others. Rather than an explicit discussion of all the different forms of autobiography, these authors opted for an investigation of the

epistemology underlying the personal story in the context of social action. According to them, this biographical genre illuminates the social context of individual lives, while also allowing room for unique, personal stories to be told.

Finally, Tierney (2000) quoted Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) who distinguished between life story and life history research by stating that “an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story by the researcher is what turns a life story into a life history” (p. 125). As Tierney makes clear, it is not so much a matter of these descriptions differing or contradicting one another. They don’t. Rather, whatever differences one detects are more a matter of what each of the above scholars would emphasize.

Analogous to Torstenson (2007), life history research was utilized here to explore the meaning and importance that the participant’s (i.e., Douglas’) experiences have had in helping to form his self-concept and philosophy of life. Presumably (according to the resiliency literature) these experiences have helped him navigate his life course through any number of situations that might have otherwise (i.e., absent certain protective factors) led to a negative life outcome.

Data presented here was drawn from retrospective inquiry of environmental factors within the family, school and community, and their respective impact upon his development (ways that he as a youth learned and developed). Consistent with this objective, in addition to identifying any protective factors that may have been present, I also sought to understand the processes through which these determinants may have influenced positive life outcomes.

Similar to Abeley (2009), I relied upon critical life history, fieldnotes/research, journaling, and student memoirs (as well as interviews) to gain insight into learning experiences from the perspective of a Caucasian male. Ultimately insights gleaned from this methodology was merged with data provided through my auto-ethnographic component to form a picture of the dynamics at work in the lives of at-risk youth across cultural and other demographic realms.

Nexus Between Epistemology and Methods

Consistent with the qualitative or interpretivist framework, this study did not so much involve discovering knowledge, or attaining accurate depiction, as it was about narrating or presenting participants lives in a way that helps to distinguish whether (or not) their respective stories (or life histories) centers on resilience. From an epistemological vantage point, I sought to co-construct knowledge with my participant, Douglas. Utilizing multiple lenses, autoethnography (for myself) and life history research (for Douglas), I also sought insights into the early lives of each participant.

During interview sessions, Douglas was presented with a series of questions, each designed to explore prominent [resiliency] themes. I also composed these same questions to myself. Towards this end, a series of questions were developed which were designed to determine the extent to which participants may or may not have fit the resiliency profile. Although a semi-structured format (see: Glesne 2006), these interviews were also conducted in the format of a conversation.

To begin with, questions were devised in reference to relationships that Douglas and I may or may not have enjoyed with caring and supportive adults. Providing that these

types of relationships were present, I sought to distinguish between relationships enjoyed with *adult* family members versus those perhaps with other adults within both the school and community environments respectively.

Similarly, questions were devised which were designed to assess the presence of high expectations, or lack thereof within the lives of participants during their youth. Questions were also designed to assess opportunities for meaningful participation, or lack thereof that may have been available to participants during their youth. Again, whether or not either of these protective factors existed, I wanted to determine the extent to which participants attribute this to adult figures within the family, school, or community respectively.

Despite the fact that some proponents embrace the role of environmental factors, others believe that resilient youth retain individual characteristics that contribute to their ultimate success. In exercising due diligence to both sides of the resiliency debate, I believe sufficient inquiry also needed to be directed towards examining the role of these personal attributes.

In order to pursue this objective, questions were devised in reference to the extent to which participants retained sufficient self esteem as a youth. Whether either Douglas or I recalled exhibiting positive self esteem (as a youth) or not, I wanted to explore the impact, if any, that the presence of self esteem (or the lack thereof) may have had upon their respective life course. Also, questions were incorporated to assess the extent to which participants may have retained other relevant attributes (e.g., problem solving skills, social competence, sense of autonomy, and sense of purpose, etc.) as a youth.

Data Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985), among others, believed that qualitative researchers represent a philosophical lot in that they rely upon abstract principles. These principles include beliefs about:

ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), and epistemology (What is the relationship between the known and those who want to know?), and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?). (p. 14)

The infrastructure containing the practitioner's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be referred to as a paradigm or interpretive framework, a basic set of beliefs that guides action, "a way of breaking down complexities of the real world" (p. 15).

Hence, it could be argued that all research should be considered interpretive, or guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be viewed as well as studied. Although some beliefs might be taken for granted or assumed, others might be considered problematic or otherwise debatable. Nonetheless, each research paradigm will necessarily make particular demands on the researcher, including the questions that are asked and the interpretations that are afforded to her or him. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), at the most benign level, four major interpretive paradigms comprise qualitative research: positivist and postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory), and feminist-poststructural. They went on to posit that:

These four abstract paradigms become more complicated at the level of concrete specific interpretive communities. At this level it is possible to identify not only the constructivist, but also multiple versions of feminist (Afrocentric and poststructural) as well as specific ethnic, Marxist, and cultural studies paradigms. (p. 26)

Some (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988) believe that data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously. The process necessarily involves organizing, arranging, and ultimately interpreting transcript interviews and other relevant information. Quoting Bogdan and Biklen (1998), “Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 175).

According to Tesch (1990), the process of data analysis is eclectic, in that, there is no single right or perfect way. In a sense, the choice of strategy requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. In conducting this study, I found it useful to consciously refrain from holding fast to preconceived notions that generally precluded [all other] possible interpretations.

Expressed differently, I resolved to make every effort to remain open to contrary or alternative explanations. As a sidebar, perhaps an analogy to the charge that I felt compelled with as researcher here might be that faced by triers of fact within American legal jurisprudence every day, in that [the better part of] discretion dictates that we each keep our minds open until all the “facts” are in and an informed conclusion can be reached.

Yet, I also remained mindful of Patton (1980) who cautioned against collecting so much amorphous information which might have the unintended effect of reducing the analysis to a meaningless exercise:

The data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous. I have found no way of preparing students for the sheer massive volumes of information with which

they will find themselves confronted when data collection has ended. Sitting down to make sense out of pages of interviews and whole files of field notes can be overwhelming. (p. 297)

The above concerns notwithstanding, a number of protocols were helpful in guiding me in the analysis of this qualitative data. First, I remained ever cognizant of the fact that, in contrast to quantitative research which generally retains strict rules for separating activities such as data collection, analysis, and results writing, within this the qualitative approach, several activities might be ongoing simultaneously.

Some researchers have long considered *simultaneously* employing activities such as collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, and formatting the information into a story or picture, as well as actually writing the text (see Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; and Merriam, 1988). As I proceeded in the study here, the process has (necessarily) involved accumulating a voluminous amount of information while simultaneously attempting to sort the information according to certain patterns, categories, or themes.

Along the way, I simultaneously attempted to interpret this information by classifying it according to certain schema. Tesch (1990) refers to this process as “de-contextualization” and “recontextualization.” According to Tesch, “this process results in a ‘higher level’ analysis. While much work in the analysis process consists of taking apart (for instance, into smaller pieces), the final goal is the emergence of a larger, consolidated picture” (p. 97).

Some researchers cite the need for identifying the coding procedure to be used to assist with reducing the information to themes or categories. This process involves what

has been referred to as “segmenting” the information (Tesch, 1990), developing “coding categories” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), and “generating categories, themes, or patterns” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Although qualitative research allows for flexible protocols for sorting through the data collected, ultimately I was confronted with the challenge of formulating categories of information and attaching codes to these respective categories. Again, Tesch (1990) was helpful in that he offered several steps for me to consider:

- Get a sense of the whole. Read through all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
- Pick one document (one interview)—the most interesting, the shortest, the one on top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, What is this about? Do not think about the substance of the information, but rather its underlying meaning.
- Write thoughts to the margin.
- When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics.
- Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
- Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
- Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by groping topics that relate to each other.
- Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
- If necessary, recode your existing data. (pp. 142-145)

Steps such as those (above) help me to engage in a sort of systematic process of data analysis. Of course, other steps were also employed. Relying upon Bogdan and Biklen

(1992), data was also segmented and coded according to whether or not it corresponded with certain themes. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested utilizing the following categories:

- setting and context codes
- subjects' way of thinking about people and objects
- process codes
- strategy codes
- relationship and social structure codes, and
- pre-assigned coding schemes (pp. 167-172)

Based on the literature, there are certain issues, ideas, or concepts that I sought to pursue and examine. Of course, qualitative research itself implies that by necessity, the focus may change throughout the course of the study. Because there is no verification [if or] that the researcher has gotten it right, ultimately, the analysis here necessarily related to my own interpretations.

Cognizant of the above fact throughout the entire process, I did not want to limit myself to these points of inquiry. Although dual methodologies (auto-ethnography and life history research) were employed in this study, during the initial stage of inquiry, both participants were asked to respond to identical questions (each designed to assess the degree to which participants fit respective components of the resiliency profile).

One of the hallmarks of the resiliency literature is that youth who retain a positive relationship with caring adults are more likely than others to avoid a negative life path. Thus, a number of questions were formulated, to determine the degree, if any, to which participants may have been impacted by resiliency determinants. One of the strategies that I employed in order to maximize use of this strategy was by *periodically* reading and

rereading my interview transcripts. During these reading and rereading periods, I took time out to jot down notes, sketch ideas, look for apparent themes as well as document other emerging stories for interpretation later.

Additionally, I sought to practice actively listening to my subject(s) (Heshusius, 1995), to discern commonalities that may have existed. Also, this exercise necessarily involved striving for and maintaining a “participatory consciousness, then, which resulted from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self into a state of complete attention” (Heshusius, 1994, p. 17) Towards this end, I resolved to listen (attentively) to the recorded interviews of each participant to pick up on the influx of voice, accent, or language each participant (including myself) used.

I also paid particular attention to body language and other gestures as participants spoke. Interestingly enough, this led to a few eyebrow-raising moments; occasionally followed by “chin holding” moments. Eyebrow-raising to the extent that oftentimes when we first hear comments that are somewhat surprising to us, we have a tendency to lift our eyebrows in a certain way. Perhaps this is what is often meant by the term “this raised my antennae or got my antennae up.”

Such incidents did much more than just simply raise flags. They also spurred me to further thought as occasionally I found myself holding my chin (*in further thought*). Suffice it to say that over the course of this project, I came to expect (and ultimately experienced) many of these moments. Not simply within the data analysis or interpretation phases, but also within the data collection phase as well.

Because of unique life circumstances, certain topics or issues tended to elicit different responses from Douglas and me. For example, one of the key planks within the resiliency literature is that youth with high expectations for future success are more likely than not to avoid situations that might compromise that success. In attempting to devise appropriate questions for investigating this phenomena, follow up questions were not only composed with consideration for the topic being discussed, but were based in part upon the unique experiences of each participant as well as in light of responses being elicited.

Consider the following question: To the extent that you retained high expectations for your future, what if anything do you attribute this to? Imagine that this question was posed as an initial line of inquiry. Next, consider also that whereas one participant may point to internal characteristics, the other may cite environmental support as key. Finally, keep in mind that, even if each participant cited the same factors, differences would most likely still abound within the context of each person's own lived experience. These are but a few considerations that I had to be mindful of as I prepared to conduct the study.

Conclusions

Bochner responded to criticism that auto-ethnography "fictionalizes" life. Does it? Can it? No -- "a story is not a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of one's life" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745) . He went on to say that, "[o]ur personal identities seem largely contingent on how well we bridge the remembered past with the anticipated future" (p.746).

Further, Bochner contemplated the question of whether auto-ethnography more closely resembles "victim art" or "reality TV"? (p. 747). His response was, "only to those

who would rather avoid the stories because they feel indicted by them and also because to tell one's story empowers a person rather than victimizes them" (p. 747).

Throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I utilized a number of alternative approaches in examining participants' recollections of their youth. First, I recorded and listened to Douglas' recollections regarding each respective stage of his life course as a youth. For example, I first looked at Douglas as a young child, then as an early youth, and then as an adolescent. The same format was also utilized in first exploring my own early life course, except that rather than conducting interviews of myself, I relied more on archival data and recurring memories to provide insights.

In each instance, I was looking for (what I took to be as) signs or indications that first, participants spent significant portions of their youth within high risk environments, and secondly, that they had been in fact able to transcend life trajectories normally associated with such environments. Along the way, I also explored the extent, if any, to which certain factors (some internal, others external) may or may not have affected or impacted their life chances.

In addition to looking at our stories individually, I also examined these collectively. For instance, after reading through my story or listening to Douglas's story in its entirety (throughout our respective life course), I would then examine our experiences side by side along each stage of the life course. In doing so, I was looking not only for similarities, but contrasts as well.

Providing rationale for why auto-ethnography matters, Bochner offered insights:

- We are studying human beings

- We are inside what we are studying (we are part of it)
- Different relationships between researcher and those who are participants, as well as between authors and readers (readers are not passive)
- Centers on how we endow meaning
- Allows us to resist the conventions that constrain which (and whose) stories we can tell – resisting social control of dominant stories
- Highlights the emotional experience rather than slipping into abstract
- Eclipses the scientific illusion of mastery and control, and
- *To offer lessons for further discussion rather than un-debatable conclusions.*
(Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 743)

Finally, in addressing the question of authenticity, Bochner cautioned, “shouldn’t you have notes to make sure you get it right? (p. 750). Along these lines, it might also be helpful to keep in mind that in addition to the researcher having criteria for judging the merits of the story, the reader (himself/herself) must also make certain judgments:

- Is the story honest or dishonest?
- Does the author take measure of himself or herself, or his or her limitations, confusions, ambivalence, mixed feelings?
- Do you as the reader gain a sense of emotional reliability?
- Is there a transformation from an old self to a new self (or a new understanding)?
- Does the story enable you to understand and feel the experiences.

CHAPTER 4

CONTRASTING STORIES OF RESILIENCY

(Foreword)

The analysis here begins with a story I composed based upon interview transcripts, observation, and archival data. In the construction of this narrative, I attended carefully to recurring phrases, themes, or events that have been uttered, observed, or otherwise emphasized. Ultimately, words have been rearranged and crafted into this story (life history if you will). This first narrative portrays Douglas's life initially as an at-risk youth and later resilient youth adult.

Douglas' Voyage (Life History)*"My Papa's Waltz"*

*The whiskey on your breath
 Could make a small boy dizzy;
 But I hung on like death:
 Such waltzing was not easy.*

*We romped until the pans
 Slid from the kitchen shelf;
 My mother's countenance
 Could not unfrown itself.*

*The hand that held my wrist
 Was battered on one knuckle;
 At every step you missed
 My right ear scraped a buckle.*

*You beat time on my head
 With a palm caked hard by dirt,
 Then waltzed me off to bed
 Still clinging to your shirt.*

Theodore Roethke

Setting the Stage

The third of four children and the second of two sons, Douglas was born in February 1961 to second generation Irish American parents. According to him, his parents were proud of this heritage, and as far back as he could remember his father was always making reference to the mother country. Indeed, he took every opportunity to let Douglas and his siblings know that they came from tough stock. According to Douglas, *“this meant that we could hold our own in a fist fight; at other times it simply meant that we could hold our liquor. Not the weak stuff like beer and wine, but the hard stuff like whisky, scotch, and brandy.”*

Ironically, this sanguine, even celebratory, attitude toward alcohol had a profound effect on his early development. Although his drinking career was short lived, and ended over thirty five years ago, he still recalls his first drink.

I had a terrible cold around five or six years old, and my father had made a hot toddy for me to drink. Although Mom questioned the appropriateness of giving alcohol to such a young child, Dad’s reply was, “It’ll do the little runt some good.” As far as Dad was concerned, if Mom had her way, she would make a wuss out of me.

Douglas recounted that after going back and forth for a few minutes his father ultimately won the argument. Douglas also recalled that such outcomes were not unusual at that time, as his mother preferred to defer to his father as the man of the house. So, he drank the *hot toddy*, and he recalls feeling better afterwards. *“I’m not sure if my improvement resulted from the elixir that Dad had made, or if my immune system finally fought off the virus,”* he recounted, *“but I got better and I guess that was the important thing.”* With the benefit of hindsight, he now believes that his mother had been right.

From his recollections, this may have been his first drink (at least as far as he could recall), but it certainly was not his last. Shortly after this episode, he began following his father around the house in the evening time when he noticed his father about to begin his daily ritual. *“At first, I would just follow him, not opening my mouth, just sort of hanging around. Then one day, almost if on cue—he asked if I wanted a drink. I nodded my head yes! ‘Now don’t try to take too much Dougie, we don’t want your mother fussing around here you know,’”* Douglas recalled his father stating. He took a small swig. Although it kind of burned his throat, he tried to conceal the discomfort from his father. *“Almost as if reading my mind,”* Douglas concluded, *“Dad patted me on the back as if to reassure me and said, ‘it’ll put hair on your chest son.’”*

In retrospect, this incident also involved what Douglas now considers to have been both his earliest (and perhaps) greatest risk-factor. *“To think,”* he reflected with incredulity, *“that someone as young as I was being exposed to alcohol, knowing what I now know to be some of the dangers associated with this substance. It just leaves me shaking my head. Sure, my father may not have meant any harm, but how many people have suffered irreparable harm simply because their parents did not believe that they were doing anything wrong.”*

From there on out he recalled pretty much drinking regularly with his Father until he was about eleven years old. It wasn’t an everyday event, yet it occurred often enough to qualify as regular. Although he did not recall being allowed to consume much more than a swig or two at a time, he reported feeling like a *“really big guy”* hanging out with his father. In Douglas’s words, *“I don’t recall any significant*

periods whereby I did not indulge as long as I was with Dad. We pretty much kept the same routine until one day I sort of realized that this was not for me.”

Changing Perspectives

The incident that led to Douglas’ sudden decision to quit is still quite vivid to him almost four decades later. As Douglas recalled it,

As usual Mom was up before dawn ironing our school clothes and preparing a hearty breakfast, us kids getting dressed and getting ready for school, and Dad getting ready for work. During breakfast, everyone was excited and talking about the events scheduled for the weekend. The family was traveling to Great America amusement park for a two-day getaway. One of Dad’s relatives had a cottage nearby and we were staying there from Friday evening through Sunday morning and visiting the Amusement Park all day Saturday.

So we went through our regular routines. School went off without incident. Soon, we were home and preparing for our excursion to Great America. Laughter filled the air, as everyone was anxious and giddy. Myself, I was extremely excited. Not only about all the rides that I planned to take, but also about being in the great outdoors all weekend. I have always loved nature and all of its beauty. I liked the woods, I liked fishing, I liked campfires (especially roasting hot dogs, marsh mellows and the like), I just liked it all.

But more than this, I looked forward to the opportunity to hang out with Dad; to maintain our bond that we had developed. Ever since that first episode when I was small, there was something about hanging with Dad, and doing our little ritual. It made me feel especially close to him; like more than just a son, and more like his partner. You might say that in some ways I felt like a little man. But anyway, we arrived without incident, got settled in, and the festivities began.

Dad asked whether I wanted to help fetch the firewood. He didn’t have to ask twice. We headed outside, and had not walked fifty yards before my Dad pulled out his flask. After taking a swig, he glanced over towards me to gauge my reaction (probably to see if I would ask for some). I wanted to, but at first I managed to refrain. I guess I wanted him to offer me a swallow or something. I also think that he knew this! But anyway, we walked a little further before coming upon a gigantic pile of wood. Dad began loading wood onto a wheel barrow that was there, and I soon joined in to help.

We got the wood loaded without incident, and headed back towards the cabin. Along the way, Dad stopped momentarily to take another sip from his flask. After he had taken a stiff drink, he cleared his throat, and then looked down towards me. "Pretty nippy out here! Have a swig, it'll warm you up," said Dad, handing me the flask. I tried to conceal my excitement, as I reached for the container and took a drink. These were the moments that I lived for then, spending quality time with my Dad, bonding and stuff like that.

We arrived back at the cottage, got the fire started and settled in for the evening. Almost as if on cue, mom began cooking, and not long thereafter the place was full of intoxicating aromas. Fried pork chops, fried potatoes, and corn bread muffins. Soon, we had all stuffed ourselves. Barely able to move, I waddled from the table towards my cot, and had soon snuggled in for the evening. I don't remember falling asleep, but I know that it didn't take me long before it was lights out.

The next morning I was up at the break of dawn. Mom was already awake, and had begun cooking breakfast. You would have thought that we hadn't eaten in three days; what with all the food that she was preparing. "Who's going to eat all that," I asked? Mom (in her normal demure fashion) just smiled and said, "Don't worry, it will get eaten." Not long thereafter, everyone else was awake. We washed up, ate breakfast, and took off for Great America.

Everything was going so good, no ominous signs of things to come, but by golly did they ever. Not quite a half of a mile away from the amusement park, a car came rolling uncontrollably out of nowhere. Although Dad tried to avoid the collision, it was to no avail. BAMMM! The impact was jarring! Moments later, I was trying to regain my bearings. "Is everyone alright," Mom and Dad asked in unison. "I'm okay, I'm okay, I'm okay, I'm okay," each of us kids replied one by one.

Soon, Dad exited the car to check on the occupants of the other vehicle. Although the driver was okay, his passenger appeared to be having some difficulties. I'm not sure how they got the news so fast (this was years before cell phones), but moments later sirens were blasting, and police and other first aid responders were on the scene. After checking both vehicles to assess the extent of injuries, the officers were soon trying to determine the cause of the accident.

After awhile, they came and asked my Dad for his license and insurance information. Then suddenly, everything became a blur! I remember one of the officers asking Dad if he had been drinking. "A little," Dad replied. "Mr. O'Connor, we are going to have to ask you to take a breathalyzer," the officer

then said. After dad took the sobriety test, the officer looked at the gauge and stated, "Mr. O'Connor, I am going to have to place you under arrest." He then went through the procedure of reading Dad his Miranda rights before placing Dad in the back of the Squad car.

Soon one of the officers came back to our car. "Ms. O'Connor, do you have a valid driver's license," he asked. "Yes Officer, I do," said Mom reaching in her purse to hand over her license. "Okay Ms. O'Connor, here's what's going on. We're taking your husband down to the station to book him. Not sure how much cash that you have on hand, but he will need approximately two hundred and fifty dollars to post bond. He doesn't have any prior arrest for DUI, so he won't have to stay as long as his bond is posted."

Recalling this incident now, Douglas stated, *"I can't tell how you traumatizing that it was for me to see my father carted off to jail like some common criminal. The sad part was that he wasn't even drunk (at least according to my perceptions) compared to some of the other instances where I had seen him drinking over the years. Yet, there was some good that came out of it."* That there was some good that came out of it related to the fact that Douglas recalled this particular incident as being the catalyst for him changing his *whole outlook* regarding alcohol.

The Wonder of a Boy (A Gaelic Son)

Watching Douglas tell this story of his father's plight with alcohol, it was obvious to me that this was a subject that has caused a bit of consternation for him in the past (i.e., between late adolescence and early adulthood). Although Douglas reported being grateful to have been able to make peace with this issue over the years, observing his mannerisms as he broached this subject it appeared that in some small way it was somewhat therapeutic for him to discuss it now.

Indeed, in describing his professional work with clients today, Douglas reported that, *"There has been a time or two where in an effort to instill hope in them, I have*

engaged in a little self-disclosure to let them know that many of the things that they are going through have been faced by similarly situated individuals, including myself.

