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Stretched but Not Broken: a Multiple-Case Study Analysis of Risk and Resiliency

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

STRETCHED BUT NOT BROKEN: A MULTIPLE-CASE
STUDY ANALYSIS OF RISK AND RESILIENCY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Special Education
Special Education

May 2017

This Dissertation by: Heather Danielle Beam

Entitled: *Stretched But Not Broken: A Multiple-case Study Analysis of Risk and Resiliency*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Special Education, Program of Special Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study was a multiple-case study analysis of two men's journey through life. From a young age, the participants were faced with multiple risk factors: racial discrimination or injustice, poverty, disability, mental health diagnoses, conflict (personal or external), exposure to violence and drugs, living in a neighborhood with high crime rates, constant relocation of homes and schools, involvement within the judicial system, lack of parental support and family cohesion, physical abuse, teacher abuse and neglect, lack of academic support, and family secrecy. Despite the risk factors each participant faced, they were resilient individuals who combatted the odds and are considered to be successful citizens in society. This study defined post-secondary success as: (a) employment: actively employed at the time of the research study; (b) completed post-secondary training: attended post-secondary education/training program(s); (c) independent living: lives independently during the time of the study; and (d) community participation: includes awareness of legal rights and laws, participates as an active citizen (obeys laws, respects the environment, registered to vote, votes, volunteers, respects other's property); locates suitable and available community services, programs, and/or resources; and obtains financial assistance from a state/federal agency.

The purpose of this study was to examine resilient and protective factors that may have contributed to the phenomenon of resiliency and self-determination in two adults who were identified with multiple (four or more) risk factors when growing up. Simply put, the intent of this research was to identify participants' risk factors and personal resiliency factors that may have contributed to their post-secondary success. This study used multiple-case study analysis. Multiple data sources were used to determine the resiliency factors that contributed to the participants' success and high quality of life. A demographic survey, interviews, observation, researcher journal, artifacts, and qualitative documents were used for analysis.

The results of the multiple case study revealed seven resiliency factors cited by the participants that lead to their success and high quality of life: (a) exposure to art and beauty; (b) support and belief from a caring adult; (c) making connections; (d) completing post-secondary education; (e) belief in a higher power; (f) acceptance of self; and (g) self-determination. The participants also defined self-determination skills that aided in their ability to be successful: self-regulatory behaviors (gathering skills to perform tasks, set goals, and advocate for self or others); behavior autonomy; psychological empowerment (internal locus of control); self-realization and evaluation; and a refusal to give up. The participants went on to reveal a call to action for school personnel, program developers, policy makers, and parents: (a) provide opportunities for children and youth at risk to experience art and beautiful things of this world; (b) quit making assumptions about children and youth at risk; (c) provide abundance of opportunities for children and youth at risk to make a situation right or improve the outcome; and (d) create meaningful and positive experiences outside the home.

This study adds to the very limited number of research studies associated with risk and resiliency, including the extension of investigation of multiple risk and resiliency factors. The results of the study provide rich text data that will benefit the lives of children and youth at risk. Suggestions for future research and implications for practice were also presented at the conclusion of the study.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Tracy Mueller. You have not only supported me and guided me for the last five years; you have taught me how to be a mom and a professional at the same time. It is a beautiful balancing act . . . and you do it with grace. Thank you for allowing me to make mistakes and never giving up on me. I truly believe I would not be here if it were not for you. I am happy to know you!

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To my sister, Shannon, thank you for believing in me and helping me along this path I have chosen. You are tough and strong. I have admired and loved you from birth . . . and continue to everyday.

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To God, all I can say, is simply . . . Thank you. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

Lastly, I would like to thank the two participants of this study. You are an inspiration to all. You have overcome tremendous hardship and adversity to rise from the ashes of your circumstance like the Phoenix. You were knocked down, but you did not stay down. You were hit, but you did not crumble. You are beautiful people, and I am

glad that I got to share your story with the world. I hope I made you proud. Keep keepin' on!

And to all of the children and youth that are faced with multiple risk factors each day. You can be anything you want. Let the story told by the two gentlemen in this dissertation be the inspiration and light you need to thrive and reach your dreams. You are somebody. You are powerful. You are strong. Never give up and never stop believing in a brighter tomorrow. I believe in you!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is risk? What puts people at risk? Is there a way to overcome risk and rise above one's predetermined destiny? With no universal definition being accepted, various researchers and theorists have attempted to provide insight and direction to define risk. Pelligrini (1990) defined risk as genetic markers or risk traits that are predetermined to increase the likelihood that an individual will develop a specific condition. Garmezy (1983) focused his definition of risk on anything associated with increasing the likelihood that a person will develop an emotional behavioral disorder (EBD). The Office of the Surgeon General (2001) cited risk as anything that increases the possibility of suffering harm.

Risk factors are generally categorized into two specific areas: biological (or internal) and external (or environmental). Biological characteristics are risk factors in which someone has no control over the predetermined risk. These types of risk factors include race, gender, and hereditary mental illness, such as schizophrenia. According to research, there is a higher incidence of boys represented in the disability category of EBD (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008) and boys are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors (Rutter, 1979). Antisocial behaviors can be described as intentional acts of aggression to self or others. Overt antisocial behaviors are behaviors expressed outwardly towards others. These behaviors include: bullying, vandalism, arson, or verbal

abuse (Encyclopedia of Children's Health [ECH], 2015). Covert antisocial behaviors are exhibited inwardly and include behaviors such as: drug use, sexual promiscuity, manipulation, and lying (ECH, 2015). According to data collected, the number of children and youth participating in antisocial behaviors is on the rise. In 1986, there were approximately 1.4 million youth who engaged in these types of behaviors (Patterson, Debaryshe, & Ramsey, 1990); whereas, in 2015, between 4 to 6 million youth engaged in antisocial behaviors (ECH, 2015). This is especially troubling since three-quarters (75%) of adolescents will continue to exhibit these types of behaviors into early adulthood (ECH, 2015).

Another biological factor putting children and youth at risk for poor post-secondary outcomes is race. According to research reports, children and youth in minority groups are overrepresented in high-incidence disability categories (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004; Bradley et. al., 2008). This is an area for concern since children and youth with EBD are already at an increased risk for poor social adjustment (Wagner & Cameto, 2004) and poor post-secondary outcomes (Murray, 2003).

External Risk Factors

External factors take place in the environment, the world in we which live. These factors occur in real-life settings and represent risk factors that directly impact social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2015) (NCCP), "poverty is the single greatest threat to a child's well-being." Currently, there are over 16 million children and youth living in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2015). Living in poverty directly

impacts the ability of children and youth to get their most basic needs met: food, shelter, and clothing (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). These types of needs are what Maslow described as basic or deficiency needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow went on to report that individuals unable to meet the basic needs of life--food, shelter, safety, and love--may be motivated to act out in negative ways to get those lacking needs met, much like what is reported today with the increase of anti-social behaviors.

Children and youth generally live in neighborhoods representative of their economic status. This impacts the level of education they receive. Children and youth living in poverty have less access to resources, proficient learning curricula, and effective teachers (Lewis, 1999). Poverty also influences access to and awareness of adequate healthcare (Murray, 2003). Lastly, poverty impresses upon the family dynamic, often resulting in a chaotic family environment (Lewis, 1999). Excessive levels of inter-parental conflict can be detrimental to the well-being and development of children and can directly affect psychological deficits and anti-social behaviors (O'Keefe, 1994; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2015). It is important to note, over 5 million children within the poverty level live in a single-parent home (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015).

In 2003, Murray reported that children and youth in minority groups are considered at risk for having dismal post-secondary outcomes when compared to white Americans. When racism, social injustice, discrimination, victimization, or hostility occur; children and youth become frustrated and angry (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). The direct result of this racial discrimination is the negative impact it has on the self-esteem of these youth and the advanced risk placed on them later in life (Kirby & Fraser, 1997).

Maltreatment is another factor facing children and youth that puts them at risk. Child maltreatment is divided into four categories: (a) physical abuse, (b) sexual abuse, (c) emotional abuse, and (d) neglect (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDCP], 2015). In the year 2013, there were 678,982 reports of abuse or neglect made to Child Protective Services (CPS), with 1,520 resulting in death (CDCP, 2015). These statistics represent a dark cloud looming over this nation.

Outcomes for a Nation at Risk

The ramifications of youth dropping out of school at such alarming rates is having a crippling impact on this country. Each year alone, 1.3 million youth drop out of high school (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2008). During the year 2008, students that dropped out of school (during that year alone), cost the nation over 319 billion dollars in lost wages. But there seems to be a silver lining for the prison industry. Incarceration is on the rise. According to Pelaez (2014), there are currently 2 million inmates in private, state, or federal prisons. The majority of inmates are African American or Hispanic, and 16% of all inmates have reported mental illness (Pelaez, 2014). One million of the 2 million inmates are serving time for non-violent crimes (this includes longer prison sentences for “microscopic quantities of illegal drugs” (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-prison-industry-in-the-united-states-big-business-or-a-new-form-of-slavery/8289>). Thirteen states have even passed a three-strikes-you-are-out policy (Pelaez, 2014), meaning that after the third felony conviction, the prisoner will be sentenced to spend life in prison. It is projected that within the next 10 years, there will be over 360,000 privately owned prisons; compared to the 100 in operation now and compared to 5 that were open 10 years ago (Pelaez, 2014).

Children and youth with EBD are at risk. According to the most recent data from the United States Department of Education (2012), there are over 373,000 children and youth identified with an EBD. These youths are three times as likely to be arrested before leaving high school and twice as likely to live in a halfway house or drug rehabilitation center or on the streets (Data Resource Center Child Adolescent Health [DRCCAH], 2006).

In 1985 and again in 2001, the United States conducted the National Longitudinal Transitional Study (NLTS) designed to examine data over a span of 10 years. The study of 1985 had 2,000 participants, and the study of 2009 had over 11,000 participants. Participants were young adults with disabilities and their parents. Some of the outcomes examined were: employment, post-secondary training, independent living, and involvement with the law. The data collected for youth with EBD reported that in year 2009, 53% of the respondents were enrolled in some type of post-secondary education, but only 35% completed an enrolled program in its entirety (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). It was also reported that only half (50%) of the participants were employed. Nevertheless, young adults with EBD have higher unemployment rates when compared to any other disability group (Wynne, Ausikaitis, & Satchwell, 2013).

Data from the NTLS-2 (2011) reported that young adults with EBD have demonstrated high levels of criminal behavior, including the highest arrest record when compared to any other disability group. By the year 2005, 61% of all students with EBD that participated in the NTLS had been arrested (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In the same year, only 19% of the respondents lived independently (Wagner & Newman,

2012). Collectively, children and youth experience the least amount of post-secondary success when compared to any other disability group (Bradley et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Students at risk, including those with disabilities, continue to struggle and fall short in achieving success with postsecondary outcomes. These deficits spill into everyday functioning and not only impact their lives, but the lives of those connected to them. Students who have multiple risk factors have an increased likelihood of engaging in antisocial and risky behaviors. The relationship among risk factors is fluid, meaning one can directly impact another. Youth at risk have struggled for decades. The research previously presented revealed students are dropping out of school at alarming rates. The increase of antisocial behaviors among youth has quadrupled since 1990. The number of inmates in jail has skyrocketed to over 2 million (Palaez, 2014).

Minority students are still overrepresented in high incidence disability categories (Bradley et al., 2008) and experience continued social and racial discrimination. Over 16 million children and youth currently live in poverty (NCCP, 2015). Over half a million (678,932) children and youth were abused in one year alone (CDCP, 2015). Students with EBD function at one to two grades below grade level (Reid et al., 2004). It is shocking, that almost a quarter of high school graduates are illiterate, and 32 million adults in America cannot read (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a).

Despite efforts made by the reauthorization of laws, rulings of pertinent case law, or the increase of evidence-based school programs, such as response to intervention (RtI) or positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), youth are still failing. That by no means implies that law, court rulings, and multi-tiered systems of support do not have

benefit, merit, evidence of success rate, or proven academic and behavioral advantages. It simply means that schools and government agencies cannot be the sole providers or entities responsible for the success of children and youth. There are many risk factors that face children and youth in America today that overflow and impact other facets of life. The problem that continues to plague children and youth in America is the poor outcomes for those at risk or those with an EBD. The outcomes are bleak and grim (as previously reported) for these populations. Thus, more research must be done to examine children and youth growing up with four or more risk factors and the impact they had on their lives. However, the research revealed resiliency factors that contributed to the success of those at risk and those with EBD and that could provide researchers and educators with potential strategies that could increase their quality of life outcomes.

Resiliency Factors

What is resiliency? What does it mean to be resilient? Similarly to risk, there is no universal definition being accepted for the phenomenon, resiliency. Kirby and Fraser (1997) defined resiliency as being able to exhibit positive outcomes despite risk factors. Garmezy (1993) and Matsen (1994) described resiliency as adapting or regaining function after adversity. Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994) cite resiliency as the capacity to handle stress without being debilitated. A review of the literature revealed that resilient youth are armed with protective factors that accompanied or counteracted the risk factors (Garmezy, 1993; Murray, 2003).

Self-Determination

Self-determination is universally recognized as an essential skill needed for post-secondary success, with the definition varying among researchers (Price, Wolensky, &

Mulligan, (2002). Wehmeyer (1996) best described self-determination as the “dynamic interplay between the individual and the environment” (p. 110). Four cornerstones were created out of the concept of self-determination; they are as follows: (a) behavioral autonomy, (b) self-regulated autonomy, (c) psychological empowerment, and (d) self-realization (Price et al., 2002).

Students that are resilient have a high sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-efficacy refers to ones’ belief in self and abilities. Self-esteem is described as self-worth and value. A person who demonstrates healthy self-esteem does not allow the minor trials and tribulations of life to affect or overtake his/her view or perception of self. Individuals with a high self-concept also tend to demonstrate an internal locus of control, meaning they have a say in their own destiny and are responsible for their actions. Lewis (1999) reported that people with an internal locus of control are more likely to react with resilient behaviors or actions when compared to those with an external locus of control.

Supportive Adult

Children are impacted by the adults in their environment. Access to the care, affection, support, and guidance of a trusted adult can provide the protective factors needed to better manage trauma, loss, or stress (Murray, 2003). The most influential factor in determining post-secondary success can be a loving, positive relationship between the child and at least one parent (Murray, 2003). But what if a child does not have that? Can he/she still thrive? Yes. The research revealed that even one caring adult changes lives. This does not necessarily have to be a biological parent; it can be a grandparent, volunteer, a teacher, or other trusted adult (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). A caring

adult can support a child through effectively processing and dealing with the daily hassles of life and other environmental stressors (Matsen, 1994).

Significance of this Study

This study is significant for three reasons. First, research has shown that children and youth are faced with risk. Some of these risk factors are biological and unable to be controlled; whereas others are external factors which occur in the environment. The first contribution made by this research study was the identification of all biological and environmental risk factors. Research has resounded the same result for decades; the more risk factors stacked against someone, the likelihood he/she will engage in risky behaviors exponentially increases (Rutter, 1994; Murray, 2003; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). Any combination of risk factors can lead to school dropout, an increase in antisocial behaviors, and poor social outcomes. One facet of this study was to thoroughly examine all risk factors presented by the participants. All risk factors identified in the literature review were examined, but additional risk factors were discovered during the research process.

Another contribution of this study was to explore the phenomenon of resiliency. In examining the literature in the field of resiliency, one commonality was made clear; many children and youth are armed with resilient qualities, called protective factors (Garmezy, 1993; Lewis, 1999; Morrison & Cosdon, 1997; Murray, 2003). Resiliency is not a new phenomenon; in 1955, Werner and Smith conducted a longitudinal study on the Island of Kauai. To date, this is the only study of this magnitude. Six hundred ninety-eight children born in the year 1955 were studied. Data were collected during formative years of life chosen based on significant milestones responsible for establishing trust,

intimacy, and identity (Werner & Smith, 1982). The study examined all children and determined who was considered “at risk” based on seven risk factors. Some of these factors included: divorce, prenatal complications, family dissonance, and mother’s level of education.

Two hundred ten participants were considered at risk, and by the age of 10, two-thirds of those 210 at risk youth had experienced four more risk factors and had deficits in learning or behavioral concerns. By the last data collection year (participants were 40 years of age), all participants had gainful employment, did not rely on social assistance, nor had been in trouble with the law (Werner & Smith, 1982). The participants were resilient. This study extended the research by thoroughly examining all identifying resiliency/protective factors. Additional resiliency factors may be identified based on cross-case analysis procedures. This study also contributed to the research by identifying any resiliency factors used to specifically combat a particular risk. This study used rich descriptions of participants’ experiences and past events to engage the reader through vicarious experience (Creswell, 2013).

Lastly, this study explored the phenomenon of self-determination (an attribute of resiliency). Self-determination is not a new concept or theory. This phenomenon has been researched for over 40 years, revealing the same finding; self-determination is necessary to achieve post-secondary success (Wehmeyer, 1997). Self-realization, internal locus of control, and self-esteem all contribute to the overall understanding of self-determination. This study revealed additional information about those contributing factors by presenting real-life experiences and stories provided by actual events in someone’s life. The findings benefit educational research with regard to the phenomenon

of resiliency and self-determination. This can help to inform the field of education by presenting the real-life perspective of those who grew up at risk or those with an EBD.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine resilient and protective factors that may have contributed to the phenomenon of resiliency and self-determination in two adults who were identified with four or more risk factors when growing up. Simply put, the intent of this research was to identify the participants' risk factors, personal resiliency, and protective factors. This study sought to identify the participants' risk factors and how they may or may not have related to the protective factors through the analysis of self-determination characteristics. Using pre-existing literature as a framework for analysis, this research extended participant findings through descriptive texts and personal participant experiences.

Research Questions

Four research questions were developed based on the literature, personal/professional experiences, theories, and generalizations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). These questions were used to focus the study for purpose (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The research questions are as follows:

- Q1 How did the risk factors of these adults affect the participants?
- Q2 What is the lived experience of these adults who had multiple risk factors as children?
- Q3 What factors contributed to the resiliency of these adults?
- Q4 What experiences did these adults associate with self-determination?

Definition of Terms

Active employment:

Employed during the time of the study

Antisocial behaviors:

Disruptive acts of overt or covert aggression.

Behavioral autonomy:

Transition from dependence to self-reliance.

Internal risk factors:

Genetic markers or risk traits predetermined to contribute poor postsecondary success.

Maltreatment:

Abuse or neglect inflicted on someone under the age of 18 (CDCP, 2015).

Poverty:

A family of four with a household income of \$23,550 or below (NCCP, 2015).

Protective factors:

Resilient qualities that buffer, interrupt, or even prevent risk factors.

Psychological power:

Internal locus of control and the recognition that behaviors impact outcomes.

Self-determination:

Intrinsically motivating behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

Self-efficacy:

Belief in self and abilities.

Self-realization:

Self-awareness and self-evaluation.

Self-regulated behavior:

Gathering skills to perform tasks, set goals, and advocate for self and others.

Temperament:

Positive temperament is referred as easy going.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Momentous Educational Laws: A Walk through Time

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10) to provide “quality and equality” through the federal government for educating students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). This law specifically provided resources and additional grant monies to schools serving high populations of students with low socio-economic status (SES), including grant money for textbooks and library books to improve the quality of education for children and youth in all grade levels. Since the inception of this law, the United States Department of Education has reported an overall increase in resource availability for disadvantaged students; however, it remains to be noted that as a nation, we continue to fall short of meeting the law’s original goal of full educational opportunity.

No Child Left Behind. On January 8, 2002, Congress reauthorized the ESEA, renaming it No Child Left Behind (NCLB). President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law with bipartisan support. The premise of NCLB was based on four principles: (a) accountability for results, (b) local control and flexibility,

(c) parental choice, and (d) use of research-based instruction that works (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This law intended to inform parents of their child's academic performance as well as the overall performance of the school (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The law went on to say that all students in grades 3 through 8 would be given assessments every year. Those assessment scores would be a major factor in determining whether schools and students made adequate yearly progress (AYP) (NCLB, 2002).

Through NCLB, states were provided the flexibility to establish grade-level-based standards and assessments in reading, writing, math, history, and science (Mooney, Denny, & Gunter, 2004). If a school failed to make AYP for two consecutive years, remedial sanctions were put into place, including but not limited to: student transfer, supplementary school services, instructional plans, or teacher rebuilding (Mooney et al., 2004). Further, if a school was deemed unsafe or dangerous, parents had the option to seek transfer (NCLB, 2002).

Another component of NCLB (2002) included the use of research-based improvements. Schools were encouraged to use evidence-based practices (EBPs) and materials. Evidence-based practices in education are defined as interventions, instructional strategies, or teaching programs that have been systematically researched and shown to make a positive difference in children when experimentally assessed (Perry & Weiss, 2007; Horner et al., 2005). In order to be considered an EBP, high-quality research is required, including experimental, quasi-experimental, or single-subject research designs that have been replicated

multiple times and were published in peer-reviewed professional journals (Cook, Landrum, Tankersley, 2008).

In response to No Child Left Behind: A call to action. In 2010, President Obama called for educational reform. In a letter, he addressed the importance of collaboration, parent involvement, and community partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). He went on to say that resources would no longer be pulled from low-performing schools; instead, these schools and their staff would receive additional support, resources, and training opportunities.

Arne Duncan, The Secretary of Education, went as far as to say,

The current law, No Child Left Behind, should be replaced with a law that ensures opportunity for every child in this country; strengthens our nation economically; and expands support for schools, teachers, and principals, as well as accountability for the progress of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

President Obama and Arne Duncan presented a Blueprint for Reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This reform was built on the following five priorities: (a) college and career-ready students, (b) great teachers and leaders in every school, (c) equity and opportunity for all students, (d) raising the bar and rewarding excellence, and (e) promoting innovation and continuous improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). President Obama penned:

Every child in America deserves a world-class education. We must do better. Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success. America was once the best educated nation in the world. A generation ago, we led all nations in college completion, but today, 10 countries have passed us. It is not that their students are smarter than ours. It is that these countries are being smarter about how to educate their students. And the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Five years later, Obama followed through with this vision of educational policy and reauthorized NCLB.

Every Student Succeeds Act. On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The ESSA was accepted with strong bipartisan support and replaced NCLB. According to the executive summary report provided by the White House, ESSA would: (a) ensure that youth are prepared for postsecondary educational options or careers; (b) be provided resources to assist students, should they begin to fall behind, specifically focusing on the lowest 5% of performing schools; (c) give state and local decision-makers and policy-holders more power to implement their own systems; (d) decrease unnecessary assessments; (e) provide more opportunities for children to attend high-quality preschools; and (f) establish new strategies and tools for testing procedures to improve outcomes for all children and youth (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). Lawmakers and educational professionals were hopeful ESSA would address some of the known shortcomings of NCLB.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Following the implementation of ESEA in 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed (P.L. 94-142). This foundational law provided the building blocks for the special education law that continues to be in practice today. Prior to P.L. 94-142 (1975), U.S. public schools accommodated only 1 out of 5 children with disabilities. However, this statistic changed when P.L. 94-142 was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997, 2004). The intent of this special education law

included: (a) the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities, including access to special education and related services; (b) the protection of the rights of children and youth with disabilities and their parents; (c) the assistance to states, educational service agencies, and federal agencies to provide education, and; (d) the examination of the effectiveness of effort (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes the following six principles: (1) zero reject, (2) non-discriminatory evaluations, (3) FAPE, (4) least restrictive environment (LRE), (5) procedural due-process, and (6) parent/student participation (Bateman & Linden, 2012). Zero reject supports the notion that no student can be denied an education. There is no disability too severe that would result in a student being denied appropriate educational services. Non-discriminatory evaluation ensures students will be assessed in their native language, with nonbiased testing materials. Furthermore, the identification and/or educational placement decisions for students cannot be based on a single test. Multi-layers of testing and evaluations must be completed so the multidisciplinary team can better identify the presence of a disability and how it impacts the student's education and learning process (Bateman & Linden, 2012).

Free and Appropriate Public Education requires that all students with disabilities be provided an appropriate public education, free of charge, designed to meet their unique and specific needs (IDEA, 2004). One major component within IDEA is the development of an individualized education program (IEP). They are created based on the student's present levels of functioning and

identified needs; accompanying goals and objectives are designed to meet those specific needs. Supplementary aids and related services are designated, and placement is then established. The least restrictive environment (LRE) provision allows students with disabilities to be educated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent possible. Schools must provide a continuum of services and supports for students who are unable to fully participate in the general education curriculum.

One major hallmark of IDEA (2004) revolves around the compilation of a student's IEP team. This team must include (at minimum): the parent(s), one general education teacher, one special education provider, a school representative, a person who interprets the evaluation data, and the student (when appropriate). Parents and students must share in all aspects of the decision-making process. Consequently, should a disagreement occur, parents and their child have the right to evoke due process procedures, including mediation and state complaint procedures (IDEA, 2000).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Transition planning for students with disabilities. In 1997, IDEA mandated appropriate transition planning and services for students with disabilities, the purpose of which was to align students' secondary educational requirements with postsecondary goals. In other words, it created a plan that would enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in the areas of education/training, career preparation, and independent living for successful post-secondary outcomes. Transition planning and services refers to how school staff/personnel, parents, and outside agencies

planned to support these youths from high school to adulthood, not what the individual student would do for him/herself.

The revised definition of transition services in IDEA (2006) is based on a “results-oriented” process responsible for providing instruction and functional experiences that would ease the youth’s transition from high school to post-school life (p. 46762). This could include post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated or supported employment, independent living, adult services, or community participation. The term transition services require the IEP team to gather information about the youth’s likes, dislikes, preferences, strengths, interests, and overall needs while providing the necessary instruction, related services, and community opportunities to achieve the set goals (34 C.F.R. §300.43 (a); 20 U.S.C. 1401§ (34) (2006).

Through IDEA, youth as well as any outside agency representatives who may be responsible for implementing or paying for services after high school are to be invited to attend all meetings discussing transition (34 C.F.R., 2006). A clear plan that includes well-designed triangulated post-secondary goals should be developed (Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, & Sedaghat, 2015). Post-secondary goals must address the skills, knowledge, and behavior needed to close the gap to achieve post-secondary success (Gothberg et al., 2015).

Since it is paramount that the IEP team develops age-appropriate, measurable post-secondary goals, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) (2012) developed an Indicator 13 Checklist. This checklist was approved by the OSEP and assists states with compliance and child

success (National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center [NSTTAC], 2012). The Indicator 13 Checklist presents eight questions surrounding transition: (a) Are the established goals measureable, age-appropriate, updated annually, and based on suitable transition assessments; (b) Do the transition services and plan of study support the student to attain his/her post-secondary goals; and (c) Was the child and all outside agencies invited to participate in all meetings that addressed transition? The NSTTAC conducted a systematic literature review study and associated 17 in-school predictors of post-secondary success for employment, education, and independent living (Test et al., 2009). Transition programming was, in fact, cited as a key predictor of post-secondary success (NSTTAC, 2012).

Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and the Law

Since the commencement of ESEA in 1965 to the present, the federal government has spent over \$242 billion dollars to educate and serve students identified as disadvantaged and at-risk (NCLB, 2002). The keystone of NCLB is high-stakes testing, including motivational-accountability based on academic performance. According to Bradley, Henderson, and Monfore (2004), minimal academic data is available for students with disabilities. There is a great need to support and provide an adequate education for these students. Over half (55%) of youth with EBD continue to drop out of school at alarming rates (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). Students with EBD perform 1 to 2 years below grade level (Reid et al., 2004) and lack basic competency skills in reading and math (Jolivette et al., 2000). This continues to be of great concern as academic failure is the number

one predictor of problem behavior and social failure (Reid et al., 2004).

According to Bradley et al. (2004), children and youth are less likely to master these standards, unless they are taught evidence-based interventions (EBI). These EBI should address all student needs: academic, social/emotional, and behavioral.

Moving Beyond the Law: Addressing the Needs of Children and Youth with Antisocial Behaviors

Between 4 and 6 million American children have been identified with patterns of antisocial behavior (ECH, 2015). McCurdy, Mannella, and Eldridge (2003) reported an increase in antisocial patterns of behavior among students. The ECH (2015) defined antisocial behaviors as disruptive acts of overt aggression (e.g., bullying, hitting, and verbal abuse) or covert aggression (e.g., lying, vandalism, theft, and fire setting) that violate the norms of societal rule.

Antisocial behaviors are cited as the root cause of over half of the mental health referrals made for children (ECH, 2015). However, school environments can be proactive and prevent antisocial behaviors (McCurdy et al., 2003). In an effort to decrease antisocial behaviors in the school setting, various programs and approaches were implemented (e.g., some form of counseling or punishment, neither of which can prevent the behavior from reoccurring in the future (McCurdy et al., 2003). A more recent approach included the “zero tolerance policy” with increased school security personnel and systems (McCurdy et al., 2003). Unfortunately, this procedure merely resulted in an increase in school suspensions (McCurdy et al., 2003) and office referrals (Sugai et al., 2000). To combat this problem, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) were established and implemented at the school- and even district-wide level.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

On June 4, 1997, IDEA was amended to include the use of PBIS, including requirements to conduct a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and create/implement a behavior intervention plan (BIP) (Sugai et al., 2000). According to these regulations, “in the case of a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others, the child’s IEP must consider, when appropriate, strategies including positive behavioral intervention strategies and supports to address the behavior” (IDEA 34 C.F.R. § 300.324 (2)(i)(3)(i)). Although this approach is an EBP that can address challenging behaviors, the law remains vague, and consequently, the use of FBAs and BIPs is approached differently across states, districts, and even schools (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006).

A three-tiered preventative approach, PBIS is used to implement positive behavior interventions and support systems (Sugai et al., 2000). PBIS is not a new intervention package or new theory of behavior; rather, it is based on a systematic approach used to enhance school, community, and families to incorporate evidence-based, research-validated practices. The three-tiered model is based in (a) applied behavioral analysis, (b) practical interventions, (c) social values, and (d) a systems perspective (Sugai et al., 2000).