Reflecting further on this subject, Douglas stated,

It is somewhat difficult to explain, but from a standpoint of being able to identify the moment that my father's drinking started to become a problem, the incident which led to his arrest was it. This was sort of a watershed moment for our family in that it seemed to affect our family dynamics. Not only did my relationship with Dad start to change. I really can't explain, but it seemed that once I stopped drinking, simultaneously I no longer enjoyed our little bonding sessions, and we basically began to drift apart.

Taking a brief moment to collect his thoughts, Douglas resumed.

I also began noticing a change in my parents relationship with one another, in that whereas in the past my mother never questioned my father's drinking, she now had begun closely monitoring Dad and was prone to making comments from time to time whenever she felt that he maybe had too much to drink and was about to go behind the wheel of a car.

Douglas recalled that this did not go over well with his father who tended to become very agitated and defensive, construing this as a direct challenge to his manhood. As relations between his parents worsened, his siblings and he were now witnessing arguments between their parents for the first time in their lives.

According to Douglas, ultimately his father came to perceive his mother's supervision and commentary as an intolerable affront. This Douglas recalled led to further escalations such as loud shouting matches and, ultimately, a violent explosion:

It was a day that I certainly shall never forget. At the time that it happened, there were no signs of trouble on the horizon. In fact, if anything, that Thursday morning in September 1977 (I recall this so vividly because I had a football game scheduled) it seemed that our family was finally getting back to a sense of normalcy.

By all accounts, Dad had quit drinking (at least he seldom drank around the house anymore), and was starting to attend Catholic mass with Mom. This

was no small feat considering the fact that he himself was fond of stating how proud of a Protestant that he was. Thinking about this now, it is no small wonder that he and Mom ever got together in the first place. From what I have been told, during the time of their youth, both of their parents hailed from the old country.

However, whereas Mom's family were faithful Catholics, Dad's family were devout (and dare I say—proud) Protestants. I don't have to tell how you deep the wounds ran between those factions within Ireland (especially back in those days). But they managed to find each other here in America, and for the most part they had done an admirable job in raising a close-knit family, and that's something that I am proud of to this day (despite some of the issues that we have had to deal with along the way). Well anyway, things appeared to be going well at this time.

This was the beginning of my junior year in high school. I had made the Varsity football team as a linebacker, not yet a starter mind you, but I was on the team and this had me really excited. But, more than that, the family was really excited also. Mom, Dad, my siblings, I mean everybody seemed to revel in the fact that another O'Connor was starring on the Homewood Flossmoor varsity unit. GO VIKINGS! Tonight was the first game of the year, and I was anxious to get out there and do my thing. I mean the crowd and all, and family, friends, and of course females in the stand cheering. Man I could hardly contain my excitement.

The school day went by pretty fast. Everything was sort of a blur. But in a good way, mind you! Once classes were over for the day, I headed straight for the stadium. Once there, I quickly glanced around to see who else had arrived. As far as I could tell, with the exception of the equipment managers and the custodians, I was the only person there. I quickly got dressed, and sat near my locker meditating, thinking about what I was going to do this evening, imagining myself sacking the quarterback, causing a fumble, and running the ball back for a touchdown. I know I know –big dreams! (DOUGLAS SMILES)

I have to admit that a few of my teachers always did say that I had a vivid imagination. But in a good way, mind you! After awhile, I decided to get up and do a little stretching, to sort of loosen up and get the blood flowing. Soon, other team members began to file in and get dressed. Eventually, the coaching staff appeared, gave us a pep talk, and we were off and running out the tunnel.

As soon as we entered the stadium, the crowd began going wild. Rah rah, Boom bah, GOOOOOO VIKINGS! Man, that stuff gave me goose bumps. We went to our end of the field to begin our warm-ups, and not long thereafter the

horn sounded. The officials conducted the coin toss (the other team won the toss). We then went to our assigned sideline and the kickoff team took the field.

We kicked the ball off, the other team received the ball and ran it about twenty yards before a member of our team tackled the opposing kick returner. At that point, our defense took the field. On the first official play from scrimmage, the opposing team's ball carrier ran straight up the middle for approximately six yards before being tackled by one of our linebackers. All of a sudden, I heard the head coach screaming, "O'Connor, get in there."

Our starting linebacker had injured his ankle on the play and had to leave the game. I ran out there, took my position, and the battle was on. Upon taking the field, I was all over the place. When the game (which we won) concluded, I had amassed five tackles, a sack, and yes I also caused a fumble. The only thing missing from my earlier vision was a runback for a touchdown. However, I was not complaining!

Afterwards, I ran towards the stands where my family was supposed to be seated. Mom was there with my two of my siblings. Some of my friends were there. Yet, there was one glaring omission. My father was nowhere in sight. "Where's Dad, didn't he make it," I asked. "No your Father isn't here," said Mom. "Something must have come up", I replied, while wondering what that possibly could have been.

We headed home, and once there, I noticed that the other car was in the driveway. "Looks like Dad is at home," I said, as I ran towards the house to tell Dad of my exploits this evening. Once inside, I didn't have to go far to notice that my father was out cold. Soon, Mom entered the house, and noticed likewise. After trying to wake Dad, she despairingly pronounced that our father was drunk

About an hour or so later, he started to wake up. He rose to his feet, then stumbled back down. Mom paced the floor for several minutes before asking Dad to join her in their bedroom for a little talk. This is when things got really funky! Not two minutes later, we heard Mom cry out and we raced to their room to assess what was transpiring. Once there, I noticed that mom had a bruise on her face, and I became enraged. "You fucking bastard, look what you have fucking done to Mom," I yelled as I barreled into him like I had done with opposing ball carriers only hours earlier.

As it turned out, this was the last straw. When the commotion had died down, Mom asked Dad to leave the house. He obliged! I am not sure exactly when it happened, but Mom eventually went down town to file for divorce. I can't tell you how strange that it felt when it had finally dawned on me that

our family structure would be much different than we had ever known, in that for the first time in our life, we would now be a single-parent family.

Rites of Passage

The time span between Douglas quitting drinking, and the altercation (described above) with his Father spanned the course of five years (from around age 11 to 16 years of age). What transpired in the interim lends further insight into Douglas' early development. Based upon his own recollection, although Douglas has always loved his father, the dynamics of their relationship, indeed the dynamics of their family unit itself, began to change simultaneously with his father's D.U.I. arrest.

As for Douglas' loss of rapport with his father, two factors weighed prominent. First, he no longer wanted to be like his father. Secondly, he resolved to do more to support his mother. As alluded to earlier, the first change began to transpire following his father's arrest for D.U.I. Meanwhile, the latter change occurred subsequent to his father's domestic violence episode.

Starting early in his youth, Douglas had begun emulating his father. Towards this end, he would often imitate his father's actions, words, and deeds -- Not only the (early) drinking, but also the acquisition of various handyman skills that his father possessed such as plumbing, carpentry, and auto mechanics know-how. Douglas was unsure where his father had acquired all of these skills because he had no formal training or education in any of them

Subsequent to changing his opinion regarding drinking in general (more specifically his father's drinking), Douglas also recalled starting to examine other opinions that he had previously held regarding his father. In essence, no longer looked favorably on his father's life style, Douglas thus began to reconsider the direction that he wished his own life path to take.

Whereas previously he had looked forward to graduating from high school, then going to work for the company where his father was employed, he now believed that such a career was beneath him. In Douglas's words: *"For fear of sounding arrogant, I simply could not see myself working construction for 10-12 hours a day, for six days a week; getting off work in the evenings and on the weekend, getting drunk, and repeating the process over and over again."*

In many ways, this period represented a sort of transition for Douglas, a rite of passage if you will. It was during this time that he began to formulate more of his own identity. No longer within his father's shadow, no longer wanting to be there for that matter, Douglas began charting a course that would ultimately lead towards him assuming the persona he now possesses. In short, he soundly rejected the proverbial "like father, like son," preferring instead to become his own person, his own man, if you will.

Douglas further recalled that throughout most of his youth, he generally exhibited an outgoing personality. This he attributed to his Irish heritage, a part of his identity he did not reject wholesale. As he put it, *"At our core, we're a gregarious people...high (bad choice of words) on life, we Irish generally possess the attitude of 'grabbing the bull by the horns,' in that we believe in taking charge of our own affairs. Not just limited to our professional endeavors, this approach also extends into our personal affairs as well."*

This optimism aside, Douglas also recalled occasions that sorely tested his family's self-assured resolve. A couple incidents involved the issue of on-going substance abuse within the home. As Douglas stated it:

It did not take the family long to come to the realization that although these were personal issues, they carried with them ramifications for the entire family, because to some extent, each of us was indirectly affected. A good example of this was that as part of our efforts to help my father combat his alcohol addiction, the

family would (from time to time) participate in family counseling. Some of us, specifically my mother and I, also took advantage of some of the other services (e.g., self-help groups) recommended by the therapist.

Another such incident involved his youngest sister who had some problems with a number of substances; among these alcohol, marijuana, and methamphetamine. According to Douglas, her problems with substance abuse created a very trying time for their entire family. Recalling this time period, Douglas stated, *“Ultimately, after several years, she did enter recovery, and I am pleased to say that she has been in sobriety for almost 25 years now.”*

Interestingly enough, this latter fact represented a source of pride for Douglas himself. According to Douglas, he and his younger sister were the only siblings to ever get into any trouble. As far as how his family responded to these crises, Douglas recalled with pride, *“As these situations arose, we basically rallied around each other. Each of us knew that no matter the circumstances in life, our family would always be there to support us.”*

Recalling his own particular troubles, Douglas believes that more often than not the etiology evolved around his very quick temper, some of which he attributes to his father’s problems. Yet, he also admits that he himself had an anger management problem. According to Douglas, having suffered for an extended period of time with pent-up emotions emanating from his father’s fight with alcoholism, he generally maintained the proverbial *chip on his shoulder*.

Making reference to circumstances that occur on school playgrounds and hallways on a daily basis, Douglas emphasized the fact that some kids can be quite insensitive if

not outright cruel. That being the case, from time to time some punk would make a smart remark or spread a rumor in reference to his family circumstances and Douglas recalled being ready to rumble.

Looking back, he reported not being proud of his actions during that time. He recalled having had a number of fights during his freshman and sophomore year of high school. According to Douglas, he would probably be still fighting today if not for people like Coaches Stenstrom and Panici (pseudonyms used throughout to protect confidentiality), who each pulled him to the side and taught him how to harness his energy in positive ways. Douglas contended that with the exception of his mother, these two gentlemen were more responsible for him making it through his early high school years than anyone else.

In retrospect, Douglas considered it to be ironic that neither of these two gentlemen, nor his mother, could do much to curb his anger until he broke one of his classmate's jaw. According to him, a certain other youth was being obnoxious and just would not stop (i.e., he kept hurling all type of insults). Finally, after Douglas's repeated requests for the other kid to leave him alone, the kid made some snide ethnically charged comment in reference to Irish coffee—or something in relation to guessing what O'Connor had for breakfast or something to that effect. Douglas recalled that at that particular point, he just hauled off and hit the guy so hard that he collapsed instantly. "*I mean,*" Douglas emphasized, "*he dropped like a log!*"

"*People starting running everywhere,*" Douglas recalled, "*up and down the hallway.*" Soon, a few teachers had arrived on the scene. Coach Panici was among the

first staff to arrive. *“Son, what happened?”* Coach asked. With his head bowed, Douglas uttered a disjointed explanation of what had transpired. Douglas recalled that, without being judgmental, Coach instructed him to go sit in his office. A little while later, Coach returned and led him to the principal’s office.

Ultimately, Douglas was expelled from school. His mother expressed total outrage, and asked his father to talk to him. Douglas recalled that the intervention did not go over very well. As soon his father entered the room, Douglas went into a screaming frenzy. *“I don’t want to talk to him. What could he possibly have to tell me?”* Douglas recalled going on and on until suddenly being slapped by his mother. *“Don’t you ever talk to your father in that manner, Douglas. You will respect your father as long as you’re in this household, do I make myself clear?”* his Mother berated him.

Although initially shocked and confused by his mother’s response, he managed to regain his composure. Soon, the magnitude of his actions began to crystallize. What a day he had so far! Getting in trouble at school, disrespecting his father, and eventually being chastened by his mother. He needed to deal with his attitude; he needed to find out what was causing him to be so uptight, he recalled that he kept thinking to himself. Before going to bed that evening, he spent a considerable amount of time in prayer and meditation. By the time that Douglas had finally fallen asleep, although unsure what the future would hold, he did know that from now on he was going to be a better person.

Coming Full Circle

In summary, Douglas provided quite candid information describing his development as a youth. He recalled that, without prompting from anyone else, he decided to forgo future

drinking activities. Douglas also (subsequent to his parents' estrangement) began to make a more conscious effort to help his mother with some of her duties. According to Douglas, he would often perform such chores as washing dishes, running errands, babysitting younger sibling, and helping to fold the laundry.

He also recalled initiating the organization of events such as "alcohol free" balls and dances at his high school. Of course, there were detractors, specifically those who, in his words, "referred to me as a crusader." Yet, for the most part, he was undeterred. "From late adolescence until today," he stated, "I have been aware of the importance of social responsibility. This, along with my family's experience with Dad's alcoholism led me to the career path that I ultimately selected."

Elaborating on the above points, he went on to add:

Eventually, I came to enjoy these gatherings so much that I decided to organize an adolescent support group. Where did I find the other participants? Quite simple! Being of Irish descent, I realized that there was any number of youth experiencing some of the same things that my siblings and I were going through. Thus, it seemed like a great idea to establish such forums for youth to not only socialize but also to gain an "installation of hope," in that we all would be able to see similar situated individuals dealing with similar issues. The reward was being able to solve problems on our own.

Late in my junior year of high school, I made a decision to attend a local (state) school, rather than going away to attend a (private) college. With events transpiring during my junior and senior year in high school, I reasoned to myself that it would be in the family's best interest if I stayed near home. Conscious of the fact that I had always planned to attend a certain private university (Notre Dame), Mom was concerned about my change in plan. Concerned that Mom might attempt to overrule my decision, I quickly alleviated her concerns by saying, "no particular reason, I just want to stay near the family."

Douglas reiterated his propensity for tackling problems head on. "Personally," he stated, "once a problem had been identified, the task then became to find an appropriate solution. Just sitting

back and hoping that it will go away, or that someone else will solve or fix it has never been an option for me. From adolescence onward, this is a philosophy that I have always clung to.”

Douglas also spoke at length about his sense of gratitude toward both of his parents and the influence he believes they had on his life:

To begin with, I generally relied upon advice received from the adults in my daily life. As a younger child, I relied a lot on my father. However, by the time that I approached adolescence, Mom had begun to play a more prominent role. Meanwhile, when confronted with perplexing problems at school, I was often quick to approach teachers for assistance. I learned early on that the crime is not in not knowing, but rather once you determine that you do not know—the crime is when you neglect to seek out those who may have answers.

For most of my youth, I enjoyed a wonderful relationship with both of my parents. Each of them in their own way significantly contributed towards me becoming the person that I am today. Even my father, despite some of the issues that ultimately consumed him, he actually set really good examples for my siblings and me. Until his succumbing to alcoholism, he was the consummate father and husband. Putting his family first, he not only demonstrated for my brother and I how to conduct our affairs, but in a sense, he also enlightened my sisters regarding what to expect (as well as ultimately--what not to accept) in their dealings with their future spouses.

As for my mother, where do I begin! My Mother has always been the rock of our family. She has always been the one constant upon which everyone could depend. Mom set so many excellent examples of how one should conduct their everyday affairs, and in many ways this continues to this very day. But more than that, her greatest example may have been in how she conducted herself in crisis; never panicking, always (it seemed) making the right decision. It was almost like she had a secret play book somewhere that she consulted from time to time.

Among some of her golden rules: Put the Lord-God first in all that you do. Secondly, treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Similarly, think twice before doing something for which you might later be ashamed or otherwise regret. I can still hear her extolling my siblings and I that what we do in public is our image, but what we do in private is our character. According to Mom, be careful what you do in private, because what is done in the dark will come to the light.

Douglas went on to add, “Obviously, the sage advice of mom was always on call (in the back of my mind) and at my ready disposal.” In instances where it may have been unclear regarding

the appropriate courses of action, he recalled oftentimes asking himself, *"What would mom do?"* More times than not, this would suffice.

Similarly, in moments when he was feeling down, Douglas recalled that he could always hear his mother's voice in the background saying, *"After the longest night, the sun will always shine."* Similarly, he recalled his mother often expressing, *"Douglas, when you have done your best, and you are confident that you have done your best, take heart. You have done all that you can do! Just do your best son!"*

"To this very day," he reflected, *"not much has changed! My mother is still the cornerstone of the family. Obviously, I still hold her in the highest reverence. But more than that, I also have a lot of love and respect for my father. Ultimately, he got his act together! Although it took a little more time than our family would have preferred, I think that I can speak for all of my siblings when I say that we are proud of our father for all that he has worked through to reach his current state of sobriety."*

Douglas also spoke with gratitude about adults outside of his family who played a significant role in his upbringing:

Regarding other adults either in the school or community, the first person that comes to mind was my Football coach (who also doubled as the wrestling coach). At a time when I had a lot of questions about life, and when my Father was going through some of his trials and tribulations, Coach Stenstrom was both mentor and big brother. Also, during a time period when I was ashamed of my father and his problems, Coach was nice enough to share some of his family history with me; specifically his own father's travails with alcoholism.

His kindness and understanding helped me to discern that my father had a sickness, and without enabling him to continue his drinking activities, if at all possible we should try to support him. Coach told me that, "it's going to require a very delicate balancing act, and it won't be easy, but if you love your father (and I am sure that you do), he is worth trying to save; providing that he himself is ready for change." In essence, no matter how tempted we had been to help Dad, we would not be able to do it for him.

Another individual who had a profound impact on my development during high school was the H-F basketball coach. Although I was never on the basketball team, I was fortunate enough to develop a solid rapport with Coach Don Panici. This legend of a coach was a surrogate father to every student at Homewood Flossmoor High School. If you had a problem, if you needed to talk, if things got too difficult for you, it was widely known that you could visit the Don's office.

Upon leaving his office, if your problems weren't gone, at the very least you had a viable plan for dealing with them. Coach had an uncanny ability for being able to empower youth to believe that they held some control over not only their daily lives, but their futures as well. A favorite phrase of his was, "Our mission statement is short: We are in the business of building outstanding men and women." And that he did! Didn't matter if you were a basketball player, football player, or non-athlete, he made you feel that you was one of his.

According to Douglas, the only expectations that his parents had for his siblings and him were that first, they would do well in school, go on to college, second, that they would give their very best effort, and third, and would treat other people as they themselves wished to be treated. "My parents" Douglas stated with finality, "believed that if we did that, everything would take care of itself."

Regarding adults in the school and community, Douglas stated that although he was obviously partial to both Coaches Stenstrom and Panici (respectively), he could very easily have given credit to the entire faculty and staff at Homewood Flossmoor High School, as well as all of the teachers in the H-F school district from K-12 for that matter. As he put it: "Most of them appeared genuinely concerned about all of their students, and did not hesitate to encourage each of us to follow our dreams, whatever they may be, and wherever they might carry us."

Finally, Douglas recalled the process whereby he came to discover what he wanted to do with his life. Although he had considered a number of other fields, he kept coming back to behavioral psychology. Primarily, this field drew his interest because he wanted to learn more

about alcoholism as well as other types of substance abuse. *“It probably sounds like a cliché,”* he added, *“but I really did. I wanted to not only learn more about these substances, but also why some people are able to avoid them, yet others are not. Also, why some people can quit, enter recovery, and maintain a state of sobriety over time, yet others cannot.”*

Pursuing this line of thought further, Douglas explained that an equal motivation was to be able to help prevent others from going down the addiction road. Acknowledging that prevention is only part of the equation, he went on to share his desire to help those who were caught-up in the addiction trap:

In the unlikely event that they did, perhaps I could be the one person who could relate and/or empathize with them. In a sense, my experiences as a youth, including the relationships that ensued along the way had a lot to do with not only my career choice, but also the direction that my life has ultimately taken. Suffice it to say that I am a firm believer that we are a product of not only our environments, but our experiences as well.

My Journey

(Auto-Ethnography)

The analysis here begins with a story that I composed based upon self-reflexivity notes and archival data. In constructing this narrative, careful attention was paid to repeated phrases, themes, or events that I have been able to recall through reflexivity. Ultimately, my memories have been rearranged and crafted into this narrative. Ultimately, this story tells a tale of my life as first, at-risk, and later a successful adult. Experiences from later life are strategically placed throughout the manuscript to highlight the connection(s) that may exist between my early youth and subsequent life course.

By electing to share recalled experiences through the use of this medium, I have, in essence, affirmed my belief in the power of the narrative to convey a message or point to the reader through efficient use of words or language. (see: Chekhov, 2004; Maupassant, 2002). In constructing this story, I have chosen to limit the relation of the events and conflict through the perceptions and interpretations of a single [first person] account.

My Journey

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore –

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over –

Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

A Dream Deferred, by Langston Hughes

Setting the Stage

I rolled over to the side of the bed and rubbed my eyes. Returning to consciousness, I then looked out of the window. It's still dark outside! But, where is that commotion coming from. Suddenly, I hear a couple of loud knocks at the door. Before I could respond, I heard my Father-in- Law ask, "Who is it?" "The Police, OPEN THE DOOR," yelled a voice in a commanding tone. "The Police! Who, what could they want this time of morning," I thought to myself.

Soon, my Father-in-Law entered the bedroom and stated in a somber tone, "Toney, the Police are at the door. They would like to speak with you about something." Buttoning my pajama shirt, I arose to answer the door. "What could they possibly want with me? I don't know anything about no crime," I thought to myself.

Approaching the screen door, I noticed what appeared to be two plain clothed" police officers. "Yes, may I help you officer," I asked, making eye contact with one of the gentlemen at the door. "Are you Toney Ford?" the officer asked. "Yes sir, how may I help you," I replied. "We need to talk with you. Would you step outside please," said the officer in a calm, yet stern tone.

As soon as I unlocked the door to step outside, I noticed the silhouettes of a number of other people. Simultaneously, two officers (now standing to opposite sides of me) had each grabbed one of my arms, and began twisting them behind my back. "Toney Ford, you are under arrest. Anything that you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have a right to an attorney, and if you cannot afford one, one will be appointed for you. Do you understand your rights," said one officer, reading me my Miranda rights.

Confused by this chain of events, I nevertheless respond. “Yes sir, I understand about my rights. But, what I don’t understand is why I am being arrested.” “You will find that out when we get down town. All we are at liberty to tell you at this time is that we have a warrant for your arrest,” said one of the officers, as they led me toward the squad car where a couple of other officers awaited with the back door already open.

Scanning the surroundings, I noticed approximately a dozen officers surrounding the perimeter of the house. “What could this possibly be about? This has to be either a mistake or a cruel hoax,” I think to myself, as I am placed into the squad car. As the officers conferred to themselves, I glance back towards the door of the house and I notice that my daughter is now standing in the doorway. “Daddy, Daddy, I want my Daddy,” I could hear her scream.