Within a three-tiered systematic approach, Tier 1 (universal) represents evidence-based behavioral interventions used for all students. Examples of universal interventions include: create and enforce classroom rules and procedures, continuously supervise and monitor students, provide students with a ratio of five positive comments for one corrective statement, differentiate

instruction, and provide accommodations. Tier 2 (targeted) includes interventions designed for a select population of students identified as at risk for problem behaviors. These interventions are typically implemented when students have not been successful with Tier 1 support and can include: check-in/check-out (CICO), behavioral contracts, and self-monitoring systems. This second tier represents 5-10% of students in schools (Sugai et al., 2000). The most intensive level of support within the PBIS paradigm system is Tier 3 (intensive). This represents 1-3% of the schools' population of students. At this level, students may be provided one-on-one support, a FBA accompanied by a BIP. It is important to note that not all students receiving Tier 3 interventions and supports are identified as having a disability.

Research has proven that without implementing prevention strategies, schools can anticipate at least 20% of the student population exhibiting behavioral difficulties (Scott, 2011). Scott conducted a study on the impact of implementing PBIS with 500 students, grades kindergarten through 5, in a central Kentucky school. The school was identified as being "in crisis," with 96% of the school's population receiving free or reduced lunches and a statewide academic success rank of 275 out of 285 schools. When compared to other schools in the district, this school had the highest rate of students excluded from classroom learning due to disruptive behaviors.

During this study, a PBIS team was created, met on a monthly basis to examine data, participated in group discussions and trainings, and presented information and data to the school as a whole. Because this school excluded a

disproportionately high number of students with challenging behaviors from classroom instruction, the goal of the study was to implement PBIS with the intent to keep students with challenging behaviors in the general education classroom with their typical peers. The study reported a 65% decrease in the number of days students were suspended, out of school (defined as being sent home from school for a period of at least 1 day), and a decrease in the number of hours (by 775) the students spent in-school suspension (Scott, 2011).

**Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act and
Discipline: Rights
for Students with
Challenging
Behaviors**

According to the Federal Government Regulations (2006), children and youth with disabilities may be removed from school for up to 10 school days due to disciplinary actions. After the 10th day, a manifestation determination must be conducted (IDEA 34 C.F.R. §300.530 (b)(1)) to examine whether the youth's behavior and violation of the code of student conduct was a direct result of the disability. This process is conducted by the IEP team in which all relevant information from the student's file is reviewed as well as information provided by parents and teacher observations (IDEA 34 C.F.R. §300.530 (e)(2)). If it is determined the behavior is a result of the student's disability, the IEP team must conduct a FBA and/or develop or review the BIP (IDEA 34 C.F.R. §300.530(i)(ii)).

A FBA is used to examine the function of the challenging behavior. Under the auspices of applied behavior analysis (ABA) techniques, data are

collected for the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences of the behavioral pattern. The information gathered is used to identify potential functions or reasons why the behavior is occurring. Patterns and trends based on the FBA are examined to develop (or revise) a BIP. This behavior plan should be based on positive behavioral interventions and support, including antecedent and setting event based interventions, replacement behaviors, teaching strategies designed to teach the replacement behavior, and consequence strategies designed to increase positive behaviors and decrease the problem behavior (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006). Once a BIP is developed, the plan must be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure student success.

If a manifestation determination is conducted and it is determined the violation of student conduct is not a result or manifestation of the disability, the student should be disciplined just like any student without a disability. However, there are special circumstances in which students with disabilities may be removed to an interim alternative educational setting for no more than 45 days, regardless of the manifestation of the disability (IDEA 34 C.F.R. §300.530 (g)). Those special circumstances include: possessing or carrying a weapon to school; using, selling, or possessing illegal drugs on school premises; or inflicting bodily harm or injury to others while attending school (IDEA 34 C.F.R. §300.530 (g)(1)(2)(3)).

From 1997-2003, a review of topical index/current decisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Law Reporter linked 100 due process decisions rendered to the required development or implementation of a BIP

(Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006). For example, in Jonesboro Public Schools (1997), the school was in violation of providing a BIP built on student need and assessment data, found to be a violation of IDEA regulations. The district was ordered to conduct a FBA prior to the development of a BIP for school and home to support the student's individual needs. According to IDEA, the IEP team must consider using positive behavioral interventions and supports to address behavior (IDEA 20 U.S.C & 1414 (d)(3)(B)(i)). In 2003, in the case of *Neosho R-V School District v. Clark ex rel Clark*, the court found in favor of the student, citing the absence of PBIS, which resulted in the student's problem behaviors not being addressed and, thereby, impeding his ability to learn and gain educational benefit from his placement.

One hallmark discipline case, *Honig v. Doe* (1988), involved the United States Supreme Court ruling against the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). This case centered around two students with EBD. The first student, John Doe, was 17 years of age, identified as having an EBD, and received special education services. Unable to manage his response after repeated taunts and the tormenting of another student, he responded by choking the other student and kicking out a window on the way to the principal's office. Doe was consequently suspended from school for five days. However, the recommendation of SFUSD Student Placement Committee (SPC) was that he be expelled from school. In the meantime, Doe was not able to return to school and was suspended indefinitely until the expulsion process was finished.

The other student involved with the case was Jack Smith (Honig v. Doe, 1988), a middle-school-aged male, identified with an EBD. It was reported that Smith stole money from classmates, became verbally abusive towards peers, and made sexual comments to female students. Similar to Doe, Smith was placed on a five-day suspension with the recommendation of expulsion. Once again, the school extended his suspension until the expulsion procedures were completed. Smith was homeschooled. In both instances, the findings indicated that these were direct violations of the “stay-put” provision, stating that students must remain or “stay-put” in their current educational placement until all proceedings are finalized.

Restraints and Seclusion when Legal Protection Becomes Challenged

The use of restraints and seclusion has gained national attention for well over a decade, including the passage of H.R. 4247 and the introduction of S. 2860: Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act. In response to reported claims of overuse and misuse of restraint and seclusion techniques for children and youth with challenging behaviors, the U.S House of Representatives’ Committee on Education and Labor demanded the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) compile data from 1990 to 2009. These data were intended to report on student death or abuse in private, public, or treatment centers as a result of restraint or seclusion. The GAO (2009) examined state laws, interviewed state staff, reviewed media reports on allegations made by parents,

and spoke with advocacy organizations. Autopsy reports and police records were also inspected.

Consequently, GOA (May, 2009) published a report titled, “Examining the Abusive and Deadly Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Schools.” Three findings were addressed in this report: (a) there were no current federal regulations established during the time period that was investigated; (b) no reliable national data existed on how and when restraint and seclusion was used in educational settings; and (c) detailed information was provided for 10 closed court cases that resulted in criminal convictions, civil or administrative liability, or large financial settlements (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

In response to these findings, Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, sent a letter to the Chief State School Officers that expressed his alarm and disappointment in the abusive and potentially deadly restraint and seclusion techniques being used in schools across the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This letter called states to review their policies and practices on restraint and seclusion to ensure that every student was safe and protected. The letter also addressed the need to incorporate PBIS as a preventative approach to meet complex behavioral needs of students. Nine principles were outlined as the framework to develop and implement policies and procedures for restraint and seclusion. These nine principles were later revised and expanded into 15 principles for states, districts, school staff, and other stakeholders, all in the hopes of providing them with the structural framework necessary to promote learning in an environment that is safe and healthy (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the use of restraints (physical) and seclusion should only be used in emergency situations. However, it is reported that restraints generally occur for reasons of convenience or punishment (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Research indicated serious bodily harm or even death may occur without the use of proper crisis management techniques. In fact, the GOA referred to restraint and seclusion techniques as dangerous and causes trauma for anyone that is involved in the situation. Almost one-third of the 60 court cases heard in 2010 under the umbrella of *discipline* were related to seclusion and restraints (Katsiyannis, Losinski, & Prince, 2012). In the past two decades alone, the GAO (2009) found countless examples of students being injured or killed because of restraint or seclusion techniques (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Regarding seclusion, *Orange v. County of Grundy* (1996), the court ruled that “placing school children in isolation [in a storage closet] for an entire school day without access to lunch or a toilet facility ‘shocks the conscience’” (p.3). Another case, *Rasmus v. Arizona* (1996) determined it was a violation of the 4th Amendment to place a student in a locked closet. Students who are forced into unmonitored secluded areas suffer psychological harm as well as feelings of anger, depression, humiliation, despair, and delusions (Finke, 2001). In Georgia, a 13-year-old male hung himself after he was repeatedly left alone in an isolated concrete room that resembled a prison cell. He committed suicide with a rope the teacher gave him to use as a belt (*King v. Alpine*, 2009).

Concerning restraint, in Pennsylvania, a 5 million dollar settlement was awarded to the parents of students who suffered heinous acts of physical abuse such as being tied to a chair with bungee cords and duct tape. The students were physically and mentally abused on a daily basis (*Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District, 2005*). More recently, in Antioch California, the largest lawsuit settlement in special education to date was awarded to four students and their representatives. The testimony indicated the teacher would hold students down on the ground with her knee in their backs, gouge their faces, refer to them as “retards,” and squeeze their arms until bruises were visible. The teacher created a hostile learning environment by consistently abusing the students physically, mentally, and verbally. It was found that the impact of this abuse had lasting ramifications and residual effects on all students involved. No data have been found to support the use of restraint or seclusion to effectively reduce problem behaviors (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Risk Factors for Children and Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Individual Psychosocial and Biological Characteristics

Internal factors have been found to contribute to an individual’s ability to become well-adjusted, successful human beings even before birth. According to Pelligrini (1990), individuals possess genetic markers or risk traits that are predetermined to contribute to the likelihood of developing a specific condition. Garnezy (1983) defined risk factors as anything associated with increasing the likelihood that an individual will acquire an emotional or behavioral disorder

when compared to a randomly selected individual from the general population. In 2001, the Office of the Surgeon General cited risk factors as anything that will increase the possibility that someone will experience harm (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001). These predetermined risk factors are what Kirby and Fraser (1997) coined as individual psychosocial and biological characteristics. Such factors or characteristics are ones where individuals essentially have no control, sometimes referred to as vulnerability (Zimmerman & Arenkumar, 1994).

Certain mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, are hereditary (Rende & Plomin, 1993). According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2016), about 1% of the general population is diagnosed with schizophrenia. Within this subgroup, about 10% of people have a first-degree relative (e.g., mother, father, sister, brother, etc.) with the same disorder. Meanwhile, there is a higher incidence among second-degree relatives (e.g., aunts, uncles, grandparents, or cousins) when compared to the general population; however, the highest risk is among identical twins (40%-65%) (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2016).

Other behavior disorder risk factors that can be predetermined include gender and race. More specifically, researchers have reported that boys are more likely than girls to engage in antisocial behavior (Rutter, 1979; ECH, 2015). Antisocial behaviors may be covert or overt acts of aggression that are “intentional” and aimed to harm someone (ECH, 2015). Overt forms of aggression could include bullying, hitting, or verbally abusing someone else. This could be a harmful act against a sibling, parent, teacher, or other adult. Overt

antisocial behaviors can also involve destruction of property by theft, vandalism, or fire-setting (ECH, 2015). These actions are expressed outwardly. However, covert antisocial behaviors are expressed within. Examples of covert antisocial behaviors include drug use, lying, noncompliance, manipulation, and other high risk-activities such as sexual promiscuity (ECH, 2015). In 1986, more than 1.4 million youth engaged in antisocial behaviors (Patterson et al., 1990); whereas, currently, 4 to 6 million American children exhibit antisocial behaviors. These types of behaviors are cited (64%) as the primary reason for childhood mental health referrals (ECH, 2015).

Unfortunately, antisocial behaviors will not cease after high school. Three-quarters (75%) of children who experience these behaviors in adolescence will continue to exhibit them into early adulthood (ECH, 2015). Research reported over three decades ago that children and youth who engage in antisocial behaviors during adolescence will continue to engage in such behaviors into adulthood. These individuals were also disproportionately represented in antisocial behaviors such as alcoholism, divorce, psychiatric concerns, and reliance on the welfare system (Robins & Ratcliff, 1979). It is important to note that the single best predictor of adolescent delinquency, gang affiliation, and adult incarceration can be traced back to behavior problems exhibited in preschool (Dishion, French, & Patterson, 1995).

Children and youth minority groups are considered at risk for having dismal postsecondary outcomes when compared to white Americans (Murray, 2003). The United States Department of Education reported that minority

students are overrepresented in high-incidence disability categories (2000).

Additional researchers reported the same findings (Reid et al., 2004; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). This is especially troubling since children and youth with high-incidence disabilities, such as EBD, are already at an increased risk for poor social adjustment (Wagner & Cameto, 2004) and poor post-school outcomes (Murray, 2003).

Environmental Conditions

According to Kirby and Fraser (1997), “the environment is the context for child development” (p.20). We learn from the world around us. The more one is exposed to opportunity and increased resources, the greater likelihood he/she will be successful. However, living in an unfavorable neighborhood may impede a child or youth’s ability to experience success. What he/she aspires to achieve is quite different than what is actually attainable. This can cause frustration, resentment, anger, or rage (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). These feelings, according to the Strain and Opportunity Theory, may cause alienation, teen pregnancy, school failure, and drug use (Kirby & Fraser, 1997).

Poverty

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) (2015), there are currently over 16 million children (22% of all children) living under the poverty level. Poverty is defined as a family of four with a household income of \$23,550 or below. The NCCP (2015) reported that on average a family of four needs about twice that amount of income, or close to \$50,000, to cover basic living expenses. The NCCP states that “poverty is the single greatest threat to

children's well-being" (<http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>). When compiling the research, three commonalities were present. Poverty is associated with the following: (a) lack of resources, (b) limited access, and (c) chaotic home environments. Children and youth living at the poverty level have an increased likelihood of lacking adequate food, shelter, and clothing (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). Secondly, children and youth living in poverty do not have access to adequate healthcare (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Murray, 2003). Parents may not have transportation to seek medical assistance (Lewis, 1999). Children and youth who live in poverty may not have caregivers who are proactive, but rather, reactive. These parents are not likely to seek preventative medical treatment for their children (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). Often, such parents do not utilize the services provided at a clinic or doctor's office, but rather, use the most expensive form of healthcare, the hospital (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Murray, 2003). Lastly, children and youth living in poverty often live in chaotic home environments with unstable or unsupportive parents (Lewis, 1999; Kirby & Fraser, 1997). Children who live with both parents are less likely to live in poverty (Jiang et al., 2015); however, according to results of the National Longitudinal Transitional Study-2 (NTLS-2), children and youth with EBD are less likely to have both parents in the home when compared to other disability categories (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). Over 5 million children living within the poverty level or low SES level live in a single-parent home (Jiang et al., 2015).

Research has continued to demonstrate the effects of poverty and the direct impact it has on stress levels, which can cause psychological distress and

poor family management (Larner & Collins, 1996). Lewis (1999) reported greater risk for poor outcomes when parents use an authoritative approach or are inconsistent, harsh, and disorganized. Wagner and Cameto (2004) reported that children and youth with EBD are at a great risk when the head of the household has no formal education past high school. It is during such situations that parents are likely to develop the necessary skills to nurture, support, and encourage their children while learning to earn an adequate wage. However, 88% of adolescents living in low SES have no employed parent (Jiang et al., 2015).

Racial Discrimination and Injustice

African Americans and other races have been discriminated against throughout history. Research has continued to show that people of color are disproportionately represented in the lower SES, unemployment, and disability categories (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). Racism puts these children and youth at risk for antisocial behaviors. When racism, social injustice, discrimination, victimization, or hostility occurs, children and youth become angry and frustrated (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). The results directly impact one's self-esteem and place them at advanced risk later in life (Kirby & Fraser, 1997).

Family, School, and Neighborhood Conditions

Poverty directly impacts children and puts them at risk in the future. Children and youth generally live in neighborhoods correlated to their economic status. Therefore, their access to resources, proficient learning curricula, and effective teachers may be compromised (Lewis, 1999). Wang and Haerteel (1995) reported that the school environment contributes many risk factors to

children and youth; these factors include: (a) academic underachievement, (b) low expectations, (c) larger numbers of minority students, and (d) poor leadership among school personnel.

Another risk factor is child maltreatment. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) (2015) divides child maltreatment into four categories: (a) physical abuse, (b) sexual abuse, (c) emotional abuse, and (d) neglect. These acts are inflicted on someone under the age of 18. In the year 2013, there were 678,932 reports of child abuse and/or neglect made to Child Protective Services (CPS) (CDCP, 2015). In that year alone, 1,520 children died as a result of abuse or neglect (CDCP, 2015). Research has continued to report that children and youth who are abused or neglected have higher rates of antisocial behaviors, delinquent acts, and aggression (Widom, 1989; OJJDP, 2015). Child maltreatment increases vulnerability (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). Zeanah et al. (2004) reported reactive attachment disorder in maltreated toddlers. This can be a result of a lack of nurturing and bonding that occurs between a parent and a child (Youngblade & Belsky, 1990). Child mistreatment also affects social and cognitive learning (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). According to Rutter (1994), these children develop negative self-image and self-esteem, view the world as “hostile,” and are at greater risk for school failure and antisocial behaviors.

Parents

Parents have the ability to impact children in a negative or positive way. Research has consistently revealed that excessive levels of inter-parental conflict is detrimental to the well-being and development of children and can directly

affect psychological deficits and antisocial behaviors (O’Keefe, 1994, OJJDP, 2015). Over three decades ago, Brooks (1994) found that children who grow up in a tumultuous, abusive environment can develop an emotional and behavioral stigma. Torry and Billick reported similar findings in 2011: parents who exhibit antisocial behaviors “can leave a child traumatized, empty, and incapable of forming meaningful personal relationships” (p. 275). Parents who lack the skills to manage conflict, either between adults or with their child(ren), increase their risks (Lewis, 1999) and can result in increased delinquency, antisocial behaviors, and substance abuse (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992).

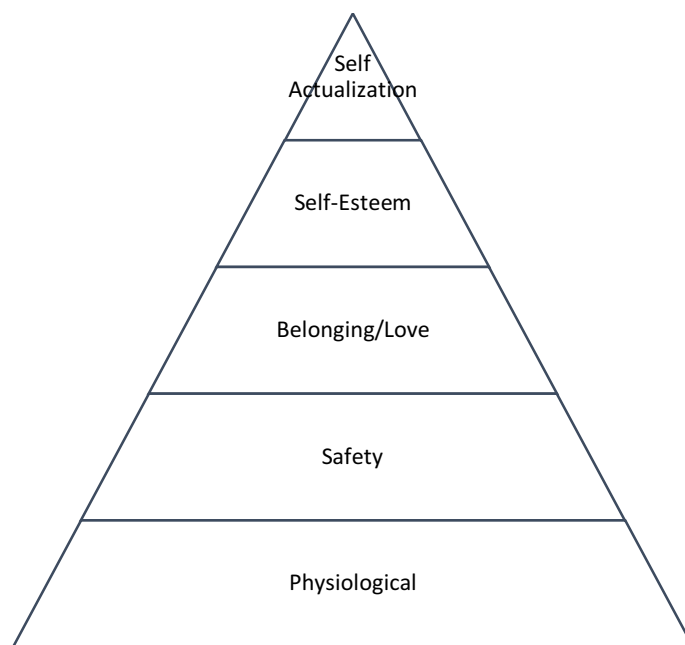
The Fluidity of Risk Factors

Children and youth may be affected by various risk factors, including biological and/or environmental. This compilation of risk factors includes the notion that as risk factors increase, so does the likelihood that a child will exhibit risky behaviors (Murray, 2003; Rutter, 1994; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). The relationship among all the risk factors is fluid, meaning one can directly impact the other. The risks from one domain can spill into other domains and directly influence crucial aspects of growth and development.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs

In 1943, Maslow (1943) defined the driving force behind all human behavior as motivation: all humans have needs and, therefore, are motivated and determined to meet those needs. Maslow (1943, 1954) outlined the root of this motivational theory by developing the Hierarchy of Human Needs. At the inception of this phenomenon, a five-stage model was developed. Over two

decades later, Maslow added three stages. The original five-stage model was divided into two categories, basic or deficiency needs and growth needs, represented through the pyramid model (Maslow 1943, 1954; McLeod, 2014) (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Hierarchy of Human Needs. Adapted from “A Theory of Human Motivation” by A. H. Maslow, 1943, *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.*

The four lower levels of the Hierarchy of Human Needs pyramid are: (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) love and belonging needs, and (d) esteem needs (Maslow, 1943). These basic needs are considered to be the rudimentary level of survival (McLeod, 2014). Typically, these needs are met with instant gratification. Examples of physiological needs are air, water, food, shelter, warmth, sex, and sleep (McLeod, 2014). Maslow estimated that 85% of the U.S. population has their physiological needs met (Maslow, 1943). However, according to the NCCP, more than 16 million children (22%) live in poverty, and

almost half (45%) of children living in the U.S. today live in low-income families (2014). Access to resources, healthcare, consistent shelter, and food are compromised for these children, thereby, disrupting their progress through the levels of this hierarchy. According to Maslow (1943), one must achieve each level before progressing to the next, inevitably attaining the highest level, self-actualization.

The second level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs is safety (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Examples of this stage include protection from the elements, security, stability, and the absence of fear creating a safe environment (McLeod, 2014). Maslow reported that approximately 75% of the U.S. population satisfies these safety needs (McLeod, 2014). The third stage of the basic (deficiency) needs is love and belonging (Maslow, 1943). This stage represents a person's need for friends, family, affection, and intimacy (McLeod, 2014). This need can be fulfilled through work relationships, family members, significant others, and friends (McLeod, 2014). If these needs are not met, one may become isolated, depressed, or withdrawn. Maslow believed that about half the population attained this level of the hierarchy (Maslow, 1954). The final stage of basic needs is esteem needs (Maslow, 1943). These needs include achievement, mastery, independence, dominance, and status (McLeod, 2014). This stage not only includes perception of self and self-respect, but it also encompasses reputation, others' perception of you (McLeod, 2014).

The highest stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs falls under the category of growth needs (Maslow, 1943). The self-actualization needs stage is

the most difficult to master. Maslow reported that only 2% of the population ever progress through all phases and reach full potential (McLeod, 2014). When individuals reach this phase, they are said to seek personal growth and self-fulfillment and strive to meet or exceed their potential (McLeod, 2014). In 1968, Maslow reported 15 characteristics that aid a person in reaching maximum potential. Some of those traits include: spontaneity, peak experiences, privacy, acceptance, new experiences, being child-like, and taking responsibility (Maslow, 1968).

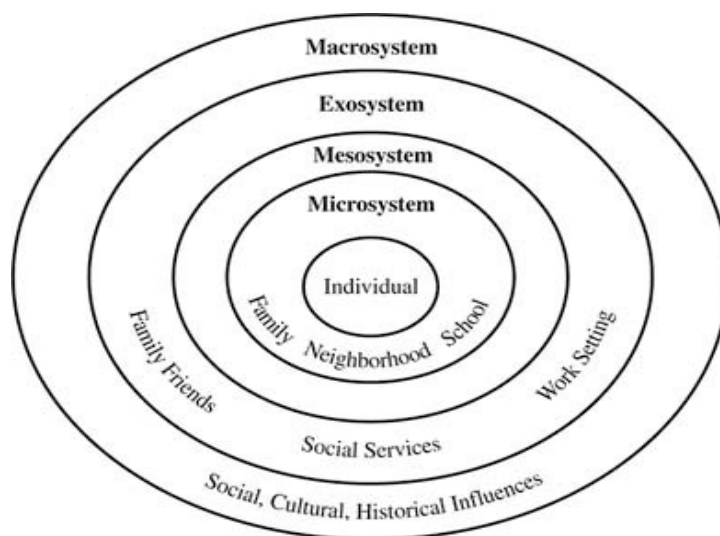
During the years spanning 1960 through 1970, three additional stages were added to create an expanded version of Maslow's original theory. These stages are: (a) cognitive, (b) aesthetic, and (c) transcendence. Cognitive refers to the need to acquire knowledge; aesthetic needs focus on the desire for beauty; and transcendence needs correlate to helping others while reaching their full potential. Some even refer to this as enlightenment or universal brotherhood (McLeod, 2014).

Maslow believed that people were generally well intended. However, when unable to meet basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, safety, or love), individuals may be motivated to act-out. For example, a starving child may end up stealing food. Similarly, if a person does not feel safe, he/she may acquire a gun to fulfill the need for safety and security. Likewise, if a child does not feel loved or desired, he/she may act out through inappropriate attention-seeking behaviors (McLeod, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development

Bronfenbrenner (1977) created an ecological model rooted in research and theory that examined interactions between systems that occurred in the authentic environment of a child. By 1986, empirical evidence gathered in real-life settings became the norm and well recognized within the literature. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development was categorized into five levels: (1) microsystem, (2) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (4) macrosystem, and (5) chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ecological systems theory of development. Adapted from "Ecological Systems Theory of Development" by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1994, International Encyclopedia of Education, 3(2), 37-43).



Microsystems are described as the most influential level of this ecological system and represent the closest, most direct contact children and youth experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These close relationships occur between family members, peers, and caregivers and transpire in the home, school, daycare facilities, and at work (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These interactions are bi-

directional, meaning how one treats others within the microsystem can determine how he/she is treated. The second level is the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem describes the interaction and influence between the different parts of the microsystem. Positive interactions create harmony and meaningful connections; but, negative interactions create disconnect and chaos. Family members who respect one another enjoy each other's company, have positive interactions, and spend time together; whereas, families who argue do not respect each other or have consistent negative interactions may retreat, isolate themselves, or seek to have these needs met through delinquent or risky behaviors.

The exosystem refers to the impact a situation, activity, or decision has on all members of the microsystem, even if they are not directly or actively involved in the process (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). An example of this occurs when a parent has a job that requires him or her to travel away from home for extended periods of time. Even though the children are not involved in this decision-making process, they are directly impacted by it. Another example would include a parent losing his/her job, making it difficult to pay rent. Even though the child was not involved, he/she is directly impacted by the situation. Macrosystems are described as the cultural environment where a person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These could include the economy or political system. Lastly, the chronosystem refers to time in relation to development. For example, a situation in which a parent is incarcerated when a child is 2 years of age might have a different impact than when the same child was a teenager.

Outcomes for Children and Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

As previously discussed, students with EBD are at risk. These individuals continue to struggle with graduation. Researchers have reported these bleak outcomes for decades, yet little is changing. The quality of life for individuals with EBD or those at-risk is not improving. The continued lack of resources, availability to healthcare, support at home and in the school setting, and access to adequate transitional services can cause these students to continue to fail and remain unsuccessful with a poor quality of life after high school.

A Nation at Risk

It is estimated that youth who dropped out of school in the year 2008 will cost the nation over 319 billion dollars in lost wages (AEE, 2008). Each year alone, over 1.3 million youth drop out of high school (AEE, 2008) creating a vicious cycle of antisocial behaviors, delinquency, and reliance on the system. There are over 2 million youth identified with an EBD, and only 40% of these students graduate from high school (DRCCAH, 2006). This is the lowest graduation rate of any population of students within the school setting when compared to the national average of 76% (DRCCAH, 2006). Due to the increased dropout rate and lack of success in school, these students are 3 times as likely to be arrested before leaving high school and twice as likely to live in a halfway house, drug rehabilitation center, or even on the streets (DRCCAH, 2006).

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage

their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (<https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>)

A Nation at Risk included an 18-month study used to create the impetus to educational reform deemed necessary to combat the mediocre U.S. educational system. At the time of this statement, there were over 23 million adult Americans unable to read, write, or comprehend material, and 13% of all 17-year-olds were functionally illiterate. However, the rate of functionally illiterate minority children and youth was 40%. According to the most recent U. S. Department of Education report, 32 million adults still cannot read (12% of the entire population), whereas 19% of high school graduates are illiterate (U. S. Department of Education, 2015a). Instead of improving these bleak outcomes and horrific statistics, it appears as though little change or improvement has been made in over 30 years.

Ten percent of today's youth experience a mental health disorder that can limit daily functioning in a variety of settings (school, home, or community) (Koller & Bertel, 2006). However, 70% of these youth do not receive the care necessary to successfully manage their disability (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2006). This lack of support can lead to poor school performance, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and increased school dropout (Kapphahn & Morreale, Rickert, & Walker, 2006). Up until recently, there has been an increase in the awareness of mental illness due to the violence we have experienced across the United States in schools.

The National Longitudinal Transitional Study

Concerns for post-secondary outcomes have increasingly grown as educators, parents, and students have begun to witness the bleak outcomes for students with disabilities after they exited school. Researchers acknowledged that it was challenging to gather, compile, and analyze data on the employment status, criminality, independent living, and graduation rates of youth with disabilities (Smith & Coutinho, 1997). Therefore, the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) was commissioned with SRI International, a scientific research institute, in 1985 to launch a study, the National Longitudinal Transitional Study (NLTS), to address these issues. There were many facets to the initial study that have transpired throughout the years.

In 2001, the Institute for Educational Sciences funded OSEP to further research outcomes for students with disabilities. Over 500 school districts were identified and randomly selected based on geographic location, size of the district, and socioeconomic status. Of those districts, 11,270 youth aged 13-16 agreed to participate. The study examined the following: (a) characteristics of youth in special education and household makeup; (b) secondary school experiences of youth in special education including school, school programs, related services, and extracurricular activities; (c) experiences of youth with disabilities after leaving high school; (d) measurement of post-school outcomes including: education, employment, social interaction, and residential domains; and (e) recognized factors that lead to postsecondary success (Newman et al., 2011).

Data were collected through a variety of sources: parents/guardians, youth, teachers, principals, and school records. Telephone interviews were conducted with parents and youth, school surveys were distributed to school personnel, youth assessments were administered when participants were between the ages of 16 and 18, and transcripts were gathered to gain additional information about these students during high school. The NLTS-2 described early adulthood as the lapse of time from ages 18 to 34. Furstenbeg, Rumbaut, and Settersten (2005) described this stage as one that begins when a student completes high school and enters the realm of responsibility and independence--essentially, adult living. This stage is identified by financial stability that is achieved by entering the workforce, embarking on independent living arrangements, and building meaningful relationships (NLTS-2, 2012). However, children and youth with EBD experience the least amount of post-secondary success when compared to any other disability group (Jolivet et al., 2000; Bradley et al., 2008). Unfortunately, these bleak outcomes have become the norm for this population of youth and can be seen across several areas of life.

Prior to reporting the outcomes, data were gathered on these participants during the years 1987 and 2003. It was reported that in 1987, 21% of youth with EBD earned As and Bs, which increased to 47% by the year 2003 (U.S. Department of Education, 1987; Wagner, M. & Newman, L., 2012). There was an increase in 1-2 day suspensions from 2% (1987) to 11% (2003). Youth with EBD also reported an increase in days absent in a 4-week period; it rose from

1.9% to 3.1% (U.S. Department of Education, 1987; Wagner, M. & Newman, L., 2012).

Post-Secondary Education Outcomes

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) links the purpose of FAPE to “prepare them [youths with disabilities] for further education, employment, and independent living” (Sec. 602(d)(1)(a)). According to the data collected, Wagner and Newman (2012) reported that in 1990, only 18% of the NLTS respondents completed any form of post-secondary education. In 2005, this number increased to 35% and continued to grow to 53% by the year 2009. The report highlighted that of those youth enrolled in any type of post-secondary education, only 35% completed the program in its entirety or graduated when compared to over half (52%) of the general population (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Employment. Gainful employment is necessary to secure financial stability and aid in independent living. By seeking gainful employment, typically, individuals rely less on the supports of family and friends or any government agencies. Bullis and Cheney (1999) said it best when they stated, “Meaningful and well-paid work is one of the hallmark outcomes for adults in the U.S” (p. 5). Nevertheless, young adults with EBD have higher unemployment rates when compared to any other disability group (Jolivet et al., 2000; Wynn et al., 2013). According to the data collected from the NTLS and NTLS-2, in 1990, over half (59%) of the participants in the study were employed (Wagner, M., & Newman, L., 2012), which decreased in 2005 to 41%. In 2009, half (50%) of the

respondents were employed with 45% receiving vacation pay or sick leave. Only 39% received health insurance. It is important to note that youth with EBD experience unstable employment (Jolivet et al., 2000; Bradley et al., 2008; Wynn et al., 2013), tend to exhibit longer delays in obtaining gainful employment (Jolivet et al., 2000), and frequently quit their jobs (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). What is especially troubling is that of the participants in the NLTS-2 who were employed, they did not earn enough income to substantially impact their ability to live independently (Bradley et al., 2008).

Justice system involvement. Data indicate that young adults with EBD exhibit high levels of criminal behavior (Wagner, M., & Newman, L., 2012), including the highest arrest records when compared to any other disability category (Bradley et al., 2008). Young adults with EBD report drug abuse and criminal activity well above the norm (Janz & Banbury, 2009; Wynn et al., 2013). According to the Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, L., & Blackorby (1992), 36% of all participants had been arrested. By the year 2005, this number had almost doubled to 61% (Wagner, M., & Newman, L., 2012).

In a meta-analysis of 25 studies that included 2,486 participants with EBD, Reid et al. (2004) reported 70% of students with EBD were arrested within the first three years after leaving high school. According to Wagner and Newman (2012), almost three-quarters (72.9%) of the study participants with an EBD had been stopped in the past two years by law enforcement, with almost half (43.9%) reported having been on probation.

Independent living. According to the World Health Organization

(WHO), evidence from 52 countries indicated that young adults who build and maintain meaningful relationships with parents or other influential adults are less likely to engage in drug use, depression, or sexual activity (WHO, 2002).

However, youth with EBD struggle with building or maintaining relationships with positive influences (Jolivet et al., 2000). This may result in parents being responsible for caring for their children after the completion of high school, thereby leading to an increase in the likelihood of significant financial hardships, creating numerous economic obligations for families (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005). The NLTS-2 reported that young adults with EBD rely on their parents. In 1990, it was reported that 27% of young adults with EBD lived independently, which decreased to 19% by the year 2005 (Wagner et al., 1992; Wagner & Newman, 2012).

A recent study was conducted with 34 parents of young adult children identified with EBD (Wynn et al., 2013). The parents rated their child's success in adulthood based on their ability to function independently. The results indicated that 32% (n = 30) of the young adult children were employed fulltime. Meanwhile, over half (59%) of the adults lived independently, with only 18% of adult children identified as being able to fully support themselves with financial independence. It should be noted that youth with EBD are the only disability category group to demonstrate an increase in "other" living arrangements such as mental health facilities, criminal justice systems, foster care, or the streets (Wagner, M., & Newman, L., 2012).

Resiliency Factors for Children and Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Rising from the Ashes, the Phoenix

According to Greek Mythology, the Phoenix, described as the Fire Bird, represents one's ability to rise from the ashes to begin a new life. Across religions, folklores, and mythological tales, the Phoenix, in its various representations, symbolizes the ability to shed old skin and be reborn. The Phoenix was a beautiful bird, similar to that of a peacock or an eagle. The feathers of this bird were stunning and colorful, brilliant reds, yellows, and oranges. Representing the colors of fire and the rising sun (Brenner, 2014). People gazed at this bird in amazement and awe, wanting its feathers. To seek protection and solace, the bird sought refuge in a far-away land.

Hundreds of years passed, and the bird had grown tired and weary because of its circumstance. Desiring to reach the place of its birth, the bird traveled over time and space to seek the comfort of the sun. Encompassing itself in fragrant twigs and branches, the bird dies within its own tomb. From those ashes rises a beautiful bird; by clapping its wings together, the Phoenix was born. The Phoenix represents "the sun, time, the empire, metempsychosis, consecration, resurrection, life in the heavenly Paradise, Christ, Mary, virginity, the exceptional man" ([http://parody.wikia.com/wiki/Phoenix_\(creature\)](http://parody.wikia.com/wiki/Phoenix_(creature)), 2016). Phoenix-like qualities are necessary to reach Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs.

Resiliency Factors

Just like the Phoenix, a resilient child rises from the proverbial ashes of their circumstance to thrive and overcome. Resiliency is not a new concept or

phenomenon. Kirby and Fraser (1997) described the term resilient to mean children who exhibit positive outcomes despite risk factors. Garmezy (1993) and Matsen (1994) described resilient as adapting or regaining function after adversity. Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994) called resiliency the “capacity” to handle stress without being “debilitated,” however, not being free from stress. Indeed, stress will present itself, yet how one handles the stressor or hassle speaks to his or her resiliency. Bernard (1991) best describes resiliency as “healthy human development--a dynamic process in which personality and environmental influences interact in a reciprocal, transactional relationship” (p. 18).

Examining literature in the field of resiliency revealed that many resilient children and youth at risk are armed with resilient qualities, called protective factors, that accompanied or counteracted the risk factors (Garmezy, 1993; Lewis, 1999; Morrison & Cosdon, 1997; Murray, 2003). According to Rutter (1985), “protective factors refer to influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person’s response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome” (p. 600). In 1955, two researchers, Werner and Smith, began a longitudinal study of 698 children born that year on the Island of Kauai (Werner & Smith, 1982). To date, this is the only study of this magnitude. Many ethnicities were represented: Japanese (33%), Hawaiian (23%), Filipino (18%), Multi-ethnic (14%), Portuguese (6%), Caucasians (3%), Chinese (1%), Korean (1%), and Puerto Ricans (1%). The fathers of the participants mainly worked in the sugar plantations and were considered semi-skilled or unskilled. The mothers were uneducated; half had a formal education above the 8th grade, and most did

not complete high school with a diploma. Data were collected during the formative years of the life cycle (1, 2, 10, 18, 32, and 40 years of age). These years were chosen because significant milestones, responsible for establishing trust, intimacy, and identity, occurred at those time periods (Werner & Smith, 1982).

Risk factors examined in the study were: poverty, pre- or perinatal complications, family dissonance, parental psychopathology, maternal education, and divorce. The study revealed that 210 participants were considered “at risk.” Of those children, by the age of 10, two-thirds who had experienced four or more risk factors had learning or behavioral issues. These same children had delinquency or mental health concerns when data were collected at the age of 18. One out of 3 grew to be competent, caring, confident adults. When data were collected at the age of 40, each of the 210 participants had gainful employment, did not rely on social assistance, and not involved with the law (Werner & Smith, 1982). These participants were resilient in the face of adversity and rose from the ashes like the Phoenix.

Self-determination. Over the last four decades, research has supported the phenomenon of self-determination as a necessary skill needed to achieve post-secondary success (Wehmeyer, 1997). Sarason (1990) cited skilled, self-sufficient citizens are those who are responsible members of society, with the capacity to seek further knowledge as a crucial skill needed to acquire postsecondary success. Wehmeyer (1997) also reported that this is an area that many youth with disabilities fail to achieve. Many youth struggle with reaching

post-secondary success in the areas of employment, independent living, and positive involvement within the community (Chadsey-Rusch, Rusch, & O'Reilly, 1991).

Self-determination is universally recognized as an essential skill needed for post-secondary success, with the definition varying among researchers (Price et al., 2002). Deci and Ryan (1985) described self-determination as “an internal need contributing to an individual’s performance of intrinsically motivated behaviors (p. 176).” The Turnbolls (2001) also described self-determination as “the means for experiencing quality of life consistent with one’s own values, preferences, strengths, and needs (p. 175)”. Ward (1988) based his definition of self-determination on attitudes, preferences, skills, and abilities; while, Wehmeyer (1996) described self-determination as the “dynamic interplay between the individual and the environment” (p. 110). It is important to note that Wehmeyer (1998) argued that self-determination is not synonymous with absolute control and complete self-sufficiency.

Based on the research of Wehmeyer (1998) and Field and Hoffman (1994), four essential characteristics and necessary components of self-determination have been developed and defined. These are the cornerstones of self-determination: (a) behavioral autonomy, (b) self-regulated behavior, (c) psychological empowerment, and (d) self-realization (Price et al., 2002). Behavioral autonomy refers to the transition from dependence to self-reliance. This autonomy can be achieved by offering choices, promoting decision-making skills, setting goals, and encouraging some level of risk-taking (Price et al., 2002).

Self-regulating behavior refers to gathering the skills to perform tasks, set goals, and advocate for self or others. Psychological empowerment addresses one's internal locus of control while recognizing that behaviors directly impact outcomes. Lastly, self-realization includes self-awareness and self-evaluation (Price et al., 2002).

Self-determination and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency are cited as the main outcomes or goals derived from IDEA (2004). The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Developmental Disabilities Assistance Bill of Rights Act (2000) also impact these goals. All of the previously discussed legal statutes directly impact the quality of life for youth with disabilities, and the IDEA goals are directly linked to the quality of life outcomes established (Turnbull, Trunbull, Wehmeyer, & Park, 2003). Similar to self-determination, an overall definition of quality of life outcomes has not been adopted (Turnbull et al, 2003). However, an eight-domain framework was established by Schalock (1996). The framework included: (a) emotional well-being, (b) interpersonal relations, (c) material well-being, (d) personal development, (e) physical well-being, (f) self-determination, (f) social inclusion, and (g) rights. Turnbull et al., (2003) cross-referenced the goals of IDEA to the quality of life domains. It was reported by the Special Interest Research Group on Quality of Life (QoL) (2003) that the IDEA goal, independent living, is congruent with the quality of life domain, self-determination.

Temperament. A child who is easy going or is considered to have a positive temperament may experience less aggression or negative interactions with parents (Rutter, 1994). Positive temperament is the most cited protective factor for infants (O’Keefe, 1994). According to Rutter, Quinton, and Yule (1977), children who are deemed “difficult” tend to be used as the scapegoat for a parent’s anger or irritation, and these children are twice as likely to receive criticism from the parent when compared to a child with a positive temperament.

Self-concept. Self-efficacy can best be described as belief in yourself and your abilities. Believing that obstacles can be overcome, hurdles can be jumped, and races can be finished creates an intrapersonal motivation to succeed. Research shows that success increases self-efficacy and success in school decreases antisocial behaviors and delinquency (Carahan, 1994). Increased self-efficacy can be intertwined with self-esteem. Self-esteem can be described as self-worth and value. A person who demonstrates healthy self-esteem does not allow the small trials and triumphs of daily living to directly impact or overtake his/her view of self (either positively or negatively). According to Brookes (1994), self-esteem relates to the way in which one deals with daily living, respectfully confronting an issue, dealing with success or failure, contributing to society, and respecting self and others. The ability to believe that we have a “say in our own destiny” and are responsible for our actions describe internal locus of control. Our actions directly impact what happens in our lives, meaning that we are responsible. Lewis (1999) reported that people with an internal locus of

control are more likely to act with resilient behaviors or actions than those with an external locus of control.

Supportive family, school, and neighborhood. Children thrive with support from a caring adult. This does not necessarily have to be a biological parent. It could be a grandparent, volunteer, a teacher, or other trusted adult (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). Access to the care, affection, support, and guidance of a trusted adult can provide the protective factors needed to better manage trauma, loss, or stress (Murray, 2003; Werner, 1993). It is crucial that children have positive adult role models in their lives. A caring adult can model pro-social behaviors and support the child through the process to effectively deal with the daily hassles of life and other environmental stressors (Masten, 1994).

Parents. Children are impacted by their living environment. Garmezy (1993) reported warmth in the home and “cohesion” (i.e., togetherness) as key resiliency factors. The most influential factor for determining post-secondary success can be a loving, positive relationship between the child and at least one parent (Murray, 2003). This cohesive and strong bond can create a safe and secure environment with attentive supervision and appropriate disciplinary practices (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). According to Murray (2003), parents who were emotionally invested, actively involved, and responsive to their child’s needs provided the most positive impact. The author went on to say that parents must provide structure while modeling appropriate behaviors for their children. This can be achieved through the successful implementation of effective parenting

strategies and opportunities designed to increase self-efficacy and resiliency factors (Kirby & Fraser, 1997).

Wang and Haertel (1995) reported that families must be involved in the community and school environment as well. When children and youth are provided with meaningful opportunities in education and employment, the likelihood that they will participate in antisocial behaviors or delinquent activity decreases (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). In addition, simply providing opportunities that are linked with family support indicates that youth are less likely to become premature parents, partake in antisocial activities/behaviors, or become frustrated and angry leading to violence (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). This form of external support is a vital component of resiliency (Garmezy, 1993). In 1996, Fergusson and Lynskey conducted a longitudinal study of family attributes such as SES, parental marital status, parent/child interaction, and parental tension or disharmony. Antisocial behaviors, including drug and alcohol consumption, were documented for participants between the ages of 15 and 16. The results of the study revealed that over half of the participants exhibited at least one family risk factor that could contribute to the participant engaging in antisocial behaviors. However, less than 1% (.2%) of the participants had multiple risk factors. The results indicated that one-fifth of the participants with multiple family risk factors exhibited antisocial behaviors (Rutter, 1994).

Conclusion

An interactive model is rooted in the relationship or “dynamic” between risk and protective factors (Rutter, 1979). Within the interaction framework,

protective factors serve three purposes: (a) to buffer (risk factors), (b) to interrupt (risk chains), or (c) to prevent (initial occurrence of risk factor) (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). Protective factors may “cushion” or filter the negative effects of a risk factor, interrupt the interaction or progression of risk factors, or prevent the risk factor from even occurring (Kirby & Fraser, 1997).

In developing the Ecology of Human Behavior, Bronfenbrenner (1979) used the link between risk and protective factors as key components to the “big picture” of resiliency. Unfortunately, the fire that burns within a child or youth facing adversity can be dimmed and eventually extinguished. Garmezy (1993) cited three major reasons resiliency diminishes: (a) prolonged stress, (b) absence of support, and (c) drastic changes within the family dynamic. However, despite these claims, children and youth can rise above their circumstance and thrive. With modified stressors, family cohesion, and external support, children and youth who were once at risk to fail and become another grim statistic now have the skills and tools to rise from the dust and soar. Children and youth who were once overlooked, misunderstood, or dismissed have the ability to achieve success and pave their way for a successful, satisfying, and fulfilled quality of life.

Given what is known about risk and resiliency, more in-depth research is needed to determine how individuals who face multiple risk factors are still able to perform against their odds and demonstrate resiliency. The current study aimed to examine four or more biological and environmental risk factors of two participants and the resiliency and self-determination factors that were used to combat those risks.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine resilient and protective factors that may have contributed to the phenomenon of resiliency and self-determination in two adults who were identified with multiple (four or more) risk factors when growing up. The intent of this research was to identify the participants' risk factors and personal resiliency factors that may or may not have contributed to postsecondary success. A multiple-case study analysis was used to conduct a thorough analysis of the phenomenon. This chapter will detail the qualitative methodology, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis that were used to address the purpose of the study.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research design is used when “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam, 2012, p. 22). The primary goal of qualitative research is for participants to understand, interpret, and construct meaning from experience or knowledge. Qualitative research is unique and provides distinct direction to guide the overall process of research. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research design focuses on meaning, understanding, and the process. The research approach often includes purposeful sampling along with clearly defined data

collection procedures. The analysis of the data focuses on comparison and inductive reasoning. Findings are categorized in the form of theme/patterns, and the results are presented in rich, descriptive texts (Merriam, 2009). It is important to note that the researcher plays a vital and crucial role in the entire qualitative research process (Creswell, 2014). A strength to this approach is the collaborative process that is built between the researcher and the participants. The positive dynamic and two-way communication style creates a trusting relationship and bond between the researcher and the participants that will increase the likelihood the participants will be more forthright and open with their experiences and construction of meaning.

Multiple-Case Study Design

For this study, a multiple-case study design was used. Multiple-case study design includes extensive and comprehensive data collection of multiple bounded systems (or cases) through exhaustive and careful data collection procedures (e.g., interviews, documents, and artifacts) (Creswell, 2014). This study used case study design for several reasons. First, according to Stake (1995), case study research is not intended for generalization; it is rooted in particularization. Thus, the intent of this study was not to yield results for a larger sample of individuals. Rather, the purpose of this multiple-case study was to explore the “how” and “why” behind risk and resiliency using rich examination and exploration (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The research questions presented in Chapter I require knowing the contexts or settings for which behaviors, memories, cultural history experiences, and events occurred in the lives of the participants. By studying these contexts (i.e., home, community, and school), the relevancy and impact the setting or contexts had on the participants were

explored. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), contexts and settings are relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon. Case-study design compliments further exploration of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development, an ecological model that is rooted in the research and theory of interactions between systems that have occurred in the authentic environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This study examined the participants' relationships and relationship dynamics within the home, school, and community setting. Lastly, multiple-case study enables data analysis in two ways: (a) within each setting or context, and (b) across each setting (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This type of analysis provides more depth and insight into and data regarding the participants and their stories by examining differences and similarities across cases.

A constructivist approach. The philosophical approach for this study is rooted in understanding the phenomenon of resiliency based on the perspectives, insight, and experiences described by the participants (Creswell, 2014). The participants constructed their own meaning of the research (Creswell, 2014). Crotty (1988) identified three assumptions related to this constructivist approach: (a) meaning is constructed by interpretation and engagement in the natural setting; (b) meaning is formed based on social and historical perspectives; and (c) meaning is formed based on interaction within the community. The goal of this research study was not meant to generalize the findings, but rather to bring meaning to that which is created, formulated, and constructed by the participants and their interpretations of experiences and the contexts in which they took place. According to Creswell (2014), this approach relies on the interpretation of the participant. The researcher is simply the vessel to bring forth the results and analyze the data.

By asking broad, open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014) the participants were provided the opportunity to reflect, recall, and relive experiences and moments in specific contexts. According to Crotty (2012), a balance must occur between subjectivity and objectivity. The researcher must have some level of creativity and imagination (Crotty, 2012). This is a process that is deliberate and planned. It is important to note that this approach values the object. Objects exist and inevitably carry meaning based on prior knowledge, cultural history, understanding, and personal experiences (Creswell, 2014). Crotty (2012) best described constructivism by saying:

It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practice, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (Crotty, 2012, p. 42)

Delimitations. During research, it is necessary to establish perimeters or boundaries for the study. Boundaries are the limits placed on the case study to make sure the scope of the study is feasible and clearly defined (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By outlining specific boundaries prior to data collection, the case studies do not become unmanageable or insurmountable (Stake, 1995). This process is also known as binding (Baxter & Jack, 2008). One practice used when developing the scope of the study is to form propositions. Propositions are broad statements based on the literature, theories, personal experience, and/or generalizations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The following propositions will be reviewed and examined throughout various times in the research process (Stake, 1995).

Table 1

Case Study Propositions

Potential Propositions	Source
Various factors put you at risk for poor post-secondary success	Professional experience; literature Wagner & Cameto (2004) Murray (2003)
Self-determination is a factor that contributes to post-secondary success	Literature Wehmeyer (1997) Price, Wolensky, & Mulligan (2002)
At least one adult believes/guides/supports a resilient person	Professional experience; literature Kirby & Fraser (1997) Werner (1993)

Note: These are examples and do not represent a complete literature review.

Researcher role. The role of the researcher is a vital component of the case-study process. Stake (1995) cited several roles the researcher may incorporate during the research study. Some roles of the researcher include: teacher, participant observer, interviewer, reader, storyteller, advocate, consultant, or counselor (Stake, 1995). The role of the teacher refers to the researcher's audience, the readers who will be reading and learning the information from the study. According to Creswell (2013), the researcher is also referred to as an instrument. While an instrument is defined as a tool for delicate work, I actively collected data and gathered information with deliberate focus. In this study, I was the sole researcher gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Lastly, as a researcher, I thoroughly investigated and included or excluded any necessary data needed to tell an accurate, descriptive story. According to Stake (1995), the researcher must pay careful attention to all elements and components of the data. A qualitative

researcher has the responsibility to thoroughly engage and submerge him/her in the entire research process. After all, it was my job to ensure that the participants' stories are best represented, described, and explained with honor and dignity that is unbiased.

Case Study Design

Institutional review board approval. Upon completion and acceptance of my research proposal by the doctoral committee Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval was obtained. This step is necessary in the research process to ensure that proper steps and protocol are followed when working with human participants. The IRB was accepted and approved on July 22, 2016. I was listed as the principle investigator. As soon as I was granted approval, I immediately began to locate my participants (see IRB approval and consent forms, Appendix A).

Participants. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Non-probability sampling or purposeful sampling is defined by Creswell (2013) as the deliberate selection of participants that will best suit the research questions and assist the researcher in thoroughly understanding the problem. Selection of participants for this study was made based on the vast amount of knowledge, experiences, information, and insight they provided to the study. Patton (2002), refers to this type of purposeful sampling as information-rich cases. Merriam (2009) refers to this as unique sample selection.

In an effort to protect the confidentiality of the participants, names, dates, and locations have been changed. Potential participants were identified through past and present professional contacts and colleagues (teachers, professors, social workers, and school psychologists). Colleagues were contacted based on their past or present job descriptions and access to participants who could potentially meet the inclusionary

criteria of this study. It was at that time that my advising professor called me and informed me of a keynote speaker she heard speak at a conference. She recommended that I contact the speaker to inquire whether he would be willing to talk with me. I sent the speaker an email (see Appendix B for the email). He replied to my email and agreed to meet with me to discuss the study in greater detail. I contacted one school counselor and one school psychologist by telephone to discuss the study. I also emailed a professor I had when I earned my Masters degree. The school counselor said she had one person in mind who would possibly meet the inclusionary criteria of my study. At that time, the professor I emailed responded and offered to be a participant. The three potential participants were determined based on the information and feedback provided by my colleagues and the participants themselves. However, since only two participants were needed for the study, my advisor and myself determined the two participants who would be most suitable for the study. The first was the motivational speaker, and the second was my previous professor. Also, I already had a working relationship with my professor and had built a rapport with him that would nicely lend itself to the nature of the investigation.

In July 2016, I met with Participant 1, Charles, in a hotel lobby in a metropolitan area in the West. We met at a location where Charles was delivering a motivational talk. During our meeting, I explained in detail the basis of the study. I informed him what his role would be and the information I would be seeking from him. I also explained that he would need to keep a detailed log and provide three written responses for three writing prompts that I would provide at a later date. At this time, Charles gave verbal consent to be included in the study and also self-identified as being risk-growing-up. This meeting

lasted approximately 27 minutes. Two days later, Charles emailed potential dates and times that he would be available to meet with me to conduct two interviews.

I also had a brief meeting with Participant 2, Gabriel, at his office. This meeting lasted approximately 15 minutes. I explained in detail the basis of the study. I informed him what his role would be and the information I would be seeking from him. I also explained that he would need to keep a detailed log and provide three written responses for three writing prompts that I would provide at a later date. At this time, he gave verbal consent to participate in the study and self-identified his life growing-up as at-risk.

Inclusionary criteria. I selected two participants based on the following boundaries or inclusionary criteria used for purposeful sampling.

1. Participants must be 30 years of age or older (by the age of 30 individuals have been out of high school for at least 8 or more years, had the opportunity to enroll and complete post-secondary training, had time to start a family, and be employed.)
2. Participants must self-identify with four or more risk factors present growing up (this number was determined by the study conducted by Werner and Smith, 1982). Risk factors included: maltreatment (physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect), male, minority, divorced parents, high school dropout, identified with a mental illness, identified with a disability, low socioeconomic status, experienced racial discrimination, lived in a single-parent home, lived in an unsafe neighborhood with a high crime rate, mother's level of education, excessive parental conflict, attended a low-performing school, and engaged in antisocial behaviors. Examples of antisocial behaviors

included: bullying, hitting, or verbally abusing someone else; destruction of property by theft, vandalism, fire-setting; drug use, lying, noncompliance, manipulation, and other high-risk activities such as sexual promiscuity. All of the previous risk factors were directly pulled from the literature review.

However, this was not an exhaustive list.

3. Participants must demonstrate post-secondary success to include: (a) employment, (b) post-secondary education or training, (c) independent living, and (d) community participation.

For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of post-secondary success was defined based on the following criteria: (a) employment--actively employed at the time of the research study resulting in independent financial stability and not collecting government assistance; (b) post-secondary training--attended and completed post-secondary education/training program(s) (including vocational training); (c) independent living--lived independently during the time of the study (may have lived with spouse and children) and performed daily living skills and household tasks; and (d) community participation--included awareness of legal rights and laws, participated as an active citizen (obeyed laws, registered to vote, voted, volunteered, respected others' property), located suitable and available community services, programs, and/or resources, and obtained financial assistance from a state/federal agency. This definition was developed based on information from IDEA-2004, Transitional Planning Inventory--Updated Version (TPI-UV) 2006, Clark & Patton (2006), Domains of Adulthood (<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/transitionadult/>), and the literature review.

For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of resiliency factors was based on the following criteria: (a) supportive and caring adult growing up (American Psychological Association [APA], 2016; Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Masten, 1994; Murray, 2003); (b) warmth and family cohesion (interpersonal relationships--getting along well with others, sense of “togetherness,” parental involvement) (Garmezy, 1993; Clark & Patton, 2006); and (c) positive relationship with at least one parent (Murray, 2003). The literature review was also used in formulating this definition.

For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of self-determination was based on the following criteria: (a) recognizes and accepts personal strengths and limitations as demonstrated through reflective thinking; (b) sets realistic, well-designed personal goals; (c) makes educated decisions and takes necessary steps to achieve set goals; (d) takes accountability and accepts consequences for actions; (e) high level of internal locus of control (believe I have a say in my own destiny, responsible for actions); (f) healthy self-esteem as demonstrated by ability to deal with daily living situations, respectfully confronting an issue, appropriately dealing with success or failure, contributing to society, and respecting self and others. This definition was formulated based on information gathered from the literature review, TPI-UV (2006), the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), and the QoL Indicators.

Data Collection

Case study research requires numerous or multiple sources of data. Multiple forms of data were collected: a demographic survey, interviews, qualitative documents (personal or public records), published works, researcher journal, participant journal, and

any other relevant artifacts (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Multiple data sources were used to aid in triangulation for internal validity (Creswell, 2014).

Demographic Survey

A 25-question online survey was created through Qualtrics. This survey was comprised of 11 multiple-choice questions and 14 short-response questions. The purpose of the survey was to gather basic, yet specific, demographic information from the participants via close-ended questions. The survey responses did not require extensive remarks or call for additional information from the participants to ensure understanding. The survey was distributed to Charles on August 11, 2106, and was completed on August 12, 2016. The survey took Charles approximately 7 minutes 17 seconds to complete. The distributed survey was completed by Gabriel on September 5, 2016. The survey took him approximately 9 minutes 37 seconds to complete.

Interviews

According to Stake (1995), interviewing “is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). Interviewing was beneficial for my research study because I was unable to directly observe any past experiences or events discussed by the participants (Creswell, 2014). Two interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, using an interview protocol with semi-structured, open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014). According to Merriam (2008), semi-structured interviews use flexible questioning, with a predetermined list of questions. This process allowed me to have some control and guidance over the direction of the actual interviews (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were conversational in nature, and I encouraged the participants to speak freely and without reservation.

Interview protocol. A series of broad questions were included in the protocol. The questions were designed based on the six types of questions compiled by Patton (2002). The six question styles included: (a) experience and behavior questions, (b) opinion and value questions, (c) feelings questions, (d) knowledge questions, (e) sensory questions, and (f) background/demographic questions (Patton, 2002) (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). All six types of questions were used to develop the demographic survey and interview protocol. Patton (2002) described the interview process best by saying that this is the researcher's way of determining what is "in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341). Each interview was recorded with the researcher's iPhone on Google Voice and was passcode protected. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. It is important to note that all transcribed interviews will remain in an electronic file that is passcode protected for five years. At that time, all interviews and conversations (audio and transcribed) will be deleted and destroyed.

Charles. Two interviews were conducted with Charles in a Midwestern metropolitan area. The first interview began at approximately 9:37 pm on an evening in August. The interview was 1 hour 39 minutes in length. I began the interview by giving Charles a hardcopy of the IRB consent form. I discussed the IRB in detail, the foundation of the study, and participant expectation. After a thorough explanation of the study, Charles signed and initialed a hardcopy of the IRB consent form stating he agreed to participate in the study.

I informed Charles of my role as a researcher, including being a mandated reporter. I also explained that at the conclusion of all interviews, Charles would be asked to rate how "safe" he felt based on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. A score of 1 represented

there were no safety concerns and he was able to be left alone. A score of 5 represented that he did not feel safe and should not be left alone. If Charles rated his safety level with a score of 3 or higher, I determined the most suitable plan and resources needed to ensure his safety and well-being. At the completion of each interview, Charles rated himself with a score of 1, representing there were no immediate concerns for his safety and well-being. No additional supports, services, plans, or actions were necessary after any interview or conversation. However, due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed, I provided Charles with the phone number to the mental health crisis center. He did not use this service.

Interview 2 was conducted with Charles at 8:45 pm and lasted approximately 1 hour 26 minutes. I reminded Charles of my role as a researcher and provided him with the same referral crisis information that was given during Interview 1. Both interviews were conducted at a private location in a public setting.