By now, my emotions have started to run the entire gamut from confusion to shame to anger. Confused about why I am being arrested, ashamed that my daughter has had to witness this incident, and angry that someone has made a terrible mistake. As the squad car drives away, I notice that the sidewalk has started to fill up with people. This included family members concerned about my well being, as well as neighbors curious about what was now transpiring.

Several minutes later, we arrive at the station. I am placed in a holding cell while the officers prepare to book me. Still somewhat perplexed, I soon began to get answers. As one of the officers walked by the cell I asked, “Excuse me officer, do I get a phone call?” Pausing momentarily, he responds, “Yes, you are entitled to a phone call. We are going to have to fingerprint you and take your picture, then you will be granted a phone call.”

Soon, a sheriff's deputy returned to the holding cell. "Mr. Ford," he asks, as he approached. "Yes Sir," I reply. "I have a copy of the Indictment that I would like to read to you. Once we have finished going over it, a copy of this document will be provided to you. Do you understand," he asks. I nod my head yes!

As the deputy starts reading the indictment, I am in total shock. On more than one account! First, I learn that the gist of the indictment spans a period of several months. I have been accused of being the mastermind behind an interstate drug trafficking operation. Also, I have been accused of being a drug kingpin. But, most traumatic of all, my alleged accuser was a member of my own family (a first cousin).

With this latest revelation, I struggle to keep my balance. I stumble back away from the cell opening, to take a seat on the bench. "Oh my God! This can't be true! There must be some kind of mistake. Me being accused of being a drug leader? But, why would George do this? I can't believe that my own flesh and blood would do this to me," these and other thoughts began to consume me.

As I struggle to regain my bearings, the deputy summoned me back towards the cell entrance. "Mr. Ford we need to book you now," he advises me. Trying to regain my composure, I respond to the officer's instructions. Led first towards a wall containing height measurements, my picture is taken. At this moment, I am mindful that I will now have an official mug shot (not unlike countless number of common criminals that I have seen on television over the years).

Next, I am escorted over to a table where my fingerprints are now taken. Once again, my emotions began to run wild. "Oh my God, I will forever be in the F.B.I.'s database. I

am going to be considered a criminal. What is Mom going to say? What is she going to think? What about my children? Their friends are going to ridicule them. My in-laws, they must be horrified. And to think that I was arrested at their home. What will their neighbors have to say?" my mind went on and on.

"What about my wife? What will our friends think? What about my peers? What are they going to think of me. And what about my Church brethren? How on earth will I be able to face them? Toney, you are going to have to get a grip. You are going to have to calm down," I tell myself, trying to return to some type of normalcy.

Almost as sort of a respite, I hear the deputy summoning me to make a phone call. "Who should I call first? Do I try to call an attorney. No, that's not a good idea because (1) I don't know of any by name, and (2) they may want a down payment or retainer fee or something. I should probably call my wife. But, then again, I am not sure if she has gone home, or whether she is still at her parent's home," these and other thoughts consume me as I approach the phone.

Reaching for the dial, I decided it would be best if I called my father-in-law, and if my wife has gone home, he could relay a message to her. Or if she is still at her parents, I could advise her personally. Although my wife was still there, my father-in-Law insisted on a more prominent role. "Toney, what are you charged with, and how much is your bond. We need to get you home, and we can discuss everything else later," he said, attempting to take charge of the situation.

Needless to say, this was quite a relief. For the first time since this incident began, I was now starting to calm down a bit. The bond was \$75,000 (which required a 10% cash

down payment to be paid to a bondsman). Within the hour, the bond was posted, and I was released. As we walked to the car, my father-in-law advised me that he had hired an attorney for me and that we would be meeting with him later that afternoon.

On the ride back to my in-laws home, the questions began coming from everywhere. My wife wanted to know what this was all about. Upon informing them what I knew, my mother-in-law wanted to know “how and why someone could do such a thing to their relative?” Soon, both my wife and mother-in-law began crying, praying to Jesus, and mumbling other unintelligible utterances. Attempting to lighten up the atmosphere, my father-in-law announced (matter-of-factly) that everything was going to be alright.

Although the situation was diffused at that time, unforeseen to any of us, the matter would get much worse over time. But, we met with the attorney, and discussed not only the indictment, but also any information that I had which may help with my defense. In contributing towards my own defense, I decided to tell my lawyer everything that I knew.

How Did I Get Here?

I began first with how a few of my Reserve Officers Training Corps (R.O.T.C.) brethren initially approached me asking for a favor. In light of the fact that I was from Chicago, they wanted to know if I maintained contact with my former homeboys (i.e., neighborhood youth I grew up with). When informed that I did, they wanted to know if I could hook them up with a connection for acquiring drugs. Surprised not only that they were interested in drugs, but also that they would ask such a favor of me, I informed them in no uncertain words that, “I don’t mess around with narcotics, and prefer not to get involved.”

They all said that it was cool. For awhile! Then a couple of months later a couple of my fellow Cadets started using little innuendos and remarks that basically they were still interested in acquiring some merchandise (i.e., drugs) from Chicago, and that they wish that I would hook them up with someone that I knew there.

Although, there was never any overt pressure applied to me, I ultimately consented and agreed to speak with a couple of my homeboys about doing business with them. Upon broaching the subject with my former friends in Chicago, I was advised that they did not wish to meet any new friends. However, if I would get the prospective customers' money, that they (my Chicago friends) would give me the drugs to give to them (my R.O.T.C. brethren).

Upon returning to the Cedar Valley, I contacted my fellow [R.O.T.C.] cadets to debrief them. Ecstatic with this news, they agreed to the arrangements. With that, and I began my role as middle man to the transactions. As an inducement for my participation in this enterprise, both parties would compensate me for my involvement. Before I knew it, the transactions became larger and larger. First, an ounce. Then a couple of ounces, a quarter of pound, half a pound, pound, and ultimately a kilo(gram).

Expressed in financial terms, the point becomes more graphic. Initially, I would receive \$200 from each party. By the end of my involvement, I was receiving over \$2,000 from each side. On a few transactions, my total commission was over \$5,000. Quite a sum for generally less than 12 hours of service on my part.

By this time, I had begun to get paranoid, and decided to advise both parties that I would not be participating in any more transactions. To my amazement, all parties said

that they understood, and I thus ceased to be involved with illicit drugs. Or so I thought! Several months later, my cousin (George) was arrested for statutory rape of a minor. After being arrested, he was released on bond.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, George had obtained a "limited use immunity agreement" with the district attorney to help them fight drug trafficking in Northeast Iowa. As part of his immunity, he agreed to wear a wire and record drug activities for the D.A.'s office. Initially, he approached me for assistance in acquiring drugs. After informing him that I was not involved in drug trafficking and would not be getting involved anymore, he then wanted to know if I would educate him on how to sell drugs.

Because he was a close family member, I really did not give much thought as to why he would be making such a request. So I began telling him what I knew, even told him about how I had helped to facilitate the transactions described heretofore. This went on for several weeks, and then all of a sudden, George stopped asking questions. Unknown to me at the time, the District Attorney had advised George that he felt his office now had enough information to take to the Grand Jury.

An indictment was returned naming me as a key principal in a drug conspiracy. Pursuant with applicable statute, I was facing up to ten years in prison. Subsequently, I began preparing for my defense. Albeit, neither my attorney nor I could understand how I could be charged with a conspiracy, when no one else was indicted. To both our surprises, the law now recognized "unindicted coconspirators." What this meant was that for whatever reason, despite being in control of information that others were allegedly involved, no one else could be indicted absent cooperation (i.e., testimony) from me.

Moreover, neither my attorney nor I could understand how I could be indicted for drug trafficking charges when (1) I had never been caught selling any drugs, and (2) no customers were ever brought forth with whom I had ever sold drugs to, and (3) the government was not in possession of any drugs attributable to me. Again, to both our surprises, the audiotapes were considered evidence of my drug trafficking activities.

Despite our best efforts, a conviction was ultimately returned, and I was sentenced to ten years in prison. From arrest to conviction, to sentencing, the process took almost two years. Meanwhile, my family situation began to deteriorate on a number of fronts. My wife became increasingly frustrated with the entire chain of events. Although we had several attempts at reconciliation, by my third month of incarceration, she had decided to go on with her life. Although terribly disappointed, I realized that despite what my cousin had done to me, my decision-making (or lack thereof) had a lot to do with these turn of events.

Complicating matters, estrangement ensued within the entire family. Although many family members voiced that not only what George had done was despicable, but also that they wanted nothing else to do with him, his mother and siblings felt that people were unfairly singling him out. As far as they were concerned, "nobody told Toney to get involved with drugs. He knew what he was doing was wrong." Thus, a chain of events were set in motion that has had ramifications for our family over two decades now.

In the interim, I had to endure a brief [but regrettable] term of incarceration. First, there was (obviously) the loss of freedom. Being confined to an environment against your will. Not allowed to go and come as you please. Secluded from other citizens, isolated

from family, friends, and loved ones, I soon gained a greater appreciation for the concept of freedom, including Patrick Henry's motto of "Give me liberty, or give me death.

Yet, there were many more hardships and or slights to endure. From the loss of privacy to the loss of respect, the prison experience was one that I vowed I would never subject myself to having to endure again. Regarding the former, having to sleep in common areas (i.e., open dormitory style) and having to utilize what for lack of a better phrase amounted to public restroom and shower facilities, your self esteem is called into question a lot. On a number of occasions, I found myself asking myself the question, "Toney, what on earth have you gotten yourself into?"

As for loss of respect, where do I begin? To know and understand that you have been classified as less than a first-class citizen, being referred to as a criminal if you will, has such a stigmatizing, even traumatizing effect. Awareness of the fact that you have also subjected your family to similar degradations is equally devastating. For instance, although they themselves have not done anything wrong, inevitably they are forced to endure the proverbial "whisper campaigns" from peers, colleagues, and others.

Yet through it all, one thing that I promised myself that I would never surrender would be my dignity. Although others may perceive me as a criminal, I would never come to subscribe to the convict mentality. Towards this end, despite the fact that I was now in prison, I would never allow prison to be in me. In short, no matter how long my stay there, I vowed that unlike many others that I encountered on a daily basis, I would never become institutionalized. I would never subscribe to prison norms that an inordinate number of other inmates appeared to internalize.

Speaking of which, television and other mediums have painted a picture of prison that irrespective of its connection with reality, nevertheless does extend a glimpse of prison that is less than flattering -- not only the high prevalence of violence, but also the high rate of recidivism among offenders. What is often left unsaid is that in many instances, many people are incarcerated simply because a life of crime was all that their environments had afforded them.

On the other hand, I myself retained other options. The irony was that whatever alternatives were available to me now had been available to me all along. However, I had somehow allowed myself to become drawn into illegal activities. Conscious of the fact that I had let a lot of people down, I was motivated to work on myself, to prove to myself as well as others that I was not this person that was now in prison.

Except for a brief period of youthful indiscretion, I had led an otherwise law-abiding and productive life. Cognizant of, and emboldened by this fact I immediately began contemplating how I might reverse the stigma that I was now afflicted with. How could I turn this situation around? How could I begin charting a new course or direction for my life? How could I begin making amends to society for my egregious behavior?

While a lot of my contemporaries sat around feeling bitter about their fate, blaming others for their afflictions, and plotting their respective revenge, I resolved to take a different approach. It was erroneous thinking that led to my coming to prison. Errors of thought led to egregious actions, and ultimately my choices wrought dire consequences.

The solution, I felt, lay in changing my attitude. Instead of simply serving my own self interests, I would begin looking out for the welfare of others as well. Resolving that I

did not have to wait until my release from custody to start working towards this goal, I began volunteering to help throughout the prison, in capacities ranging from tutoring fellow inmates for taking the General Equivalency Degree (G.E.D.) exam, to serving as peer sponsor of inmates under suicide watch, to counseling youthful offenders on the consequences of violence.

Moreover, rather than simply sitting on the sideline, I would also be taking a more active role in community affairs. This I resolved could also be started now, as opposed to waiting until my eventual return to society. When the prison began a pilot program designed to involve inmates with governing themselves, I was one of first to volunteer.

Upon learning that one of the housing units was being converted into a sort of community environment, I decided that I would run for elective office. As fate would have it, I was elected as the first mayor of the Moral Development Community (as part of Behavioral Modification Program). Along the way, I received a number of awards from prison administrators which ultimately led to my case being submitted for special review with the Iowa Board of Parole after only ten months of incarceration.

Initially hesitant to attend the Parole Hearing for fear of being turned down, my family convinced me that it was God's will for me to go before the Board. Mama faced it squarely asking, "How do you know that the Lord does not have a blessing for you?" So I went to the Hearing! I barely slept the night before, tossing and turning pondering what questions they might ask, as well as what I might say in response.

On the morning of the Hearing, I quickly dressed and headed for the Chow Hall. Although I could not bring myself to eat, I felt at ease away from the Housing Unit

(sitting around waiting for my name to be called). So I sat in the dining hall talking with fellow inmates about a sundry of subjects. Just as I was about to return to the Housing Unit, I heard my name on the intercom system. "Ford, report to the Lieutenant's office."

The moment of reckoning was here! Although located less than several hundred feet from the dining hall, this was one of the longest walks of my life. "What if they turn me down?" I kept asking myself. My concerns were totally unwarranted! After less than two minutes of conversation, one of the five Board Members asked rather matter-of-factly, "Mr. Ford, why are you in prison?"

Not wanting to appear patronizing, I replied rather simply, "I broke the law." "Yes, we know that, but what did you do," asked another member. "Oh, I understand. I sold drugs," I replied. "No, I don't think you do understand. We know you broke the law. We know you sold drugs. But, your case carried not only probation, but also a deferred judgment, yet nowhere in the file is there any discussion of either," said yet another Board Member.

"Oh, okay! Well, basically I think that I made the District Attorney or somebody mad or something," I said. "So what do you believe that you may have done to tick him or her off?" asked the Board Chairperson. "Well basically, I have a conspiracy case as you can see from the file. Yet, I am the only person that has ever been charged. The reason being because I refused to give them up," I said. "So you refused to testify, and the D.A. basically threw the book at you, is that it," the Chairperson continued.

"One final question, Mr. Ford, and I think that I know the answer to it already. Have you learned anything, and if so what," asked the Chairperson. "Yes Ma'am, I have

learned something! I learned that my mother had been right in a lot of things that she told my siblings and I growing up. Such as, one mistake can change your whole life. Also, what's done in the dark will come to the light. And when making decisions that impact your life, keep in mind that the same decision may impact the lives of many others," I answered.

With that, I was asked to step outside for a moment. Summoned back inside approximately a minute later, I was informed that I was being granted a Special Parole. Said the Chairperson, "Mr. Ford, we see a lot of inmates as we travel around to each facility. We see a lot of individuals who belong in prison; from time to time, we occasionally encounter an individual who has no place in prison. In our opinion, you fit in this latter category. It is unfortunate that a young person as gifted as you ever had to endure an experience as you have. Yet, we firmly believe that you have learned something, and that you can yet make something of your life. God bless you young man, and please take care of yourself."

Just like that, I was being given a second chance, a new lease on life if you will. Yet, for me it represented much more than that. As with the prison population in general, for the past ten months, most of my daily decisions were already made on my behalf. What time I would get up or lay down each day? What time I would eat each day? And so on! Now that I was returning to society, it would be incumbent of me to make sound and otherwise responsible decisions.

Additionally, my return to society would also necessarily involve resuming some relationships, establishing others, and reevaluating yet others. Along the way, I would

also have to make better decisions. Then there was the aspect of hobbies and other interests, these too would require a reexamination. Which ones would I no longer engage in, and which new ones would I select? Answers to these and other questions lay imminent. My very success (or dare I say freedom) depended on how I approached and otherwise addressed each of these.

But, where should I start? After careful and exhaustive thought, I decided that the starting point for any inquiry should be a revisit of my past -- things that were good, as well as the things that were not so good. Regarding the former, these correlate to protective factors, or expressed differently, factors that might sustain me. Similarly, the latter corresponds with risk factors, or rather, things that might hinder or limit my chances for success. What follows below is a narrative of this inquiry, encapsulating experiences from early youth through young adulthood. For me, it was not enough to declare that I would change or had changed, if I had no idea of how and why I had arrived at this destination in the first place.

Scion of the South

The second of six children (three boys, and three girls), my life began on an autumn morning in October 1962. My father owned and managed a country store and café in the Mississippi Delta, and my mother was a stay at home mom. Our family situation pretty much remained the same from the time of my birth, until around the time that I was nine years old. After that time, our family pretty much became a single-parent household until the arrival of my step-father a few years later. Nevertheless, for me, it was never the same as having my natural father involved in my daily life.

My earliest recollections stem from moments spent with my grandmother. Looking back to this early period, I am comforted by the fact that, this wonderful woman was the first person to make me feel that I was someone special. I recall her rocking me on her lap, singing to me, and frowning at anyone who dared raise their voice in my general direction. I recall my mother warning my grandmother that she was going to spoil me and that no one else would be able to tolerate being around me.

Legend has it that grandma was charmed by me from the first moment that she laid eyes on me. There I was, a premature (2-7/8 pounds) bundle of lungs and heartbeat, and not much else. My mother tells the story to this very day of how I bore a strong resemblance to the figure that later became known as "ET." The story continues with how when it came time for the family to take me home, no one would step forward except my grandma.

So we went home, and of course for Black folks at that time in the Mississippi Delta, there were no fancy baby items such as bassinets or cribs or stuff like that. But rather, most Black parents allowed their newborns to sleep in the bed with them. Yet, not so much as how I looked (smile - from what I've been told), as for my tiny size, my mother was unsure what to do with me. Well, good old grandma decided to create a sort of crib for me by strategically placing pillows in and around one of the dresser drawers and this became my first bed.

Apparently after several short weeks I had gained enough weight whereby my elders felt comfortable assigning me to a normal bed. However, rather than sleeping in my parent's room (Smile! You think bedroom politics were involved?), I somehow ended up

sleeping in my grandmother's room. Fine—with me! Grandma was always so doting with me that things kind of worked out just fine—don't you think? But yeah, I continued to bond with my grandmother, and this continued until one dreadful day mama pulled me to the side to inform me that I would no longer be sleeping so close to grandma.

You can probably imagine the hurt and confusion that raced through my little mind, yet as time went on, the reason behind these new arrangements were even more traumatic than the actual change itself. As it turned out (unbeknownst to me with my four year old level of understanding at that time) grandma had suddenly become very ill. She had contracted leukemia and the prognosis was not very good at all.

As the matter was later explained to me, my parents were worried that the energy that young kids generally exhibit would cause me to somehow injure grandma while I was either attempting to get in or out of the bed. So, for the first time in my young life, I had to sleep alone. Bummer, huh? Unfortunately, grandma's condition only worsened. Then suddenly, one day grandma was gone!

Although losing a close family member is generally a traumatic experience for almost any family, for us, the impact was even more devastating. What I have heretofore not mentioned is the whereabouts of my grandfather through all of this. Grandpa was already deceased; having died before having the opportunity to see any of his grandchildren or vice versa.

From what I have been told, grandpa ran a "juke joint" at the time of his death. In addition to dancing, drinking, and stuff like that, a good number of the patrons also participated in after hour gambling activities. On one particular evening in question, one

of grandpa's closest friends grabbed his pistol to confront another gentleman that he believed had been cheating.

Upon realizing what was transpiring, grandpa stepped in front of his friend to attempt to diffuse the situation. Simultaneously, the gun discharged. With that, my grandfather was gone! -- leaving behind a widow, several children (none more than 18 years of age, and a couple of them younger than ten years old). Now, only seven short years later, this side of the family was left without both the patriarch and matriarch of the family, as, neither my mother nor any of her siblings were older than twenty four years old.

Not until many years later did it dawn upon me the degree of trauma that my family had lived through. I recall visiting with friends (and distant relatives) over the years and longing for a relationship with my grandparents like many of my peers shared with their grandmother or grandfather. More than four decades later, the effects of these terrible losses still permeate our family on a number of fronts, and across multiple generations.

Not only were my siblings and I deprived of the opportunity to experience either of our grandparents, but my mother and her siblings were robbed of their right to seek the wise counsel of their parents. Inevitably mistakes were made regarding parenting decisions that otherwise may not have been. Also, with knowledge failing to be passed from generation to generation (i.e., that normally exists within most families), links to our family heritage may have been forever lost.

Looking back in retrospect, only one other incident even remotely comes close to eliciting the emotion that I felt with my grandma's passing. One of the reasons that this particular event stands out as is because it occurred on the first day of school during my

fifth grade. On Monday morning (September 1972), my oldest brother (Mike) and I awoke at the break of dawn. Wanting to get an early start, as we got dressed this morning, we discussed amongst ourselves what lay ahead with the upcoming year.

One of the enduring promises of each new school year was the new friendships that lay ahead. Kids moving out of the hood, others moving into the neighborhood. This year, we were changing schools as well. Having recently moved into the Magnolia Courts, we were now in a new area ourselves. More than that, we were moving up. For most Blacks within the Mississippi Delta, the Magnolia Courts was considered the good life. Most households were comprised of two parent families; with at least one, if not both parents working.

Although a housing project, the Magnolia Courts managed to avoid the negative connotations associated with similar housing infrastructure located within northern industrial big cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Newark. Taking pride in this, the [M.C.] went to great lengths to ensure that appropriate tenants resided here. It was under this context that we approached this new segment of our young lives. By the time mama awoke this morning, we had already bathed, gotten dressed, eaten breakfast, and were now sitting and watching episodes of *Leave it to Beaver*.

The normal first day protocol occurred. Most students arrived at school on time, early in fact -- perhaps the only day of perfect attendance the whole year. Excitement in the air, everywhere in fact! Home room assignments, classroom assignments, old friendships being rekindled, updates on latest gossip, allegiances reaffirmed, new friendships developing; all packed in one five to six hour affair.

Ultimately, the school day ended, and everyone headed home. By now, most people have decided upon their cliques for the year. Who they will hang out with, walk home with, etc... But also, who they don't like, and who is to be avoided. Because we have been in our new neighborhood for several weeks now, Mike and I had established beforehand our own crew to "kick it with." This group consisted of Leonard Earl (his uncle is married to one of our aunts), Clifton Ely (our mothers grew up in the same neighborhood), and Luther McCourt (our mothers were long term members of the same church).

Having discussed and debated this subject for the past couple weeks, our little group had planned to take on another neighborhood group for an "end of the summer" marble contest, with the winning team getting all of the other team's marbles. Although most teams always kept some (by simply not bringing everything to the meet) of their marble collection, these events were still quite popular among neighborhood youth as bragging rights were also heavily at stake.

As part of the conditions for this contest, the winner between these two groups was had agreed to play the winner of two other groups the following day. Unfortunately, the next round would never take place. At least not this year, at least not for members of our group! Although winning this first event, collectively, we would be unable to ever compete as a unit again.

After the contest on this particular evening, each of us went home to alert our parents of our whereabouts (or checking in, as we called it), and to inquire as to whether any special chores or instructions awaited us. Once we had all checked in and gotten

clearance from our parents we would generally meet up at a pre-determined location (one of our front yards) to engage in whatever activity that we had previously planned for the evening.