Gabriel. Two interviews were conducted with Gabriel in a Western metropolitan area. The first interview began at approximately 9:40 am on Labor Day, 2016. The interview was 1 hour 19 minutes in length. One week prior to the first face-to-face interview, I emailed Gabriel the IRB consent form. I began the first interview by giving Gabriel a hardcopy of the IRB consent form. I discussed the IRB in detail, explained the foundation of the study, and expectations. Gabriel signed and initialed a hardcopy of the IRB consent form that stated he agreed to participate in the study.

I informed Gabriel of my role as a researcher, included being a mandated reporter. I also explained that at the conclusion of all interviews, he would be asked to rate how “safe” he felt based on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. A score of 1 represented no safety

concerns, and he was able to be left alone. A score of 5 represented that he did not feel safe and should not be left alone. If Gabriel rated his safety level with a score of 3 or higher, we would determine the most suitable plan and resources needed to ensure his safety and well-being. At the conclusion of the first interview, Gabriel rated himself with a safety score of 3. I asked more specific questions. Do you feel like you want to hurt yourself? Do you feel confident that you can be left alone? Where are you planning on going when you leave this interview? Will there be people around you, or will you be by yourself?

After the discussion I had with Gabriel and with his responses to my queries, we both felt confident he would be able to be left alone without injury to himself or others. I provided him with the number to a 24-hour mental health crisis line. Gabriel later reported that he did not use this service. However, due to the sensitivity of the topics we discussed, Gabriel's personal safety rating, and his past mental health concerns, I texted the participant at 7:02 pm to check in with him. He responded at 9:22 pm and reported he was fine and there was no reason for concern.

Interview 2 was conducted with Gabriel, at approximately 8:15 am. This interview lasted 58 minutes. At the beginning of the interview, I reminded Gabriel of my role as a researcher and provided him with the same referral crisis information that was given during Interview 1. At the conclusion of the second interview, Gabriel rated himself with a personal safety score of 4. When the interview concluded, Gabriel took a walk to clear his head and then returned to work. There were no concerns for his safety and well-being at the end of the interview. Both interviews were conducted in Gabriel's office, in a public location, in a metropolitan setting.

Interviews with outside sources. By seeking outside sources (parents, educators, friends, siblings, etc.) to interview when conducting a multiple-case study design, a deeper understanding of the participants and their experiences is created. This is achieved through additional perspectives, insights, and points-of-view provided by the outside sources.

During their first interviews, I asked Charles and Gabriel to identify any outside sources who may be willing to talk with me. Charles declined having me speaking with any outside sources, but did mention that his brother may be willing to talk with me in the future. However, Gabriel revealed two individuals who might be willing to speak with me. The first individual was Gabriel's oldest and dearest friend, John. He was also the godfather of Gabriel's daughter, Shannon. The second person was Shannon. Unfortunately, John was poor in poor health. He was unable to meet with me. Shannon was also unable to meet with me due to her rigorous college schedule out of state. Thus, despite repeated attempts, I was unable to interview any outside sources.

Observations

Charles was observed performing a monologue portraying an African-American slave who accompanied explorers on various journeys. According to Merriam (2009), observations: (a) triangulate findings, (b) make it possible for researchers to observe the participant firsthand in their natural environment, and (c) offer specific insight about the routines of the participant. The observation lasted approximately 30 minutes. At the end of the monologue, Charles took questions from people within the audience. Forty-three people attended.

Qualitative Documents

Each participant provided documents that were used for data analysis. This form of data collection provided additional insight and knowledge of the events and experiences discussed by Charles and Gabriel, including more depth and understanding into cultural and monumental moments of their lives. According to Creswell (2014), by including different types of data collection procedures, such as artifacts and qualitative documents, one “can capture useful information” that may be overlooked by simply interviewing (p. 190).

Charles provided me with his self-authored internationally best-selling book. The book described his journey through poverty, disability, and delinquency as well as his ability to overcome his risks and live a successful and fulfilling life. Meanwhile, Gabriel provided two forms of documents. The first was a handwritten letter from the program coordinator of a recreation center associated with the Department of Parks and Recreation. This letter was written on Gabriel’s behalf during a court proceeding. The second document provided was a published peer-reviewed research article Gabriel authored. The article he shared was a qualitative study of migrant children and youth. Upon additional investigation, I was able to locate his curriculum vitae which included his areas of research, four additional publications, employment history, educational history, fellowships, consultancies and keynotes, grants, courses taught, and recognitions and honors.

Participant journal. During the research process, both participants were asked to keep a journal or log (Creswell, 2014). Suggestions for the journal or log were provided, but not limited to: missed information that was later realized, feelings or memories that may have been purposefully forgotten or suppressed, any “ah-ha”

moments of discovery that were constructed throughout the research process, or additional questions. This journal also included three writing prompts for further analysis. The three writing prompts were predetermined at the beginning of the study to provide additional information associated with the questions asked from the interview protocol.

Charles was asked the following three questions via email on December 7, 2016:

(a) If you could go back one day in time, what would it be?; (b) What is your favorite memory?; and (c) What is your worst memory? Charles did not provide answers to these questions. He was traveling a lot at this time and may not have had time to respond.

Meanwhile, Gabriel was emailed four questions on November 28, 2016. The questions he was asked to reply to were as follows: (a) Did you experience racial discrimination? If so, provide an example; (b) My favorite memory was . . .; (c) My worst memory is . . .; and (d) If I could go back one day in time it would be . . ., and why? Gabriel emailed his responses to the four questions on December 15, 2016. The reason Gabriel was asked an additional question was because he did not speak of racial discrimination or injustice during his interviews. Since I was seeking information regarding race as a risk factor (based on the literature), I asked him to provide information regarding any instance of racial injustice or discrimination.

Gabriel answered the four questions I emailed him, but did not keep a separate log regarding the suggested prompts. He said, “The thoroughness of the data collected during our interviews pretty much covered it all.” However, it is important to note that several emails were exchanged between Gabriel and myself that focused on the research process, his personal feelings about the study, and moments of clarity he gathered from

the process. The information gathered from his written responses was added within the findings section to support the information that was obtained from his interviews.

Researcher journal. In addition to the afore-mentioned data, I maintained a journal throughout the study. The purpose of the journal was twofold. First, I took copious notes throughout each interview that included noting facial expressions, body language, long pauses, tears, laughter, smiling, and any quality or attributes that were not depicted from an audio recording. Second, I kept a journal of my own reflection through this learning process. As the research instrument, it was important for me to reflect on the data and stories collected along the way. I often would write thoughts that would come to my mind at night or when I was not specifically working on the study. My own journal notes were used as another form of data for triangulation to provide an audit trail.

Data Recording Procedures

All interviews were recorded on my iPhone using Google Voice. The interviews were recorded for the purpose of allowing me to transcribe the data so that I could correctly analyze and report the information provided. All audio and transcribed data will be kept in a passcode-protected account for five years. At that time, the data will be deleted and destroyed. It is important to note that any qualitative documents or artifacts provided during the study were used for reporting purposes only. I was not asked to return any artifacts to the participants. Thus, all information gathered for this study was kept confidential.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is the complex process of attempting to make sense of the data collected (Merriam, 2008). With qualitative research, the amount of data gathered can be

overwhelming, confusing, or abundant. According to Creswell (2014), making sense out of the data is like peeling back the layers of an onion and then putting it back together again. If permitted, this process could go on for life (Merriam, 2008). Thus, the first stage of data analysis was interview transcription. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Next, I gathered all data: transcriptions, artifacts, qualitative documents, participant journal, researcher journal, and researcher notes for review; I “winnowed” the information to funnel the important data and eliminate unnecessary data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

All data were independently coded. Coding is a process that requires organizing data by dividing it into purposeful chunks or brackets (Creswell, 2014). Codes were developed based on (a) expectant research, (b) surprising information, or (c) particularly fascinating or unusual research (Creswell, 2014). Using Tesch’s Eight Steps in the Coding Process (Tesch, 1990), I independently coded the data. I focused on the participants separately, meaning I completed Charles’ within-case analysis before moving on to Gabriel’s within-case analysis. First, I carefully read all the transcripts for Charles. I wrote notes in the margins, focusing on underlying meanings. I provided codes for all the transcribed data. From this point, I manipulated the codes and corresponding participant text responses into similar segments. I took the segments and compared them against my data. After all codes were broken into segments, I looked for similarities among the codes and chunked them into overarching categories or themes.

Themes are the overarching categories, and the codes are the components that support the main themes used to identify any patterns or trends. This process is known as “within case analysis.” I highlighted specific words from Charles’ responses that could

be used as potential headings. Based on all the information gathered, the independent codes were created into five risk factor themes: poverty, engagement in antisocial behaviors, disability, race, and failure of systems (educational and juvenile justice system). There were six resiliency themes identified: exposure to art and beauty, belief in self, making connections, completed post-secondary education, and a belief in a higher power. Three themes were created for self-determination: self-awareness, refusal to give up, and purposeful or prepared planning (see Appendix D).

I completed this same coding process for Gabriel. Based on the information gathered and the variety of data sourced used, four risk factor themes were developed: exposure to violence, poverty, engagement in antisocial behaviors, and a mental health diagnosis. Three self-determination themes were created and defined: refusal to give up, purposeful or prepared planning, and self-regulatory behaviors. There were also additional subheadings used for both participants (see Appendix E).

Cross-Case Analysis

According to Creswell (2014), multiple-case study research design opens the door for additional research and analysis of the data. One benefit to multiple-case study research is the depth and understanding of the complexity of the case. It is not to transfer the data to a greater population. By gathering data for multiple cases, I was able to conduct a within-case analysis (themes within each case) as well as a cross-case analysis. A cross-case analysis identifies themes across each case (Creswell, 2104). When completing this task, I began by meticulously reviewing the themes created from the various forms of data provided by each participant. I looked for commonalities in themes, responses, or experiences presented by both participants. I created a word

document with the headings representing the overarching themes or patterns that were present in both cases. I then looked for specific codes that were reported by both participants and placed them under the corresponding category. I also made a notation at the bottom of the document of any major discrepancies or differences between the participants. This cross-case analysis created a deeper understanding of the data, while recognizing similarities and differences between the participants.

Verification

Triangulation

Maxwell (2005) stated: “Validity is a goal, rather than product, it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative” (p. 105). Triangulation is one of the best strategies used to establish validity of credibility in case-study analysis (Merriam, 2008). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources when creating themes. According to Creswell (2014), “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding validity” (p. 201). For this study, triangulation occurred through the collection of interviews, qualitative documents, journals, artifacts, and observation.

Charles. In order to achieve validity of credibility within the study, I used multiple data sources to create and analyze themes. The data sources used for this participant were: a demographic survey, two interviews, researcher journal, observation, and participant-published work. Two interviews were conducted, and interviews were transcribed verbatim. During each interview, I kept copious notes. The notes provided additional information that could not be reflected through the transcribed interviews

alone. The notes recorded information such as: observable changes in the participant's demeanor, slouching in the chair, verbally making the sound of an Uzi, slamming hand onto the table, long pauses, and gazing into the distance. I also wrote in a journal, describing the process in detail. I reflected on the process, my role as a researcher, and insight that was constructed by the participant himself.

Another data source used for triangulation was observation. I observed Charles on stage. He portrayed an African-American slave. His performance was raw, enlightening, and purposeful; it was the culminating factor that displayed self-actualization through his love and exposure to the arts. Segments of his presentation were recorded. They were transferred to my iTunes account, which is passcode protected. The last artifact used to triangulate the data was a #1 internationally best-selling book written by Charles himself. The book outlined his journey through poverty, antisocial behaviors, interactions with various systems, and his transformation to success.

Gabriel. The data sources used for this participant were: a demographic survey, two interviews, researcher journal, artifacts, participant written responses, and participant published work. Two interviews were conducted, and interviews were transcribed verbatim. During each interview, I kept copious notes. The notes provided additional information that could not be reflected through the transcribed interviews alone. The notes recorded information such as: observable changes in the participant's demeanor, tears, reaching for a tissue, long pauses, grabbing the researcher's hand, and gazing into the distance. I also kept a journal describing the process in detail including notes, ah-ha moments about the process or themes, my role as a researcher, and insight that was constructed by the participant himself.

Another data source used for triangulation were artifacts. Gabriel provided me with a copy of the letter that he described as “the letter that saved my life.” I reviewed this letter. The letter spoke to Gabriel’s work ethic and the necessary role and benefit he played within the recreational center in which he volunteered. The letter went on to say that the youth he worked with would be worse off if he was not able to continue working there. Information from the letter was added within the results section. Other data sources used were a published journal article written by Gabriel and his curriculum vitae. I was also able to review the written responses provided from Gabriel’s journal and several emails that were exchanged between us.

Member Checking

After the data were analyzed, I used member checking to ensure internal validity and credibility (Merriam, 2008). Member checking is described as the most effective way to ensure that a researcher does not misconstrue or misinterpret the meaning behind the participants’ responses (Merriam, 2008).

Charles. After the within-case analysis was completed, I contacted Charles to seek clarification regarding the analysis. An email was sent on January 18, 2017, with five questions that needed further explanation and interpretation by Charles. The questions sent to Charles regarded his step-mother, his biological father, his teachers, and his step-father. Charles responded on January 19, 2017, with the clarifying information. I made corrections to the results accordingly. Charles was also sent the preliminary findings and themes of the study on February 1, 2017. He responded on February 4, with two minor corrections. Corrections were made accordingly. This process aided in ensuring the exactness and accuracy of the overall categories/themes and preliminary

findings (Creswell, 2014). It is important to note that I did not share the themes of one participant with the other participant.

Gabriel. In order to ensure that I was reporting the information accurately, several levels of member checking were completed. The first level of member checking occurred on September 9, 2016, at the start of the second interview. Immediately after the first interview concluded, I reviewed my notes and wrote two questions I had for Gabriel about his interview responses. At the start of the second interview, Gabriel clarified the two questions I presented. I also emailed him the preliminary findings, on two separate occasions. These findings included demographic information, risk factors, resiliency factors, themes, and the preliminary findings. The first email was sent to Gabriel on February 11, 2017, and the second email was sent on February 18, 2017. Gabriel immediately responded with minor corrections that needed to be made. I made the corrections accordingly.

Inter-coder Agreement

Using inter-coder agreement strategies, all interview transcripts were provided to another doctoral student who was familiar with case-study research and acted as an independent rater. She coded the provided transcripts (Creswell, 2014). The process of using the other coder required the independent coder to read at least 25% of the data and create coding using the dictionary code list provided by the researcher. This is also known as cross-checking (Creswell, 2014). Any discrepancies or disagreements in the coding resulted in a discussion between the independent coder and myself until mutual agreement was established.

Charles. Transcribed interviews were shared with another doctoral student through a passcode-protected file to ensure inter-coder agreement. The doctoral student was recommended by my advisor for having past experience with case study analysis and cross-checking. The dictionary of themes I created was emailed to the inter-coder. The inter-coder used the Nvivo Software Program for the analysis of the transcribed interviews. After the cross-check was completed, there were no discrepancies to report. No corrections were needed. Both the inter-coder and I were in agreement.

Gabriel. Transcribed interviews were shared with the same doctoral student who was used for Charles, through a passcode-protected file. The doctoral student acted as an inter-coder who had past experience with case-study analysis and cross-checking. The dictionary of themes I created were emailed to the inter-coder. The inter-coder used the Nvivo Software Program for the analysis of the transcribed interviews. There was one discrepancy to note; the inter-coder and I disagreed on the usage of the word *broke*. The inter-coder and myself reviewed the transcripts and discussed the correct meaning of the word. According to the transcribed data, Gabriel was referring to how broken he and his family felt inside, not their lack of money or financial stability. After a brief discussion and review of the data, the inter-rater coder and I were in agreement.

Ethical Considerations

Regardless of the style of research, ethical considerations play a dominate role in the research process and must be considered throughout all phases, not just for data collection procedures (Creswell, 2013). I was proactive and examined potential ethical concerns and strategies to remedy any issues prior to this investigation. First, I ensured that I had approval from my dissertation committee and the IRB prior to beginning data

collection or participant recruitment. Second, I provided an informed consent form to all participants prior to any data collection, explaining my study, presenting researching questions, and seeking a signature and initials. In addition, I explained to the participants that they did not need to sign if they did not wish to participate, and they had the right to stop at any time. Another potential ethical consideration I avoided was “going native” (Creswell, 2013), which refers to becoming biased toward participants and swaying personal perspective. This was avoided through inter-coder agreement, member checking, and reporting all relevant and necessary information in the findings. Finally, I provided each participant a copy of the preliminary findings.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative multiple-case study approach, this study added to the research about understanding the phenomenon of resiliency. This multiple-case study analysis tells the story of two participants, Charles and Gabriel, who had four or more significant risk factors stacked against them. Despite these risk factors, Charles and Gabriel were able to work through their challenges and are referred to as resilient. Using multiple sources of data and thorough data analysis procedures, risk and resilient themes were identified. In the next section, these themes are defined, explained, and presented in a narrative format that includes direct quotes, rich descriptions, and story vignettes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine resilient and protective factors that may have contributed to the phenomenon of resiliency and self-determination in two adults who were identified with multiple (four or more) risk factors when growing up. The intent of this research was to identify the participants' risk factors and personal resiliency factors that may or may not have contributed to post-secondary success. A multiple-case study analysis was used to conduct a thorough analysis of the phenomenon.

For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of post-secondary success was defined based on the following criteria: (a) employment: actively employed at the time of the research study; (b) post-secondary training: attended and completed post-secondary education/training program(s) (this includes vocational training); (c) independent living: lived independently during the time of the study (may live with spouse and children); and (d) community participation: included awareness of legal rights and laws, participation as an active citizen (obeys laws, registered to vote, votes, volunteers, respects other's property), the ability to locate suitable and available community services, programs, and/or resources as well as financial assistance from a state/federal agency. This definition was developed based on information from IDEA-2004, TPI-UV-2006, Clark & Patton, 2006, Domains of Adulthood (<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/transitionadult/>), and the literature review.

This chapter will detail the research questions and the findings. Each case study participant will be presented individually, followed by a cross-case analysis that presents the similarities and differences between the two case studies (hereafter referred to as Charles and Gabriel).

Charles

Demographic Information and Background Story

Charles, a 49-year old African American man, was diagnosed with a learning disability at a young age. Later in his educational career, he was also diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity activity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia. Charles was born in, Indiana, in 1967.

I don't know that I can describe my birthplace. I was born in Indiana. I don't know anything about it. My father's father was there. My father went there to work at the GM (General Motors) Plant and took my mother. They went from St. Louis. I was the only one of my siblings that wasn't born in St. Louis. They moved to St. Louis after my oldest sister was born and moved back after I was born.

Today, Charles resides in a small town in the South, with his wife of 10 years and his two sons, ages 12 and 17. Charles described his current employment for the past two years as a consultant for youth development issues, a public speaker, and an educational trainer. Charles is a motivational speaker who travels across the country speaking to schools and educators. He reported that he is paid contractually and earns approximately \$60,000 per year. He does not earn paid time off, nor does he receive health insurance through his employment. Charles is a registered voter and voted in the last presidential election. He reported no current involvement with the justice system and does not require government assistance. Charles earned his General Equivalency Degree (GED)

and went on to attend college where he earned a Bachelor's Degree. He also attended the military prior to completing his law degree.

Mother: Alma. Charles described his mother, Alma, as a hard worker who “always found a way to make things work. She was my mother, and she was the one that took care of us. She was probably Christian. Mostly, she was a person of faith, not religion.” Alma was an artist. She “was a fierce poet.” The relationship Charles had growing up with his mother continues today. It is a relationship that is strong and vibrant. Charles shared that Alma's love was a clear demonstration of unconditional love. By contrast, Charles did not experience such love, support, or comfort from his biological father, Don.

Biological father: Don. The relationship Charles had with Don was not like that of his mother. The relationship Charles had with Don was tumultuous and strained. Don was described by Charles as “a pretty tough guy. One of those guys that bad people called bad. He was just tough.” At a very young age, Charles remembered his father being removed from the home in handcuffs. This was the result of an intense domestic violence incident perpetrated by his father toward his mother.

When I was 6, my sister and I witnessed my father attack my mother. My oldest sister Trista ran into the kitchen, so I followed her. We grabbed two big butcher knives and came back in the room. We were trying to be as scary as a 6- and 7-year-old can be when a grown man is taking everything you love from you. When he saw us, he loosened his grip. But he wasn't afraid.

Even though Charles had witnessed his father put his hands on his mother previously, he recalled that this incident was the last time. After the police removed his father from the home that night, Charles' mother filed for divorce. Charles shared, “They divorced, and it was ugly.” It was at that time that Charles did not see his father for

several years, “After my parents’ divorce, there was a few years when it was just her [his Mom] and the babies, with an occasional boyfriend who would be around for awhile.”

Siblings. Charles had three biological siblings growing up: one older sister, one younger sister, and one younger brother. In addition, when Charles was in the 10th grade, a foster brother, Sheldon, joined their family. Charles loved them all dearly.

Siblings are always an interesting thing. My mother and father had four kids. Two boys, two girls. There were the four us. I learned much later that my father had a son older than my sister. My half-brother [Bruce] who was in Indiana was just a few months younger than me. Then I have several step-brothers and a foster brother. He [Sheldon] moved into our house when his family fell apart.

Currently, Charles reported that two of his brothers were incarcerated and serving life-sentences for murder. In Charles’ best-selling book, he recalled the time that Sheldon, one of his brothers, murdered another man. This was a trying time for Charles and his family. Charles described his youngest sister as an educator who is completing the final semester of her Masters Degree in Special Education and his oldest sister as a slam poet, youth advocate, and poetry teacher. One sibling is transitory and has little interaction with Charles or his family. Thus, there is little information to report for this sibling.

After Charles’ parents divorced, his father remarried before Charles was 8 years old. Don married Bruce’s mother, Peaches, who was a school teacher. Shortly after Don’s remarriage, he found God. Charles elaborated by sharing, “He [Don]got into the church. He’s been in this church ever since. Forty years. He is the lead pastor of the church. It’s his church now.” Don’s family lived in Indiana where his father had prosperous employment through General Motors. Don held that job for several decades until just a couple years ago when he retired.

Step-father: Junior. Despite the occasional boyfriend, Charles' mother eventually met a man she loved and married named Junior. Junior was a Rastafarian and Vietnam War veteran who served two tours as a Ranger. Similar to many Americans who returned from the Vietnam War, Junior was unable to obtain gainful employment. Charles shared, "Like a lot of folks, he had gone AWOL (absent without leave). He wasn't somebody that could just go down and get a job. He was also this dude that everybody was pretty sure was certifiable and would hurt you."

Despite Junior's inability to obtain substantial employment, he contributed to his family through his many talents and gifts. Charles added: "He [Junior] knew how to do everything. We didn't have YouTube, but he figured out how to do things." He continued:

My father [Junior] had this 8mm film projector. He did some filmmaking. He did a lot of stuff. He was a Black Panther back in the 60s and did a lot of documenting of a lot of crazy stuff going on in the south. He did photography and all that.

Even though Junior did not fit the typical mold of a father, he was the man in Charles' life. He protected the family and taught Charles how to be a black man living in America.

He always kept things going. He was always contributing, even when he wasn't the bread winner. I think, watching him . . . he had the ability to not be the bread winner, and still be the man of the house. It was not like he had been emasculated and demoted. . . . I could watch him and see that there was a way, as a man trying to figure out the way I wanted to be as a man. He was definitely the person I looked at for that.

Family Connections

Alma and Junior. Charles experienced both positive and negative family dynamics growing up. Despite relocating homes on a regular basis, Alma and Junior

managed to create an environment of peace and harmony for Charles and his siblings.

Charles described this by saying, “Our home life, in spite of being transitory at times, was pretty strong. In our immediate family growing up it was tight.” Both parents were passionate artists and valued the time the family spent together: “My mother and father are both artists, and so we had a strong artist community, and so it meant lots of time for folks to get together and enjoy each other. And usually, a board game, or a poetry competition, or a talent show would break out.”

Charles described his family as the family all kids longed to have.

It was interesting, wherever we went, my mom and my step-father were the kind of parents every kid wanted. We lived and they took care of us. They would take care of all the kids in the neighborhood. That was one of the things about my parents, being those folks that everybody wanted to be around. Children loved them. So, whenever we had something, everybody enjoyed it.

Charles’ family provided support for other children and families within the community as well.

My father had this 8mm film projector. He did some filmmaking. But he would get these cartoons, Woody Wood Pecker or whatever. But he would get these cartoons. All these kids would come over and watch cartoons. And do whatever. And he would teach us how to fight.

Despite the turmoil and tribulations that were seething into the community around Charles’ family, he felt loved, supported, valued, and an overall unity within his family nucleus. Charles shared: “We always had this strong family because we always had this strong support. Just . . . the presence and the closeness of a family.”

Family celebrations: celebrate you. A unique aspect of the family dynamic that was created by Charles’ mom and Junior was the celebrations that occurred. Charles reminisced about celebrations from when he was a child.

Birthdays were fun, but they were very different than traditional birthday parties. But, we always celebrated, and my mother always made sure that people felt celebrated. Birthdays growing up were good. We always had celebrations. Thanksgiving we cooked a lot. As we got into the older life, at Thanksgiving, there was always a lot to be thankful for. We always used it as a time to kind of mark where we were and acknowledge that we were still here to keep moving forward.

Because Charles' grew up in a strong African eccentric home, the family celebrated Kwanza in spectacular fashion.

We celebrated Kwanza. That was a really big celebration because my mother and father were both really involved. So, it was a time for us to really look at the principles of Kwanza and really celebrate those. And, so we would have folks over, and we would have 50 people come over, and there would be all kinds of people--Black, White, Native, Asian, and this was just kind of the place. Everybody loved coming to my mother's house for that kind of real family celebration. And people expected it . . . like real family celebration.

However, Charles did not experience these types of positive relationships and close family connections with all his family members. As previously mentioned, Charles had a very trying and turbulent relationship with his biological father, Don. He also had a difficult relationship with his step-brother, Bruce (Don's biological son).

Don and Bruce. Even though Charles' relationship with his father was strained for many years, he and his siblings eventually began visitation. "I'd go to visit him in the summertime. It was usually just me. Sometimes we all did. At first, we would all go. And my grandmother, Don's mother, would ride back with us on the Greyhound. And she would bring us all back. Then it was just me for awhile."

However, the moment Charles arrived at this father's home, there was immediate conflict with his step-brother Bruce. Charles shared: "Me and Bruce, my step-brother, would always get into it. Usually wouldn't last past me putting my bags down. He

would say something.” This point of contention remained for many years. Charles was admittedly envious of Bruce.

Bruce had skipped a grade because he’s really smart. And he was in this team, and he did that, and he did these things. He wasn’t in trouble all the time in school. And he had this big ol’ house. He had his own bedroom . . . with a big, ol’ bed. And a pinball machine and a pool table.

At times, Charles struggled with the life that his father created for another family and not for him and his siblings.

That was a big challenge. ‘Cuz he [Don] had a really good job. But we were on welfare. He had a really good job. And whether he was trying to punish her [Alma] or what. He wouldn’t send 40 dollars a week for his babies. And the six of us were living in an efficiency apartment. About half the size of this room [approximately 10 square feet total], and I’m trying to figure out what was wrong.

At one point in time, Don offered Charles the opportunity to move and live with him and his family in Indiana.

He asked me. He told me that I could come live with him. That I could have my own room, and my own suit, and my own stuff. And pinball machines and pool tables. All the food I wanted, all that stuff. And I was like, why would I do that. There was his house where there was that plastic stuff on the sofa, and a plastic pad you had to walk through the room. You couldn’t get on the carpet. Everything was staged, and it was all about appearances. They went on cruises . . . and on vacations . . . and we drove around in our old car until everybody fell asleep, and went and checked into a hotel somewhere and thought we were in some other city.

Nevertheless, despite how appealing and intriguing that lifestyle may have been to

Charles, he never waived from the family bond and connection he had with Alma and Junior.

It didn’t even make sense to me. As perfect as his [Don’s] life seemed for a person who was looking for that . . . it was the last place in the world I would want to be in. There was no way I would have chosen to be there instead of with my mama struggling, and with my brothers and sisters.

**Risk Factors Charles Faced:
The Perfect Storm**

From a young age, Charles' life was challenging. At times, his parents struggled to put food on the table, pay the electric bill, or pay the rent. The family often relocated school districts and homes. Charles life was faced with a great uncertainty.

My overall lived experience was that there was an element of uncertainty. But, I also think that for me, it created a real sense of . . . those risk factors. I guess the inoculation that I got at home created a sense in me of . . . I took a lot of risks. But, I took a lot of risks to try things that I wasn't supposed to try because I was like if I'm supposed to be dead anyway . . . so, why the hell not!

Charles was a risk-taker and never shied away from a confrontation. This resulted in engagement in antisocial behaviors, several arrests, and multiple expulsions from school. Just like his brother, Sheldon, always told him, "People like us don't get to be great."

Charles lived a life filled with obstacles and challenges. He has been shot. He has been stabbed. He has been racially discriminated against and imprisoned because of the color of skin. Charles has lived a life that would cause most people to crumble and lose their way, a life that would cause a person to fall without rising again. But, Charles came to a place of acceptance.

My lived experience was one of challenge. I accept it. It was just like an epiphany at an early age. I realized that my life was going to be hard. Or, it was going to be short. I had to decide if I was OK with a hard life, or if I was just gonna roll it up. And once I accepted that and realized that I have scars all over my body. Once I realized that they're just scars and I've survived a lot of things. Once I accepted that it was hard and accepted it was going to be frustrating. I was going to have to fight everybody for everything all the time. But my mama told me that I had the capacity to do that. So, it's just a fight. I've been fighting since I was 6 years old. The fight changes. And it has changed; it went from physical to verbal to intellectual. But it was always a fight.

Data analysis for Charles resulted in five risk factor themes: (a) poverty, (b) engagement in antisocial behaviors, (c) disability, (d) race, and (e) failure of systems (educational and juvenile justice). Each risk factor will be described in the next section, with detailed information to support the overall risk theme.

Throughout his childhood, Charles was described as a risk-taker. Charles shared, “a dare could put me in a bad place.” Charles reported that he rarely backed down from a fight: “I was that kid getting in trouble on the playground. I was very risk attracted.” He continued:

Immediately outside of the comfort zone of my home was the real world always pushed up against me. Asking me what I was going to do about it. And one of the real challenges was that every day I walked out the door; I was this Black, dyslexic boy, with ADHD. If you take race, poverty, and ability or disability and you roll those three up. And you throw gender on there if you want . . . you have the perfect storm.