As Michael and I headed outside, we were met by Luther McCourt on our front lawn. “Hey ya’ll, I got a quarter, do ya’ll want to go get some candy,” he asked excitedly. Looking at one another, Mike and I replied almost simultaneously, “We have to go ask mama first.” Upon consulting with mama, we learned that dinner was almost done, and we would have to eat first.

We returned outside, and informed Luther of our small dilemma. “I’ll bring ya’ll something back,” said Luther, before heading off towards the store a couple of blocks away. Heading back inside for dinner, Michael and I had soon eaten, before inquiring whether we could return outside to play. Upon receiving clearance from mama, we went back outside to wait for Luther to return.

A little later that evening, Mrs. McCourt (Luther’s Mom) approached our house, sobbing almost uncontrollably, before asking whether our mother was at home. Pointing inside, we told her “yes”; before following her back inside to see what was bothering her. Noticing us lingering around, mama promptly instructed us, “ya’ll know ya’ll ain’t supposed to sit around grown folks when they talking. Go to your room, and don’t let me have to tell you again.”

From what Mike and I could gather so far, we had reasoned amongst ourselves that something terribly had happened to Luther. His mother was saying something to the effect that, “they (meaning angry white folks) had taken Luther.” He had been accused of

allegedly whistling at a white woman, and in Mississippi in 1972 this was an unforgivable sin. Ultimately that evening, mama sat Mike and I down and began trying to explain to us what was going on.

“I ‘spose ya’ll saw Luther’s mom crying, and ya’ll wondering what’s going on,” said Mama, looking in our eyes to gauge our reaction. “Yes ma’am,” we replied in unison. Well, “they (white folks) accusing Luther of some horrible things. They done taken him to reform school, and they won’t let his mama see him. She don’t know what to do. I would be beside myself if something was to happen to one of my boys,” said mama, continuing to stare intensely into our respective faces. (Recalling this experience many years later, I could still see the dual look of concern and fright in the eyes of this woman who for my siblings and me was always thought of as all-powerful and fearless).

As Dad arrived home later that evening, Mama quickly went from looking out the window to coming into our room to see if we were still awake. “Ya’ll need to go to sleep,” she said, with emphasis on the sleep (meaning RIGHT NOW). From past experiences, Mike and I realized that this meant that they had grown up things to talk about. I did not know about Mike, but I wasn’t about to go to sleep, at least not anytime soon. Mama began informing my father of the events of the day, most notably the incident surrounding Luther. As mama got deeper and deeper into her concern for what had happened, her voice began taking on a more frantic tone. After awhile, she began yelling at my father, “they’re not going to get my boys, we can’t let them get our boys.”

Allowing mama to vent for what seemed like forever (but probably closer to several seconds), my father began trying to calm her down. “It’s gonna be okay Joe Ella. It’s

gonna be okay baby. The boys are fine. Ain't nothing gonna happen to them," he said. Finally, Mama began trying to regain her composure. Sniffing occasionally, and pausing from time to time to dry her eyes, she ultimately turns towards Dad and states, "we're getting out of here. I'm gonna call Ruby and Beatrice (My aunts in Chicago and Iowa, respectively) and have them look for us a place."

I can still recall my father's initial reaction. "Damn it Joe Ella, damn it baby, we don't have to make such drastic moves. Everybody knows that shit like that happens from time to time. Folks just have to be more careful with where they let they kids go unattended. Hell everybody knows how those white folks are. They always trying to make an example out of Black boys. That's how they 'spose to keep us in line -- so that we don't get too big for our britches."

"I can't believe I'm hearing you say that. Don't you care bout what happens to our boys. You sound like you okay with risking our boys with them white folks. They might like to keep black boys in they place, but we don't have to subject our boys to that. We got options baby. Bea and Ruby them always talking bout how better that things are in the North. They been saying for a long time that they don't understand what we doing still down here with these crazy white folks."

"Dog gonit (a term used by southern Blacks in place of *Damn It*) baby, they got white folks in the north too," said Dad, trying to regain control of the conversation. "Yeah, but they ain't like these white folks down here. They believe in letting Black folks live like other human beings. They believe in letting Black kids grow up to be somebody. Well, my mind is made up, and me and the chillens are leaving soon as we can. Either you

coming with us, or we leaving without you. We got to do something to protect our boys, to give em a chance to do something with they life,” said mama.

The two of them continued to debate this issue for the next few months, with noticeable friction ultimately engulfing their relationship. Within a couple of months, my siblings and I went from seldom hearing our parents raise their voice, to watching them argue almost every day. As the Thanksgiving holiday neared, my mother had carefully planned our exodus from Mississippi.

Although none of us (my siblings and I) agreed with Mama’s decision to leave Dad, we were powerless to prevent it. Personally, I will never forget that fateful day. It is a moment that is permanently seared in my memory. My Dad had just left for work. As soon as Dad’s car turned the corner, Ms. Annie Lee (one of my mother’s closest friends) pulled in front of our house. Almost out of nowhere, mama began carrying bags out to the car . “When did she have time to do all this packing,” I kept thinking to myself.

Once they had secured our belongings in the trunk, they began rounding us (my siblings and I) up one by one. “Where we going mama,” I asked as we drove away from the house. “We going out of town,” she replied. Yeah, but where we going, and what about Daddy,” I asked. “Chile, I’m gonna tell you once and one time only to stay in a child’s place,” said mama with a look in her eyes that said “ENOUGH ALREADY, if you know what’s good for you.”

So the inquiry ended, at least for the time being. Soon, the car pulled into the Greyhound bus station. We were hoarded out one by one. Michael and I were each instructed to watch two of our younger siblings while mama and Miss Annie Lee checked

our bags into the terminal. Once done with the luggage, mama rejoined us as we waited for our bus to arrive.

“Now boarding at Gate 17 (this number has been easy to recall over the years as this is my older brother’s birthday) the Greyhound bus for Chicago and all points in between. “Let’s go,” said mama abruptly leading us towards our departure terminal. Boarding the bus, a flood of emotions encompassed me. “We headed to Chicago-huh? What about Dad? How will he know where we at? When will we see him again,” I pondered. Exiting the terminal, a gripping thought surfaced, “our lives will never be the same again.”

Throughout my youth, I enjoyed very cordial relationships with a number of adult family members, obviously my mother, my grandmother (early on); as well as several of my aunts. After my grandmother fell ill and ultimately died, my mother became the central adult figure in my life. Whereas my grandmother was the first person to make me feel that I was special, my mother was instrumental in keeping me focused on what was required for future success.

However, the irony is that the one person that I would have liked to have maintained an ongoing rapport with was my father. Of course, as fate would have it, this was not to be (at least subsequent to our migration to the North). Suffice it to say that, this was a source of great anguish for me during my adolescence.

Yet, there were a number of other adults who had a significant impact on my development. These ranged from (other) family elders, to teachers, coaches, pastors, and the like. Indeed, a number of these individuals not only impacted my life as a youth, but also have made significant contributions to me becoming the person that I am today. The

first individual that I recall making a positive impact on me was my second grade teacher (Mrs. Shaw). I remember that when I first started school I had a speech impediment. The times have changed, but with the lack of information back then, it was not unusual for “inaccurate assessments” to occur.

Indeed, there were some stakeholders at Eliza Clark Elementary School who mistook my speech impediment for a learning disability, so much so that they were preparing to place me in special education. Fortunately, Ms. Shaw would have none of it. She was adamant and firm that rather than placing me in such a class, what was actually warranted was some type of speech therapy. Ultimately, I was afforded therapy, and a tremendous travesty was averted.

The next person who had a tremendous impact on my early childhood was my fourth grade teacher (Dr. Wayne Orr). I remember his name so vividly because he was the first “white person” that I can recall that really had a positive effect on me, as well as my educational path. One day a couple of my classmates and I were seated in the back of the classroom joking around. Mr. Orr sat there the entire time saying nothing. Just as the bell rang signaling the end of the school day, he announced, “Mr. Ford, I need to see you after class.” I have to tell you that right away I knew what it was about, and this made me somewhat mad (alright very mad).

Of course, I didn’t tell him that! But, I didn’t have to! He began, “Mr. Ford, you are probably wondering why I made you stay after class when all three of you were clowning around. Well, we got the results back from the Iowa Basic Skills test, and to make a long story short, you have tremendous potential. In fact, with proper guidance, you can grow

up to be anything that you want to be in life. The sky is the limit for you. As for your two comrades, they will probably be clowning around ten, twenty years from now.

I would be derelict in my duty, if I did not take the time to get you charted on the right course. So I am going to discipline you, not because I do not like you, but rather because it would be such a waste for you to throw your gifts away.” After his speech, lecture, admonishment, or whatever it might be called, I was given three paddles across my hand. Although it stung to no end, I took my punishment like a man. In fact, given the state of race relations in Mississippi at that time (and my understanding at that time) it made me feel good to know that this “white man” thought so highly of me, that he would want to try to save me.

The Migration North

Beginning with the incident with Dr. Orr (described above), I had resolved to apply myself academically. Towards this end, I decided it might be a good idea to get my first library card. On many of days, I would either go sit in the library and read for hours on end, or if the family were traveling out of town to visit relatives for the weekend, I would often check out a couple of books to take along. As fate would have it, books became sort of a refuge for me once our family moved to the north.

To a large extent, the time spent with my books made up somewhat for the time that I was no longer able to spend with my father. Similarly, spending time teaching myself to read, had the cumulative effect of motivating me to learn other activities on my own as well. Whereas most young males have their father to teach them how to play basketball,

football, baseball, etc., personally, by the time that I was of the age where I had become interested in activities such as these, my father was nowhere in sight.

I remember attending certain sporting events (including practices) that either my friends or older brother were involved with. I also recall volunteering to help the coaching staff on a number of occasions, in a variety of capacities ranging from carrying water back and forth, issuing equipment and uniforms, and keeping team statistics. Although I never acquired significant athletic ability, I was able to gain a greater knowledge of and appreciation for a number of sports. I became a sort of “unofficial” assistant coach as I generally knew more about respective assignments than did many of the players themselves. On a number of occasions where players had forgotten their assignments, they would approach me for advice (not wanting the coaching staff to know of their negligence).

Thus, I was able to apply many of the skills that I had acquired as “team manager” activities towards my academic endeavors. For instance, keeping team statistics helped me to refine my math skills. Likewise, I was able to acquire planning and organizing skills as a result of helping the coaching staff(s) coordinate team activities.

Meanwhile, by the time that I entered junior high school, I was no longer associating with kids my age. For instance, in seventh grade, I was hanging with sixth graders, and by ninth grade, I was hanging with seventh or eighth graders. Of course, by the time that I entered tenth grade, I stood only 5 ft 2 in tall, and barely weighed a hundred pounds.

Although at first glance, one might wonder what would size have to do with anything, yet, from a social competence perspective, the further that I grew apart from

my peers, the more I also began to withdraw from a lot of activities that my peers were involved with, so much so that I sort of became an introvert. Because of my paranoia about not fitting in with youth my age, I started to become sort of my own person.

Looking back, it was sort of strange. On the one hand, the kids that I went to school with everyday were much bigger than me, so I did not feel comfortable hanging with them. On the other hand, the kids that I did hang with were a year or two younger, and although physically we were the same size, as far as stages of mental development, I was years ahead of them.

Eventually, I began to question if and or whether I fit in anywhere. This ultimately led to my becoming somewhat of a recluse. To compensate for lack of social confidence, I continued to immerse myself in books. I would read anything that I could get my hands on, and I would use books to teach me about things that a lot of my peers were able to attain by socializing with other teens.

Although I believe that I (as do most people) have certain internal instincts which helped me to navigate the world around me, I also believe that whatever measure of problem-solving skills that I possessed, my path would have been much more difficult absent the support and influence of elders who have gone before me. Thus, whenever I was confronted with peer pressure and other temptations, although it was my personal resolve to avoid certain high risk activities such as drinking, fighting, or stealing, inevitably, I would end up relying upon advice received from my mother to guide me.

Personally, so much of my youth was punctuated by my mother's presence. For fear of sounding overly dramatic, Mama occupied such a role in the lives of my siblings and I

that it is difficult for me (in retrospection) to think of a single attribute that I may have retained, that Mom did not influence in one way or another.

Nevertheless, if there was any one area where I had to learn to make it on my own, it was in education. As previously alluded to, my mother had a very limited education. During the time of her youth, she nor her siblings had [the luxury of pursuing] an education because economics at that time dictated that every able body help to till the cotton fields. Thus, although Mama was our greatest supporter, she was of marginal help to us in figuring out difficult homework or other coursework.

Ever cognizant of this dilemma, I developed a sort of steely resolve, that basically said, "it's all on you." Whether you sink or swim, it's all on you. Don't expect much help, because if you do and it does not materialize, then what? Since I could not answer that question, I simply became a doer, in that I decided that it would be best not to wait for help to come.

Thus, unlike a number of my peers, as I entered high school, I had begun thinking seriously about my future. First, I had now made a more conscious effort to research different professions, in hopes of discovering a field that I would like to pursue as a career. Whereas a lot of my peers were having delusions (of grandeur) of playing in the National Football League (NFL) or National Basketball Association (NBA), I quickly realized that an individual has a much better chance of becoming a doctor or lawyer, as opposed to becoming a professional athlete.

Similarly, I realized that not only was it important to focus on a career that has "less exclusive entrance barriers," but also that would afford a measure of longevity.

Ultimately, not only was I able to discern just how difficult that it was to become a professional athlete, I also realized that even if one was fortunate enough to be able to make it, he would also have to keep in mind that these are also very short careers in contrast with some of the other professionals. Accordingly, I did not spend much time chasing some of the dreams that other inner city youth tended to pursue.

Above all, I realized fairly early that getting good grades was the key to my future, as this would likely have a major impact regarding whether or not I would be able to attend college. At any rate, I was one of a very select few youth from my neighborhood who even planned to attend college. Indeed, the only others that I recall expecting to go to college were several star athletes and a group of girls who were sponsored by a certain nonprofit foundation.

One of the key contributors to my success in high school was my tenth grade African-American History teacher (Mr. William Clayton). Now here was a man who really made an impact on me at a time when I was very impressionable. It is no secret that adolescence is a time when many youth are in search of their own identity, when they began trying to make sense of the world around them. In this regards, Mr. Clayton was a beacon of hope (a reservoir of knowledge, if you will). Yea, more than that!

He possessed what I considered to be keys to my African-American heritage. For some time, I had begun to have thoughts that something was missing from the histories that we--my peers/classmates were being taught. There were very few, if any, people of color being mentioned. I have always been the inquiring type; in that I generally always seemed to come up with questions for which I wanted answers.

Within Mr. Clayton's class, I finally started to get some of those answers. Where do I began: Beginning with the people living along the Tigris and Euphrates River (beginning of civilization; to the Egyptians including Imhotep (father of medicine, centuries before Hippocrates ever came on the scene); to Hammurabi (and his codes, which were the prelude to modern laws and statutes); to the Egyptian Pyramids (modern man is hard pressed to build infrastructures lasting a hundred years); to Cleopatra and King Tut (modern science has difficulty embalming people to last two weeks without decomposing); to Ghana, Mali, and Songhay (had universities thousands of years before the Greeks; indeed, the Greeks themselves studied in these places); to Estavenico (Little Stephen, who arrived on the North American coast years before Columbus), to Cripus Attacks (first person to die in the Revolutionary war); to Benjamin Bannecker (drafted the blueprint for what is today—Washington, D.C.).

From Frederick Douglass, SoJourneyer Truth, and Phyllis Wheatley, to Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner (each led slave rebellion in fight for freedom); to John Brown (although a white man, gave his life to the Slave cause by raiding the arsenal at Harpers Ferry); Oscar DiPriest, Hiram Revels, and Blanche K. Bruce, among others (elected to congress during Reconstruction); to P.B.S. Pinchback (former Lt. Governor of Louisiana during the 1800's, who ended up succeeding the Governor during a period of incapacitation) to W.E.B. DuBois (first Black to graduate from Harvard), Booker T. Washington (and his Atlanta Compromise, among other contributions), and George Washington Carver (had many contributions to the field of agriculture, creating many uses of the peanut, including peanut butter); to the Tuskegee Airmen (1st Black Fighter

pilot squadron, had many successful missions); to Madame C.J. Walker (1st black self-made millionaire, as well as 1st female self-made millionaire); to Matthew Henson (was with Admiral Gray when he made his expedition to the North Pole); to Louis Latimer (worked right alongside Thomas Alva Edison); to Charles Drew (created process which makes it possible to process plasma for blood transfusions) and Nathaniel Hale (1st person to perform open heart surgery).

Continuing with Thurgood Marshall (architect of *Brown v. Board of Topeka Kansas*, and 1st Black to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court), to Adam Clayton Powell, A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Marian Anderson, and many others (too numerous to mention here). Whereas Dr. Orr had given me the confidence that I could be somebody, Mr. Clayton gave me examples (role models if you will) of people who looked and talked like me; further enhancing my belief that I could indeed be **SOMEBODY**. So many shining examples that when the opportunity arose to demonstrate my knowledge of the African-American culture and its contributions to the American fabric, I jumped at the chance.

I remember that it was a Friday morning (April 1980), and I awoke early in anticipation of the day's event. As part of its end of the school year programming, a local youth agency was sponsoring a talent contest where neighborhood youth could present performances in one of three categories: Poetry, Song, or Speech. As part of my presentation, I chose a speech (motivated partly by Malcolm X, and partly by my life experiences thus far) that I had written about the Black man's experience in America, as well as the promise of a better future that one day was sure to come.

I had been working on my speech for several weeks now, spending every free moment writing, rewriting, as well as practicing my delivery ad nauseum. The day of reckoning was here, and it was time to put up or shut up. Kids throughout the “hood” were bragging up their performances. Dancers talking about cutting a jig, and singers talking about hitting certain notes, and then there I was practicing my speech as somewhat of a cross between Jesse Jackson and Malcom X. The irony of my choice of presentation was that almost half of my peers wondered why I would want to represent Jesse Jackson, and the other half questioned my capacity for capturing the fiery essence of Malcolm X. Undaunted by my detractors, I pressed onward.

Despite skepticism from my peers, I had my reasons for admiring both of these gentlemen. With Malcom X, I could identify with [almost] every aspect of his persona. From his growing up without his father (as did Jesse Jackson), to his early exposure to racism (up close), to his unapologetic passion for promoting Black self-reliance, I have always retained adulation as well as admiration (more so than for any other figure in modern history) for this authentic American hero.

In my humble opinion, Malcolm X is the most misunderstood figure in modern American history. Widely noted for his fiery speeches and his railings against the mainstream establishment, I believe that many people were intimidated by the fact that here was a black man during turbulent times in America who was not afraid to speak his mind. Here was also a man who held fast to the notion that Blacks were a noble and honorable people with a rich and otherwise illustrious heritage. Ironically, in evaluating

Malcolm's teachings in light of the resiliency literature, this individual was ahead of his time so far as inspiring underprivileged youth with believing in the power of their future.

Moreover, Malcolm embodied the essence of the resiliency approach in as much as here was a caring supportive adult, who not only strove to inspire others to believe in their future, but also advocated opportunities for meaningful participation. Looking back in retrospect, as a African-American youth striving to be "somebody," I was very much impacted by the messages that I heard emanating from this larger than life figure.

Similarly, and almost from my first acquaintance with him, I have also always had a great affinity for Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. Although he certainly has his detractors, suffice it to say that I am definitely not one of them. From my perspective, he has done as much, if not more for civil rights and human rights than any person alive today.

Often maligned as opportunistic, this Civil Rights giant has worked tirelessly to advance not only the cause of Black America, but that of other people as well. From traveling to Syria to negotiate the release of American hostages, to leading picket lines on behalf of (predominantly) White workers at the height of the strikes occurring at packing plants throughout the nation during the mid 1980's, to organizing more voter registrations campaigns and registering more citizens to vote than any figure in American history, his position as a truly genuine American hero is safely secure. A favorite phrase of his not only sits on all fours with the resiliency literature, but also sums up the efficacy behind this man's appeal, as well as speaks to my appreciation for his efforts, "What the mind perceives, the mind can achieve."

Thus, as I walked through final preparations for that evening's event, I could hardly contain my enthusiasm. However, I had to proceed cautiously! Mama had forbade my siblings and I from "hanging out" at the local teen center. As far as she was concerned, it sat in a dangerous section of the neighborhood, and too many "gang bangers" and other delinquent youth hung out there.

Mama was preparing to leave for Bingo for that evening, and my stepfather had already left for work (now that he was assigned to second shift). As mom barked out instructions for everyone, I intentionally stayed out of her way. Almost as if her antennae was up, she came towards my room looking for me. "And you, what are you planning to do this evening?" Pausing to measure my words, I turned to face mama so that she could see that I was working on a document. From past experiences, I realized that although my mother thought she was a "private detective," generally, she would always give me my space to operate if she thought that I was working on some official paperwork, homework, etc.

"What's that?" mama asked, before turning to exit the room. Realizing that she was simply making her official rounds prior to leaving for bingo, I replied, "Oh that! This is a speech that I am writing" (my response was intentionally sterile hoping that no further questions would be forthcoming). "About who?" Mama asked, as she exited the front door. "Malcolm X," I replied, waiting for further responses from her. None came! Great! She was finally gone!

I quickly ran to the bathroom, showered, got dressed, and was gone before a couple of my nosy sisters inquired into what I was up to. They (especially Janice) were always

on the prowl trying to build up brownie points with mama. Oftentimes, my sister Janice (because she was a female) was forbidden by my mother from tagging along with me. “You have to be a lady, and you can’t be palling around with your brothers,” my mother used to chide her.

Although my siblings and I truly loved one another, this still did not prevent us from experiencing episodes of sibling rivalry from time to time. Thus, not only was I careful to avoid mama this evening, but my sister Janice as well. Arriving at the center a little early, I noticed that a lot of other youth were hanging around outside. I headed inside to check in and to find out my place of order within the evening’s program. Upon learning that my appearance wasn’t scheduled until midway through, I headed back outside to “look cool”, or otherwise hang with some of the kids that I seldom got a chance to spend time (with the exception of riding the same school bus).

BAD MOVE!!!! Just as I headed outside, I noticed a car racing down the street, then all of a sudden, the car came to a sudden crawl, and it seemed like flares were coming out of the window. Naïve as I was at that time, at first I did not truly discern what was going on. It was surreal! People were yelling, “Get down! Get down!” Moments later, I heard a loud sound race past my ear, and then a piece of brick tore away from the building. I **GOT DOWN!** Suddenly, it was eerily quiet!

When the smoke had cleared and the commotion finally over, a couple of local teens had been shot; one in the leg, and the other in the back. Apparently, one of the neighborhood gangs had violated some pact that they had held with a gang from across town, and the result was a drive by shooting. The talent show was abruptly canceled!

Police were soon all over the scene, and not allowing anyone to leave prior to making a statement. "Mama is going to know that I was here," I kept thinking to myself.