Charles described gender, race, disability, poverty, and the criminal justice systems as the main factors that put him at the greatest risk in his environment.

So each one of those [race, poverty, disability, and the criminal justice system], as they layer on and became a static label, they became basically cement blocks. Making it a little heavier and a little harder to keep your head above water. And the expectation is that eventually you just sink. You wallow into it. Each of those took away my value.

Poverty. According to the United States Census Bureau of 2011, the poverty line is described as a family of four (two adults and two children under the age of 18) with an annual income of \$23,021 or less. Charles’ family lived in poverty: “We were just really poor.” There were times when his family would have to boil a giant pot of water on the stove so they could bathe or “run an extension cord to the neighbors’ house to keep the refrigerator going” when the electricity was turned off due to non-payment of services. Charles reported his mother would even have to use a neighbor’s phone because there

was often not a working telephone in his home. At times, the family had to sleep in one room of their apartment because they could not afford to heat the rest of the house. “So, early on, I have this memory of always moving and always being hungry. There were times when Junior would come in the middle of the night, at the end of the month, and tell us, ‘Get your stuff. We are leaving.’”

The family would relocate to another place often. Charles shared, “We moved houses a lot.” On occasion, the family would move only a mile or two away from their current location. Charles stated, “We didn’t stay but a few weeks until we moved a couple miles up the road to another apartment complex. That was my fifth elementary school and my seventh-grade year.” At that time, elementary school was kindergarten through seventh grade.

Charles described his life as transitory and, as a result, the siblings were often split among family members. “There was a time when we all got split up. My older sister had to live with my dad, and my younger brother went to stay with my aunt. My youngest sister went to stay with a cousin in Detroit, and I stayed in Atlanta.”

During the interview, Charles spoke of another memorable time his siblings were separated. This sibling separation occurred after a devastating fire left the family homeless, in addition to 10 other families within the community.

Ten units. Everything burned to the ground. We got a few things out. We got my mother’s writings and some of our family pictures. We lost a lot of them. My youngest sister, Shelby, ran back in [the burning home] for the Jell-o. She was on a mission. The fireman had to carry her out. She was like, ‘We gotta get the Jell-o!’ And we all just watched it burn.

Charles reported that the Red Cross provided his family with clothes; however, when he returned to school in the days that proceeded the fire, his classmates would say, “Hey, I remember that sweater.” Or, “Hey, that’s mine.” Charles was very embarrassed.

Feast or famine. Charles’ family was not always struggling to make ends meet and live paycheck to paycheck. In fact, Charles shared, “There were times when both of them [Alma and Junior] were working. Things were good.” One year Charles reported that his family had an amazing Christmas, with gifts to exchange, food to eat, and an actual Christmas tree to trim in their living room. Charles described it by saying, “We had this tree, it was so tall that it bent over. And we had popcorn strung, and we had penny candy strung, and gifts everywhere. It was amazing.”

Charles shared that this was an extreme change from years past when Junior would pin Christmas lights to the wall in the shape of a Christmas tree “and we would string popcorn to the wall and then we would make gifts for each other.” On occasion, the day before Christmas, the family would typically attend an event at the local Civic Center and be provided with an abundance of food as well as a gift-wrapped package for a boy or girl.

You know, there were thousands of us. We would come down, and the volunteers would have lots of food. You’d get a big compartmentalized Styrofoam tray. You would go through the line, and they [the volunteers] would give you as much food as you wanted. And when you were done eating, you could get on stage and sit on Santa’s lap. And they would take a photo and give it to you. Then when you left the stage, a volunteer would give you a gift-wrapped box that would say boy 5-7 or girl 9-12. And then we would take that [gift] home and put it under our tree. And that was our Christmas for a couple years.

Unfortunately, the year that Charles’ family was able to celebrate the Christmas he had always envisioned--with family, gifts wrapped under a 10-foot tall Christmas tree, and food overflowing from the refrigerator--it was all destroyed in the fire. Charles lost

all of his new gifts, including puzzles, robots, and board games. Just like that, Charles' family and siblings had to relocate and were living in poverty again.

Cannibalistic community. Charles described a symptom of poverty much like a cannibalistic community, where everyone is out for him or herself and will, consequently, feast on another poor family's misfortune. This phenomenon was directly related to the act of becoming evicted. Relaying stories of people profiting from another person's misfortune, Charles recalled witnessing this act first hand:

When people got evicted, and people got evicted all the time. They got evicted at the end of the month when they couldn't pay. We would go down and sit with people's stuff because other folks would come and take it. It was a free-for-all. It's [your stuff] out on the curb, and you happen to be at one of your two jobs that you are working. And nobody calls to tell you that they put your stuff out. You just come, and it's gone through. It's ravaged through. And I really think that we see a lot of that. Young folks who are, because of their families, accept that is the way it is. This is the only way it is. You take what you can get when you can, and other people just gotta deal with it. It is just like poverty versus poor. I think poverty was a mindset. We [my family] didn't have that mindset, and so we didn't delve into the sense of . . . I've gotta' get mine. Because we had this strong family inside. Having that strong family internally kept us from feeling like we were scavenging.

We weren't victims in these communities. We just chose not to be predators in these communities. I think that it was a choice. It was a choice that allowed me and my brothers and sisters to think of ourselves and our situation different. It's not dog eat dog; it's not you take what you can. And so, that is often what I think staved off desperateness and desperate actions; because my parents made it clear that we weren't surviving on other people's misery and pain. We were trying to figure out how we get past our own and get to better places. But, this wasn't a cannibalistic community.

Charles saw the struggle people in his community faced, and it was not until he left the comfort and the security of his family that he, too, began to engage in antisocial behaviors. Charles shared: "We fought all the time."

Engagement in antisocial behaviors: Violence and aggression. Regardless of where they moved, Charles' family was quickly well-known within the community. "So,

everybody knew, you don't mess with these people right here because we were crazy. Wherever we went, it was kind of all boys there too, and we got bigger, and we fought all the time. So people saw us. People were like, don't mess with them." Charles would often engage in antisocial behaviors with his brothers and friends. "I could strip a bike down and put it back together in minutes . . . breaking and entering, assault, and theft. I've been stabbed. I've been run over. I've been shot."

During an interview, Charles recalled a pivotal moment in his life. He was visiting his family during a collegiate break. One evening, Charles and his brothers were trying to locate a night club in a neighboring town. Junior's reggae band was playing, and Charles' entire family would be there. Unable to locate the intended establishment, Donte [Charles' brother] pulled into a gas station to ask for directions. As Charles, Sheldon, and Donte put the truck in park and prepared to exit the vehicle, Charles recalled:

This old hoop-tee comes rolling into the parking lot and glides to a stop. Tinted windows, sitting low, and six brothers rolled out. They get out like this is all their territory. And they're looking at us and kinda giving off attitude. Donte was driving. He puts the truck in drive, and he goes, and he blocks their car in. This confrontation starts, and they start screaming, and yelling, and cursing. And I'm college Charles.

Charles tried to deescalate the situation by saying, "Hey guys, we are trying to find this club. You should hang out with us. I'll buy you a beer." Unfortunately, this did not cause the situation to subside. In fact, the situation escalated. Donte became agitated with the situation.

And so, they're going back and forth, and finally, he [Donte] gets tired of the argument, so he reaches up and taps the 38 pistol that he keeps on the dashboard; just to let 'em know. . . . If you're going for this, we're ready. Instead of doing what a rational person does when confronted with deadly force, they escalate.

Charles reported that the six men were not afraid of the 38 caliber pistol on the dashboard. Charles shared: “‘You think we’re scared of a little, 38. I got something for that 38,’ and he goes off, and I hear the back door of the car open.” The man was grabbing a shotgun. With a pistol on the dashboard, a shotgun steps away, and six angry, aggressive men yelling into the old Chevy truck, Charles explained that he had one overplaying thought in his mind. “I don’t want my mama to have to come down to the jailhouse to visit her boys. Then, all of a sudden, I’m like, she sure as hell ain’t coming down to claim no bodies.”

By this time, Sheldon was bubbling over with anger and beginning to act erratically. Charles described: “I can feel him [Sheldon] getting agitated. His whole body starts humming, and he begins pushing up on the bench seat of the truck to get to the Uzi tucked behind me.” Charles had to make a choice because Sheldon’s choice would be to shoot first and blame later. Charles reported:

He is one of those guys that says, ‘You shouldn’t have made me shoot.’ But I’m trying to exert my will and keep Sheldon from getting to this machine gun. These guys are still screaming in my ear and screaming at Donte. And they don’t have any idea that I’m trying to do my best. I don’t know if they was scared or if they don’t know that literally . . . I am the last thing between them and nothing, the end.

Charles tried his best to convince Donte to pull away and the other men to get in their car and leave the scene. He shared: “So, I’m pushing back on the seat, ‘No, Sheldon! Come on, Donte!’ We’re just trying to find this club.” It was at that time that Sheldon was able to grasp the Uzi.

He [Sheldon] arcs it out the window past me, and all the other guys are yelling, “Machine gun, machine gun, he’s got a machine gun!” And they’re starting to dive for cover. Everybody in the store is diving for cover. And the guy who is reaching into the back seat for a shotgun, comes out with his hands up in the air. Turns, and I’m looking straight down the barrel to his chest. And he’s looking at

me. And he said, "Please, please, God, don't kill me. Please don't kill me." And in my head I'm saying, "I don't have any choice anymore. If I have to choose, I gotta choose you. I gotta make a decision about who doesn't go home tonight. I gotta choose you." And I'm looking down the barrel. I'm like, alright. This is it. I failed.

As this time, Charles shared that he had two very distinct and separate voices playing in his mind.

I'm thinking about what Sheldon says. "People like us don't get to be great. We don't get to be what we want to be." And in the back of my head, I hear, "If you could see what I see every time I look at you, then you'd know how great you are. I think that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. And all you can do, Charles, is make me a fool for believing such things." I had two voices. I had two voices. And my mama keep telling me, you have to choose, right? Somebody's gotta be right about you, and somebody's gotta be wrong. I had these two really clear voices of people who believed in me, and I believed, who told me that I could be greater than this right here. In that split second, I took a deep breath, and I grabbed the barrel. And for one moment, I became that big brother. He [Sheldon] took his finger off the trigger and turned. I told him, I said, "You lay down, Boy, and you thank God I'm not the man I used to be because what you just put me through, you would never see another sunrise!" And we peeled outta there like the Dukes of Hazard.

Charles and his brothers drove for several miles until they pulled the truck over to the side of a dirt road. After several minutes, they nervously giggled and gathered their composure. "And, um, finally, we get ourselves, our bravado back." They eventually located the club and were reunited with Charles' family. "And we go in [to the club] and my sisters are there, and my younger brother, Tommy, and my mom, and [Junior] is up on stage. And when we're together, it's always just magic. When the whole family's together. And so, we had a great night."

Charles struggled with antisocial behaviors regularly growing up. Aside from fighting, Charles was arrested, expelled from law school three times, and suspended from elementary, middle, and high school multiple times; he was a vandal, a thief, and a bully toward others.

Disability. From a very early age, Charles knew that his brain did not function like other kids'. Throughout his elementary- and middle-school years, he was diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, and a specific learning disability. He shared, "My mind worked differently." He recalled a time when he was with his brothers and became frustrated when he attempted to open a door.

I got frustrated from trying to open a door once when I read it backwards. My brothers were with me, and they finally told me what I was doing. And I just started laughing. They got a little nervous. I realized that me pulling on that door and everybody's watching me like I'm clearly retarded, this is going to be me my whole life.

Charles eventually realized that "If every time something happens that makes me feel foolish because that is the way my brain works, I am going to be miserable and angry my whole life."

It was clear Charles needed additional supports and services to be successful in school. Charles elaborated by saying: "It had become clear I had some disabilities. Because I couldn't sit still. I couldn't mind. I couldn't read and make symbols. I couldn't understand letters and figure, all that stuff out because of my dyslexia and my ADHD." So instead of being provided the necessary supports and interventions, Charles was regularly placed in isolation. This began as soon as he entered first grade.

My first-grade teacher started locking me in the coatroom. My teacher decided the best place for a child like me was in the coatroom, away from the good kids. So, that became my place for awhile. Locking me in the coatroom was definitely a death nail for me. Without those other kids to stimulate me, fire me up . . . I got nothing to keep me moving.

Charles was not only isolated, he was also excluded and required to sit away from his peers in the classroom. He recalled his third-grade teacher, Miss Mans. Miss Mans operated her classroom with an authoritative style. Charles reported that Miss Mans

would make him sit directly beside her desk, away from the other students, and would strike him with her Mr. Feel-good. He said,

She had a fiberglass fishing rod and wrapped in up in duct tape. That was her Mr. Feel-good.

I was put out of a lot of classrooms. I was told to put my head on a desk. I sat at a little table away from everyone else because I didn't have a desk. There would be some [teachers] . . . the range from cruel, "We're going to read, and Mr. Charles, you ARE going to read." To neglect. They'd just ignore me.

By excluding and isolating Charles from his peers and removing him from vital academic instruction, he shared that he felt like a failure: "I'm tired of being the stupid kid that can't read and can't do like everybody else." By being excluded and isolated from his peers, Charles lost his lifeline. "I talk to people. That is my lifeline." His ability to converse and engage with others was how he compensated for his disability. Charles said, "So, I know how to engage folks. I know how to draw out what I need and build that relationship quickly. Even if it is only temporary."

He continued, "I've always been that learner who moved with everyone else. So, if there were kids talking deep stuff, I could jump right in. Part of my real gift is I know people. That has allowed me to survive."

Race. Charles shared that his race had a direct impact on his childhood. He shared, "I think that being a Black boy was a challenge because there were assumptions that came with it." Charles has always believed that people of color, especially young males of color, face challenges and discrimination to a much greater degree than young White males.

Young Black and Brown boys are at-risk because there are perceptions in the classroom. There are perceptions in the community. There are perceptions when they go McDonalds. There are perceptions when they go the Boys and Girls Club, when they are on an athletic team, or when they're on an academic team. Being followed around stores, being told to get out of the store because you're not

going to buy anything. . . . All because of the color of your skin. There are all these assumptions about them.

Charles shared that while growing up, it was difficult to be a young, Black male living in the East Point of Atlanta. Charles described this area as racially segregated with “lots of racial tension.” Charles recalled one time when he was chased several miles by guys in a replica car driven by General Lee from the television show, Dukes of Hazard. That type of discrimination was not just something he experienced in the community. Charles also experienced discrimination in his apartment complex.

The apartment that we lived in, the general manager was a White guy named Jim. He and his cousin, Bill, who was a police officer, would make sure that . . . WE KIDS didn’t come to the things for residents. Like at the clubhouse, if there was a party for the residents, Jim and Bill, when he was off duty, would work the door and make sure the WRONG residents didn’t show up. Jim would keep the wrong people out. He did this because I was Black.

This was not the only time that Charles had unpleasant encounters with the police. At the age of 11, Charles was arrested. One evening, one of his friends got caught shoplifting. As Charles and his friends were outside the store waiting for their friend to emerge, they spotted a police car pulling into the parking lot. Charles and his friends ran. He recalled: “There was police coming into the parking lot, and he’s [the police officer] pointing. We all take off. Down the strip mall, into the laundromat, and out the backdoor. I crossed the train tracks.” Even though Charles was not involved in the shoplifting incident, the police appeared to still be looking for him and his friends.

As Charles was riding a make-shift bike home, he noticed a car began to slowly shadow behind him.

It’s been a long time, and this car is right behind me. I’m trying to find the next trail to cut off across the train tracks, and the car starts getting up on me again. I thought, call 9-1-1. Then I saw it was a police car. He passed me, and I see all my boys. He blocked me off and jumped out of his car.

The police officer demanded that Charles get off his bike, leave the bicycle along the train tracks, and get in the car with him. Charles was unwilling to leave his bike along the side of the road. He demanded that the officer permit him to ride his bike back to his home. “I said, ‘I just can’t leave my bike.’ He [the officer] was like, ‘Alright, you can ride home, but if you try anything, I’m gonna run your little black ass over with this big white car.’” Charles rode the remainder of the way home with this police officer directly behind him. At one point, Charles was able to evade the police officer. The police officer eventually caught up to Charles while he was at his home. The officer dragged him from his home and arrested him. “I wound up before the judge, even though I was not doing anything. The judge was one of those African-American women who thought, ‘You don’t hang out with thugs if you’re not a thug. And you’re not getting off.’ She put me on probation.”

Failure of Systems: Educational and Justice

Charles shared that a “disproportionate number of African American kids wind up deep into the system.” Charles was no exception. The educational and justice systems are intentioned to educate, rehabilitate, and train, while providing the necessary tools, assistance, and support for people to become successful, contributing members of society. The assumption is that these systems will protect children and youth at risk by breaking the perpetual cycle of involvement with the system. Nevertheless, this is not always the case, especially for a child like Charles.

When a young person hits the system, the system doesn’t do that thing. Every child who hits the system, the system automatically increases the chance of them coming back to the system. The data tells us that. A kid goes to detention, it automatically increases the chance of them coming back to detention. If they had

it two or three times, it almost guarantees they're going to be arrested for something. But we don't look at that. I'm trying to help this family by taking this kid and putting him in this other environment, and it doesn't work.

Charles believed that there is an assumption that young men of color need the system: "They wind up getting in all this trouble, going to all these bad places, because then they can access services." The assumption is that being involved within the system is better for men of color than the actual environment in which they live. By getting into trouble, these men will finally have the resources, support, and training to get the services they desperately need.

Judges send little Black boys to treatment centers because then they can get the services that they're not getting at home. They say that they need to be supervised in these environments because they don't have two parents at home. They don't, but these are the same things that we see with other kids, too. But, they don't make the assumption that a single-parent home is unsuitable. They don't make the assumption that we need to lock them up to get services. They'll tell one parent, well you need to get this child counseling. And they'll tell another one, we're gonna commit your child to the system so they can get help.

Hope to hospice: Sympathetic versus empathetic. Charles shared experiences about the educational system failing him. One failure he discussed was being educated from a place of sympathy, rather than empathy. Charles shared:

Too many people who try to serve kids do it with absolutely no belief that the kids they serve are going to do better or be greater. But this is just their mission. So, it's sympathy, right? I always say we've shifted from a hope system to a hospice system. People are spending all of their time trying to give these children end-of-life experiences because their life is so terrible and so truncated. They're so focused on "I'm trying to see if I can do something good for them right here because I know the rest of their life is gonna suck, and it's gonna be short, and it's gonna be painful." If you go into it with that attitude, you are the creator of that.

Charles experienced this treatment throughout his life and especially during a time when he was supposed to be viewed as successful. When Charles was accepted into law school, he needed to arm himself with the necessary tools and proactive solutions to

successfully compete with the other law students who did not face similar challenges. Knowing that he would need accommodations because of his disability (i.e., additional time for exams and books on tape), Charles sought the support from the vocational rehabilitation counselor on campus, Ms. Sue. He shared: “I went to my vocational rehab counselor, my disability advocate, when I got into law school to help me come up with a plan to survive law school.” When Charles entered Ms. Sue’s office to develop a plan, the response he received was not the response he had anticipated.

She [Ms. Sue] sat there in her office, looking at me with this sympathetic look. Her whole heart was on her sleeve. Her eyes were welling up, and she was just beside herself with pity for me, thinking that I could be a lawyer. And, she said, “You have failed your whole life. They go through these little histories, and you have failed your whole life, and I’m afraid that supporting you going to law school is just going to be another failure. I can’t have that on my conscience.” So, she said, “I’m not going to support you. I can’t, in good conscience support you trying to get through law school. But, I’ve got these programs,” and she pulled out these pamphlets, “I can get you into where you can learn how to do something with your hands, something you can be proud of.”

Charles also reported similar experiences with the juvenile justice system: “The juvenile justice is the same way. These kids have such terrible lives, and they’re going to be dead before this, and so we just keep them safe here. When they’re with us, we keep them safe, until they go back into the real world.”

During an interview, Charles shared:

We are preparing people for the grave, not preparing people for greatness. And too much of our system is doing that and thinking that is the best work we can do. Believing that the best thing we can do is to make these children comfortable as they die. And, it’s unacceptable. I think that is what is creating this tempest.

Resiliency Factors for Charles

During the second interview, Charles was asked to define resiliency. His response was as follows: “The word resiliency, I guess the first thing that comes to mind

is bounce.” Charles referred to the analogy of a ball. When a ball is bounced and hits the ground, it rises back up into the air. “To the ball, it goes down and when it hits that, the bottom of the trajectory, it comes back up. I think resiliency is like that.” People are like the bounce of the ball. People can bounce back from a difficult situation with the pretense that someone believes they are worthy and valued. Charles went on to say, “Resiliency is predicated on the idea that someone has convinced them they are worth bouncing back. They are worth driving for more. They are worth toughing through the difficult times because there’s going to be something better.” It is a choice, a choice to be better. He continued, “Resiliency in and of itself is the bounce. But in order to have that, you have to be filled with something. To keep getting up one more time if you get knocked down. But it all comes back to the pieces around you.”

Growing-up, Charles had many people in his life that supported him. He had his mother, Junior, and Dr. Lou as “hope dealers that were pumping me up.” But not everyone had that. Not everyone experienced that type of encouragement and love.

I had friends, and I know people whose parents told them they wasn’t shit and they was mistakes. And they were useless, and so, when that is your reality, then your ball is flat. When you hit hard, you finally hit that thing hard, you just want to give up because this makes perfect sense for you to be there. A flat ball don’t bounce. So, somebody has to be pumping that ball up. Somebody has to be fusing it with the kind of energy, the kind of air, the kind of dense matter that allows it, when it hits the ground, to spring instead of just plop.

Despite the life that was lived by Charles including poverty, engagement in anti-social behaviors, disability, race, and failure of educational and justice systems, he managed to demonstrate post-secondary success. Charles is defined as successful because he lives independently, is employed, does not rely on government assistance, is not involved with the justice system, completed his post-secondary education, and

participates within the community. He follows the law, he votes, he is aware of his rights, he respects others' property, and respects the environment in which he lives.

Data analysis revealed six resiliency themes for Charles: (a) exposure to art and beauty, (b) others' belief in Charles, (c) making connections, (d) completed post-secondary education, (e) belief in a higher power, and (f) self-determination. Each of these themes will be described in detail in the next section.

Exposure to art and beauty. With the resonating words, "people like us don't get to be great" constantly replaying in Charles' mind, he made a conscientious choice to not succumb to that mentality and be great. When children and youth are raised in poverty, they often do not experience art and beauty. Charles shared: "Kids who are poor and living on Welfare aren't supposed to go to plays." Charles learned to play Dungeons and Dragons and other "White games that poor kids and Black kids don't get exposed to." Charles had opportunities that other children and youth living in a similar situation did not experience. Charles directly related this to his mother and step-father's love for and participation in the arts.

She [Mom] drug us out to plays. And to art programs. And to the museum. We would get on the bus and ride all over town. I mean, we'd go ice-[skating]. And she made sure we had experiences that let us know we had a right. Even if we don't always have access. We have a right. We have a right . . . to want . . . and, to think about being more than just whatever that situation was. It was a really valuable gift.

Charles was regularly exposed to violence, aggression, drugs, and guns. He witnessed abuse, families being evicted from their homes, and death. It was his exposure to art, plays, and music that allowed him to see different aspects and perspectives of the world, not just the ugliness. This was identified and described by Charles as an outlet for him to escape the negative aspects of his life. The exposure he had to art and beauty

growing up extended into adulthood. This exposure began with school plays and transferred to the stage, as demonstrated by his monologue performance. He also writes poetry and completes spoken-word performances throughout the country.

Belief in Charles: Hope dealers. According to information that was gathered from Charles' best-selling autobiography and our interviews, he spoke about people who believed in him and referred to them as hope dealers: "someone that speaks light into darkness." This is a term Charles has coined as his own. Hope dealers speak hope into hopeless situations. They look past the tribulations, mistakes, misfortunes, and situations of people and believe in their strengths and talents. Hope dealers believe that a person can be more than just their situation. A hope dealer seeks empathetic understanding with their heart, not solely their eyes. Charles stated, "I call a hope dealer, the ability to assess a situation, and to find the light in the room . . . and turn it on. Even if it was just a little bitty light."

He described his hope dealers:

I had those people, who, when they said they thought I could be great, even with all the scars, and all the baggage, and all the stuff. . . . I think they meant it. So, there was a point in my struggle where, even if I wasn't quite sure I was ready [to be great], I had a sense of it. But, the fact that they believed it, gave me the courage to dig a little deeper. So, you know, I really wanted to make them right. Because, I believed in them.

Hope dealers have realistic and deliberate belief in people; they are not fake or disingenuous. According to Charles, "If you're not complimenting a child every day, then it's not your faith. It's not for real. That's just conversation. And I think a big piece of what's going on with young folks is that they need that." Charles went on to say that we are failing our youth by not providing an authentic and genuine faith and belief in those we serve.

Alma: a mother's love. Growing up, Charles' mother would tell him on a regular basis: "Baby, if you could see what I see every time I look at you, you'd know how great you are." Charles' mother was not only a support system and his most vocal cheerleader, she was a hope dealer. Charles reported that his mother would locate a little light within him "over and over again, and she'd just keep turning it on." Charles described his mom as his eternal support. Charles spoke of a particular time when he questioned his mother about the supportive words of love that she offered him on a regular basis.

She is like an autopilot. Sometimes I ask, "Do you remember that?" And she says, "I don't know if I do." But that's the key. That's when you know, it is just they're neutral. I don't remember saying that, because I say it all the time. It wasn't something special. It was just being willing to say those kinds of things which are words, and which are actions, over and over. Even in those moments where it made absolutely no sense. It was completely incongruent with the circumstance.

Alma never left Charles' side, despite the arrests, the expulsions from school, and the delinquent behaviors. She believed in him and the light within him.

Dr. Lou: Places of greatness. After another public school expulsion, Charles' mother negotiated a deal with a private, alternative school called Sunrise School. Since his mother could not afford to send him to a private school, she agreed to work and do various tasks for the school as a trade for Charles' tuition. Charles shared, "Sunrise School became my home. I moved to the school. I lived there three years probably." It was there that Charles met another hope dealer, Dr. Lou. "This was the first time in my school career someone believed in me unconditionally. It was the first time in a school setting someone told me I was great and dared me to prove her wrong."

Dr. Lou incorporated effective teaching strategies and a belief in Charles that empowered him to become greater. Even though he had ADHD, a learning disability,

and dyslexia that caused him to struggle with certain aspects of learning, other areas were strengths for him. Dr. Lou identified his strengths and built on those. Charles excelled in mental math, so one day a week Dr. Lou would have the class put all their materials away, and the class would complete mental math problems. He recalled, “So one day a week, I was math-god of the universe.” Dr. Lou would allow Charles to complete reports orally and when she noticed he was getting antsy and beginning to lose his focus, she would suggest he go outside and run around the building to release energy.

Charles spoke of a time when “I was going crazy and she’d [Dr. Lou] show up and say, “Why don’t you guys go the mall.” “We don’t have any money.” “Well, here’s 20 bucks.” Charles thrived in this environment. He excelled with her support, sharing: “She gave me places to be great. So that I wasn’t swamped every day with the fact that I was broken.” She believed Charles could accomplish anything and everything he put his mind to. “I know who you are. I think you can accomplish anything that you set your mind to. All you can do is make me a fool for believing such things.” It was that type of belief that Dr. Lou and his mother had in him that transferred from external belief of others to internal belief of self. “Eventually, I could see the light, too.”

Making connections: Community and school connections. A theme that emerged with Charles was making connections. He cited this theme as a necessary component that contributed to his resiliency. He and his family, despite constantly relocating neighborhoods and school districts, were able to form meaningful relationships with people of the community. Charles and his family had a strong bond that never waived.

Community connections. Even though Charles' family had inconsistent living situations, they had connections in most communities, wherever they lived. Charles remembered a story his youngest sister, Shelby, once told him. One evening when she was in high school, Shelby was returning home from work. It was very late at night and in a neighborhood with high crime rates and high poverty. But "you do what you have to do to make it work." So, as Shelby exited the bus, a man did as well. As she walked quicker, his pace increased. She walked for three blocks until she finally looked at the man. He said to her, "Hey, you live in that big house, right?" She was like, 'Yeah.' He was like, 'I'm across the street, but I'm gonna walk you home because I need to make sure you get there because you live in that house with all those crazy dudes, right?'"

Shelby and this man had never talked previously, but a member of the community "had her back." Even though some politicians and people may describe certain city environments as carnage, that is simply not true. The community looked out for each other. "We weren't surviving on other people's misery and pain. We were trying to figure out how we get past our own and get to better places. This wasn't a cannibalistic community . . . we helped who we could."

School connections. Charles experienced abuse and neglect at the hands of several public school teachers growing up. As previously discussed, Charles was placed in isolation, excluded from class discussions, put in a closet for days at a time, ignored, removed from his peers, and physically struck by his third-grade teacher's Mr. Feel-good stick; despite all of these negative and traumatic experiences, he still managed to make valuable and meaningful connections with school personnel. Similar to that experienced with Dr. Lou, Charles experienced effective teaching, empathetic support, and positive

school interactions. Charles shared: “I actually have some good memories of Madame Sheatz, my French teacher, who convinced me after taking a semester of French, I was going to be a foreign exchange student.” Charles believed he was going to eat chocolate sandwiches, “French bread and chocolate. “WHAT?? They eat chocolate sandwiches?” “Oui, Oui!”

Charles also recalled a positive connection during the seventh grade. He was picked to be the mailperson in a Valentine’s Day play. Being turned down just months previously to play Scrooge in the holiday play, he was thrilled with this accomplishment. His role was prominent and required him to slip on the ice and fly through the air as the letters within his mailbag scattered. Charles felt a huge sense of accomplishment as he recited his only words of the play,

“I can feel it in my bones. It’s going to be a razzle, dazzle day.” That was my line, and I stuck it! And then I did my slip, and I flew way into the air. And I came down. And I hit that ground, hard. Boom. And these letters are all raining down around me. And the whole auditorium . . . just erupted with screams and cheers! And I’m laying there . . . and these letters are falling down. And I’m like, I like this. It was the first time I got that kind of attention. I wasn’t jumping over a table and doing something bad. And it just, was like, WOW!

That was the first time Charles spoke with accomplishment and authority in his voice during the interviews. At this moment in time, Charles shared “I was not the troubled kid.”