After the interview, I quickly headed home! As soon as I got a half a block away I heard my sister (Janice) yelling, "Toney, is that you? You weren't down at that place were you? Oohh--Mama, gonna get you!" "Yeah, yeah, I know," I thought somberly to myself, with little energy left to argue. I continued on inside and went directly to bed, cognitive of the fact that as soon as mama arrived home, I would be in big trouble.

Just as I was about to reach a state of deep slumber, I heard Mama's voice coming from what seemed like a distant place. "Where is he at? Is he alright! Oh my God, I told his hard head self about hanging out with those kids. I bet you he'll think twice before he take his behind back down there again," her voice continued to get louder and louder, and closer and closer. Suddenly, I could feel her presence standing straight over me. I was waiting for the other shoe to drop, for her to grab me or shake me or whatever other punishment that I obviously had forthcoming. IT NEVER CAME!

Instead, my mother leaned over me, caressing me, crying, and praying. Thanking the Lord for sparing her baby's life, mama went on and on for what seemed like fifteen minutes. Suddenly, she stopped, and arose to her feet. "Are you hungry?" she asked. Realizing that she was trying to return to a state of normalcy, I replied, "Yes ma'am."

Returning shortly with a couple of BLT's, and sitting down beside me, she begin, "Mama loves you, you know that, right!" (I nodded in agreement) "Well, I am sending you to Iowa to stay with either Aunt Beatrice or Aunt Ruby. Before I could protest, she

declared, “I have made my decision, and as soon as school is out, I am getting you out of here.”

Coming Full Circle

I have long felt that my journey to Iowa was no accident. Indeed, in many ways, I have come to see it as my “rite of passage.” To begin with, just as it had come a time for my brother to leave the nest a year earlier, in a strange sense, one might say that similarly my time had now come; albeit unexpectedly.

For Michael, his odyssey began with his decision to start dating his junior year of high school. Seventeen years old at this time, he finally had his first girlfriend. Up until then, none of my siblings nor I had ever been on a date with a member of the opposite sex. Yet, because it was his junior/senior prom, my mother allowed Michael to attend with a date. It must have gone well because Michael was permitted to continue courting this young lady. With each passing day, my brother became more and more smitten.

Beginning in the spring of 1978, and continuing up through midsummer of that same year, Michael proceeded with that relationship until he reached the proverbial state of “heads over heels.” Then one day, his girlfriend abruptly informed him that she was seeing someone else. My brother was devastated! He was no longer his “outgoing” self. An athlete his entire life, all of a sudden—he no longer had any desire to play sports. Not long thereafter, Michael informed Mama that he wished to enlist in the military.

Because Michael was within 6 months of his eighteenth birthday, he could enlist providing that Mama agreed to sign. She did, and within a few weeks, my brother was gone. Unknown to the family at that time, it would be five years before we would see

Michael again. When we did see him again, he was going through a period of melancholy, brought on by his use of illicit drugs; which ultimately he confided in me, initially began following another failed relationship (i.e., his wife filing for divorce).

In many ways, my brother's exodus for the Army set in motion a chain of events that (upon second glance) may have been predictable. To begin with, I was now the oldest sibling at home. In addition to having to figure out some things on my own, I now also had younger siblings looking up to me. Trying to set good examples for them to follow, I stayed out of trouble -- no drinking, smoking, or sex. I did fairly everything right until that fateful evening that I decided to attend (albeit without prior approval of Mom) the teen center to participate in a talent contest. As it turned out, I was almost shot.

As a cautionary measure, Mama decided to send me to Iowa to stay with relatives. Once in Iowa, I soon realized that I was no longer under my mother's thumb. Not unlike my brother (Mike), I now felt that it was time for me to start acting more like a "man." With that, I decided that it was time that I had a girlfriend. Almost overnight, my life course began to change!

After meeting and talking with "the girl next door" for a couple of weeks, she and I decided that we would now be boyfriend and girlfriend. The relationship began innocently enough, holding hands, going for walks in the park, going to movies, the usual teenage stuff. Then, one weekend we decided to go to the drive-in theatre with another teenage couple.

Well, so as not to get too graphic or over dramatic, they were doing their thing, and before long, we were doing our thing. Outside of the fact that this was my "first time", it

was no big deal. Or so I thought! Boy was I ever wrong! This incident led to other incidents, ultimately culminating in a pregnancy announcement within five months of my arrival in Iowa.

Upon learning of my girlfriend's expectancy, I was frantic. Oh boy, what am I going to tell Mama? How is Mama gonna react? Mama is going to kill me! These were among some of my initial thoughts. After discussing the matter with Aunt Ruby, it was decided that I needed to notify my mother A.S.A.P. And so I did! However, she reacted in the total opposite of what I would have predicted.

"So, you done gone and got a girl pregnant, huh? Well, about the only thing to do now is to start making plans to take care of the child. I realize that you are use to Mama coming and get you, and bailing you out of everything, but this time, you gonna have to step up to the plate. You are a man now! At least you are doing man things! Mama gonna be here for you, but it's time for you to step up and be a man," said mama.

"But what about school? And what about college?" I asked. "You should have been thinking about school, and about college when you were acting grown. Now, you done gone and brought a life into the world, and you gonna do right by that child. How many months is the girl?" asked Mama. "About two months," I replied. "Well then, you got time to finish high school before the baby arrives.

As for college, you gonna have to tell them people in Boston (University) that you cannot accept the scholarship at this time. Maybe, after a little time off, you can find a school in Iowa that will accept you. I won't say that I am mad at you, but I will say that I

am extremely disappointed. You done went all this time doing well in school and planning your future, and a few months in Iowa you done gone buck wild,” said Mama.

Duly chastened, I did as admonished! I finished high school, got a job (painting), the baby arrived, my girlfriend and I got our own place, and at eighteen years of age, we began raising our first child. My daughter was the joy of my life, and remembering how I had longed for my father as a child, I promised my daughter and myself that I would always be there for her.

Things started off well, so well in fact that by my daughter’s first birthday, my fiancé and I now could start planning for our future. She had applied to Hawkeye Community College and gotten accepted, and I applied to U.N.I. and was accepted. We planned our respective school schedules so that one of us would generally always be able to be home with our daughter. In those rare occasions when this was not possible, my fiancé’s mother agreed to babysit.

Within a year in a half, my fiancé had graduated with an Associate Degree, and decided to take a full time job. For awhile, this gave us additional income. Then, I was laid off from my job. We were able to get by for a few months, then I decided that I needed to do more to do my part as the man of the house. Because of the recession at that time, the Cedar Valley was going through hard economic times. Thus, I was not very successful in landing another job at that time.

Accordingly, I decided that I would consider joining either the Guard or Reserves. Along the way, I learned that I could join R.O.T.C. and still continue on my educational path. And so I did! But, more than that, I made a lot of new friends, and a lot of new

contacts, many of them from all over the world. Things seemed to be going well in every area of my life.

Although I did not drink at the time, I began attending a few “keggers” with some of my Army Cadet brethren. I was starting having fun with males my age for the first time in my life. When some of them learned that I was from Chicago, they began asking about famous places and landmarks. With each discussion, I became more popular.

A few of them began asking about some of my Chicago homeboys. “Did they slang (I.e., sell drugs), Did I still maintain contact with my old homeboys, and could I hook them up with some cocaine?” Initially, I told them that although I knew some people who were “in the game,” I myself did not indulge, and preferred not to get involved.

Eventually, I agreed to help them out. A little one time. A little more the next time, and before long I was in over my head. Although able to graduate, my future plans were soon derailed. Ultimately arrested for a controlled substance offense, I was confronted with a nightmare that haunted me for a number of years. How did it happen? How did it come to past? Perhaps some of the answers may be found in the analysis that follows below.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF TWO TRANSCENDING LIVES

Youth development is a progressive process in which youth attempt to meet their needs and build their lives in a positive progression toward manhood... Throughout this process, young people seek ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build competencies and connections they need for survival and success (Edginton, Kowalski, & Randall, 2005, p. 52).

Preliminary Discussion

In this chapter, I offer an analysis of both Douglas's life history narrative and my auto-ethnography. In this analysis, I use the framework of resilience (as found in the professional literature) as a means for addressing the question – To what extent were the key resiliency factors present in our lives? But I will also address further, and I believe more significant, questions – to what extent did these factors play out in our lives, how did they contribute to our individual capacities for resilience, and what did they mean to us personally?

This second level of questioning gets at what I consider to be the inherent limitations of the resiliency framework writ large. Through this study, I have come to conclude that it is not enough to know if or whether specific (and unmistakably deterministic) resiliency factors are present in the lives of young people. Although such knowledge is to some extent informative and useful, is it not more fundamentally important to understand how these factors (and perhaps many others) shape the lived experience of individual young people? Thus, my goal in this analysis is to trouble and interrogate the discourse of resiliency in order to demonstrate the fundamentally interpretive and non-deterministic nature of what we call resiliency.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the key resiliency factors involve two dimensions. The first dimension is referred to as external determinants, and the second, internal determinants. To reiterate, the external determinants are:

1. caring and supportive relationships
2. high expectations for behavior and attitudes
3. opportunities for meaningful participation.

According to the resilience literature, each of these external determinants are said to be found in the home, school, and the wider community. Yet, it should be noted here that the three external determinants are not as neatly demarcated from one another as they might initially appear to be. Although the resiliency literature tends to treat them as separate and distinct entities or categories, closer scrutiny reveals quite a bit of overlap. For example, adults who provide caring and supportive relationships no doubt as a function of their caring communicate high expectations for behavior and attitudes. Likewise, they would naturally also provide opportunities for meaningful participation.

The same holds true for the internal determinants. A young person who possesses a sense of autonomy is also one who has a sense of purpose. Coping skills and social competence are also qualities found in some form in individuals with a sense of autonomy, depending of course on the criteria used to define these qualities. The internal determinants are:

- sense of autonomy
- sense of purpose
- coping skills
- social competence

Another issue that surfaces is the relationship between the external and internal determinants. As I conducted my analysis of Douglas's and my narratives, it became increasingly clear to me that, quite straightforwardly, there is also no clear demarcation between external and internal. Various resiliency researchers have pointedly noted that resilient young people exhibit a set of internal determinants, or what most of us would think of as personal attributes (Bernard, 1991, 1993, 1997, 1998; Garmezy, 1977, 1980, 1985; Rutter, 1990, 2007; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Werner, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). In essence, these young people bring something to the table that is uniquely their own. Yet it is unclear, and I do not believe it can be made clear, whether or to what extent the external determinants (conditions) create or foster the internal ones.

If they are separate categories or contingencies, one must then question which has primacy. For example, the external determinants (caring and supportive relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation) must certainly cultivate the development of the internal determinants (a young person's sense of autonomy, sense of purpose, coping skills, and social competence; see; Brennan, 2008; Nelson, 2008; Rose, 2009; Short & Russell-Mayhew, 2009).

Yet equally, a convincing case can be made in the opposite direction. A young person who possesses strong internal determinants has a strong tendency to draw to him or herself the relationships, expectations, and opportunities that constitute the external determinants (see; ; Cameron, Lau, & Tapanya, 2009; Grothaus, 2004; Khanlou, Koh, & Mill, 2008; Peacock-Villada, Decelles, & Banda, 2007; Prescott, et al., 2008).

The foregoing entanglement has led me to venture that the construction of external and internal determinants represents a false dichotomy. Or at best the relationship between the two is dialectical in nature such that one category cannot be distinguished for any useful purpose from the other. With this situation in mind, I will deal with both external and internal determinants in this analysis as they arise in making sense of Douglas's and my narratives. In doing so, I hope to illustrate the points made above regarding the overly deterministic framework of the resiliency literature.

Douglas and Toney: Through the Resilience Lens

Environmental Support

We begin first by examining the extent to which Douglas and I enjoyed caring and supportive relationships during our youth. As our narratives indicate, there is ample evidence that both of us can be said to have received considerable support from our parents, educators, and other significant adults in the community. Looking first at our home environments, both Douglas' and my early youth was spent in adulation of our fathers. Yet neither Douglas' nor my relationship with our fathers was uncomplicated. No question both of us experienced a strong, loving, and meaningful bond with our fathers, but these relationships were far from idyllic.

In Douglas's case, his bond with his father contributed to his self-worth and sense of personal presence. He was his father's "drinking buddy," and from this he came to see himself as a peer. No doubt for one so young it was heady stuff to be treated like a "man," an insider taking part in a tacitly clandestine activity. They had secrets that were

distinctly their own, and the very special bond this created certainly surpassed the kind of “fishing buddies” bond more typical of close father-son relationships.

But was this a good thing? Any responsible adult would declare unequivocally – absolutely not! In fact this bond is deeply troubling on a number of levels. Most obviously, it is with very good reason illegal to offer children alcohol or drugs. To do so is a form of child abuse. These substances are demonstrably harmful to children’s growth and development, and although Douglas’s father allowed him only small sips, research shows that even this kind of exposure can significantly increase the possibility that the youngster will develop alcohol dependency as an adolescent and adult (Byrnes, Chen, Miller, & Maquin, 2007; Meyers, McDermott, Webb, & Hagan, 2006).

On another level, one can and should question the appropriateness of Douglas’s father treating him like a peer. Professionals and academics in the fields of child development and child psychology have long asserted that “equality” in a parent-child relationship presents a rather obvious problem in that children need and desire adults in their lives who are constructive authority figures, ones who enforce proper boundaries of behavior and exhibit the kind of self possession the child can aspire toward (Cottle, 1969; De Goede et al., 2009). A parent like Douglas’s father who treats his son like an equal creates a deep anxiety within the child, an anxiety that struggles mightily with the contradiction between his childlike needs and the implication that he has risen already to the same level of maturity as the father whom he expects to fulfill those needs.

Finally, and most importantly, it is indisputable that growing up with an alcoholic father poses a significant risk factor for youngsters (Andreas & O’Farrell, 2007; Gavriel-

Fried & Teichman 2007; Jester et al., 2008). Although Douglas reported that his father's drinking posed no problems in the family prior to the DUI charge, a considerable body of research has concluded that family interaction is essentially defined by substance abuse or addiction (Burke, 2003; Graham, 2006; Ryan, Marsh, Testa & Louderman, 2006; Silvern, 1991). Among many other difficulties, children of addicted parents are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and elevated rates of psychiatric and psychosocial disorders (Earls, Reich, Jung & Cloninger, 1988; Fitzgerald et al., 1993; West & Printz, 1987). Of particular relevance to Douglas's situation is research confirming that while alcoholic parents often lack the wherewithal to provide discipline and structure in the home, they expect their children to display maturity well beyond their years (Kumpfer & DeMarsh, 1986).

All of this appears to paint a decidedly bleak picture for Douglas; but, upon further consideration, perhaps the situation is not altogether unambiguous. What I am suggesting here is that Douglas's relationship with his father constituted a highly complex *mélange* of the good, the bad, and the indifferent. He may not have had what experts and professionals would consider a good, much less ideal, situation with his father, yet to Douglas it was an enormously significant bond of affection. However else experts or professionals might assess it, Douglas experienced his bond with his father as a source of emotional sustenance. It was durable enough to withstand some substantial adversity, so much so that as an adult Douglas continued to speak of his father not only with genuine warmth but even gratitude.

One might also venture that it was not in spite of these adversities with his father, but because of them, that Douglas emerged from his youth as a resilient adult. On the face of it, Douglas's father's alcoholism was a serious and potentially detrimental state of affairs. And no doubt it took its toll. Viewed from another vantage point, however, his father's alcoholism presented Douglas with (at least) two very crucial moments of moral reckoning. Here I am referring to his father's arrest for DUI and the domestic violence incident.

Douglas cited both of these events as shocking, frightening, and, in the case of the former, tremendously humiliating. For the first time in each instance he was able to witness in a very powerful way the destructiveness and denigration that inevitably accompanies alcohol addiction. Yet these events were also pivotal in forcing Douglas to decide what kind of person he wanted to be and what kind of life he wanted to live.

Fortunately, Douglas chose after the first event to stop drinking with his father, a decision that ultimately spared him the nightmare of fighting an addiction of his own. And as a result of both events, he came to understand his mother in a different light. This altered understanding led him to admire her strengths and to step into a supportive role on her behalf. No doubt this helped him crystallize how he as a man would come to relate to women, as well as define his own version of masculinity. Moreover, in Douglas's estimation, this new understanding of his mother gave greater credence to her moral guidance and personal example.

Partly because of this opportunity to evolve as a youth, Douglas was able to extract significance or meaning from these experiences that were instrumental in his

developing a sense of purpose for his life. Something in him, whether we credit it to high expectations of adults within the family, school, or community, or personal attributes such as a sense of autonomy, coping skills, social competence, or an expression of his moral substance and intent, ignited a desire in him to form a support group and, later, to center his life's work on counseling those afflicted with addiction.

We might inquire at this point about the origins of what the resiliency literature refers to as the internal determinants (Benard, 1993; Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1990; Werner, 2000). We can surmise that Douglas's mother's moral guidance throughout his childhood and youth must have played a significant part in fostering his desire for fashioning an affirmative self-definition characterized by responsibility for self, empathy, and caring for others. She offered him clear expectations for his behavior and attitudes. She also served as an exemplar of these expectations. Deferential to her husband though she was during the balance of Douglas's youth, he also witnessed her stepping to the forefront to control her own and her children's destinies when Douglas's father was at his lowest point. Would Douglas have developed these internal determinants even if his mother had not articulated and modeled these expectations? The same question can be raised regarding the influences of coaches Stenstrom and Panici.

It is important to note that even after the two pivotal events in Douglas's life his journey to becoming a resilient adult was not without its setbacks and reversals. Most notable were his strained relationships with some of his high school peers who subjected him to their slurs and taunting. Despite his largely successful efforts at coping with his family problems, he still retained, by his own confession, "a chip on [his] shoulder." His

inability to control his anger came to a head when he broke a schoolmate's jaw. It is difficult if not impossible to gauge the degree to which his coaches' wise intervention during this incident fostered the emotional maturity that helped Douglas learn to manage his anger. The same can be said for Coach Stenstrom's generosity in openly sharing his own tribulations as the son of an alcoholic father.

We can only surmise that these caring and supportive adults and the example they set for him must somehow have been crucial to Douglas's resiliency. What we cannot say for certain is whether Douglas's internal attributes owe their emergence to roles these adults played in his life. Were their influences indispensable, were they necessary but not sufficient, or would Douglas have eventually achieved resiliency without them?

Prior to adolescence, both Douglas and I experienced events that led to an estrangement or severing of physical and therefore emotional contact from our fathers. These two events resulted in a shifting of relational dynamics with our parents resulting in our mothers, who had previously held a more secondary influence, rather abruptly becoming the central figures in our lives.

This parallel is not, however, a seamless one because there are distinct differences concerning the circumstances of our respective separations from our fathers. First, Douglas' separation from his father constituted an act of volition on his part (a deliberate choice he made following his father's arrest for DUI). My separation from my father, on the other hand, resulted from my mother's unilateral decision to leave the south, effectively leaving my father behind. Second, whereas Douglas's estrangement from his father did not involve a physical separation between the two, the opposite was true

regarding my relationship with my father. Because Douglas continued to retain physical proximity, there remained the possibility for reconciliation and a renegotiation of their relationship. And this mending of their relationship on new grounds of mutual respect is eventually what occurred. On the other hand, the geographic distance between my father and me served to preempt any possibility of preserving and sustaining our father-son bond. Once he was out of my life, both literally and figuratively, the supportive role he played in my life simply vanished overnight.

As noted above, a similar parallel exists regarding Douglas's and my relationships with our mothers. Because of our separation from my father, my mother abruptly became not only the primary breadwinner, but also the sole disciplinarian, confidant, and decision-maker. Out of love, concern, and at times genuine fear for our well-being, she proved to be a firm disciplinarian. Consequently, my siblings and I were greatly restricted with regard to where we could go (not far from the house), what we could do (nothing for which we did not obtain prior approval), and whom we could associate (only youth whose parents Mama personally knew). This generally made for very limited horizons in terms of exercising personal decision-making. For my older brother and me, this policy did not change until after we had left home.

Although generally successful in keeping my brother and I out of harm's way during much of our youth, I truly believe that this particular parenting approach had its downside in that it afforded us precious little opportunity to develop some important personal skills and boundaries. In this sense, the nature of our family dynamics was very instrumental in

the choices that we ultimately made, or phrased differently, might reasonably have been expected to be able to make during our youth.

Whereas Douglas' parents seemed to hold something of a *laissez-faire* (i.e. liberal) parenting philosophy, my mother adopted a much more conservative approach. From this perspective, Douglas may have operated from a much more advantageous position than I in terms of having the latitude or space to develop a more mature sense of responsibility for his choices.

This was the dilemma that that my siblings (particularly my older brother) and I faced growing up. Although it was certainly noble of Mama to want to shield us from some of the harsh realities that always seemed to lay just around the corner, we were inevitably going to be confronted with having to make "age-appropriate" decisions on our own.

Although I have long felt that some of Mama's decisions impeded my siblings' and my growth (particularly during adolescence), I would venture to say that her world view differed rather dramatically from Douglas' parents. To begin with, as Caucasian parents, they would not have had to consider many of the pitfalls and traps that existed and lay ahead for their children. Raising Black males, first in the Mississippi Delta during the turbulent Sixties and later in Chicago during the rise of the gang and drug cultures in the 1970's, Mama was confronted with such issues on a daily basis. After all, it is indisputable that many young lives were being lost to tragic circumstances within each of these locales (Mississippi, as well as Chicago) during some of the formative years of our lives. I might add that this situation continues to endure.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as Douglas and his siblings were allowed considerable leeway in some of the choices that they made (particularly during adolescence) they were simultaneously afforded opportunities for meaningful participation. Similarly, by granting Douglas and his siblings such discretion, his parents also seemed to (at least tacitly) convey a positive belief in their future. In essence, Douglas' parents seemed to convey that they believed that he and his siblings were capable of making sound and otherwise mature decisions.

In retrospect, the opposite seems to have been true regarding how my mother elected to engage my older brother and myself. In fairness, it should be noted that perhaps it was not so much her children's judgment my mother doubted so much as the social forces surrounding us. That said, I personally believe that some of the fateful decisions that my brother and I would later make [at least partly] resulted from our lack of experience or unfamiliarity with having to make our own decisions.

From my brother's erratic, seemingly thoughtless, decision to enlist in the military to my boneheaded decision to engage in first sexual promiscuity, and secondly unprotected sex, our early decision-making speaks volumes about our lack of preparedness upon entering adulthood. Similar observations could be made regarding my brother's decision to engage in substance abuse, and to my decision to engage in drug trafficking.

Although the point could be made that this is a subject to be explored in the following section pertaining to internal attributes, because it cuts to the heart of one of the environmental determinants (specifically—opportunities for meaningful participation), it is also a valid topic for discussion here. To begin with, some contend that certain social

skills must be mastered and or internalized, if individuals are to be able to reach an acceptable state of actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1971: Maslow & Lowery, 1998; Piaget, 1972, 1990, 2003). From my vantage point, this drive towards social competence is one and the same with the human need of belonging[or desiring to connect] to something outside of ourselves.

Nonetheless, as we each approached the point in our respective lives wherein this need for “belongingness” began to assume added significance, I was far less prepared and thus far behind Douglas in the development of the internal attributes that foster actualization. By the time this need to belong had begun to assume increased prominence in our respective lives, our families’ level of influence now begun to dissipate. Phrased differently, it is in our pursuit of belonging that our personal selves now began to take precedent over the influence of our respective families.

Personal Attributes

Expanding the conversation to include personal attributes, I next focus on one of four themes relating to the internal self including: (1) sense of autonomy, (2) coping skills, (3) sense of purpose, and (4) [the aforementioned] social competence. I begin first by examining the degree to which Douglas (then later) I may have exhibited a sense of autonomy as a youth.

Sense of autonomy. Although humans are by their very nature social beings, each of us yet retains a level of individualization. Yet, as I earlier pointed out and will now elaborate on further , the line separating the self from its social and cultural surroundings and influences is blurred or perhaps nonexistent. As humans come to an awareness of the

self as an individual, we thus embark upon a quest for social acceptance and recognition. According to Corsini (1996), this is the beginning of our drive towards positive relationships in that our sense of autonomy allows others to develop interest in and respect for our individual uniqueness. In this sense, self autonomy allows others to perceive that we are separate and distinctive.

From Corsini's perspective, each youth is an unfinished project encompassed by a unique set of potentials which are constantly challenged by a progression of environmental factors. Piaget (1972, 1990) would refer to this dynamic as the child utilizing schemas (or a set of skills) to successfully navigate his/her environment. The resiliency literature would refer to this as exercising a sense of autonomy. In learning to exert themselves, or otherwise taking charge of their own affairs, youth began to acquire a sense of identity, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and task mastery to redirect their life courses away from negative messages and conditions (Benard, 1991, 1993, 1998; Garmezy, 1977, 1980, 1985; Rutter, 2007; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992).

Exploring this concept in relation to Douglas and myself, some interesting insights emerge. First, although Douglas and I both demonstrated a certain level of autonomy during our youth, our rationales for doing so as well as the results that followed bore stark differences. In light of our parental influences, this was not all that unpredictable.

As mentioned earlier, Douglas' parents afforded his siblings and him considerably more latitude and discretion than my parents did for my siblings and me. Douglas was free to explore a much wider realm of interests than I. Thus, when he decided to establish

the adolescent support group, he was in essence able to refine organizational skills that it would take me many more years to develop.

Similarly, because Douglas had greater leeway in deciding upon activities in which to participate, he was also able to expand his interests and horizons. My activities on the other hand were limited either to the church or school environments. Therefore, if I was going to develop any extraordinary gifts of any kind, they would for all intent and purposes have to come from one of these two domains. Subsequently, I elected to focus my energies on academic pursuits.

However, neither Douglas nor I could claim to have reached this particular stage (of development) without guidance from adults within the school or community—in addition to those received from our family. For Douglas, Coaches Stenstrom and Panici urged him to consider organizing the adolescent support groups as a means of channeling his energy in a more productive forum. Meanwhile, Dr. Orr (my fourth and fifth grade teacher) and later Mr. Clayton (tenth grade African American history teacher) were equally instrumental in encouraging me to strive towards academic excellence as a means for avoiding the regrettable fates of some of my classmates and other contemporaries.

Another important element within the resiliency paradigm is the concept of social skills. Generally defined, these are behavioral tools which individuals use to overcome adverse or perceived disadvantaged circumstances; albeit without necessarily correcting the surrounding circumstances themselves (Kats-Gold & Priel, 2009; Lefler et al., 2009; Snow & Powell, 2008).

When Douglas formed the support group, he was in essence trying to cope with or otherwise make sense of his family's ordeal with his father's alcoholism. Similarly, when I decided to obtain a library card, proceeded to checkout, and read every book and magazine that I could get my hands on, I was likewise attempting to find an escape from inner feelings of isolation, abandonment, and perceived neglect.

In each instance, both Douglas and I were successful in learning to manage our situations or otherwise cope (i.e., function in spite of and) with them. In this regard, both Douglas and I would appear to embody one of the hallmarks of the resilient youth. "A resilient individual is one who has the capacity to effectively cope, adjust, and respond to the problems, issues, and circumstances that face him or her in everyday life" (Edginton & O'Neill, 1999, p. 204). Not all "successful" coping skills or strategies are created equal, however, nor do they play themselves out in the same ways in different contexts.

Individuals generally draw upon a wide range of coping skills (varying based upon the problems to be addressed or overcome) to help them navigate and or make sense of the world around them. When Douglas joined the football team to burn off some of his anger and aggression, he was exhibiting action-based coping. Conversely, when I withdrew from some of the few activities that I was permitted to participate in at school and church, I was in essence demonstrating emotion-based coping in that I was motivated by feelings of inferiority.

Along the same lines, when I developed my own study techniques to help me master most of the exams that I have taken throughout my academic career, I was exercising action-based coping. On the other hand, when Douglas elected to join his father with in

his drinking exploits, he was engaging in emotion-based coping in trying to otherwise gain his father's approval.

Incidentally, Douglas' scenario (described above) calls into focus two interesting points. First, it would suggest that humans begin developing and incorporating coping mechanisms at a very young age. Secondly, it would tend to indicate that not all coping mechanisms lead to positive results. Further, some coping mechanisms constitute a "mixed-bag" in that they lead to both affirmative and detrimental results.

Schools and communities throughout the nation have witnessed countless youths who have joined gangs or decided to engage in illegal activities for the sole purpose of coping, fitting in, or otherwise having something or someone with whom to identify (to escape feelings of isolation, abandonment, neglect, etc.). One would have to look no further than my decision to help my R.O.T.C. brethren to gain a clearer picture of this.

Sense of purpose. According to researchers at the United States Department of Education (1998),

building resiliency is not something that adults do to or for youth. Rather, it is the process of providing a caring environment, creating opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities, offering positive alternatives for free time, and helping young people make a successful and healthy transition into adulthood. (p.).

Resiliency researchers might characterize the foregoing as helping youth to attain a sense of purpose. Indeed, it appears to be consistent with one of the resiliency environmental determinants (specifically, future expectations). Again, both Douglas and I benefited from the positive expectations of adults within either the school or community environments, in addition to those encouragements that we received from home. From early on, both Douglas and I had long known that we would go on to college. If there

were any differences in the expectations of Douglas and myself, it was in the fact that whereas he knew how his education would be paid for, I had no such assurances. Douglas always knew that if he did not earn a scholarship he could still attend college. For me, either an academic scholarship or grants and loans would be my avenues for success.

Nevertheless, as a result of our expectations regarding our future, both Douglas and I gained something of a competitive advantage over some of our classmates. I would venture that my carving out an academic path was somewhat more unusual in contrast to other inner city youth than was Douglas' choice to engage in athletics and create a role for himself as a leader of his support group in contrast with other middle class White students.

Likewise, although there obviously was a segment of Caucasian youth who did not retain the resources that would facilitate a college career, such students would constitute more of an exception than the rule compared to their minority youth counterparts. The fact that I was encouraged and planned to go to college placed me on a path markedly different than that of many of my African-American friends and classmates.

Social competence. This segment begins with my awareness that, as humans, each of us have a desire to be respected, or to have esteem or self-respect (Maslow, 1943). For many of us, this need is generally fulfilled through our relationships or affiliations with groups or organizations. As stated above, in an attempt to fulfill this need, we oftentimes long to be affiliated or otherwise belong to groups that make us feel good about ourselves.

Specifically, individuals require activities that afford them a sense of contribution, acceptance or self-value. Deficiencies at this level generally can result in low self-esteem or an inferiority complex. Demo and Savin-Williams (1992) and Rosenberg (1965) described self-esteem as an evaluation of one's self that involves a judgment of personal worth, approval, or disapproval.

Whereas Douglas' social skills afforded him the tools for channeling his energies in a productive manner, my lack of this attribute had the opposite effect. Although Douglas began a serious push towards satisfying his belonging needs during late adolescence, similar efforts for me did not begin until late in my undergraduate career.

In summary, Douglas' liberties regarding not only friends with whom to associate, but also organizations in which to belong, afforded him more leeway in his decision-making during a critical stage of his development. Accordingly, when the time came for him make key decisions, he was in a better position to exercise sound judgment. His involvement in sports, or play, played a significant role in development in this realm.

From our learning to carry out or explore new and different roles, to our acquisition of traits such as social skills, cognitive skills, problem solving skills, thinking skills and language skills, play is an activity that humans and animals participate in to explore and learn in their environments (Piaget, 1972, 1990, 2003). Learning needs met through play include opportunities to:

- Practise, choose, imitate, imagine, gain confidence, persevere
- Acquire new knowledge, skills
- Develop language that then forms the basis for literacy skills
- Create, observe, experiment, think

- To communicate, question, interact with others, social interaction, and
- To know and value one's own strengths and limitations.

Consistent with the foregoing, I believe that youth who participate in athletics and other (organized) age-appropriate activities) will generally present as better adjusted than those who do not. Thus, irrespective of one's professional standing, political persuasion, religious affiliation, social class, or ethnicity, it is difficult to deny that there are social ramifications to play.

How many of us enjoy playing by ourselves? In addition to the fitness rewards that are gained through play, there are other benefits (including social competence) to be acquired. Because of his propensity for engaging in play, Douglas developed an outgoing personality. I, on the other hand, resulting from lack of opportunities for (meaningful and age-appropriate) play managed to become more of an introvert.

Thus, when Douglas decided to establish the adolescent support group, he was for all intent and purposes practicing an activity (i.e., counseling) that he would later choose as his vocation. This early practice (or play activity) allowed Douglas to develop skills that would later serve as the catalyst for his professional career.

Similarly, when I engaged my siblings in mock debates and mock trials, and played school with them, I was in effect practicing activities that were representative of my fondest wish for who and what I wanted to be – a lawyer. This desire has yet to be fulfilled. But rather, and quite ironically, by early adulthood, I found myself on the wrong side of the law.

Findings and Conclusion

This brings us front and center with one of the key findings in this study; the presence of early dysfunction, delinquency, and other problems associated with youth does not necessarily mean that a youth cannot eventually escape a negative life trajectory. Douglas' turnaround from some of his early problems (first with alcohol and later with violence) would validate this point. Because my youthful error occurred two decades ago, the path that I have traveled subsequent to that time period would suggest that I too have provided credibility to this contention.

Meanwhile, it might be noted that the above findings run counter to one of the major planks within the resiliency literature. Resiliency researchers contend that one of the promising features that distinguishes traditional studies from resiliency research involving "at-risk" youth is that whereas the former has centered squarely on a deficit model advancing enduring images of pathology and hopelessness, the latter emphasizes an approach that centers on constructive potential and hope (Benard, 1991, 1997, 1998; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007). Yet the fact that both Douglas and I rebounded from early life troubles clearly indicate that there yet remains promise in studying wayward youth.

A related finding is that early conformity does not necessarily ensure that there will not be problems in later life. As mentioned in Chapter 5 (my auto-ethnography), my early life was devoid of the pathology normally associated with traditional research. From early youth through adolescence, my life generally resembled that described within the resiliency literature.

Indeed, it was not until early adulthood that I embarked on an inauspicious life path. This finding would also appear to run counter to resiliency research. A literal reading of the resiliency literature would lead one to believe that if youth are able to avoid negative behaviors as youth they can be expected inevitably to experience positive life results (Benard, 1991, 1997, 1998; Garnezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007). Yet, by contending that resilient youth are those that will and/or have escaped a negative life trajectory, the resiliency literature would seem to rule out all other life outcomes once a state of resiliency has been declared early on.

Douglas and my stories demonstrate that there remains some usefulness in studying youth presenting with negative life experiences. The narratives here clearly suggest that resiliency is not a static event in that once a youth has attained it there are guarantees that problems will not be encountered in later life.

Another finding is that environmental factors, although important, may not be as decisive as internal attributes in fostering youth resiliency. At best, the relationship between the external and internal factors is necessarily inextricable from one another. Both Douglas and my story strongly suggest as much. Although Douglas began drinking at an early age with his father, he did not succumb to his father's plight with alcohol, electing instead to choose a different life course.

Hypothetically, experts might proclaim that 20 percent of youth with alcohol present in the home will become alcoholics themselves. However, the flip side, which is equally if not more compelling, would be that 80 percent of such youth do not become alcoholics. In contrast, although there were no drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes in our household, both

my older brother and I ultimately smoked cigarettes, drank alcohol, and were involved in illicit drugs in some form (i.e., either Mike using or myself selling).

Another finding from this study was that youth with high expectations were more likely to meet with successful outcomes. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, both Douglas and I had longed believed that we would ultimately attend college. These beliefs were influenced by the expectations of adults within the family, school, and community environments respectively. It might be noted that his particular finding is consistent with the resiliency literature.

Although it might be equally noteworthy that regardless of events occurring within our family life, both Douglas and I were able to draw upon support within the school environment to enhance or sustain our future life prospects. Whereas Douglas relied upon encouragements from both Coaches Stenstrom and Panici, I benefitted tremendously from Dr. Orr's insightful admonitions that helped to chart me on a course for first academic, and later other life successes.

This directs us towards another finding -- this being that youth believing that their future horizons held the promise of success for attending college were less likely to engage within delinquent behavior that might otherwise compromise that possibility. With the exception of assaulting one of his classmates, Douglas generally did not engage in any conduct that might have compromised his possibilities for success. I, on the other hand, was actually attending college and fulfilling that promise when I chose to involve myself in illegal activity.

Ironically, my entire youth (Kindergarten – 12 grade) was devoid of any episodes of aberrant or delinquent behavior. Indeed, subsequent to the fateful encounter with Dr. Orr, my entire academic career (i.e., through high school) was generally devoid of anything less than a serious focus. This focal point did not change until my journey as a senior in high school to Iowa.

In summary, my research has led me to explore resiliency as a far more complex and nuanced construct than is generally depicted in the resiliency research as a whole. In this chapter, my goal was to depict this complexity and nuance. My employment of interpretive, narrative methodology presented a very different understanding of resiliency than I possessed when I entered this study.

The question that can be posed at this point is – what does his life-history narrative and my auto-ethnography have to tell us about resiliency? Certainly, in keeping with the language of resiliency research, Douglas and I exhibited a number of “personal attributes” that were clearly very significant in our individual quests to create what each of us envisioned as a good and meaningful life. As it turns out, this “good and meaningful life” is what is known as a “resilient” life in professional parlance. I invoke the distinction in language for reasons that will later be dealt with in Chapter 6 of this work. For the present, I simply want to suggest that how these ideas are expressed, or the language we use to describe them, is no small matter.

CHAPTER 6
THE ROLE OF HISTORY, CONTINGENCY AND CONTEXT
(A CRITIQUE OF THE RESILIENCY PARADIGM)

Introduction

The respective poems in Chapter 4 by Theodore Roethke and Langston Hughes, as well as the excerpt in Chapter 5 by Edginton et al., (2005) provide appropriate backdrops for the themes contained within this next chapter. One of the questions that educators, resiliency researchers, and other stakeholders alike might ask is simply that: What does happen to a dream deferred? Hopefully, this manuscript has provided some keen insight (i.e., via first person account) into the possibilities, as one of the two participants (myself) experienced just such a scenario, in that my dreams were somewhat deferred. Conversely, this manuscript has also provided insight into the possibilities that might exist when a dream is not deferred, or phrased differently, when second chances are afforded to youth, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

Frank McCourt's acclaimed memoir, *Angela's Ashes* (1996), opened with the seemingly glib proclamation that, "A happy childhood is hardly worth your while." The author's airy delivery of this incongruous remark impels the reader's eyes to seek confirmation. "A happy childhood is hardly worth your while." What sense does this make in a world that much prefers the happy childhood? Conventional wisdom, after all, would have us believe that the happiest of childhoods is always and inevitably superior to all others. And, by extension, that redemption can rarely if ever be found in the unhappiest of childhoods. Here, McCourt told us otherwise.

The virtuosity of his opening line lies in its capacity to foreshadow the whole of his journey -- from a deeply imperiled and degradingly impoverished childhood to a self-possessed and highly accomplished adulthood. Readers of *Angela's Ashes* (1996) would be frustrated in an attempt to enumerate in McCourt's youth the presence of possible "protective factors" so frequently cited in the resiliency literature. Rather, he survived hunger, deprivation, and disease so treacherous that three of his siblings died before they were out of toddlerhood. The adults in his life, including his parents, extended relations, teachers, members of the community, and religious officials either could not or would not offer refuge. On the contrary, they were time and again the primary sources of his misery.

By any formal criteria he surely qualified as an "at-risk" youth if ever one existed. Yet he emerged, again by any definition, as a resilient adult. After his recent death McCourt's memoir was hailed by critics for the absence of mawkishness that typifies the garden variety "dreadful childhood" memoir. Grossman for example, noted that *Angela's Ashes* was "purged of anger and bitterness and self-pity," and that, "in an extraordinary act of forgiveness, he wrote about his [alcoholic] father with humor and even compassion" (Grossman, 2009, p. 21).

My purpose in referencing McCourt's memoir within this manuscript can be stated succinctly -- at the closing stages of this study I have come to conclude that there may be more "truth" about resiliency to be found in the richness and complexity of the personal narrative than in the whole of the professional resiliency literature. Further, I have come to conclude that the professional literature on resiliency has, on balance, done as much to distort our understanding of the phenomenon as it has to illuminate it.

I am acutely aware of the seriousness of this charge and the subsequent risks I take in pursuing this line of thought. Through the remainder of this chapter, I have sought to explain in greater detail how I arrived at this point of view. I begin first by pointing out two facts that I believe the resiliency literature has failed to account for or otherwise acknowledge. First, the resiliency literature seems unclear whether deficiency of one or more determinants can be offset or (at least) neutralized by the prevalence of other determinants. Similarly, it is somewhat ambiguous whether other factors (in addition to those generally cited by the resiliency literature) also significantly contribute to youth resiliency, and if so, to what extent.

Unraveling the Resiliency Mystique

By the close of this study, I had come to the realization that to conduct research on youth resiliency has been essentially to inquire about the formation of the self. What goes into the creation of the self---the individual? Indeed, what is the nature of the “self? To seek answers to this question I turned to the eminent philosopher, Charles Taylor (1989, 1991), whose work offered me compelling insights about these questions.

First and foremost, Taylor characterized humans as self-interpreting, meaning that the self is, fundamentally, a product of our interpretations. As our life course changes and our interpretations evolve as a result, our identities are continually reformed. Further, the continual reforming of our identities – our “selves” – always involves the backdrop of our past history and interpretations, but is not necessarily limited entirely by either. And while there is an element of continuity, the construction of the self involves infinite complexities and boundless combinations of meanings. In Taylor’s words, “the self’s

interpretations can never be fully explicit. Full articulacy is an impossibility” (1989, p. 34).

Important to this study, and resiliency research in general, Taylor directly addressed the question of whether the “self” can be studied in an objective sense as “self” is understood in psychology or modern social sciences. His answer is an unequivocal – no. Although “the self, even in this sense, ought to be an object of study like any other,” he stated, “there are certain things which are generally held true of objects of scientific study which don’t hold to the self” (1989, p. 33). He went on to enumerate four conceptual obstacles to the objective study of the self:

1. The object of study is to be taken “absolutely,” that is, not in its meaning for us or any other subject, but as it is on its own (“objectively”).
2. The object is what is independent of any descriptions or interpretations offered of it by any subjects.
3. The objects can in principle be captured in explicit description.
4. The object can in principle be described without reference to its surroundings. (p. 33-34)

Taylor pointed out that because an individual’s identity is an outcome or product of the *significance* each of us gives to conditions, events, experiences, and so on, the self can only be understood through what he terms “a language of interpretation.” Thus he concluded, “[t]o ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn’t in principle be an answer” (p. 34). Resilience, then, is an endlessly multifaceted concept that cannot be adequately captured or described by reductionist theories or frameworks.

Taylor (1991) also instructed me that the creation of the self is bi-directional, or, better said, there is a dialogical relationship between what is internal to the individual and what is external. “The general feature of human life,” he explained, “...is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression” (p. 32-33, emphasis in original). These languages involve not only the spoken or written word, but also “the ‘languages’ of art, of gesture, of love, and the like” (p. 33).

It’s not just that we learn the languages in dialogue and then can go on to use them for our own purposes on our own. This describes our situation to some extent in our culture. We are expected to develop our own opinions, outlook, stances to things, to a considerable degree through solitary reflection. But this is not how things work with important issues, such as the definition of our identity. We define this always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter – our parents, for instance – and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live. (Taylor, 1991, p. 33).

The self is subject to a host of external factors (dependent upon culture and context) and, in dialogue with these external factors creates the self through the act of interpretation. Thus, self-reflexivity is constitutive of the self.

Taylor thus described an unbreakable link between an individual’s moral values and his or her identity. One’s personal understandings of what is good and right are integral to one’s interpretations of self and thus who he or she is. As I now see it, the problem with the objectivist, and hence reductionist, epistemology of much if not most of the resilience literature is that it takes morals off of the table. The dominant understanding of resiliency characterized in much of the resilience literature seems to

have its roots in the medical model of psychopathology that has dominated the social and behavioral sciences since their inception (see Ross, 1991; Smith, 1994).

Consequently, an objectivist approach to studying resilience obscures the issue of values, both of the young people themselves as well as those of the adults charged with their care. This includes all adult citizens and not just parents, educators, and youth services professionals working directly with young people. And although this body of literature refers to values (e.g., caring, supporting, meaningful, and so on) it does not directly engage what these values mean to individuals and how they play out in the context of their lived experiences.

In my reading of the resiliency literature I detected an instrumental rationality that suggests resiliency can be achieved by plugging in an armamentarium of protective factors (i.e., caring and supportive relationships, high expectations for behavior and attitude, and opportunities for meaningful participation) that in combination with the presence of internal factors (personal attributes that presumably pre-exist external factors) will lead to resiliency. This overlay of instrumental rationality leads to a formulaic recipe to concoct resiliency that is overly simplistic and that seeks a far too facile solution to the life problems young people face. From my own perspective, youth (and the obstacles they confront) should be viewed as much more than objects for intervention to be acted upon by professional experts employing an arsenal of scientifically derived approaches. In what follows, I examine both external and internal factors to reveal this complexity.

External Factors

To review, caring and supportive relationships are nurturing, participatory relationships that are grounded in trust and respect, and that reach toward valuable goals. Some researchers have long contended that a caring and supportive relationship remains the most critical variable throughout childhood and adolescence (Demos, 1979; Rutter et al., 1979). High expectations for attitude and behavior are enacted by adults who communicate to youth a “yes, you can” message that encourages ambitious life goals. Ideally, these inspiring messages are to be delivered within an environment that offers substantive support for the achievement of these goals.

Caring and supportive relationships. No doubt caring and supportive relationships with adults are of great consequence, and it is not my intent to dismiss summarily the importance of them. On the contrary, I agree that these kinds of relationships are crucial to us all. What I do intend to highlight however is that these relations like all human relationships are complex, subject to individual interpretations, at times paradoxical, essentially moral, and distinctly context-dependent.