Completed post-secondary education. Charles believed that even though he had a disability, earned a General Educational Development (GED) Certificate, was expelled from an alternative school, had a cumulative GPA of 1.67, and was involved with the juvenile justice system, he wanted to pursue college. He said, “I decided my next challenge ought to be college.” Charles looked at several universities and with the

support and guidance of Dr. Lou, he applied to college. The college he applied to was a college that you “literally had to be poor” to be accepted. It is referred to as a work study college. Each student who is accepted must agree to work on-campus in exchange for free tuition. However, it was mid-summer 1985, and Charles had not yet received word from the college regarding his acceptance. This was troubling to Charles since two of his peers at Sunrise School had already received their acceptance letters. He decided he needed to contact the university to discuss his acceptance or denial. Charles later recalled: “So, I picked up the phone and called collect.”

Charles was not familiar with the process of college acceptance. He was not accepted into this college; however, when the school operator answered and accepted his collect call, he was transferred to the Director of Admissions, Mr. Baker. Mr. Baker gave Charles the bad news that he was not accepted. Charles shared, “He told me that he did not think that things were going to work out, but he agreed to review my file.” An hour later, Charles received a call that would change his life. It was Mr. Baker who said, “Okay, Charles, I think we are going to give you a chance.”

Charles was the first member in his family to attend college. Nevertheless, he experienced many trials along the way. Charles struggled to maintain a suitable GPA and began to fall farther and farther behind. Charles recalled that he was falling behind in his classes and was also behind in his work hours. Not complying with the work hours for the school is just as great of a violation as an academic violation. Barely surviving the first two semesters of Charles’ college career, he was placed on academic probation. Charles was expelled from college a year later. It was at that time that he enrolled in the Army. After successfully graduating at the top of his class in both basic and advanced

training, Charles was given the opportunity to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS) or Special Operations Training. He refused this offer. Charles reapplied to the college he was expelled from and was accepted this time.

Charles reported that completing his post-secondary education was not easy or without hardship. Charles reported that during the three years he attended this work study college, “a number of my cousins were murdered”. Donte was involved in an altercation and shot. But, Charles persevered and graduated. As President of the student body, Charles gave the opening welcome and invocation at graduation. It was in that moment that a transformation happened.

As I rose to take my position at the same podium Dr. Maya Angelou addressed us from all those years ago, I spotted my mother being escorted down the aisle to take her seat. It was at that moment, as she caught my eye, that I realized I was finally getting a glimpse of the man who she had been looking at since she picked me up from the police station when I was 11 years old. I stood on that stage, a testament to her and so many other hope dealers.

A belief in a higher power: Anchor for resiliency. At the age of 12, Charles was practicing Islam. His father was not impressed by his religion and forced him to attend Bible Camp and other church-related activities when he would visit him. Charles shared, “I chose to become Muslim when I was 11 or 12. Going back to my daddy’s house, who was a Church of Christ minister, he was dragging me off to church every day of the week.” When Charles arrived at his father’s house, “He [Don] would take all my stuff and put it in the closet and was like, ‘You’ll get that when you leave my house.’” It was during that time that Charles changed his birth name to his Muslim name. Since Charles was a Junior, his father asked him to not change his first name, but rather, his middle name. Charles agreed.

Growing up Charles experienced many different forms of faith and rituals. They were not always traditional. Charles did not regularly attend church, but the family celebrated through music, dance, and cleaning. Charles recalled: “We would crank up the Jesus Christ Superstar Soundtrack, and we would clean, and sing, and dance. It was our time. It filled us up. It was definitely ours. That was our spiritual time.” Many of the family friends were associated with a variety of faith traditions. “We celebrated all of them. We did Seder, and did Ramadan, and we did Christmas, or we were heathens with everybody else.” Charles experienced similar acceptance at his college as well. He reported, “When I was in school there, there were Muslims, and Jews, and every denomination of Christianity, a half dozen Tibetan students, refugee students.” It was the culmination of his mother’s faith he witnessed growing up and the different people and traditions he interacted with and experienced throughout his life that impacted his belief in a higher power.

During his interview, Charles shared, “I believe in a higher power. I believe there is only one. I am strong believer in faith. I believe it is a necessary part of resilience, part of survival.” Charles reported that he is disappointed that religion is labeled so tightly. “It always amazed me that we have 500 words that mean butter, but we can’t have more than one word that means God.” By doing so, we are marginalizing youth and not encouraging them to discover a faith because they are being forced to choose. “The last thing we ought to be telling people is how you have faith. We just need to tell them you should have faith, and let’s explore what that means.”

Charles continued:

We have to have a faith in something greater than yourself. You have to be able to look and see a greater thing so that we can imagine ourselves greater, right?

When we're in our difficult places. . . . If there's no greater to imagine, if there's no greater to aspire to, internally or externally, then there really is hopelessness. You can sit in the pain of who you are and where you are, and you just spin. . . . So, without that anchor, something that can hold you and give you the faith or the courage to climb . . . that there's something to aspire to, then there really is nothing you can do. So, I think that's instrumental.

Charles defined hope as a construct, a reliance on future possibility, and the ability to speak light into an abyss of darkness. He believes that resiliency is not possible without hope. He spoke of spiritual hope, the intentional instilling of possibility:

I call it the ability to speak light into darkness. Not with the expectation that you're going to brighten the whole world, but you might just clear a little path. So, before there is resilience, there has to be hope. There has to be an intentional instilling of possibility. And that's work. That's real work that a lot of folks don't want to do. And that's where it falls apart. People say, well, some kids got it, and some kids don't.

Charles went on to say that "Hope refers to what happens next, not what is happening right now or what happened in the past." In the year 2009, Barack Obama won the popular vote, the electoral college, and the American people in an unprecedented election to become the 44th President of the United States of America. Not only was Mr. Obama the first African-American president, he united an entire country based on hope. His message was as follows:

Hope is not blind optimism. Hope is the thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us. By the men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be. (<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/315845-hope-is-not-blind-optimism-it-s-not-ignoring-the-enormity>)

Self-determination. Charles said, "In order to be able to bounce back, you have to believe that you have a right to do that." Eventually Charles had to accept his lot in life and moved forward. "I think part of my resiliency was first owning the fact that life

was going to be hard. And once I was able to get OK with the fact that life was going to be hard, and commit to doing it, then everything else was just me keeping my promise to myself.”

Charles realized,

I was broken, and then you get to a point where you go, ya’ know what . . . I’ve been through tough shit. So, I can take another hit if it comes. That probably allowed me to go into places where people were like, “Dude, I don’t know why you even try.” But it’s like, “They can’t kill me, right?” My life has been in danger before.

Eventually Charles transformed his thought process and overall thinking from acceptance to optimism.

I am an optimist. Look, you don’t need to be the one telling yourself you can’t. There’s a whole world out there telling you that for you. You don’t need to be one of them. It shouldn’t be one of your job duties. It shouldn’t. And I have rallied against that being one of my things. There have been times when I’ve been low, and I’ve failed, and got expelled from college, and lived in my mama’s basement. Totally, what the hell, I got kicked out again. But, it’s OK. It’s all OK.

Despite the risks and adversity Charles experienced growing up, he shared that he was determined to not be another statistic. He was not going to live his life confined behind the bars of a 6 x 8-foot jail cell like his brothers. He was going to raise a family, inspire others, obtain his law degree, lead the juvenile justice system in a southern state, have competitive employment, not use government assistance, and be an advocate.

However, this story did not come to be written because the pieces of his life fell nicely into place. It was the belief others had in him that transferred to belief in himself.

According to Charles, “Self-determination is when somebody helps you find a vision of yourself and paints it so bright against the background, that you can’t help but want to get to it. It drives you.”

Self-determination begins with self-awareness, what Charles refers to as truth data. He explained self-determination:

I would have to say that it is having enough truth data about yourself to make the best decision about who you become in the world. Having enough data, that you can say this is who I am. It's not just a knee-jerk reaction. So, having enough [truth data] and being aware enough of who you are and your experiences.

Charles gained belief in himself because of how he was fed by others.

It was a steady measured infusion of confidence, competence, and love and hope . . . that gave me the courage to say, "That's not who I am. That's not what I am." That's what I experienced. That's what I have done. That's where I have come from. But that's not who I am.

You must possess the belief in yourself to be able to overcome obstacles and turmoil. "In order to get to greater, you're going to have to be brave enough to go back and face whatever shit you did, and then put it back together" by any means necessary. "I've got duct tape and bailing wire. I've got some chewing gum. And so, stick that baby together, you cross your fingers, and you go on anyway."

Charles spoke about refusing to give up, even when the football moved. Beginning at a young age, Charles was a determined child. When a teacher told him he could not become something, he found alternative ways to shine. When the disability advocate from his law school suggested he find an apprenticeship to work with his hands, he got a law degree. When he got expelled from law school three separate times, he never missed a day of class.

I don't leave when you say I'm done. I leave when I say I'm done. And that is the thing that I carry, and I think the thing that got me there was being able to recognize that I push through things that I wasn't supposed to be able to. And every time I conquered one of those . . . every time I had one of those, it was very often followed by a setback. I kept hitting walls and finding devastations. I felt like Charlie Brown with the yellow shirt with a brown stripe on it. Because, damn, every time I'd get up, it was like, oh, he's up again, move the football.

Charles could have succumbed to the words he repeatedly heard growing-up: “People like us don’t get to be great.” But, he did not. “I always said, ‘That’s crap, that’s bullshit.’ I get whatever I want. I don’t walk away from failures.” Charles accepted his failures, hurdled the roadblocks, and re-evaluated when mistakes were made.

I don’t walk away from mistakes. I try my best to own them. I probably don’t own all of them. Some of them I probably don’t even know that I have had. . . . I have been encouraged to be able to face the fact that I have to be responsible for what happens and in doing that, I also gave myself permission to make something else happen.

Self-determination does not happen without purpose and preparation. Charles failed in life; yet, he did not wallow in his failures; he used them as learning experiences and stepping stones to obtain his goals. He used setbacks and failures to gather the right equipment, tools, and allies to overcome challenges. “Self-determination is when you have the ability to take all of those experiences and the thought of who you are to formulate a real plan of who you become.” You have a say in your future. You have a say in your destiny. You are the author of your story.

Gabriel

Demographic and Background Information

Gabriel is a 44-year old Chicano man, born in a metropolitan area in a western state, in 1971. “My mother came to this country; she was six months pregnant with me, from Mexico. She came as an undocumented immigrant--later on, became a citizen.” Today, Gabriel resides in the same metropolitan city in which he was born. He is currently separated from his wife of 20 years. She does not reside in the home with him at this time. Gabriel has one daughter, 19 years of age, who is currently attending college in the Bay Area. In September, 2017, Gabriel described his current employment role as

an Associate Professor and Researcher at a university in a metropolitan area in the West. Gabriel reported he is paid a salary and earns approximately \$80,000 per year. He does not earn paid time off, but does receive health insurance benefits through his employment. Gabriel is a registered voter and voted in the last presidential election. He reported no current involvement with the justice system and does not use government assistance. He participates in community activities and is a member of many professional and personal organizations. Gabriel earned his high school diploma, his Bachelor's degree, and his Doctorate of Philosophy degree.

Mother: Ruth. When Gabriel's mother, Ruth, was six months pregnant with him, she fled the country of Mexico to seek a better life for herself and her unborn child. Gabriel shared: "My mother left Mexico to flee from my biological father, who was very physically abusive with her." Gabriel recalled a story his mother often told regarding his biological father. "One of the stories she tells me is that he dragged her by the hair down the river. He was gonna . . . he wanted to . . . he didn't want the baby to be born. He didn't want me to be born. So he tried to, sort of, beat me out of the womb with a brick." After Ruth discussed the situation with her parents, it was agreed that she could no longer be safe and needed to flee Mexico.

Seeking refuge. When the difficult and uncertain decision was made, Ruth began her journey to seek safety, security, and refuge elsewhere. This move was not only for herself, it was also for her unborn child, Gabriel.

Ya' know, so my mom left. She talked with her parents, and she left. They put her in a trailer, to come to the United States, with a bunch of other people who were trying to pass illegally. She had to wait in a theater for hours until the coyote [human smuggler] came. The way she tells it, the trailer was packed. It took days. It took about three days to get here because they took their time. They try to fly low under the radar. And then she got here.

Gabriel reports that Ruth's highest level of education completed was third grade. "She was the oldest of the women in the family, so it fell to her to do all the laundry. She had to leave school to take care of my uncles." She also earned her citizenship and gave birth to another son, Ricardo. Ruth currently resides on the east side of a metropolitan area where she has lived for decades. "And they'd been living on the east side forever."

Biological father. Gabriel reported that he did not have a relationship with his biological father growing up. The relationship between Gabriel and his biological father was nonexistent until his early 20s. Gabriel shared, "[the relationship did not begin] not till the age of about 21. About 21. I didn't need it, ya' know." He reported that his biological father recently passed away. "He just passed away. He just passed away." But growing up, Gabriel did have a male in his life who became his father-figure. "I won't say he's my adopted father. He's just my father because he's the one that raised me."

Step-father: Juan. Gabriel recalled the time his mother met his step-father, Juan. Juan was 10 years older than Ruth and was just released from prison for murder. Gabriel shared, "When he came out, he met my mother when they were walking up and down the street. He lived a block away, across from Century Park. And my mom, she thought I needed a father." So, Juan and Ruth were married. At the age of 5, Gabriel's name changed to that of his new father's name. "That's how I became Neruda. I'm very proud to be Neurda. He paid a lot of money for that name to be given to me. He was about as good of Dad as I could have."

After Juan was released from prison and after he married Ruth, he got a job as a butcher in a small meat packing plant. Gabriel shared, "We'd [Gabriel and his bother] go

visit him at lunch, and he'd give us hotdogs, cold cuts, and all the stuff like that." But this was not the only job that Juan had to earn money. According to Gabriel, "My father was a big time drug dealer man." Juan juggled being a drug-dealer and a butcher at the same time with relative ease. It was not until Juan was injured at his butcher job that their lives took a turn for the worse.

Gabriel said, "Ya know, he ended up getting hurt. He slipped a disk in his back" and lived in constant pain. In order to alleviate the pain, Juan began to use heroin. It was not long until Juan was no longer just a drug-dealer; he was now a drug-user and drug addict.

His sister, my aunt, got him on to heroin and stuff. And, everything was just different after that because then my father used . . . and he sold. And on top of that, he wasn't no joke. My dad was no joke, man. He was not to be messed with. He did not mess around. He wasn't one of these yelling and screaming sort of guys. No, he was not to be messed with.

Juan lived this lifestyle for many years. He brought guns, violence, drugs, and the unsafe people into Gabriel's home from a young age. Unfortunately, due to the lifestyle lived by Juan, he died at the age of 51. Gabriel shared, "Like I said, my father did his best, but you know, he died, at the age of 51 when I had just turned 21. The heroin and all that, the hepatitis."

Siblings. Gabriel had one half-sister and one half-brother growing-up. He reported, "I don't call her a half-sister. My biological father had a daughter. It's just that we're not close, that's all. I love her, but we don't see each other a lot." Ruth and Juan also had a son, Ricardo. Ricardo currently resides not far from Gabriel, yet, they rarely spend time together.

We're not close. I think it's everything growing up that just made us like . . . apart. He was my dad's sort of son. But, my dad never treated us differently. If

anything, he treated me better. He [Juan] never put his hands on me. He put his hands on my brother, but he never put his hands on me.

Brother: Ricardo. Gabriel reported that growing up in such a volatile, violent, and explosive environment would typically bring siblings closer together as a support system for one another, however, it had the opposite effect on him and his brother.

You know, it's weird if my brother appears because we were already apart. It didn't bring us closer together, it just made us, you know, kinda compartmentalized us. Like, I live in this house and so does he, but we didn't really act as brothers. We didn't.

To this day, Gabriel does not have a strong relationship with Ricardo. He reported that when he does have to see his brother, he becomes overwhelmed with anxiety and sadness. He elaborated by saying, "We have trouble with it. I've thrown my brother out of my house twice. I throw people out of my house when they call someone a peckerwood. I don't want that around the kids."

Gabriel recalled that Ricardo was very talented. He was an artist, but did not reach his full potential. He did not have the internal drive, or maybe the belief within himself, to set goals and strive to achieve them.

He was never really able to get himself going like I did. I was fortunate enough to. He's really a much more talented person. He's a great artist, but he never really, ya know, I don't know why. I'll have to ask him one day. He had a chance to... he was offered an art school scholarship in high school, to go to an art school out of state. He was that good. And, he didn't take it. He stayed in the streets more.

Family Connections

Mother and Juan's love lost. According to Gabriel, his mother and father were not in love with each other when they married. He cannot say for sure that they ever loved each other. This could be because of Juan's lifestyle choices, the physical abuse he perpetrated onto Ruth shortly after they were married, or the countless times he raped her.

Gabriel shared: “I don’t think she [Ruth] loved him [Juan] in the beginning. Maybe she grew to love him, which was going to be a difficult thing, a difficult path for her.” He went onto say:

You have to understand that the background to all of this is my father beating my mother, savagely, for 16, 17 years. As soon as they got married. Yeah, my father was beating my mother, and so, my brother and I knew what that was like to be in the house with that.

Gabriel had to call his grandfather on many occasions to come and remove him and his bother from the home. The violence was too extreme and very intense for two young boys to witness. “So, during middle school, it was getting very bad. I can’t tell you how many times we had holes in the wall,s and my grandfather had to come and get us at 2 in the morning, you know. . . . He [Juan] was putting a gun to my mother’s head.”

Because of such violence and aggression, the cops were regularly called to Gabriel’s home. This created a great deal of embarrassment and shame for him. Everyone in the neighborhood would come outside of their homes to observe the police activity.

I remember one night, they came and got him, and the policeman told me, “You’ve got to be strong now. You’re the man of the house.” And I just looked at him like . . . looking back on it, this is what my look said. I didn’t say anything, but “What the fuck are you talking about?” Ya’ know, even then I knew that was ridiculous! So, I went out and my friends were out there. Everybody was watching. . . . Everybody sees it.

Parental compensation for peace and security. Gabriel believed his parents would counterbalance their actions, the violence, the drugs, and the child predators he and his brother were exposed to growing up through compensation. His parents showered him and his brother with excessive amounts of gifts, miscellaneous items, and toys. Gabriel believed that at times, his parents felt badly about the lifestyle and

environment which they created for their family, maybe even ashamed. Yet, little effort was made to improve the quality of life for Gabriel or Ricardo; they were simply showered with unnecessary gifts, but not safety and security. Gabriel believed the actions and behaviors of his parents were a direct result of an effort to minimize the chaos experienced in the home. He shared, “It was maybe part of the compensation, the overcompensation.” Gabriel went on to say:

There would be some days that we would wake up and the whole house would be full of shit. Shit we didn’t even know. Shit we didn’t even own. It was like, there was a chandelier in my house. Ya’ know! We had everything though . . . except for peace and security.

It could be any given day that Gabriel would wake to find all this stuff in his home, but Christmas and birthday celebrations were even more extravagant. His parents spared no cost to provide the children with anything and everything they may have desired.

There was no toy or stuff that we didn’t have for Christmas. My dad would send my auntie to go forge and come back with anything I wanted, just a bunch of stuff. So they tried to compensate. We had crates of things that were stolen. Everything. It wasn’t what we really wanted or needed; it was just stuff. You know, it made you, the way candy makes a child happy for a second, after that . . . nothing really. You know?

Unfortunately, no amount of stuff or material possessions provided Gabriel and his brother the safety and security they longed for. Their happiness was fleeting and short-lived. Gabriel went on to report that there was only two times his parents were harmonious and happy, when they made tamales or attended yard sales.

It really is the only time I can remember them being totally in harmony, like working together. Peaceful. It was really beautiful to watch them do that. Really beautiful. Later on when they would go to yard sales, pick up appliances, take them apart and re-sell them, that was another time when they were really good. So, holidays were kind of an occasion for that.

But these brief moments of parental happiness and unity were quickly replaced with heartache, violence, anger, and resentment. Gabriel shared: “The family structure was rotting.”

Gabriel and Juan. Despite the horrific things Gabriel observed his father do, he still loved and cared for Juan. There was a tenderness he shared with him. “Every time I’d find him in the bathroom passed out naked. All the needle stuff on the toilet . . . he’d tell me, ‘Bring me some pills, bring me some Kool-Aid,’ because he was trying to balance it out and stuff like that. And I felt for the man, I did. I felt for him.” Juan loved Gabriel in return. As previously mentioned, the interactions Gabriel had with Juan were quite different than the interactions Juan experienced with his biological child, Ricardo. Juan never put his hands on Gabriel, he only loved him to the best of his ability. Gabriel recalled when he joined the football team during his sophomore year of high school.

My father was out there at every practice. I’d come home, and he’d draw a bath for me, just to soak and stuff. That was my father, too. He was a super smart man. He was a prison lawyer. A jailhouse lawyer. With better opportunities, he’d have been the Chicano Thurgood Marshall. He would have been. . . . It wasn’t to be.

But the violence, drug use, inter-parental conflict, lack of family cohesion, lack of parental support, and lack of parental guidance caused Gabriel to begin to resent his father. Even though they experienced positive and warm moments, Gabriel harbored a great deal of hurt and anger. Gabriel discussed a situation that occurred between him and his father Juan.

I was starting to get older and starting to kind of strike back a little bit. I was trying to learn the guitar, and my dad went and got me one from the pawn shop. In prison he had learned to play guitar. And, I remember that he had spent a whole day making these notes, like on this piece of paper, all the chords and stuff like that. Hand-made.

And I tore them up in front of his face because he made me suffer so much. I probably got frustrated because it wasn't coming along as easily as I thought. But, I knew I was trying to hurt him, and I did. You know, it's like one of the things that I regret sort of the most in life. Because like, what did I do that for? But, that's kinda all it was, you know. Back and forth, times of peace.

Grandfather and Gabriel: Witnessing abuse. Growing-up, Gabriel felt alone.

He had one uncle, Samuel, whom he could connect with, but Samuel had limited intellectual functioning. Because of this, he was not someone who Gabriel could seek for guidance or refuge from the tumultuous environment he faced at home. Gabriel went on to say, "He's [Samuel's] a good person, but there's no one that I could really turn to. My own grandfather called me *el veneno*, the poison." The dysfunction and disconnect Gabriel experienced within his personal family nucleus spread to his extended family as well. This lack of family cohesion and support caused Gabriel to become reclusive and introverted. He struggled to fit in with his family. He did not have a strong, male role-model to guide him growing up, and he did not respect the men in his life. He went on to say, "But there was nobody really that I could . . . as you grow older and your eyes open up. I didn't look up to any of the men in my family." He recalled holiday celebrations as times of excessive drinking and questionable behaviors. "My mom has six brothers and sisters, so you can imagine what the family gatherings were like. I would see my uncle kissing my aunt, but it wasn't his wife. So it really threw me off. I saw it a lot. I saw it a lot." However, that was not the only type of questionable and inappropriate behavior Gabriel witnessed by his family members growing up.

Gabriel reported that within the Mexican culture "there are children in many extended Mexican families that are given away, because someone had them and they can't take care of them." This was also true in Gabriel's family. Gabriel's grandmother

and grandfather agreed to accept Nielle, a 16-year-old cousin, into their home. However, she was not regarded or treated as a family member. She was referred to as the arimadas, “that means that they are like a cat that kinda sidles up to you. They are not part of the family, but they’re there. Nielle always had this role that she’s the maid.” Even though she was a blood relative, she was excluded from all of the family functions, celebrations, and special events. Gabriel recalled a time when his entire family went to a local amusement park. Nielle was not permitted to ride any rides or participate with the family in completing any carnival games. Her role was to tend to the screaming infants, take the toddler children to the bathroom, and wait for the older children to exit rides. She was treated as the family maid. Unfortunately, she was also sexually molested by Gabriel’s grandfather.

One day when I was about 16, I walked in and my grandfather had her [Nielle] on his lap. I . . . I fucking panicked. You know, they were doing something I wasn’t supposed to see, and I didn’t know what the hell to do. I never did anything. She later escaped and that’s no, that’s no exaggeration. She planned an escape from my grandmother’s house. Um, but that was like moral annihilation. What the fuck do you believe in?

Gabriel remained voiceless about what he observed between his grandfather and Nielle. This was common practice for his entire family; you were not to speak of or discuss anything questionable that was seen. He was raised with dark family secrets that were to remain unspoken and ignored. The secrecy within his family was extensive. Gabriel said, “If we didn’t see it, something was kept secret from us.” He went on to report about a horrific event that was perpetrated by his grandmother toward Nielle. This, too, was kept secret from him.

During the time that Nielle was living with Gabriel’s grandparents, they lived in an old home. At times, the septic tank would overflow and need to be repaired. In order

to remedy the problem, the septic tank lid would be removed, exposing raw sewage that needed to be drained.

I guess Nielle had done something wrong. I don't know what the fuck it might have been. She could have burned a tortilla, maybe. I don't know. But my grandmother, who saw her as like my grandfather's plaything . . . she threw her in the septic tank. She threw her in the septic tank. I didn't find out about this until 20 years after it happened. That's what we grew up in.

Uncle Oscar. Gabriel reported that both his grandfathers have passed away, and he has littler interaction with the remaining members of his families. He shared: "I don't really see them, nor do I seek them out. I didn't look up to any of the men in my family." Just two years ago, his Uncle Oscar put a gun to his head.

While Gabriel was working, he received a frantic phone call from Ruth:

My mom said he [Uncle Oscar] was on the porch, with his gun, drinking and saying he was going to kill my mom and my grandma, and burn the house. So my mom said, "Come do something." I'm like, "Call the police!" And, I knew they weren't going to call the police. So, I went down there, and I tried to have him give me the gun. At the same time, in a little moment where he was not watching, I called the police. So, they're on the way, and he starts to get up and go inside. And, I know if he goes inside, he's going to go down to the basement. I'm like, no, if they go down and find he gots a gun in the basement, they'll shoot him. So, I'm trying to hold him up. His back is toward the street, and I'm facing the street. The police are coming up, and they don't know who's who. They don't know who has what. He [Oscar] has the gun in his shirt pocket, in his jacket pocket. And, he pulls it out and tries to put it to my head. The police see this, and they come up, and they were really cool. They just took the gun away and sent him to a 72-hour hold.

Not phased by the events that just occurred with Oscar, Gabriel immediately returned to work as if nothing happened. Completely desensitized to the horrific events that literally just took place moments ago.

Then I came back to work, like nothing. And, I went up and I joked around with it, with my colleague upstairs. I was the only one laughing. And I thought, it hit me a little bit later, I thought, “Oh, why am I back at work like nothing happened? Crazy.” And, really, I just came back to work like nothing. When stuff happens to me these days, what may impact you, any person, sort of immediately, it may take me a half-hour for me to let myself feel it. It may take me a little time to let me feel it. Because I’m kind of blunted, perhaps a bit desensitized to it all. I guess even, in the deepest part of me, maybe it’s just what people do. But, I had to make it something of a virtue. But, it’s all I got. I have to make it something of a virtue . . . that I don’t feel, don’t hurt me.

School Experiences

Growing up, Gabriel described his elementary school experience as stellar. Even though the family moved at least 10 times for cheaper rent during his elementary school career, he was able to thrive. He attended three different elementary schools and was categorized as gifted and talented. He reported, “So, from elementary school, I was in gifted and talented. Whatever that means.” He enjoyed his elementary school experiences and sought solace and comfort from caring adults. Gabriel was not a discipline problem and was a quiet student who kept to himself. He stated, “I’ve always been more sort of inward in my orientation.” He had supportive teachers who cared for him and provided him with the love and attention that was lacking in his home environment. “My teachers, I think, cared for me a lot. I think they saw something kinda messed up. No, I think they saw something. . . . Somehow I appealed to them as someone to look after, and to recognize, and to try to cultivate talent.”

But despite the kindness and support he received from most of his elementary school teachers, he exhibited anxiety. He shared a very traumatic experience that happened to him while he was in elementary school.

This is tough to say. This is tough to say. But you know, this uh, I would uh . . . I can’t tell you how many times I peed my pants at school. I can’t figure it out. I was like, “Did anybody see that? Did anybody notice that? Did anybody say

anything?” It wasn’t anything medical as far as I knew. I would be quiet and then somebody like . . . one teacher who kinda yelled at me, and that’s what I did.

When Gabriel entered middle school, his family relocated to El Paso, Texas.

Ruth and Juan believed that if they relocated to another place, the family’s quality of life would improve. He reported, “They thought a change of scenery, a change of neighborhood—maybe my father will get his ways right.” Unfortunately, the problems the family experienced in Colorado accompanied them to Texas. Gabriel went on to say, “So, we moved to El Paso, and it didn’t go good there. My father. I mean . . . you may not have the east side, but you have Mexico right there. And my dad, he could spot people.” So, as Juan’s drug use subsided slightly, Ruth began to feel more and more isolated. Even though Ruth had a brother who lived on the other side of El Paso, it was not what Ruth had become accustomed to. Gabriel said, “We had family in Mexico in Juarez, but not like on the east side, where she [Ruth] could call her father, and he would be there in 5 minutes. So, my mother, I think, felt much more isolated.” It appears as though everyone in the family still struggled. It was at that time that Gabriel was faced with challenges he had not experienced before.

And it was different, ya know. I’m over here [in Denver]. I was a de-segregation child, so I grew up with White folks, Black folks, Mexican folk. So I knew how to get along in different ways. And you go to El Paso, and suddenly like, like, I’m the Black/Mexican kid. That was a little tough.

So, despite the change of scenery, the violence, drug use, and overall resentment toward one another continued. There was no peace within the family unit that was planned for by relocating to Texas. Because of this, the family returned to the metropolitan area in which they previously lived.

So, I started high school in El Paso, and then we moved back because I think my mom wanted to be closer to family. She was quite isolated. And, even when she

was here, she was somewhat isolated, but I think she could see people, and I think that helped her a great deal. So, we moved, maybe about mid-year through my freshman year, to a nasty high school. It was a long time since I had been recognized as gifted and talented. Sometimes I think about, I don't it, I know, how the hell we went to school seeing what we had seen the night before. I think, think it, um, I think it uh, it messes with me. Is there something wrong with me? Is there something wrong with me?

But, because of the inconsistent living situations and Gabriel's introverted behavior, he did not form many meaningful bonds with peers. "I think I made friends easily; I just didn't have many." During high school, he floated between what he described as "closet nerds like me, or homies from the neighborhood that were just fun to be around." However, Gabriel struggled to find a strong connection. "I just never fit in." He recalled times that he would rather stay at home and read, instead of spending time with friends.

There was times that they'd be out on Friday, and I was like, "Nah, I want to stay home and read." You catch shit for that. You catch shit for everything. And sometimes you give in . . . a lot of times I didn't. It just made me, within my group of people that I considered my best friends in the world, like I didn't fit in with them either. So, yeah, it just didn't work out. We didn't know how to be each other's friends either. Young men just trying to live . . . not compete, but trying to act like men. Outdo one another, goad each other into doing things. It just wasn't a good thing for me. Yeah, it wasn't good at all.

Dark Family Secrets: Engrafted Family

As previously mentioned, the dark family secrets, inter-parental conflict, exposure to domestic violence, and chaotic living situations left Gabriel scarred and traumatized.

To seek answers, he asked difficult questions, to no avail.

I've asked them [Gabriel's aunts]. I've asked them tough questions, like "Why didn't anybody call the cops on my dad? How did you see us? How did you see me?" And, I think the questions are even too tough for them, but I am still left with no answers in my life. What was going on here, man? So, there's not anybody really. I have an engrafted family that I've kind of chosen, and that's kind of the thing that sort of keeps me, uh . . . it keeps me alive.

Several years ago, Gabriel and his wife separated for the first time. It was during that time that he reached out to his mother to discuss problems he was experiencing in his relationship. He said, "It was like, look, I just have trouble because we saw a lot of stuff. My mom got real defensive and angry. 'Well, I gave you a father.'" Gabriel reported that every time he tried to talk with his mother about his past, "it really doesn't go, doesn't go well, whenever we talk about that kind of stuff." It is typical behavior for his family--do not speak about the past or what was experienced, simply ignore it. Because Gabriel did not have a positive role-model growing up, he eventually began to exhibit the negative behaviors he witnessed.

Gabriel has struggled with infidelity. He shared, "I saw things growing up like infidelity, I certainly had problems with that, in a relationship before my wife." He also struggled with domestic violence. He went on to say, "There was problems with domestic violence on my part. And, I was ashamed . . . incredibly ashamed." But that is how Gabriel learned to deal with relationships. He reported, "That's how I learned to handle everything. You lie about it and keep it secret. If you fuck with me, I'll fuck with you back 10 times harder. It's not like we heard about violence; we saw it." He explained:

But, all that stuff, I think, is like having a uranium rod in the basement. You don't have to touch it. You just have to be in the proximity of it for it to have a toxic effect. That's a hell of a powerlessness to watch. And you say, like, "I'm getting bigger." Waiting for that day of reckoning with my father. But again, that's sort of the only tools that you have. If somebody disagrees with you, you're like, "OK, fuck you then. That's cool." You don't like it, you go. It's a bad, bad way of being. A terrible way of being. But yeah, it's had an influence on every aspect of my life. I'm surprised I can keep a job. Much less.

Risk Factors Gabriel Faced

From a young age, Gabriel's life was challenging. At times, there was not enough food for the family to eat. His family often relocated school districts and homes. He had difficulty building and maintaining meaningful relationships with friends and family members. He struggled with depression and mental illness throughout his life. He was exposed to guns, violence, drugs, and countless family secrets when he was just a child. Gabriel's life was filled with pain and heartache. Gabriel described his overall lived experience as one of suffering and acceptance. But, this was not just his personal lived experience, it was the lived experience of his mother as well. He shared, "I wish it could have been different from the point of view, to eliminate my mother's suffering. I had just enough to make something out of myself. I escaped by the skin of my teeth from a lot of things." However, Ruth was not as fortunate. She was not able to escape her suffering and pain. Ruth would say to Gabriel: "Well, he didn't hit you, he hit me" Gabriel deals with this burden regularly, the suffering of his mother. He reported, "I wish somebody could help my mother with that. I mean, she was raped by my father. How's she gonna deal with all that? I feel bad for her, number one. My Dad, he could be a violent, violent man." Even though Gabriel's relationship with his mother is on the mend, there is still tension and pain between them.

The life that was lived by Gabriel was riddled with obstacles and trials. He has been arrested, emotionally and physically abused, and isolated. He has faced challenges that would put most people into a place of perpetual despair and self-destruction, but not Gabriel. He had to come to a place of acceptance for the life he lived. Gabriel shared:

I am on the way to being content with the kind of person I am. But, you really can't just erase it, otherwise, who would I be? I feel like I'm on the other side of

it. And that kind of stuff is in the rear-view mirror. And every day I put another mile between me and it. So, I guess my answer is, I'll take it because there ain't no other way. I'll take it. I had to make something out of this. Otherwise, I end up.

Data analysis for Gabriel revealed four risk-factor themes: (a) exposure to violence, drugs, and guns; (b) poverty; (c) engagement in antisocial behaviors; and (d) a mental health diagnosis. Each risk factor will be described in detail in the next section with information to support the overall risk theme.

Exposure to violence, guns, and drugs. Growing up, Gabriel was exposed to violence, guns, sexual predators, and drugs. He recalled, "On the table were suitcases full of guns. Mounds and mounds of the little balloons full of heroin and everything. It would come and go." The exposure to these risks came at the hands of his immediate and extended family. Gabriel described what put him at the most risk when he was growing up.

The violence in the home. The presence of guns. The presence of drugs and alcohol of all kinds. Now growing up and knowing more, the presence of sexual predators in the family that no one did anything about. They never visited me, but you know. . . . You're in danger with any of that stuff. I think things like seeing just the general disrespect in which people treated one another because you're socialized into it, so it becomes normalized in a way. Generalized infidelity in the family, so you're socialized into it.

The lifestyle in which Gabriel's parents participated welcomed violence, illegal weapons, drugs, and unsavory individuals into the family living situation. Gabriel and his brother were exposed to this lifestyle from birth. Because of this, they both became desensitized to the criminal behavior that was happening daily within the home. Situations that would cause most children to live in constant fear were simply normal for Gabriel and his brother. Suddenly, this lifestyle began to make sense to them.

Just as Gabriel began to engage in antisocial behaviors, Ricardo began a life of crime. He became heavily involved with gangs. This created additional stress, violence, and turmoil within the family. Gabriel described his relationship with his brother: “I think I hated him because he disturbed what little peace that we had. Some days were like, oh, it’s not peace; it’s like whew, nothing happened to me. That’s not a peace . . . that’s the absence of conflict.” But, the few moments of peace and harmony Gabriel experienced with his family were often destroyed by Ricardo’s actions.

And when he would disrupt shit by not coming home, or when the other, his rivals, would come to the house and fucking kick the door and wait outside for him, and stuff like that, like at 3 in the morning. I’d go out there with my Dad. I’d go out there with a bat and shit. But, when I saw my brother, he got it worse. I fucked my brother up, man. He knew I didn’t like him. I think it was because, maybe, on the surface, I would tell myself it was because you’re hurting Mom and Dad, but I was just like, you’re fucking up . . . you’re fucking up the peace, man.

Gabriel went on to report that his brother moved out of the family home at the age of 14. He moved in with his girlfriend, who later became his wife. They are still married to this day. But, Ricardo emancipating himself at such a young age deprived the brothers of repairing their strained relationship and forming a close bond with one another.

Gabriel said, “It’s just the fact that we were all broke, made it hard to form bonds with my brother. So, me and my brother never really had a chance beyond adolescence to grow . . . to grow together.”

Poverty. Gabriel and his family lived below the poverty level. His parents struggled to make ends meet. Even though Juan and Ruth provided festive celebrations for holidays and birthdays with an abundance of gifts and elaborate toys, they did not always have enough food to put on the table or money to pay the rent. Gabriel reported that his family relocated homes many times to seek cheaper rent. He went on to say:

Certainly, there were these times of drought when we didn't even have enough for food because he'd [Juan] be out . . . I mean, he'd pull out rolls of 100s like that, and then nothing. And, my mom would sit there. We'd come home after school, and we'd eat, and she would just watch us. I asked, "Why aren't you eating, Mom?" She was like, "No, no, I already ate." It didn't hit me until years later that she was waiting to see what we would eat.

In order to provide her children with the most basic needs, Ruth became very resourceful; she took to a life of thievery. But, not thievery the way one might expect. She used the resources that were available to her to create a little piece of security for her and her children. Gabriel described how his mother did this:

When my father would pass out, she'd whip off about \$2,000 from this fat roll of 100s. Every time. He wouldn't even notice it. That's when we started always having at least money for food. That's when my mom started to have a little something for herself. She'd go rob him. But, what are you gonna do? How can you say its robbing money off of somebody who is selling drugs? She took it. You know, I figured, I look back on and I think, that was her pension for being a punching bag for so many years.

Engagement in anti-social behaviors. Gabriel was an introvert. He generally kept to himself and was a quiet observer. He acted like a sponge, taking in everything around him to gather information. He observed his friends' behaviors when they experimented with drugs and alcohol, but did not participate.

They were all experimenting with drugs, sex, alcohol. And I'd be on the side just sort of enjoying the whole scene. Watching it. And, I don't know what prompted it, but one day, we went out to a party, and I guess I just . . . I took the step, and I started drinking. And, I didn't stop.

That night, Gabriel drank to the point of blacking out. He was incoherent and almost unresponsive when a pounding came to the front door of his friend's house. It was his father. Devastated and tearfully apologetic, Gabriel was ashamed with his behavior. His father, Juan, did not raise his voice, nor put his hands on him. He simply pulled Gabriel from the bed and said, "You're not hurting me. You're not hurting me." This was not

the only time Gabriel drank alcohol to the point of blacking out. He recalled: “That was like one of many times that I drank to blacking out.”

Gabriel also reported he was arrested for a physical assault charge when he was 20 years of age and described himself as the “most violent kid in the neighborhood.” When Gabriel was arrested, he remembered “My mom had to go and beg people to put their house up and stuff to bail me out of jail.” Several days after Ruth posted bail for Gabriel, he and his father went to discuss the pending charges at the police station. As the police officer was listing the several felony charges Gabriel was being charged with, Juan asked to speak to the detectives in private. “My dad says, ‘Can I talk to you in the other room?’ They come back 5 minutes later and said, ‘You can go home.’ I wondered, oh my God, he must have told them something that they could use in lieu of, you know, [felony charges]. That’s my dad, though.” All felony charges were later dropped.

Mental health diagnosis: Shit rolls downhill. Gabriel has experienced anxiety from a very young age. He reported urinary incontinence during his elementary school years, depression and withdrawn behavior during high school, and anxiety today. Gabriel reported that when he is forced to spend time with his family, he immediately becomes anxious and sad. He elaborated by saying: “When we do family stuff, I get nervous after a half-hour, and I want it to end. I don’t even want to be around it. It makes me anxious and sad, and I just want to go away. I just want it to be done.”

He recalled a particular event that occurred last summer. Gabriel was supposed to go to the Sand Dunes in Colorado with his family. He did not want to attend this vacation, even though he described the Sand Dunes as his favorite place. He argued with his wife because he did not feel as though he had thoroughly planned for this vacation.

He was worried to leave the responsibilities of his job and relax with family. He told his wife and daughter to go without him. However, his daughter whispered to him, “Just come. Will you come for me?” And his response was, “I’ll come for you.” However, he did not enjoy himself or the time he spent with his family. He recalled:

I was nervous the whole time. I was just waiting for something bad to happen. So, I didn’t really enjoy it that much. I didn’t really enjoy it. I enjoyed the parts where I was by myself or with my daughter . . . amidst the group of 15 . . . um, vacation. . . . And be away from books.

This was not a vacation for Gabriel. He was forced to spend time with family members who made him uncomfortable or with whom he did not have a positive relationship. He was forced to be away from books. Books were his safety net; they always provided him an avenue to escape his life. Books provided him the ability to become someone else.

Needless to say, this was the last time Gabriel attended a family vacation.

Aside from the anxiety that Gabriel has exhibited since elementary school, he struggled with depression. At times, he still struggles with depression. Gabriel reported:

I was kinda a melancholy kid. Sad. Prone to crying a lot. For which . . . shit rolls downhill. What my father did to my mother, my mother took out on us . . . emotionally. You cry, and it was like, “Don’t be a faggot!” You get hit or you get fucking pinched; you get yelled at right in your face or something like that. So, it wasn’t good. It just rolled downhill. And I was meaner to my brother. We were all broke, man. We were all broke.

To this day, Gabriel does not strive to be happy. He does not find happiness as a concept that is useful for him or a concept that he aims to achieve. He enjoys the happiness of others, but has little happiness within himself.

I don’t thrive off it, really. I don’t. I feel satisfied. I want to feel fulfilled. But, happiness for me is a very fleeting kind of thing. So, I try not to even mess with it at all. But now, I’m not a particularly happy kind of person. I like experiencing joy for other people’s stuff. That’s cool. That makes me feel good. That makes me feel real good. Um, but for myself, not particularly. I’m not a happy kind of person. I’m overly serious.

Due to the mental issues Gabriel experienced and the shame he carried for his personal choices and the decisions made by his family, he attempted to end his life several times.

Suicide attempts. Gabriel reported he has attempted suicide many times. “I tried to kill myself like six or seven times in my life.” He attempted to end his life by vehicular suicide, excessive consumption of medication, excessive alcohol intake, and self-inflicted wounds. He shared: “I’ve tried to hurt myself by taking pills and alcohol. I’ve lost track, it has to be in the 20s.”

He recalled his first suicide attempt:

The first time was, I had the domestic violence thing with my girlfriend. I took a car. Went over here to I-25, pulled over to the side of the road, and thought about it for a minute, and I just floored it. I hit . . . I went straight into the concrete barrier at about 70 miles an hour. And nothing happened to me. I didn’t have no seatbelt, nothing. I just flew around in the car.

Shortly after this, Gabriel took his father’s gun and went to a park to end his life again.

The other time, shortly after that, because I thought, well what am I? What the fuck am I? What am I doing? I grew up thinking, what the fuck I am. So, I got my father’s gun, that was a little nickel-plated 25. I went to the park with it. I put it to my head, but I couldn’t do nothing. I couldn’t do nothing. He went on to report the other times he attempted suicide. “Then I tried to slit my wrists; I couldn’t do that good, either. I didn’t do it deep enough, just hurt myself. So I tried pills. I mean like, a lot of pills.” Yet, Gabriel was unable to end his life. It was at this time that he decided to seek treatment.

He had feelings of hopelessness and despair. He did not value himself as a person and did not value his worth. He had a very poor self-concept and was overcome with feelings of self-loathing and self-destruction. It was while he was completing his doctoral program that he sought support from a counselor at the University of California

Los Angeles. When the counselor questioned Gabriel's state of mind, he replied: "I do not feel ok." It was at that time that Gabriel was placed on a 72-hour hold. Gabriel went on to report that he cannot recall all of the times he tried to take his own life; "I've lost count. I'm surprised I can hold a damn job and do the most basic of things. I really am. I am surprised."

Gabriel was asked to describe his worst memory. He penned this response:

The ones I mentioned in the interview about trying to end my life. Even today, as I go through a divorce, it feels like high noon compared to those days. The hurt, the shame, the absolute inability to reach out or cry for help. Debilitating even in memory.

Gabriel has been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder and low-grade depression.

However, he does not find those diagnoses to be accurate. He has had over a dozen counselors, but never gave them the opportunity or time to accurately diagnose him. He elaborated by saying: "I just never went long enough or talked with anybody sort of long enough for them to really figure anything out." Gabriel reported he sought a mother-figure with an empathetic ear to counsel him. He shared: "I didn't like it. I didn't like it. I liked the counselors, some of them. It was mostly the women, mother-figures. I felt just good seeing them, and just sitting there." But after awhile, Gabriel began to disregard the words of his counselors because they told him he must value himself and begin to appreciate his self-worth.

They would say, "You gotta love yourself and forgive yourself." And, I just got so frustrated. I didn't want to hear that shit no more. I didn't want to hear that shit no more. I was like, "Look, I am what I am. I ain't hurting myself." I ain't done that stuff for 14 years. I don't want to hear it no more. This is how I function. My shame is close.

Gabriel also stated that once he began to feel better, he did not see the benefit of still attending counseling sessions. He went on to say: "I'll go, and they were like aspirin,

right. You don't take aspirin when you don't got a headache. So, as soon as you feel better . . . I just stop going." He believes he is the most suitable counselor for himself. He shared: "I'm my own best counselor these days, because I actually listen to myself. I'm a lot better at being honest with myself, whereas before, I was the person most apt to deceive himself." He reported that he has been prescribed medication to deal with his mental health diagnoses, some of which had benefit, some did not. He is currently not taking any medication for his mental health.

Poor self-concept: Self-hatred. "No one is worse to me than me. I'm absolutely awful to myself, you know. I'd be put in jail for fucking abuse . . . to myself." Gabriel reported that he has to engage in self-regulatory behaviors and positive self-talk daily to even function. He stated: "Trying to convince myself that I'm not a piece of shit takes a good hour and a half to two hours every day. So, it's just daily maintenance, you know. Daily maintenance."

Gabriel recalled a specific time when he was in a remedial English class. The teacher asked Gabriel to take a standardized test with 100 questions. Because he completed the test quickly, the teacher accused him of not trying. The next day, the teacher came running into the classroom and informed him that he earned 100% on the exam. Immediately, Gabriel was transferred to an advanced placement (AP) course. He stated: "I went, and I stayed about a week. I just didn't believe in myself. Yeah, I just didn't believe in myself. Simply."

Gabriel also carried a great deal of shame and remorse for the choices and actions of his past. He reflected on the time he was arrested, "It must have pained them both [his parents] to see this is what we showed our son growing up, and look what he did now.

He's the most violent kid in the neighborhood. It must have pained them to know." But, his shame runs deeper than just for himself. Gabriel also felt a sense of shame for the life that his parents lived. He recalled the pride he felt when his father worked as a butcher.

I remember the pride when we'd go see him, and he'd be in his butcher's outfit. That white coat, and he had that iron glove. He would do all this sort of butcher tricks like sharpen his knives. And, be cool when he would show off how thin he could cut the meat and all that stuff. That was stuff that, as a child, would make you proud.

But that pride eventually faded. After Juan suffered his debilitating back injury, he could not legitimately work. He made money by selling drugs. His lifestyle shamed Gabriel.

He sold drugs along the way. And, what the hell am I gonna talk about? It was very . . . I have to say, I was ashamed. I have to say, I was ashamed of my dad. Yeah. I'd have to say that. I have to face that, too, that I was ashamed of what he did and the fact that he didn't have a regular job.

But the shame was not just Gabriel's to bear; Juan was also filled with shame for the decisions he made and the path he chose. Gabriel reported that in an effort to improve his life and repent, Juan attempted to find God.

My dad was trying to straighten his stuff out. He had gotten into a religion. I have these vivid scenes of him, watching them televangelists. . . . Sending like, \$5, \$10, \$15, and I really felt for the man. I felt for him because I'd walk into the room, and he'd be there at night with the glow of the television on him, and he'd have his hand up praying. And, I knew what he was praying for. But, by that time, I resented him so much, you know, it was like, uuhhh . . . it wasn't working out good for any of us.

This was a man who carried around a great deal of shame over what he did . . . a great deal of shame. That last year of his life was really the best that we ever had, and I'm so glad that we had it. Because I'd drive him to go see my brother at work. And, my brother was a hard worker, too. And, on the way, he would tell me all these things . . . all these things about his life and what he did. These regrets that he had. He would just be very honest about that kind of stuff . . . which I thought was very beautiful. I thought that was very beautiful.

Gabriel was asked to discuss a time that he would like to relive again. One might think that he would choose a positive or happy memory, but he did not. He responded with the following written words.

If I could go back to one day in time, it would be any time I yelled or was mean to my wife, daughter, or mother. The way we grew up infected us with meanness and callousness at times. We come to say we have “tough skin,” but at times, the difference between that and being mean (because we were made mean and lacked the tools to be anything but mean) is negligible. So, so many regrets and laments in life, I don’t even know where to start. They are like old newspapers piled up in the corner, in chronological order, and I am the hoarder.

However, despite Gabriel’s success and ability to overcome adversity, he still treads lightly through life, he lives in constant fear. Gabriel worries regularly that the life which he has created for himself could go off the rails at any time. He worries that at any given moment, the rug could be pulled out from underneath him, and he will be broken again. “You know, like I said, here we are in my office. Sometimes I just feel like I want to walk around quiet, so not to disturb that. I’m afraid it will crumble. So, I just try to preserve it. Walk as lightly as possible.”

Resiliency Factors for Gabriel

During the second interview, Gabriel was asked to define resiliency. He defined resiliency as “that which keeps its form.” He went on to say, “I try to just keep my form, having been through the fire. . . . I just try to remain who I think I am, or at least who I want to be.” Gabriel has been knocked down, but refused to stay down. He has risen from the ashes of his past, his choices, and his failures--to rise like the Phoenix.

I’m about as tough as they come. It would take a lot to knock me on my ass. It would take even more to keep me down now. I wasn’t good at that before. I would drown in a puddle before. But, you go through all these things, and if you don’t want to keep doing worse, it’s a hell of a thing to try to keep doing better in life. It’s a hell of a thing.

Despite the life that was lived by Gabriel including his exposure to violence, guns, and drugs, his poverty, his engagement in antisocial behaviors, and his mental health diagnoses, he managed to demonstrate post-secondary success. Gabriel is defined as successful because he: lives independently, is employed, does not rely on government assistance, is not involved with the justice system, completed his post-secondary education (Ph.D.), and participates in the community. He abides by the laws, he votes, and he is aware of his rights. He advocates for others and seeks social justice for all.

Data analysis revealed five resiliency themes for Gabriel: (a) others' belief in Gabriel; (b) acceptance of self; (c) completion of post-secondary education; (d) belief in a higher power; and (e) self-determination. Each of these themes will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Others' belief in Gabriel. According to the research that was previously discussed, children and youth thrive with the support of a caring adult. Gabriel experienced this support through teachers and his parents. Even though he lived a challenging life growing up, he came in contact with people who believed in him.

Teachers' belief in Gabriel. Gabriel had people who saw a light within him. He shared: "My teachers, there was kind of a tenderness there that I really appreciated, liked and needed—really thrived on. It probably remains to this day." When he attended school, the interactions he had with particular teachers met a need that was not being fulfilled at home. The teachers with whom he connected were supportive and safe. Gabriel reported that the teachers who were the most supportive, kind, and affectionate to him were his elementary school teachers. Even though he attended several different elementary schools, he still managed to locate teachers who valued him and his potential.

During this time, many of his teachers provided a calm, secure environment--something that Gabriel so desperately wanted, but rarely achieved while living at home. He also reported that there was a teacher at the high school level who believed in him. He shared: “But you know, by high school, those names [of his elementary school teachers] felt really distant. I did have one high school teacher that believed in me.” These teachers believed in Gabriel and his abilities. They saw a light within him that needed to be ignited. They needed Gabriel to believe in himself and his potential, just as they believed in him and his value. Gabriel used the belief these educators had in him to propel himself forward. Their belief drove him to be something, to be greater. “But, I think it was these books and teachers who said, ‘Well, you’ve got something . . . some talent of some sort.’ It could save you. The more I dedicated myself to it, it helped me help myself out of these things.”

But, Gabriel did not only experience people who believed in him within the walls of a school building, he knew he had parents at home who believed in him and his gifts. Even though he did not have stability and warmth within his family, he knew he was loved.

A mother and father’s belief in Gabriel. Gabriel said, “Outside of that [my teachers], it was my mother and my father that believed in me.” Even though Gabriel was often put in compromising or inappropriate situations, he knew his parents loved him. He saw it in their actions toward him. He knew their love when he got arrested. He said, “The very fact that she [Ruth] bailed me out of jail showed a belief in me.” He also reminisced about a time his mother demonstrated authentic love and belief in him.

This was not an action of overcompensation like he had experienced so many times in the past; this was purely the demonstration of a mother's love for her son.

While Gabriel was completing his Bachelor's Degree, he needed to purchase a very expensive textbook. One afternoon, he was talking with his mother about the cost of the textbook. At this time, Ruth was working in a downtown location, cleaning office buildings. The way she was paid was dependent upon how many floors she was able to clean.

So, if you're doing Floor 13, that's worth 2.5 hours. You could finish it in 1.5. So, in a way, if you were fast, in a five-hour shift at night, you could get 7 hours of pay. So, she would do an extra floor for me. She would do an extra floor in order to give me the money to buy the book. So, I think people . . . they saw things in me, and they did more than just tell me or . . . only be affectionate. Which are important things. But, they would also procure materials for me, and put me in the right places in order to thrive. So, that's how I knew. Those people and many, many more believed in me.

Gabriel also mentioned a lovely memory he had regarding his father, Juan. When Juan was very ill and hospitalized, his father knew how much books meant to Gabriel. He discussed how his father collected books for him from the hospital.

But, my dad, when he was sick, at the end of his life, he'd be in the hospital a lot. And, he would always steal books from the hospital for me. So that's how I knew! He'd steal those paperback, the paperback pocket books. I still got 'em. I still got 'em at home.

Clearly, Gabriel experienced how people celebrated and believed in him in different ways, but each act of kindness and support made him stronger. Each act of love, affection, and sacrifice empowered him to begin to believe in himself and his talents.

Acceptance of self. Gabriel realized that he needed to begin to see himself through the eyes of others. "It's other people, really. It's other people. Because I had to come and see myself through their eyes. I had to learn how to do that." He needed to see

his value, talent, and overall self-worth in order to be successful. He needed to see himself as others saw him. “I had to kinda learn how to see myself the way other people saw me.” He needed to begin to believe in himself and accept the life he has lived in order to move forward.

I don’t want it [my past] to govern me . . . my sense of embarrassment of who I am. But it’s there. I don’t want it to govern me. It’s not going to govern me, but you’re asking me to banish it and erase it from my head. I can’t fucking do that. I don’t even think, for me . . . I don’t even think it’s advisable. I know who I am. I know what I’ve done. It helps me because it is cautionary. Sometimes, you’ve just got to accept how you are broke.

Gabriel spoke about a time that Juan ran into his boss, Lewis, at the grocery store. Lewis said to Juan, “Your son’s a good worker.” Delighted by the compliment he just heard about his son, he raced home to tell Gabriel. Juan said, “I’m real proud of you.” It was at that moment that Gabriel realized, “I had to see myself through Lewis’ eyes, through my father’s eyes.” Gabriel began to see himself the way others saw him, his potential, his worth.

Throughout Gabriel’s life, he was faced with choices. He made positive decisions that benefitted him and negative decisions that were detrimental to his well-being. He recalled:

You can make three or four good decisions, and then one bad one will set you back. You know, so, it’s really learning how to keep doing it, day after day after day after day. Until it became something like second nature . . . which it still isn’t to me. I still have to concentrate a lot to be good. But, I can see myself making the decisions. I can see myself going through it and trying to do better.

Gabriel spoke about two pivotal moments in his life. It was within these moments that a transformation occurred.

As previously mentioned, Gabriel was arrested for physical assault. He was set to receive 180 days of jail time. He recalled: “After I got into trouble, I was like, ‘I’m

gonna keep it simple. I'm just gonna read and go to the rec.'" After the events of that "apocalyptic night. I worked diligently to reform myself after that." It was at that time that Gabriel developed a meaningful and close relationship with the program coordinator of the recreational center he regularly attended, Josue.

Josue would call Gabriel into his office and give him books to read. Gabriel shared: "So, he gave me all his liberation theology stuff. I'd come in the next week, and we'd talk about it." As the court date approached, Gabriel asked for letters of support that spoke to his character in an effort to have his sentence reduced. "I asked him [Josue] to write a letter for me." Josue penned a handwritten letter on Gabriel's behalf. The letter read, "I have become cognizant and perceptive enough to recognize moments when people's lives are about to 'turn the corner.'" He went on to describe the volunteer work Gabriel had been doing. He also wrote, "I truly believe that we will be losers if he is taken away from us. We believe in Gabriel and would wish that you would see him as we do. We trust him." Gabriel went on to say:

And, there was letters from teachers. The judge just, he whisked through them. I was like "Oh, this is going to go bad. I'm not going home after this. I'm gonna get these 180 days like he said." I was scared. And then, he stopped at the one that had the Denver County seal. It's from the director of the recreation center here on the west side.

Gabriel described that letter as the "letter that saved my life." "The judge said, 'It's because of this letter that I am giving you 180 days of probation. Otherwise, I would send you to the county jail right now.'" Gabriel continues to have a relationship with Josue. He said:

I can't tell him thank you enough . . . 25, 24 years later, and I feel like I just walked out of the court room. What the fuck is that? Just barely escaped, you know. That's how I felt. That's why I'm resilient, because these other people believed in me before I believed in myself. And, I had a lot of them. I had a lot

of them. I had a lot of them. You know, more than I could count. More than I could count.

Gabriel described another turning point in his life. It happened after he was released from the 72-hour hold. When he was in the first year of his doctoral program at a prestigious university in California, he was combative and reported that he “took pride in sort of running circles around people and embarrassing them.” It was at that time that he received valuable advice from a mentor: “You want people to listen to you ultimately, that’s why you’re saying that, but they won’t listen to you the way you do things.” From that moment on, Gabriel reported: “I worked very hard to be respected among my peers and by my professors, and to be the top scholar.”

Completed post-secondary education. Gabriel began his post-secondary education at a community college. He transferred to a Western metropolitan university to complete his Bachelor’s Degree. From there, he decided to pursue a Master’s Degree, but, he did not complete his Master’s Degree. With \$84 in his wallet, he moved to California. He recalled: “I got accepted, and I just left. I didn’t finish my Master’s. Don’t need to. . . . I was in a doc program at the University in California.” While he was a doctoral student he received a very prestigious fellowship. Gabriel graduated from his university and was honored to be the Marshal of the Ceremony. This honor was bestowed upon him by the other doctoral students. He was the top doctoral student, the top scholar.

Belief in a higher power. Gabriel reported: “I want to live as the Lord intended. So I try. I try.” Gabriel recalled that when he was younger, he only turned to religion or a belief in a higher power out of desperation. His religious experiences at that time were very fleeting. He went on to say: “I don’t think I’d really grown into it until the last few

years.” He has matured in his belief in God. “Now, I take it a lot more seriously, and I feel it in my heart, probably for the first time in my life since I was a child.”