Douglas, for example, might have come to detest his father for his human flaws, and in so doing might have dispensed altogether with the many valuable qualities his father possessed. He might also have precluded the possibility of taking what he learned from his relationship with his father and putting it to productive use to create his professional and personal role as a substance abuse counselor. As it turned out, it was both the bad and the good experiences he encountered with his father and others (such as his coaches) that ultimately led to his own self-constructed version of transcendence. It is important to

emphasize, I think, that even the so-called bad experiences provided the impetus for redemption.

In my own case I am still working out my relationship with my parents, still having a dialogue with them, as Taylor put it. For years, I nurtured a latent resentment toward my mother for taking me away from my father. To my way of thinking back then, I missed out on having a male role model in my life, helping me to negotiate my way through the struggles and pitfalls of adolescence and young adulthood. I felt, in short, that something of inestimable value had been denied me. The magnitude of this loss grew in significance because in the absence of having my father in my life I could only imagine. More lately, though, and as a consequence of having made my own mistakes and being forced to contend with the complexities of being a parent myself, I have arrived at a place where I have gained significant insights.

First, my mother was confronted with an irreconcilable dilemma pitting her between her parental obligation to keep my siblings and me safe -- to shield us from the worst effects of southern racism -- and the importance of keeping our family intact. She chose the former. I now have a fuller understanding and appreciation of just how much of a dilemma this was. I have since arrived at a real sense of gratitude toward my mother, realizing that she made what she considered to be the most loving, responsible decision.

Second, and in a related vein, this situation has given me an occasion to grow, thus fostering further my capacity for resilience even at this late stage in my life. It is in this capacity for empathy, self-understanding, and compassion that I can re-story my life in such a way that I now can interpret these [apparently] negative events and conditions

auspicious [rather than regrettable] or at least helping to point the way toward creating my own sense of wholeness.

High expectations for behavior and attitude. There appears to be a near universal consensus that adults do well to encourage young people to embrace lofty goals and high expectations for their behavior and attitudes. And I agree that a very good case can be made that such encouragement is inspiring for youngsters. That said, I also believe we would do well to consider that this maxim is not without its complexity.

Both Douglas and I were expected to go to college. Adults around us repeatedly made this expectation quite clear. For one of us, college attendance was reasonable and realistic goal; for the other it was an abstraction. Douglas knew his college tuition would be paid for, but I did not have any idea where or how I would acquire the necessary funds. I had no idea how to apply, little idea about what attending college would be like, and, importantly, no college educated role models with whom I personally identified to make going to college seem like a serious possibility. Going to college therefore seemed to me an enormously daunting prospect. In short, Douglas and I experienced these voices of expectation quite differently.

My point here is that high expectations can be a source of hope, but they can also be a fount of free-floating pressure leading to a sense of despondency. These encouragements can be interpreted by their recipients in very different ways with very different results. From the vantage point of a minority inner-city youth like myself, high expectations offered by adults may appear more like being told one can fly to the moon.

Young people hear what adults “expect” of them, but they also see the adults not living up to high expectations themselves. Moreover, even if young people may not be able to articulate it, the prospect of achieving a college education is accompanied by a very strong intuition that it will involve a sacrifice more enduring than the investment of time, money, and effort.

To become college educated means that one undergoes a transformation, both personally and culturally. Where does the Black man (or woman) from the “hood” belong after earning the coveted diploma? Ineluctably he no longer “belongs” to the world from which he came – at least not in the way he belonged before. Because he came from that world he will never truly become a member of the world beyond the hood. Inner city youth are not alone in this predicament.

Sociologists Sennett and Cobb (1972) explored this phenomenon as one of the “hidden injuries of class” encountered by poor and working class youth of all races whose parents work hard and sacrifice for their children’s future. If they reject their parents’ aspirations out of a sense of being manipulated to live their parents’ dreams rather than their own, they have in a very profound way betrayed their parents. But if they actually abide by their parents’ wishes the very act of doing so creates a separation of class and social rank between themselves and their parents. As Sennett and Cobb summarized it:

As the children consider dropping out of school, or becoming artistic craftsmen, their parents worry below the surface of self-congratulation that their children may not after all redeem them in quite the way they expected. But the young who do not let their parents down also betray them. (p. 132)

The act of achieving social mobility imposes an invidious class disparity between parent and child, one that confirms the parents as subordinate and inferior.

The loneliness of the poor or working class adult is also addressed in Lubrano's (2004) book, *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*. For these adults (whom Lubrano refer to as "Straddlers"), going home is always a poignant, if not painful, occasion. He wrote:

Practically any journey home for a Straddler is going to inspire pain and nostalgia, guilt and ambivalence. Being class-mobile means you're rejecting at least some part of your past, of your kith and kin. Otherwise, you would have stayed. For Straddlers, it's odd knowing that life in the old place is going on without them. The town or neighborhood you rejected and quit is still there, as are many of the people – perhaps your parents included – whom you told at one time or another, "There must be something more than this." Out in the wide world, the place you left still invades your dreams, still is a part of you. To totally deny its importance is to lose vital parts of yourself. (p. 109)

The problem for Straddlers, Lubrano also pointed out, is that while they can no longer feel at home when they go home, they undergo a painful struggle to assimilate in their white-collar world.

In the white-collar world, the adult from a blue-collar or poor background oftentimes never quite achieves a sense of being comfortable in his or her own skin. The values, cultures, traditions, and use of language diverge dramatically, and the gulf between the two is never completely reconciled. The workplace is an acutely awkward place for these individuals as Lubrano explained,

Even with familiarity class chasms somehow widen rather than contract, and different-collared people in adjoining offices can barely work together, let alone get on civilly. Everything that's different about them – upbringing, quality of education, family wealth or the lack, personal style – intensifies in close quarters. (p. 147).

Never having been middle class, the ways of the white-collar workplace elude them, and learning to fit in even to some degree is difficult and painstaking process that exacts a steep psychological price.

Arguably, the intersection of race and class both heightens and complicates this situation. As Ogbu (1991) pointed out, African Americans and other racial minorities whom he referred to as *involuntary minorities* (minority groups that were either enslaved, colonized, or conquered) experience a very different, i.e., unreceptive, and intolerant reception from the dominant White culture compared to voluntary immigrants (groups that came to this on their own volition). This is not only the case in the United States, but in many other countries as well (Finn, 1999). Moreover, at times, the demand to assimilate to the dominant culture places the involuntary minority member in a conflicting situation that requires him or her to adopt the very values of the historical oppressor.

Ogbu (1991) also explained that the historical consequences of racism have made it difficult for African-Americans, for example, to perceive a clear relationship between academic performance, effort, and reward. This is so because for so many years African-Americans were denied education and employment commensurate with their achievements. Subsequently, because the linkage between effort and reward did not apply as it has to Caucasian-Americans, African-American youth have had a more difficult time internalizing this equation.

High expectations are neither simple nor straightforward. But rather, they are highly subject to personal interpretation as well as historical and cultural context. Yet, the

resiliency literature makes it seem simple enough and encourages a mindset that portrays the dispensing of high expectations as part of the recipe for resiliency.

Opportunities for meaningful participation. My greatest opportunity for meaningful participation emerged through my very introversion, i.e., my propensity to withdraw into the world of books and academics. One can hardly consider this participation in a social sense, although it was highly meaningful to me. Unfortunately, my bookishness meant that I did not develop many useful social skills useful for success in adulthood. Nor did I have opportunities for participation within the broader social setting, such as it was. Yet I owe much if not all of my success to it. Ironically, in some ways my lack of social acumen that led me away from social involvement also contributed to my success because if I had been more socially engaged I most likely would have landed myself in quite a bit of trouble. Instead, I was able to draw on Malcom X and Jesse Jackson, role models well outside of my community. Very few of my peers had such an opportunity.

On the other hand, Douglas had local heroes in his coaches as well as quite a few opportunities for meaningful participation in the wider social realm. And no doubt these opportunities served him well in terms of contributing to his resiliency. So much documentation exists endorsing the value of participating in organized (youth) programs that the value of doing so is now beyond question (Edginton et al., 2005; Edginton & Randall, 2005; Edginton & O'Neill, 1999). Undeniably, for Douglas, the opportunities to organize alcohol-free dances and later to create an adolescent support group at his school provided superb opportunities for meaningful engagement.

My point is that what counts as opportunities for meaningful participation depends very much not only on the social and cultural context in a given time and place, but also depends on what is meant by “meaningful.” Although Douglas experienced opportunities for meaningful participation as this term is commonly understood, one could also argue (as I am here) that my participation in the world of books and with my non-local heroes was no less meaningful. Both kinds of meaningful participation contributed to our individual resiliency, even if my version of meaningful participation may not conform to more common understandings of this construct.

Internal Factors

Expanding the conversation to include personal attributes, the focus next centered around each of four themes relating to the internal self such as: (1) sense of autonomy, (2) coping skills, (3) sense of purpose, and (4) social competence. My analysis here required guidance that would enhance my understanding of the relationship between internal attributes and the way that Douglas and I developed as youths. Subsequent to careful consideration, including elimination of other plausible and otherwise related theories, I began this stage of the analysis by relying upon Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs to help guide me.

Maslow published his first conceptualization of his theory nearly 70 years ago (Maslow, 1943) and it has since become one of the most popular and often cited theories of human motivation. His hierarchy of five basic needs represent those most fundamental to human beings and include:

- physiological needs
- safety needs

- needs for love, affection and belongingness
- needs for esteem; and
- needs for self-actualization

Simons, Irwin and Drinnien (1987) clarified the point that, as a humanist psychologist, Maslow set forth his hierarchy as a representation of what he considered the most basic of needs, beyond which exist needs for understanding the world around oneself, the need for esthetic appreciation, and those needs which are purely spiritual in nature. These authors also added the widely known point that the realization of each need beyond the physiological ones is dependent upon the fulfillment of the one preceding it – hence the hierarchy.

Yet, there is little agreement about the identification of basic human needs and their proper ordering. Lack of consensus notwithstanding, I believe Maslow's body of research can be very important to parents, educators, administrators and others concerned with developing youth under their charge. It provides guidelines regarding vital issues that must be addressed if youth are to be afforded opportunities for success.

Sense of autonomy. Common consensus holds that possessing a sense of autonomy is an indisputable good. The more autonomy one acquires, the higher his or her quality of life will be. Autonomy is in fact so highly prized in America, as well as other western cultures, that individualism is elevated to the near exclusion of, or even disregard for, communitarian values. Thus, the question can be raised – does anyone really make it on his or her own? (MacIntyre, 1999).

So from the outset, it is clear that the degree to which personal autonomy is valued is profoundly informed by cultural forces. It is also clear, or should be clear, that

autonomy is a social construct; and, as such its very nature is subject to interpretation. In communities throughout the nation, inner city youth find hustling to be an expression of autonomy – a means for standing on one’s own. For them, hustling is as much of an autonomous “career move” as becoming a Wall Street financier. The case can be made that the fundamental difference between the two is that the former is sanctioned by the dominant culture while the latter is lauded.

Or for that matter, was my own choice to traffic drugs to my ROTC friends an expression of my autonomy or an attempt to meet my basic need for belongingness and esteem among my peers? Either way, I believe I have made the case that the decision did not work out for me – to say the least. Thus, autonomy is a contested good. Much depends upon the goals one seeks as an autonomous individual as well as the consequences attendant thereto.

The resiliency literature might refer to the development of a sense of autonomy as learning to exert ourselves, or otherwise taking charge of our own affairs. In executing this sense of autonomy, youth rely upon a sense of identity, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and task mastery to redirect their life courses away from negative messages and conditions (Benard, 1991, 1993,1998; Garnezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007; Werner & Smith,1989, 1992).

Further, as I pointed out in Chapter 5, however, there is no clear demarcation between the external and internal. Although the resiliency literature would contend that resilient young people exhibit a set of internal determinants, or what most of us would

think of as personal attributes, it remains ambiguous at best whether, or to what extent, the external determinants (conditions) create or foster the internal ones.

In this study, irrespective of sense of autonomy, or of our choice of activities in which to pursue, neither Douglas nor I could claim to have reached this particular stage of development without guidance and the necessary space afforded us by adults within our respective environments. While our individual expressions of autonomy were uniquely our own, this internal factor was dialectically dependent upon the external factors in our respective environments.

Coping skills. Generally defined, coping skills are personal attributes which individuals use to overcome real or perceived adverse circumstances. Individuals generally select and draw upon a wide range of coping skills to help them navigate and or make sense of the world around them. The resiliency literature portrays these skills as altogether positive and efficacious. But is it really as straightforward as that? Can the use of strong coping skills sometimes backfire to produce damaging if not tragic results?

Upon closer scrutiny, and in light of my analysis of data, the construct of coping skills is neither as clear nor straightforward as the resiliency literature might lead us to assume. More to the point, the presence and exercise of coping skills does not necessarily dictate that youth will experience positive life outcomes. Consider, for example, an adolescent female desiring to try out for the cheerleading team or to enter a beauty pageant. In order to meet unrealistic weight requirements, she decides to curtail her caloric intake. If unable to supplement her nutritional needs, she may unwittingly subject

herself to future health problems. A similar fate may befall an adolescent male desiring to participate on the wrestling team.

Suffice it to say that on a daily basis, youth throughout the country are confronted with dilemmas in which they have to learn to cope. Many other scenarios, in addition to the ones noted above exist. From the adolescent female wanting to fit in with her peer group who has to decide on whether to remain sexually abstinent (and risk being ostracized for being a “square” or a “prude”) or become promiscuous (and risk becoming pregnant or affected with a sexually transmitted disease), to the adolescent male trying to fit in with his peers and having to decide on whether or not to join a gang. The choices they confront may not come without serious or even dire consequences either way. In the case of the adolescent male, if he joins the gang he may set his life on a course for criminal activity. On the other hand, if he does not join, he may be subjected to violent retribution.

In any event, their efforts to fulfill their basic needs for safety, or love, affection and belongingness, or even their need for self-esteem (Maslow, 1943), teenagers in the situations described above may well possess and mobilize some very powerful coping skills – but sometimes toward very regrettable ends. At any rate, to suggest that if youth simply acquire coping skills as a route to resiliency is simplistic thinking at best. Again, as stated in Chapter 5, schools and communities throughout the nation have witnessed countless numbers of youth who have joined gangs or decided to engage in illegal activities for the sole purpose of coping, fitting in, or otherwise having something or

someone with whom to identify in order to escape feelings of isolation, abandonment, neglect, and so on.

Indeed, it was because of impending pressures such as described above that persuaded my mother to send me to live with relatives in another state. It is not that I was not coping, because for all intents and purposes I was coping very well. But, in my mother's eyes, that may not have been enough, as she *strongly* felt that imminent danger lay just around the corner. She could very well have been correct, because no tidy set of coping skills, however well-refined, would ultimately have extracted me from the dilemma of choosing or not choosing to join a gang.

The central point here is that young people often use quite powerful coping skills to meet their basic needs, but they do so at times to their detriment. Thus, it is not enough to assert, as the resiliency literature unmistakably does, that young people should be taught coping skills. Most already possesses a vast range of these coping skills. Complications arise when those coping skills are exercised in a particular context to meet their basic needs that, according to Maslow, must be met prior to advancing up the hierarchy.

Sense of purpose. As part of its Creative Partnership for Prevention Initiative, the United States Department of Education was clear in that building resiliency is not something that adults do to or for youth. Rather, it is the process of providing a caring environment, creating opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities, offering positive alternatives for free time, and helping young people make a successful and healthy transition into adulthood" (The United States Department of Education,

1998). Generally speaking, when adults within the family, school, and community environments strive to instill high expectations in youth under their charge, they also help to facilitate the development of a sense of purpose in youth.

Again, both Douglas and I benefited from the high expectations of adults in the school and community environments, in addition to those encouragements that we received from home. Nevertheless, these pronouncements of high expectations must come with at least some credible expectations for tangible support if they are to translate into an authentic hope for young people.

Yet for countless numbers of underprivileged youth, adult expressions of high expectations become hollow platitudes precisely because there are no corresponding resources to underwrite their attainment. Under these circumstances, these young people are acutely aware that their high aspirations are inconsistent with the practical reality of their circumstances.

Consequently, the lexis of high expectations becomes a source of anxiety rather than inspiration. Such was the situation during my own youth. In hindsight, one might say, “you made it didn’t you?” Perhaps so! But, that conclusion also remains open to some interpretation. Meanwhile, what of the countless numbers of youth, particularly inner-city youth who, despite being subject to such lofty prospects, reason to themselves that no resources are readily available?

Under the assumption that some economic independence represents a more rational, hence more worthy, “sense of purpose,” they reason to themselves that they might as well take the first employment position (in many instances dead end jobs) that

becomes available to them. In essence, despite believing that they could succeed on the collegiate level, because of a lack of resources they believe that postsecondary education is not a realistic option for them.

The crucial question becomes -- how does one construe the values-laden and context-dependent construct vaguely and imprecisely referred to as "sense of purpose"? Were Douglas's and my ambitions to complete our college educations necessarily superior to other "at-risk" youths' desire to forego a college education in favor of expedient employment? This question becomes more difficult to answer when young people, for example, seek to address the immediate and pressing desire to contribute badly needed economic support for their families. The resiliency literature would recognize Douglas and me as having a sense of purpose. Such would not be the case for the young person described above.

Social competence. As Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs makes clear, only physiological and safety needs supersede the needs for love, affection, belongingness and esteem. For many of us, these upper level need are generally fulfilled through our relationships or affiliations with groups or organizations. In an attempt to assuage these needs, we oftentimes long to be affiliated or otherwise belong to social groups or connections that make us feel good about ourselves, or that affords us a measure *or sense* of esteem.

As illustrated through our narratives, Douglas and I took divergent paths in seeking to fulfill our needs for belonging or acceptance. Whereas Douglas' highly developed social skills afforded him the tools for channeling his energies in a productive

manner, my lack of these skills had the opposite effect. Although Douglas began a serious push towards satisfying his belonging needs during late adolescence, similar efforts (aside from the promiscuous relationship that I had as a senior in high school resulting in the birth of my oldest daughter) for me did not begin until late in my undergraduate career.

Phrased differently, having had the opportunity to act out or otherwise engage in age-appropriate role play with peers, helped Douglas to attain a cognizable level of social competence at a much earlier period than myself. In contrast, my social skills were decidedly under-developed as a result of having few such opportunities. And I had fewer opportunities for two reasons.

First, my mother's need to protect my siblings and me from a dangerous environment meant that she wound up seriously restricting our social interactions. Second, I was by disposition a less social being, one more at home with my books than in social settings. Consequently, a lot of my (social) acumen has been a function of luck and pure chance. Viewed through the resiliency prism, it would be difficult for me to sustain high hopes for a promising future as my early youth was woefully lacking in a key internal determinant.

Finally, and notwithstanding my academic success, because stories such as mine generally run contrary to those of other similar situated minority youth throughout the nation, it is disingenuous to expect young people (specifically, inner city youth) to be able to reach so far beyond their surroundings, to find wholeness and wellness in a distant land. In this sense, the methodological underpinnings of the resiliency research has done

great harm to the inner-city neighborhoods throughout the nation, because of the expectation that youth learn to look outside their community for this wellness. And in the event when they do, they generally don't come back or look back. For many individuals, the opportunities are out in the white world, so they cannot be blamed for not going back.

Turning the Corner towards Transcendence

My pursuit of this study was fueled by both a professional as well as personal desire to understand why, after enduring perilous, even miserable, childhoods, some adults emerge in one piece. At the outset of this study, I defined resiliency as the capacity to regain personal power and develop a strong core sense of self in the face of poverty, severe family hardship, and community devastation (Benard, 1998; Ford, 2008; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2007).

It is noble of resiliency researchers to study "resilient youth," but are we not all to some extent and in some form resilient? And if we only measure success by what has transpired at the onset of adulthood, are we truly relying on legitimate, defensible, or otherwise trustworthy information? On the other hand, what of youth who despite little support from adults within the family, school, and community succeed nonetheless? My example of author Frank McCourt comes to mind here. Conversely, what of those youth who despite having access to tremendous privilege yet somehow manage to make a mess of their lives? The recent plights of professional golfer Tiger Woods, or South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, come to mind here.

Both of these scenarios suggest that environmental factors may be oversimplified, or at the very least poorly understood. Some of these questions are generally

precluded from inquiry as a consequence of the methodological framework selected for conducting such research. One school of thought might reason that this is because resiliency researchers do not regard certain youth as worthy of attention.

Yet, for me, the central idea has been to develop the notion that we can talk about “resiliency” in terms about internal attributes and external conditions, but in doing so we must refrain from sidestepping moral considerations. My conviction that resiliency research would greatly benefit from moral exploration is inspired by Robert Coles’s (1986) methodological critique of the field of child psychiatry. His book, *The Moral Life of Children* deals with questions about *how* children acquire their moral frameworks and values, a question the quantitative literature on moral development must disregard due to its “value-free” stance.

The language of resiliency does not describe resiliency as it really is, rather the language used is constitutive of resiliency. By extension, consequences necessarily attach to how resiliency is “languageed.” As Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) asserted:

Language does not “reflect” social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality. Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where one’s sense of self – one’s subjectivity – is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses – competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world – makes language the site of exploration and struggle. (p. 961).

In short, language constitutes or creates the world as opposed to simply describing it. To restate, in this section, the attempt has been to demonstrate how one might analyze Douglas’s and my narratives in the language of “resiliency” or re-narrate them as moral stories. The upshot is that both Douglas and I brought some moral substance to the table

that enabled each of us to make sense of our lives in a way that led to our reconstructing a life for ourselves with meaning and purpose.

The Resiliency literature, in addressing the needs of children, generally speaks of protective versus risk factors as though the former are used to reduce the latter. In this regard, the protective factors become synonymous with the needs of youth. If the protective factors are present, the young person's needs will be met. If these are not present, his or her needs will go unfulfilled.

In distinguishing between his two major categories of needs (deficiency and growth) Maslow (1943) believed that each lower need must be met before growth needs can be fulfilled (Huitt, 2004). An individual is ready to act upon the higher needs only if the more primary needs have been met. Phrased differently, only if the more primary needs have been satisfied will individuals then feel emboldened to focus upon growth needs (i.e., self-actualization). From this perspective, this is a dilemma (meeting the primary needs of all youth, rather than a select few) that the resiliency literature has failed to account for, acknowledge, or appropriately address.

Summary and Conclusion

In analyzing youth development in relation two competing epistemological frameworks (realist versus non-realist), one derives a very different understanding of what resilience means, how it is achieved, and how professionals and society can intervene to promote resiliency. I have attempted to demonstrate that the present methodological commitments of the resiliency literature leave gaping holes and myriad other questions unanswered.

I find it no small wonder that a disproportionate number of inner city youth would underperform on achievement, intelligence, and aptitude tests alike. Generally lacking the very basic necessities of life (at the very least, not knowing where the next meal or next pair of shoes will come from), how could these youth possibly be expected to engage in abstract thinking (upon which many of these exams are based).

An apparent connection between Maslow's Hierarchy and the resiliency literature involves the axiom that in meeting the respective needs of youth, the lower needs seems to be regarded as a province of the child's environment. To make my point more bluntly, I suspect the rational-technical interventions suggested by the resiliency literature neatly absolve society from the obligation to meet the social, economic, and educational needs of our most impoverished young people. Hence, what is actually a social justice issue is obscured by technological "fixes" as a technical problem.

Another weakness in the literature is its premise that as long as certain protective factors (Clayton et al., 1995) are present, either in the individual, the family, the school or the community, the youth will go on and have a productive life. From this perspective, once a youth has made the transition from adolescence into young adulthood, they are out of danger. Such youth will have in effect, escaped a negative life trajectory forever.

In light of some of my own indiscretions as a young adult we now know that such projections are not entirely accurate. My own personal history would suggest that the resiliency literature needs to cast a wider net. It must in essence, widen its scope. If transitioning from adolescence to adulthood without becoming a delinquent is the parameter for measuring success, as well as for ensuring that an individual would never

go "bad," a very momentous episode of my life never would have occurred.

On the other hand, Douglas' story or life history demonstrates that just because a youth makes a mistake during adolescence does not mean that they cannot go on to have a very productive life. As we know through his testimony, Douglas was able to tap into resources in the school and community to get back on track. Perhaps his story might indicate that all youth should have such meaningful opportunities.

But more than that, Douglas' story also tell the tale of the wonder of second chances. Indeed, Douglas' story speaks volumes about the importance of not giving up on youth. It speaks volumes about working with youth until they can find their own way, their own life purposes. For similar reasons, my own life story also serves to illustrate this point. Suffice it to say that if not for being given a second chance, it is unlikely that I would be completing this manuscript today.

On the other hand, the irony that is being played out in families, schools, and communities all over the country is the same one that was played out during the time of the Kerner Commission (1968). In its forty year update of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968), the 40th Anniversary Committee of the Kerner Commission (2008) raised issues that should alarm us all:

The Kerner Commission concluded that unemployment and underemployment were the most important causes of poverty, yet African American unemployment has continued to be twice as high as White unemployment during each of the 4 decades since 1968. The employment prospects of the nation's out-of-school 16-24 year old men have declined considerably since 2000. The economic condition of African Americans is much worse today than in 2000. Home ownership rates, family incomes, wages and employment are declining. The number of African American ex-offenders struggling to find employment is constantly rising. Among high school drop outs aged 19, only 38 percent of African Americans are employed, compared to 67 percent of Whites. (p. 5)

The 40th Anniversary Committee of the Kerner Commission (2008) were no less critical of the role that some Federal *educational* mandates have played in fostering or maintaining this status quo:

The No Child Left Behind Act has failed. Evaluations have shown that No Child Left Behind has had little significant success in either changing previously existing educational trends or in diminishing the educational achievement gap. The American educational system allocates more unequal inputs and produces more unequal outcomes than most other industrialized nations. Large disparities remain in America between the educational achievement of White and Asian American high school students compared to Latino and African American high school students. (p. 5)

Bringing the issue of inequity full circle, the Commission attempted to alert America to perhaps the cruelest irony emanating from disparities in education and employment.

Speaking to the eight fold increase in the total population of persons in prisons and jails since the late 1960s, the 40th Anniversary Commission stated that:

Well over 2,000,000 persons now are in American prisons and jails. America has the highest reported rate of incarceration in the world. African American men who have not completed high school have a 60 percent chance of imprisonment. African American men aged 25 to 29 are almost 7 times as likely to be incarcerated as their White counterparts. The rate of incarceration of African American men in the U.S. is 4 times higher than the rate of incarceration of African American men in South Africa during the pre-Nelson Mandela apartheid government. An American prison-industrial complex has developed. The states collectively now spend more on prison construction than on construction for higher education. A disproportionate number of ex-offenders return from prison to a small number of heavily impacted communities. (p. 6)

It is undeniable that Douglas and my environments have played a significant role in our development. Like a disproportionate number of African American youth, a significant portion of my childhood was spent in impoverished, crime-filled, and underprivileged neighborhoods. In contrast, like a greater percentage of White youth,

Douglas grew up in what might accurately be described as a middle class neighborhood. Similar to the Kerner Commission's warnings four decades ago, Douglas and I basically hailed from two different Americas. The context matters.

Subsequent to the fortieth anniversary of the Kerner Commission's Report, conditions look bleaker than perhaps at any moment before in our nation's history:

On this 40th anniversary, it is a good time to consider the current challenges for minority youth. The disparities paint a stunning portrait of inequality. Black and Latino newborns in the United States today are 300% more likely to grow up in poverty than are white newborns. Poverty is a major basis of other facets of structural racism - affecting health, education, employment and ultimately feelings of hope for the future. (p. 34)

Linda Darling-Hamilton, a member of the 40th Anniversary Commission addressed what she feels are some of the catalysts behind today's disturbing trends:

While America led the world in high school graduation rates in the 1970's, the country recently ranked 13th, in large part because achievement trends for minority students have dropped. White and Asian students are doing as well or better than the international average. But African American and Hispanics are scoring so much lower it brings the entire average down. Other countries have had "a very intensive, purposeful set of investments in ensuring that all kids are getting access to education," while America's school policies are "unstable and have not been consistent to move us forward. (p. 53)

That context matters should suggest that resiliency goals and objectives should be tailored to address presenting issues on an individual basis, rather than continuing to rely on an universal (i.e., one size fit all) mentality form of youth prevention. Similarly, evaluations should be conducted to determine not only success towards meeting outcome objectives, but process objectives as well.

It is (ultimately) not enough to evaluate the outcomes, if we have no idea how these were arrived at in the first place. The question is not, "are African American and

Hispanic youth falling behind their White and Asian counterparts? But rather, Why? Also, how did we get here? More importantly, What is it going to take to re-chart the proverbial “ship” on its proper course? If schools and communities around the country would be willing to acknowledge the realities that many of these young people face in their daily lives, it might then become possible for (requisite) receptiveness by all stakeholders [themselves] to strive towards working with these youth to enhance their prospects for a more promising future.

From an academic viewpoint, one of the key questions may involve asking how educators and youth workers in school and community settings might help to negate the inequities discussed above, or phrased differently, to foster resiliency in all youth. Strategies aimed at building resilience into the daily lives of youth must include not only mentoring activities, but also requisite support for helping these stakeholders to adopt a student-friendly approach.

Within classrooms all over the country, teachers interact on a daily basis with many youth about whom they understand very little. In light of this, it seems inconceivable that one (i.e., dominant or majority) approach will work with youth in all circumstances (e.g., across cultural, ethnic, and class lines).

Some researchers (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001) have asserted that the quality of our schools is directly related to the quality of our teachers. For these researchers, school success (as measured through collective student learning) is inextricably linked to teacher efficacy. Simply stated, if students are to be expected to learn, then teachers should be expected to teach. Teachers must possess requisite

knowledge, skills and abilities for facilitating student learning. The *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* (1996) offers insights:

What teachers know and can do makes the crucial difference in what teachers can accomplish. New courses, tests, curriculum reforms can be important starting points, but they are meaningless if teachers cannot use them productively. Policies can improve schools only if the people in them are armed with the knowledge, skills and supports they need. (p. 5)

Educators, youth workers and other stakeholders seeking to understand and adequately address concepts and or processes that students may find difficult or confusing, may themselves find direction from Feiman-Nemser (2001) who offered the following guidance:

before they can embrace these new visions, prospective teachers need opportunities to examine critically their taken-for-granted, often deeply entrenched beliefs so that these beliefs can be developed or amended (p. 1017).

Benard (1998) provided a set of best practices for working with high-risk young people derived from the approaches and strategies that have been used successfully by "turnaround teachers" and other youth practitioners for generations. According to her, believing in students' resilience requires foremost that teachers believe in their own capacity to transform or change.

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by educators [and youth workers] every day, a number of researchers are looking at ways that other stakeholders can contribute to the resiliency of our nation's youth. Contemporary strategies have ranged from such diverse activities as [pilot] grassroot soccer programs (Peacock-Villada et al., 2007), art therapy (Prescott et al., 2008), and child and youth care forums utilizing social-ecological inquiry (Cameron et al., 2009).

Brennan (2008) explored interventions aimed at improving and expanding the social network as a means of increasing social support to some of our most vulnerable youth. Nelson (2008) agreed that by implementing programming with meaningful social activities for youth, we all benefit through the renewal of our neighborhoods and communities.

For Yahoem, Granger, and Pittman (2009), one of the critical challenges facing the field is understanding how to assess [and improve] what happens within out-of-school time (OST). For these researchers, it is equally important to know and understand what systems and programs do with youth, as it is to hold them accountable for client outcomes.

Khanlou, Koh, and Mill (2008), conducted a study to assess the impact that cultural identity and experiences of prejudice and discrimination has upon the life prospects [and ultimately life course] of certain ethnic minorities. From these researchers perspective, youth residing in culturally diverse societies oftentimes are subjected to prejudice and discrimination, and such experiences have the propensity for negatively impacting psychosocial outcomes.

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders, youth workers as well as educators to work towards either leveling the playing fields, or alternatively, working to bring marginalized youth up with the mainstream. Although some of the work must be done with the youth themselves, Rose (2009) stressed, it is also vital for everyone to work with the parents as well.

Not only through traditional activities such as Parent Teacher Conferences (P.T.A.), but also programming that has as [one of] its main objectives an improvement in the standing or life course of the parents as well. From Rose's perspective, inevitably, it requires a concerted effort. To emphasize the point, I would call to mind the old axiom "that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link." As Rose (2009) wisely suggested, if society is serious about helping youth to reach their true potential, likewise, it must be committed to helping families to fulfill their full potential. By strengthening these families, in many instances, we actually begin to eradicate the very source of pathology that seems to beset many of these youth.

In conclusion, one might ask the question, whose responsibility is it for the child's well being? The youth themselves? The family? The school? The community? At the end of the day, I have come to believe that resilience does not emerge as the product of rare and special personal qualities, but rather from the magic of the everyday and the ordinary. This should not be taken, however, as a justification for inaction or for adopting a *laissez faire* [all's well that ends well] stand on issues impacting our most vulnerable youth. Just as some of the obligation belongs to youth themselves, so it is also all of our (home, community, and the school's) moral obligation to act to bring about a more just society that supports, aids, and abets the capacity of all (rather than a select few) youth to achieve resiliency....or, in the language I want to use -- transcendence.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

At the onset of this study, a number of issues took center stage within the inquiry here. In search of a better discernment of these, this study was designed to explore what participants believed were the origins or contributors to resiliency in their own lives; what sources of strength and encouragement they drew upon to strengthen and guide them as they negotiated their ways from youth to adulthood; how their understandings of their own experiences compare and/or contrast with traditional (e.g., younger) resiliency subjects; how their experiences compare with each others', and most importantly, how their experiences and insights might inform ongoing efforts to promote resiliency among youth from economically disadvantaged and/or underprivileged backgrounds (see; Introduction, p. 3).

Although many of these questions were answered in the analysis here, other equally significant questions remain. These would range from points of inquiry such as,

1. Should some factors be weighted over the others (i.e., is it more important for parents to provide emotional support or financial support)?
2. To what extent, if any, are teacher's expectations transferable to students under their instruction and supervision?
3. How might motivational patterns of minority (African-American, Hispanic, Asian, etc...) youth differ from majority (white) youth?
4. How might motivational patterns of resilient minority youth differ from their non-resilient counterparts?; and,
5. What happens to resilient youth in later years?

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

EXTERNAL (ENVIRONMENTAL) DETERMINANTS

- To the extent that you enjoyed positive relationships with adults (e.g., teachers, coaches, school counselors, etc..) within the school environment, please describe the nature or extent of these relationships as you can recall. If you recall no such relationships, please describe your feelings in this regards. Concerning these emotions, please distinguish between those you may have had as a youth, versus those you now retain.
- To the extent that you enjoyed positive relationships with adults (e.g., mentors, camp counselors, choir directors, coaches, and youth workers, etc...) within the community, please describe the nature and extent of these relationships as you can recall. If you recall no such relationships, please describe your feelings in this regards. Concerning these emotions, please distinguish between those you may have had as a youth, versus those you now retain.
- To the extent that your belief in your future was influenced by the actions and or words of *adult* family members, please describe these expectations, as well as how these may have affected your development as best you can recall.
- To the extent that your belief in your future was influenced by the actions and or words of *adult* members of the community, please describe the nature and extent of these expectations, as well as how these may have affected your development as best you can recall.
- To the extent that your belief in your future was influenced by the actions and or words of teachers, coaches, and other *adults* within the school environment, please describe the nature and extent of these expectations, as well as how these may have affected your development as best you can recall.
- To the extent that you feel that you had opportunities for meaningful participation as a youth, please describe what role if any, that adult family members may have played in this; as best you can recall.
- To the extent that you feel that you had opportunities for meaningful participation as a youth, please describe what role if any, that others (i.e. teachers, educators, coaches, mentors, religious authorities, or adult members of the community may have played in this; as best you can recall.

INTERNAL (Personal) FACTORS

- To the extent that you enjoyed positive self esteem as a youth, please describe the effect, if any, that the presence (or absence thereof) may have played within your life, as best you can recall. Concerning these emotions, please distinguish between those you may have had as a youth, versus those you now retain.
- To the extent that you exhibited positive self esteem as a youth within the school environment, please describe the effect, if any, that its presence (or the lack thereof) may have played within your academic performance, as best you can recall. Concerning these emotions, please distinguish between those you may have had as a youth, versus those you now retain.
- To the extent that you enjoyed positive self esteem as a youth in your interactions with adults (e.g., mentors, camp counselors, choir directors, coaches, and youth workers, etc...) within the community, please describe the nature and extent of this, as best you can recall. Concerning these emotions, please distinguish between those you may have had as a youth, versus those you now retain.
- To the extent that your belief in your future was influenced by the degree (or lack thereof) of social competence, please describe these expectations, as well as how these may have affected your development as best you can recall.
- To the extent that your attainment of social competence (as a youth) was influenced by the actions and or words of *adult* family members, please describe your understanding of this impact, if any, as well as how this may have affected your development as best you can recall.
- To the extent that your attainment of social competence (as a youth) was influenced by the actions and or words of *adult* members of the school or community, please describe your understanding of the impact, if any, as well as how this may have affected your development as best you can recall.
- To the extent that your attainment of a sense of autonomy (as a youth) was influenced by the actions and or words of *adults*, either family elders or members of the school or community, please describe your understanding of the impact, if any, as well as how this may have affected your development as best you can recall.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS DIALOGUE (presented during Dissertation Defense)

Toney – Hey Douglas.

Douglas – Hi Tone.

Toney – What’s good? Have you had a chance to review the transcripts? Anything stands out?

Either about yourself, myself, or the both of us

Douglas – First, I am amazed at some of our similarities.... and surprised by some of our differences.

Toney - Wanna tell me about it?

Douglas – For sure. The most obvious similarity is how important our early bond with our fathers was for both of us. We both seemed to revere our mothers, too, but they became more important only after we both experienced a sort of estrangement (or in your case separation) from our fathers.

Toney – What do you make of this?

Douglas – I would first say that we both were fortunate to have had such discerning mothers. Each, in their own way had an uncanny knack for filling whatever role was needed to further family stability, and in your case, security. I can only appreciate some of the issues that your Mom was faced with above and beyond what traditional parents—or dare I say mainstream parents -- have to deal with in directing the early lives of their children.

Toney - Any specific examples of these “dilemmas”?

Douglas – Well, it must be hard to protect your sons from racist attitudes toward black males. That’s pretty scary, and it would make me crazy with worry.

Toney – I think it came pretty close. Anything else?

Douglas – Another incident that stood out for me was your reporting almost being shot at the local teen center. Again, this is not something that white families are generally confronted with.

Toney - You grew up in Chicago as I did, right?

Douglas – I did! I think I know what you are getting at. But, as you very well know, Chicago is one of the most ethnically segregated cities in the North. It's like Bagdad, Iraq in a way, with "green zones" -- or more aptly termed safe havens and combat zones, or dangerous places. So no, this is not something that majority (White) families would normally be confronted with on a daily basis.

Toney – Good point. But, the prevalence of violence, racism, and poverty would not be the only things that may place youth at-risk -- right?

Douglas – Very true. The environment that I grew up within had its share or risk factors as well.

Toney - Such as?

Douglas – Ahhh...like the alcoholism and domestic violence in my childhood home?

Toney - That, among other things! Care to delve further into these topics?

Douglas – Sure. As I mentioned during the interviews, for most of my youth, my father was a heavy drinker. Yet, our family did not realize or recognize the seriousness of my father's behavior prior to the car wreck incident. From that point on, we were faced with a dilemma of our own. Do we keep condoning (or as the counseling literature would say enabling) Dad or do we confront him. Our family discovered, as do most families where alcohol or substance abuse

has become a problem, this can have the unintended effect of upsetting family dynamics. As I have learned during my career as a Behavioral Specialist, families function as sort of a system. Along the way, anything that impedes or obstructs the family's normal operating procedures is bound to have a negative effect on family dynamics.

Toney - Am I hearing you say that your father's drinking was considered a "normal" activity by your family?

Douglas – Yeah, for us it had become normal. This is a situation that plays itself out in families each and every day. Because of this seeming normalcy, families (particularly youth within these families) are exposed to inordinate risk. Children learn vicariously through imitating the behavior of others. With youth and parents in such close proximity to each other on a daily basis, it does not take a great leap of faith to understand that such behavior can have a negative effect on impressionable youth. I might add that a number of studies have documented the connection between children of alcoholics (COA) and subsequent substance abuse by youth themselves.

Toney - How did your father's alcoholism affect you?

Douglas – Looking back, I'd say it was pervasive. It affected everyone, my siblings and myself as well as my parents themselves. It affected my opinion of my father, ultimately leading to my no longer wanting to follow in his footsteps. It also affected by mother's opinion of my father, ultimately leading to her no longer being willing to defer to him.

Toney - I see. And your father's reaction?"

Douglas – Predictably, it did not set well with him. He didn't much like his authority being disregarded, especially on days when he was drinking. It made him irate and confrontational.

Toney - And one day, his anger came to a head?

Douglas – Exactly! Ultimately, he became so irate with Mom “challenging his authority” that he hit her. Ironically, Dad’s darkest hour represented the beginning of his return to normalcy.

Toney – Care to elaborate?

Douglas – Sure. After the domestic violence incident, Mom filed for divorce. This was an event that Dad probably never imagined transpiring. Yet, Dad finally realized that he had hit “rock bottom.” From this point on, he began a path that led to his turning his life around. He suddenly quit drinking and began faithfully attending therapy. He not only never raised his hand towards Mom again, he seldom ever raised his voice in anger.

Toney - Any other casualties?

Douglas – The C.O.A. statistics hit our household head on.

Toney - Excuse me!

Douglas – My younger sister ended up having her own battle with substance abuse.

Toney - What effect, if any, do you believe this may have had upon you and your life course?

Douglas – It reinforced my commitment to working to prevent the onset and spread of substance abuse. Looking back, it was kind of surreal. Just as Dad’s odyssey was ending, my sister’s was commencing. Collectively, their travails served as sort of compasses as far as directing my life choices. I would like to believe that this experience has given me a greater discernment of and appreciation for the nuances involved with substance abuse.

Toney - Would it be fair to say that you gained something from these unpleasant experiences?

Douglas – Definitely! Sometimes the worst parts of our childhoods are the ones we learn from the most, especially when you use them to decide what kind of person you DON’T want to be.

Toney - I agree! Any similarities or contrasts that you have been able to glean from my background?

Douglas – In the transcripts, you mention that your father’s absence from your own life made you determined to be a better father than he. Similarly, you mention learning from some of your brother’s mistakes.

Toney - For sure! Yet, I also made some of the very same mistakes as each of them.

Douglas – Everyone makes mistakes. I have certainly made enough of my own.

Toney – Maybe so, but you never made a mistake as egregious as the one that I made.

Douglas – Depends on how you look at it. At least your’s didn’t involve physical violence. Gosh, Toney, I broke a guy’s jaw in high school because I couldn’t control my anger.

Toney - Yeah, but you didn’t wind up in prison for it.

Douglas – True, but that’s because you were charged with a crime, and I was afforded a diversionary program. Not unlike scenarios that I observe every day in my work with minority youth. This is one “fact of life” that I generally try to impress upon them. Not justifying the system, but rather laying out the cold hard facts. Just as discrimination is unfortunately a part of the general society, it is also quite prevalent within the criminal justice system. This, I might add, only serves to highlight just how inspiring that your path to success has been.

Toney - That’s very kind of you, Doug. I only wish that I could have taken a much less “eventful” route if you know what I mean.

Douglas – I do! Although I too wish that you could have avoided your term of incarceration. I also believe that the experience has given you a very powerful testimony as far as being able to reach other impressionable youth.

Toney - I could live with that.

Douglas – Dude, you'll be fine!

Toney – Thanks, Doug, that's encouraging.

Douglas – Just keeping it one hundred! See you next week.

Toney – Next week it is. Same bat time, same bat channel!

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: *Toward a deeper understanding of the role of schools and communities in promoting youth resiliency.*

Name of Investigator(s): Toney Ford Sr.

Invitation to Participate:

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you made an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose:

- 1) The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of youth resiliency. That is, the study seeks to identify sources of strength and encouragement within the school and community that contribute to becoming a successful citizen.
- 2) This research project is designed to answer the following questions: a) How do the four adult participants in this study describe their own ability to achieve resiliency? What do they believe are the origins or contributors to resiliency in their own lives; b) What specific sources of strength and encouragement did they draw upon within the school and community to strengthen and guide them as they negotiated their way through difficult circumstances to become highly successful and productive citizens?; and c) How might these adult participants' experiences and insights inform ongoing efforts to promote resiliency among young people facing poverty, severe family hardship/dysfunction, and community devastation?

Explanation of Procedures:

Interview questions will be drafted to explore each of the domains associated with resilient youth (*e.g., Relationship with caring and supportive adults, High expectations, and Opportunities for meaningful participation*). Your confidentiality will be carefully protected, as no aspect of this study will be discussed with anyone other than my faculty advisor. Moreover, a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity.

Permission is requested to audio-record interviews, however, you are entirely free to accept or decline this request. Audio-recorded interviews will be maintained only until completion of the study. During the interview, you may choose to not answer any question and at any point you can ask that the recorder be turned off. All files (audio-recordings of interviews, interview transcripts, field notes, and archival data) will be maintained in a secured [locked] cabinet in a place where only I have access to them.

If you agree to participate, study procedures will take place off campus in quiet, private, and informal settings, however, deference remains with you regarding your actual preference for interview/observation sites (Example: Your home, office, or other venues off campus according to your preferences. If you retain no preferences, other options might include a private room at public library or community center). The initial interview will last approximately ninety (90) minutes; with a prospective follow-up interview lasting up to one (1) hour in length. With the exception of withholding of your name for confidentiality and privacy purposes, no withholding of information is required.

Discomfort and Risks: Risks to participation are minimal, in that risks to participation are similar to those experienced in day-to-day life. Thus, there are no foreseeable risks to participation.

Benefits and Compensation: No compensation or direct benefit will be provided as a result of participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact (Toney Ford) at 319-610-7067 or (if appropriate) the project investigator's faculty advisor Deborah Gallagher at the Department of Special Education, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-3380. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor)

(Date)