He continued, “With the help and support of a very close friend, who is very well versed in all this. He’s like my brother and my father, all rolled into one. He helps me. He cares. He looks after my soul. And, he helps me look after my own.”

Self-determination. Despite the risks Gabriel faced, he had a dream to become somebody. He had a desire within himself to not succumb to the lifestyle his parents had created for him. He was not just going to become another statistic; he was going to become a professor. He was going to raise a family, inspire others, speak out for justice for all, become a published author, not use government assistance, and advocate for migrant workers. Throughout the course of Gabriel’s life, he developed skills along the way in order to achieve success.

Gabriel was purposeful in his actions and planning. He was deliberate. He reported: “I am happier with purpose.” He thrives with direction and a decisive plan. He went on to say:

Look, this morning I woke up, I showered, made me some toast. I prayed the fifth day in the morning of the psalter, made my bed, folded up my clothes. I even folded up my dirty clothes. I made myself here. Got my coffee, got my plan for the day. And, I’m going to carry it out successfully. It took me many years to get to that point.

Gabriel even planned his family vacations around trips he was taking for the university.

He said: “I’m going here, and I’m going there, and I take them [his family] with me. So, even when I’m there, for me, work is first. Because if this is the reason why I’m traveling, I have to fulfill my duties.” Gabriel even plans when he can eat ice cream. He

shared: “It would be rare if you catch me eating ice cream on a Monday. I fucking ain’t earned it. You’ve got to earn it. That’s Friday and Saturday stuff.”

Gabriel believes that self-determination includes “a lot of trial and error, a lot of advice, a lot of trying different things.” Since it is human nature to make mistakes, he believes that people should be presented with countless opportunities to make a situation right, to improve or change the outcome. He stated: “You’re going to make a lot of mistakes, and you need more opportunities. You need an abundance of opportunities.” We must provide others with a plethora of opportunities to right the wrong.”

Gabriel is motivated and driven to be somebody, his own person. He did not have a desire to be like his father. He shared, “I didn’t want to be like my father. There’s things I liked. I liked qualities about him, but I didn’t want to emulate him.” So, he would escape within the pages of a book and find a character that he could relate to or strive to be like. Gabriel recalled:

The person that I wanted to emulate, I would find these people in my books. Tom Joad in *Grapes of Wrath*. He was a person, the first time you meet him, he’s out of jail, and he’s hitchhiking. But, he’s on this search to understand what does it mean to be a good person, and I want to be, I desperately want to be a good person. Desperately.

By locating these literary characters, Gabriel had an abundance of characteristics, qualities, and traits he could add to his repertoire and attempt to mimic. He reported, “It kind of propels you forward.”

At this time, Gabriel is in the prime of his life and his career. He went on to say:

What I enjoy more than anything is that I’m on, I’m on task trying to be somebody. That’s what I like. I get nervous when I’m not. If I was separated or not, I would be here on Labor Day because I want to be someone. I want to be someone. You know, 100% I want to be someone.

The determination Gabriel has within himself is insurmountable. He gained momentum and did not stop. He recalled a particular moment when his motivation ignited. He was attending community college and passing time with his “oldest friend on the planet, John.” Gabriel recounted this story from John’s perspective. At the time, Gabriel was drinking on campus, carrying a switchblade and, just as he reported, “looking for trouble.” One afternoon, he and John were getting ready to begin a chess match. John looks to Gabriel and says, “It was like you had a light turn off in you.” Gabriel had told himself at least 10 or 11 times, “If I don’t do something, I’m going to end up dead or in jail because that’s what I’m looking for. I’m going to end up dead or in jail.” Until that point, Gabriel just uttered those words internally. However, on that day, he had done something differently--he voiced those exact words to John. It was at that specific moment, Gabriel gathered his belongings and left for the library. He made a choice to change his path. He recalled: “So I said to him [John], I’ve got to go. I’m going to the library.” John said, “I never saw you after that except when I saw you going into the library.” John went on to say, “When you [Gabriel] get momentum, that’s what you’re about. It may take you just a little bit to get there . . . but, boy, I’ve never seen . . . cuz you were just gone. You hit the button and that was it. I never saw you afterwards except in the library.” It appears as though the driving force within Gabriel to achieve success ignited that day and has not stopped yet.

Gabriel realized,

I’m good. I can do it. I have done it, and I can continue to do it. If I keep things, like, for real, if I keep alcohol out of my life, I’m good. I can’t tell you the last time I had a drink. But, if I keep that out of my life, I’m good. You know, otherwise, it makes too easy to give in. In here, I feel like my life has . . . everybody has to find it somewhere, maybe no human being finds it cleanly. Maybe I’m just hoping for something that doesn’t exist. But, I have a purpose in

my life because of it. I, I, I'm trying the best that I can to be a person that I envision myself to be. I'm filled with, daily, with regret, lament, and I wish I could feel cleaner inside . . . but it simply isn't that way, so, I try to make do with what I've got. Ya know, it's what I have. It's what I have, so, I'll continue to just try and make something out of it.

Even though Gabriel demonstrated a high level of internal motivation, he lacks a healthy self-esteem level. He sets extremely lofty goals and will not stop until they are achieved. But, he struggles to accept himself and the life that he has lived. He does a great deal of reflective thinking, which can often become a double-edged sword.

Charles and Gabriel: A Cross-case Analysis

After a thorough within-case analysis was completed, a cross-case analysis was conducted. During this phase of the analysis, I examined the themes and codes that were created for the within-case analysis. I identified similarities and differences across both participants. By completing a cross-case analysis, the depth of the analysis of the data is greater. Just as completed during the within-in case analysis, I was looking for common themes regarding demographic information, risk factors, resiliency factors, and self-determination qualities across both participants.

The analysis revealed several themes that were common to both participants. Each participant was a male of color. Each participant was raised in a metropolitan area, in an unfavorable neighborhood with high crime rates and low income. Both participants lived below the poverty level growing up. Charles and Gabriel relocated homes and schools many times throughout their life. They both engaged in antisocial behaviors and were arrested. Both participants were exposed to drugs, alcohol, and guns. Gabriel reported: "I would have to imagine it was because . . . it all leads to the drug use which is what absolutely ruined us. It absolutely ruined and corrupted all of us." They each had

divorced or separated parents. Both participants' fathers found God. Charles and Gabriel believe in a higher power. Both participants had siblings. Both participants had four or more risk-factors present growing up.

Each participant attended and completed a post-secondary education program. Growing up, both participants had a caring adult in their life. Both participants were driven internally and extremely motivated. Gabriel shared: "I want to be somebody. So, I've got to go be somebody; my sense of how good I feel has a really short shelf-life. It's really hard for me to be, sort of like, still." Charles and Gabriel were employed during the time of the study, and both were published authors. Both participants had transformative moments in their life. They were each faced with very specific challenges and overcame them through the planned and purposeful choices they made. Both participants loved their parents, and their parents loved them in return. Even though Gabriel did not experience the family warmth and cohesion that Charles did, he still knew he was loved. Charles and Gabriel practiced self-regulated behaviors: gathered skills to perform tasks, set-goals, and advocated for themselves or others. Both participants had an internal locus of control and practiced self-realization and self-evaluation. Gabriel shared:

So, you see the signs early on that you can find some way. So, maybe it just means to be resourceful. Maybe that's one of the associated concepts or synonyms. But, it's a beautiful thing when you can, as much as a person can, that you can hold your life in your hands and shape it. It's a pretty beautiful thing.

Gabriel and Charles both experienced behavioral autonomy, transitioning from dependence to self-reliance (Table 2).

Table 2

Cross-case Analysis Results--Similarities

Similarities among Participants	Charles	Gabriel
Male	x	x
Behavioral autonomy	x	x
Self-regulated behaviors	x	x
Internal locus of control	x	x
Self-evaluation	x	x
Minority	x	x
Raised in a metropolitan area	x	x
Lived in an unfavorable neighborhood	x	x
Lived in poverty	x	x
Relocated homes	x	x
Relocated schools	x	x
Engaged in anti-social behaviors	x	x
Has been arrested	x	x
Exposed to drugs	x	x
Exposed to violence	x	x
Exposed to guns	x	x
Separated or divorced parents	x	x
Fathers found God	x	x
Believe in a higher power	x	x
Had siblings	x	x
Had multiple risk factors growing up	x	x
Completed post-secondary program	x	x
Hope dealers	x	x
Motivated	x	x
Employed	x	x
Published authors	x	x
Transformative moments in life	x	x
Loved their parents	x	x

Several differences between the two participants were established during the cross-case analysis as well. The difference between the self-concept from both participants was extreme. Gabriel struggled daily to value himself and his abilities; whereas, Charles is confident, secure, and values his self-worth and purpose. Gabriel is

an introvert, and Charles is an extrovert. Gabriel lacked the family support and love that Charles experienced. Charles was exposed to beauty by his parents; whereas, Gabriel experienced domestic violence, balloons of heroin, and constant secrecy.

Table 3

Cross-case Analysis Results--Differences

Differences between Participants	Charles	Gabriel
High self-worth	X	
High self-esteem	X	
Family cohesion and warmth	X	
Introverted personality		X
Extroverted personality	X	
Parental support	X	
Exposed to art and beauty	X	
Gifted and talented		X
Strong reader		X
Self-determination	X	X

Even though each participant experienced similarities and differences within their lives growing up, they both managed to let the light and drive within them navigate them to places of success, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Each participant in this study was resilient in overcoming hardships, multiple risk factors, heartache, and unfortunate circumstance to rise from the ashes and soar--just like the Phoenix.

Awareness and Additional Insight According to Charles and Gabriel

As the research concluded, Charles and Gabriel discussed additional insight into their past and how that impacted their lives. They offered additional awareness and perceptiveness for teachers, administrators, stake-holders, other school personnel, and parents. Three themes were created as potential ways to improve the quality of life and increase post-secondary success for children and youth at risk as cited by the lived experiences of Charles and Gabriel. The three themes were: (a) provide empathetic support, instead of being sympathetic; (b) avoid assumptions; and (c) provide opportunities and resources.

Empathy Versus Sympathy

Charles spoke about a handful of educators who were not sympathetic to his life, living situation, or community conditions; instead, they were empathetic. These individuals taught Charles to accept that his life would be hard and provided him with the necessary tools to survive, and even thrive. According to Charles, some educators treat children and at risk youth with sympathy. He went on to report that these students are treated as if they had lost something and should not be challenged. He said, “I think a big piece of what is going on with young folks today is I had people telling me I would be great, even with all the scares and baggage.” He went on to say:

People all the time talk about how they believe in kids and how they believe they can do anything. But they don't do anything to make that belief live. And, that's not faith. Because faith is belief plus action. So, you have to believe that the kids you serve can do something, and you have to do something every day to make sure they have the ability to do that thing.

According to Charles, aside from passing assumptions towards students at risk, there is also a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy by some teachers and the juvenile justice

system. There is a preconceived notion that young men of color will not make it; their struggle is too great.

Charles went on to say:

I talk to teachers, especially, and say, “You are the only one who can determine the truth of these children.” When you say, “That child can’t learn,” you no longer value him. Because everything in your subconscious is gonna work and conspire to make you right. Because nobody wants to be wrong. So, you can’t say that. You can’t. You can’t. If you don’t have the courage . . . there’s this one quote that I use a lot. Hope is, for those of us who do this work, “Hope is mandatory. Because we can’t give what we don’t possess.”

False hope. Charles recalled a time when a teacher accused him of providing false hope to a group of students he was working with. The teacher said, “Do you think it’s fair that you’re giving them all this false hope?” A bit perplexed by her question, Charles asked to her to elaborate on what she meant. She replied, “You know these kids. You’ve seen their records. There’s no way these kids are going to do all this stuff they’re talking about. So, we’re just basically setting them up to be disappointed.” Oftentimes, we cannot change the circumstance for children and youth at risk, so educators and other school personnel believe they are placing within these students’ unattainable goals and dreams.

The teacher went on to say:

I don’t want to pump them up and then they go out into the world, and the world slaps them in the face; and told them that it’s not going to happen. We hedge our bet, and we hedge our encouragement and enthusiasm for the children because we are afraid that some weird thing happens. If they don’t get it, it’s our fault.

Charles believed that we must have hope and empathy for children and youth at risk. Not all children and youth grow up in the same environment. It is important to be cognizant of the population of students that one is working with.

The yard. Words evoke different meanings and different memories for people.

The word “yard” to a young girl who lives in a small town in western Pennsylvania with a yard that has an underground swimming pool, green grass, and the most updated swing-set may evoke a different emotion or memory when compared to that of a man serving time in prison or a child referring to his/her recess area in the bad part of town. Charles reported: “We didn’t have a playground area. We just had asphalt. Our playground area was just concrete.” During the interview, I made several notations when Charles discussed “the yard.” I noted that this was the first time I heard a person refer to his elementary school play area as the “yard.”

According to the Urban Dictionary, “the yard” refers to recreational areas separated by walls or fences to create smaller spaces within a prison . . . essentially a prison within a prison. According to Merriam Webster’s 1913 dictionary, a yard is “an inclosure about a prison, or attached to it.” The exact criteria and rules for the yard(s) is facility-specific. However, yards are typically separated into different areas based on the level of security required for the inmates. Charles did not experience a yard like the young girl who grew up in western Pennsylvania. He did not have a recess area that was inviting, covered with grass or bark chips for safety. He equated his recess area to the yard of a prison--concrete and asphalt. He went on to say: “So we played tackle football. I have scars all over me. But, we just played football. Of course you would get scars and tear up your arm.”

Avoid Assumptions

Growing up, Charles experienced racial tension and discrimination, whether it was from community members, law enforcement, school personnel, the juvenile justice

system, or peers; he was faced with significant challenges. Charles encouraged the destruction of assumptions associated with color. We must eliminate automatically assuming that people of color are untrustworthy or thieves. People of color do not need to be singled-out and followed around convenience stores for fear they will steal something. We must begin to trust each other. We must break racial barriers and support our fellow community members without being fearful.

We must quit assuming that at-risk children and youth live in an unfit environment. Charles discussed that a child of color living in a single-parent home in an unfavorable neighborhood, below the poverty level, with a mother who works multiple jobs is often viewed as a child who lives in a bad and harmful living situation. However, White children and youth living with the same risk factors are not perceived with the same assumptions and preconceived notions. As a result, children and youth of color are placed in the system at disproportionately high rates. Many times, children and youth of color are placed within the system because it is assumed that it is the only way they will get the services and support they need to become successful individuals. It is assumed that their environment at home is unstable, unloving, and unfit, with no legitimate data to support the allegation. Charles urged people to stop making assumptions about children and youth of color.

It is important to note that precautionary measures must be implemented when there is concern of neglect, abuse, and other forms of misconduct towards children and youth, regardless of race. It is important to include observations, reports, interviews, and other forms of data deemed appropriate to ensure all children and youth are safe.

Provide Opportunities

Charles and Gabriel both reported that children and youth need opportunities outside the home that are positive and meaningful. Gabriel reported that he made a great deal of mistakes, but it was the opportunities with which he was presented that permitted him to rise above his circumstance and achieve success. Gabriel believed that students need countless opportunities to right a wrong. Charles went on to say that children and youth should be provided with opportunities to experience art and beauty. He reported that many children who live within the poverty level or are at risk do not have access to art, plays, museums, and live music.

Due to the exposure to art that Charles experienced, he shared stories in which he was able to progress to a higher level of human growth and personal understanding. Charles shared that he was able to appreciate the beautiful things in life. Charles attended plays. He learned to express himself through spoken word. Some of the most memorable moments of joy Charles experienced growing up were a direct result of the family's love and participation in art and with aesthetic beauty. Both participants reported that all children would benefit from access to resources, programs, and opportunities, regardless of socioeconomic status, color of their skin, or location of their home.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Children and youth at risk struggle with post-secondary success. There is an increase in students dropping out of high school and an increase in children and youth who engage in antisocial behaviors. In fact, the number of children and youth who engage in antisocial behaviors has quadrupled since 1990 (Patterson et al., 1990; ECH, 2015). These types of behaviors include, but are not limited to: manipulation, stealing, fire-setting, bullying, hitting, sexual promiscuity, verbal abuse, or lying. What is especially troubling is, of the children and youth who engage in antisocial behaviors, 75% will continue to exhibit those behaviors into adulthood (ECH, 2015). By engaging in antisocial behaviors into adulthood, there is a higher likelihood of divorce, alcoholism, psychiatric concerns, and reliance on welfare (Robins & Ratcliff, 1979).

Currently, minority students are overrepresented in high-incidence disability categories (Bradley et al., 2008), lower levels of socioeconomic status (SES), and unemployment (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). When compared to White American youth, minority youth are considered at risk for having poor post-secondary outcomes (Murray, 2003). Unfortunately, these concerns and issues for children and youth at risk have been documented for decades. Incarceration is on the rise. There are currently 2 million inmates in private, state, or federal prisons (Palaez,

2014). The majority of inmates are African American or Hispanic, and 16% of all inmates have reported mental illness (Palaez, 2014). This is especially concerning since more prisons than schools are being built each year in America. According to the Hamilton Project (2017), this country alone spends 80 billion dollars a year for incarcerated inmates.

The purpose of this current study was to examine resilient and protective factors that may have contributed to the phenomenon of resiliency and self-determination in two participants who exhibited four or more biological or environmental risk factors growing up. A biological risk factor is a factor with which a person has no control; for example: race, gender, and hereditary mental illnesses. An environmental risk factor is based on the environment in which one lives; for example: poverty, living in an unfavorable neighborhood with high crime rates, and child maltreatment. A multiple-case study analysis was conducted to answer the following four research questions:

- Q1 How did the risk factors of these adults affect the participants?
- Q2 What is the lived experience of these adults who had multiple risk factors as children?
- Q3 What factors contributed to the resiliency of these adults?
- Q4 What experiences did these adults associate with self-determination?

The Challenge Associated with Risk Factors

The current study first began to identify the risk themes by each participant. Risk factors were examined and documented in the literature review. The risk themes created for the participants were: (a) poverty; (b) engagement in antisocial behaviors; (c) disability diagnosis; (d) exposure to guns, violence, and drugs; (e) failure of systems (educational and justice); (f) mental health diagnoses; and (g) race.

According to the National Center for Children Living in Poverty (2015), poverty is the single greatest threat to a child's well-being. By living in poverty, children and youth do not have access to resources, effective teachers, and curricula and often live in a chaotic home environment. Children and youth living at the poverty level have an increased likelihood to lack adequate food, shelter, and clothing (Kirby & Fraser, 1997) and do not have access to adequate healthcare (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Murray, 2003).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs also addresses this concept, beginning with the first level of physiological needs (Maslow, year). This level is related to the physical requirement for survival (food, shelter, water, air, and clothing.). Maslow reported that a person may act out in order to have these needs met. Both participants lived below the poverty level. Both participants discussed times when there was not enough food to eat or money to pay the rent. Because Gabriel lived below the poverty level, there was excessive inter-parental conflict. His parents rarely got along. Research has consistently revealed that excessive levels of inter-parental conflict are damaging to the well-being and development of children and can directly affect psychological deficits and antisocial behaviors (OJJDP, 2015; O'Keefe 1994). This was true with both participants. Gabriel suffered with anxiety, depression, and bi-polar disorder and was withdrawn. Both participants engaged in antisocial behaviors.

A study conducted in 1994 (Brooks) found that children and youth who grow up in a chaotic and abusive environment can develop an emotional stigma. Similar findings were reported by Torry and Billick in 2011. This was also true for Gabriel. His home life was chaotic. Research has continued to demonstrate the effects of poverty and the direct impact it has on stress levels, which can cause psychological distress and poor

family management (Larner & Collins, 1996). Both participants relocated homes and school districts regularly in search of cheaper rent. Charles and Gabriel both experienced unstable living situations.

Both participants engaged in antisocial behaviors including violence, fighting, stealing, lying, and vandalism. Both participants were arrested. According to the research, boys are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors when compared to girls (ECH, 2015; Rutter, 1979). Both participants struggled with antisocial behaviors throughout childhood into early adulthood. According to the research, children and youth who are exposed to antisocial behaviors (exposure to guns, violence, and drugs) by their parents can traumatize their children and impede their ability to make meaningful relationships (Torry & Billick, 2011). Gabriel struggled throughout his life to make meaningful relationships with his family and friends. Currently, Gabriel is going through a divorce. By witnessing domestic violence, disrespect, and dysfunction growing up, he became traumatized. The actions and behaviors of his parents have caused Gabriel a great deal of shame and sadness.

Another risk factor that was identified was racial discrimination. Charles was repeatedly exposed to racial discrimination and injustice. When racism, social injustice, discrimination, victimization, or hostility occur, children and youth become angry and frustrated (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). The results directly impact ones' self-esteem and place those children and youth at advanced risk later in life (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). As a result of the racial discrimination Charles experienced, he began to not trust people or law enforcement.

Charles and Gabriel were both impacted by all levels of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development. This ecological model was based on the interactions between systems that occurred in a child's authentic or natural environment. The first level, the microsystem, is considered to be the most influential level of this ecological system. Microsystems represent the closest, most direct contact children and youth experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These close relationships occur between family members, peers, teachers, and caregivers. According to this model, negative interactions between the microsystem can cause children and youth to retreat, withdraw, or engage in risky behavior to meet their needs. This model also examined the cultural system where a child lives and the time of experiences in relation to development. Charles experienced positive microsystems within his family environment; Gabriel experienced positive microsystems within his school environment.

The Power of Resiliency

The more risk factors a child or youth face, the less likely they will achieve a satisfying quality of life or post-secondary success. However, this was not the story that was written by the participants in this study. The risk factors Charles and Gabriel experienced growing up would typically result in just another statistic; but they chose to write their own story. They did not settle for a life that was statistically chosen for them. They rose from the ashes of their circumstances, heartache, and trials to become a Phoenix.

Aside from identifying risk factors from each participant, this study advanced research and identified resiliency and protective factors that enabled Charles and Gabriel

to exhibit post-secondary success. The resiliency themes that were identified from the participants were: (a) exposure to art and beauty; (b) support and belief of a caring adult; (c) making connections; (d) completion of post-secondary education; (e) a belief in a higher power; (f) acceptance of self; and (g) self-determination.

According to Charles, children and youth of color do not typically experience the atheistic aspects of this world. He reported that children and youth who live in poverty, especially young Black and Brown boys, do not have the opportunity, resources, or access to experience plays, exhibits at art museums, poetry slams, live music, or the darkroom of a photographer's studio. Research has clearly revealed that millions of children cannot have their basic needs met because they live below the poverty level. Even though Charles and his family were poor, his family always made sure he was exposed to art and beauty. He regularly attended plays, art museums, poetry readings, and live music. He was able to exit the life of struggle, hardship, and uncertainty to appreciate what Maslow described as the aesthetic phase of his Hierarchy of Human Development. When children live below the poverty level and struggle to have their most basic needs met; their parents may not have the finances, access, or desire to attend such events. However, Charles' parents were artists. By exposing Charles to this lifestyle, they showed him that life was not just the projects, guns, violence, or hatred. Life could be beautiful.

Support and Belief of a Caring Adult

Both participants had people in their lives growing up who supported them and their abilities. Charles had the support of his parents, siblings, and Dr. Lou; Gabriel had the support of several elementary school teachers, Josue, and John. Gabriel did not

welcome more supportive adults because of the devastation he was exposed to since he was a young child. He became leery of people. However, children and youth who have access to the care, affection, support, and guidance of a trusted adult offer the protective factors needed for children at risk to better manage trauma, loss, or stress (Werner, 1993). A caring adult provided both participants an opportunity to be better and accept who they were and who they wanted to be. Adults who believed in the participants offered support for participants to effectively deal with the daily struggles of life and other environmental stressors (Masten, 1994).

Garmezy (1993) reported that warmth and family cohesion is a cornerstone in resiliency. Murray (2003) went on to report that the most influential factor for determining post-secondary success may be a loving, positive relationship between the child and at least one parent. Charles experienced family cohesion and love from both parents. Gabriel, on the other hand, did not experience family cohesion, love, or support from either parent growing up. His family was dysfunctional, broken, and filled with resentment. According to Murray (2003), parents who are involved, emotionally invested, and responsive to their child's needs provided the most positive impact. Gabriel still struggles with the life he was forced to live because of his parents. Charles and Gabriel both managed to reach success, with or without the support of a parent. However, both participants cited the support of a caring adult as a necessary component of their success.

Unidentified Resiliency Factors

Upon completion of this study, three resiliency factors were discovered by the participants that were not identified prior to completing this study: (a) belief in a

higher power; (b) making meaningful connections; and (c) acceptance of self. Both participants cited belief in a higher power as a crucial component of resiliency. Charles even reported that resiliency is not attainable without the belief in a higher power. He described the belief in a higher power as the anchor of resiliency. According to the Search Institute (SI), there are forty Developmental Assets for adolescents that are the stepping stones to becoming healthy, responsible, caring adults (2006). The nineteenth external asset is involvement in an active religious community (SI, 2006). Another resiliency factor is making connections. The research revealed the importance of the support and guidance from at least one parent and/or a caring adult; but, Charles and Gabriel went a step farther to report the importance of making connections. For the purpose of this study, connections were operationally defined as positive interactions with others and the ability to appropriately resolve conflict should it arise. These can be connections with co-workers, friends, peers, or unexpected individuals. Both participants reported that they could connect or navigate with any group of people. It is more challenging for Gabriel to welcome connections, but both developed connections with people other than a trusted adult or parent. Lastly, both participants came to a place of self-acceptance. Even though Charles and Gabriel lived troubled and difficult lives, they had to come to a place of acceptance. They both had to make a choice that was transformative in their life and their ability to rise. Both participants eventually accepted that they could not change their past, the color of their skin, the lifestyles and environments in which they were raised, or the mistakes they made in the past. Charles and Gabriel came to a place of acceptance. You cannot move forward if you cannot

accept who you are and where you came from. Based on the findings of this study, anyone can be anything they choose, despite their past, risk factors, or poor choices.

Self-Determination

Self-determination has been studied for decades and is identified as a necessary component of post-secondary success (Wehmeyer, 1997). Wehmeyer described self-determination as the “dynamic interplay” between individuals and their environment (1996).

Deci and Ryan (1985) described self-determination as “an internal need” necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself to perform. According to the information provided by the participants, three self-determination themes were defined: (a) self-awareness; (b) refusal to give up; and (c) purposeful and prepared planning.

Charles and Gabriel were determined individuals. They both had to look past their living situation, peer-group, or decisions made to move forward. According to Price et al. (2002), self-determination is divided into four categories: (a) behavioral autonomy, (b) self-regulated autonomy, (c) psychological empowerment, and (d) self-realization. Both participants demonstrated all four characteristics. Each participant successfully transitioned from dependence to self-reliance. Each participant had to make choices that would benefit their life. Charles and Gabriel both set goals and ensured that they were achieved. This autonomy can be achieved by offering choices, promoting decision-making skills, and setting goals (Price et al., 2002). Both participants practiced self-regulating behavior which refers to gathering the skills to perform tasks, set goals, and advocate for self or others. Psychological empowerment addresses one’s internal

locus of control, while recognizing that behaviors directly impact outcomes.

Lastly, both participants engaged in self-realization that includes self-awareness and self-evaluation (Price et al., 2002).

Charles

People oftentimes do not value who they are as a person and, therefore, they think they deserve very little out of life. They believe they do not have a say in their life's direction, in their destiny. Similarly to Charles' brother who constantly resounded the words, "People like us don't get to be great," Charles may have believed his choice was already made for him. But, he did not share that viewpoint. Charles made his choice because it was his right. One must have belief in him/herself, self-awareness, and enough truth data to make a purposeful, planned decision. The determination that Charles experienced in his life was tremendous. He was able to examine situations, develop a plan, and have the courage and belief within himself to make his aspirations a reality. Charles rose from the ashes of his circumstances to reclaim his quality of life. It was a choice. It was his choice.

As Charles transformed his life into something his mother could be proud of, he made the choice to no longer just accept his circumstances and fear that things were going to go off the rails; he made the choice to be positive. He was no longer waiting for the football to be moved from underneath him and began to see the world with more hope and light. "I am an optimist." Charles sees the silver lining in unfavorable situations. He had meaningful connections, hope dealers, a belief in a higher power, optimism, self-determination, personal hope, and empathic support that allowed him to step into the light

of his greatness. His moments of greatness have shone the way for others in the darkness; he is now a hope dealer.

Gabriel

From a young age, Gabriel appeared to live a tortured life, internally and externally. He was subjected to violence, guns, and predators of all types. Gabriel believed it was the drugs that ruined his life and corrupted his family. It was this lifestyle that Gabriel was exposed to that put him at the most risk growing up. He was around unsavory people and unhealthy situations. He witnessed domestic violence among many members in his family and watched his brother become sucked into a life of gang violence and uncertainty. Gabriel, too, was violent. He engaged in antisocial behaviors and was arrested as a result of such actions. His life appeared to be in constant turmoil.

Gabriel was raised in a life of secrecy, followed by unanswered questions--all of which still haunt him today. He carries shame and remorse for his past transgressions. He struggles with happiness, as he described it: "That is a concept I don't care much about. Happiness is fleeting." Because of these feelings, he walked around the successful facets of his life quietly, as if not to rock the boat. It appears as though he lives with a great deal of uncertainty, even though he was extremely successful in his academic pursuit and professional career. He has a skewed self-concept. He believes in his abilities, but does not believe in himself. He does not value who he is a person. He takes joy in the happiness of others, but has very little joy for his own successes and achievements. The most joy he has experienced was when his wife gave birth to their daughter. He was the first person to hold her. Gabriel has low self-esteem. He continuously beats himself up for actions of his past, actions that are no longer within his

control. He feels sadness. He has attempted suicide several times and sought to ease his pain through alcohol. Gabriel lives in a pervasive state of sadness, or lack of happiness.

Gabriel has struggled to form meaningful relationships with others. Even though he has a handful of people he values and confides in, he does not have a lot of strong bonds. It was not until the last years of Juan's life that they were able to form a healthy and positive relationship.

Gabriel grew up in poverty, unable to achieve the most basic levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. According to the motivational theory, Gabriel did not achieve the most rudimentary levels of the hierarchy: physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem. According to Maslow, these are not fluid levels; one must achieve one level before advancing to the next to achieve self-actualization and enlightenment. So why was Gabriel resilient? Why did he rise from the ashes to soar like a Phoenix?

Gabriel has a driving force within him that is paramount. He has such a desire to be something, to succeed, to be somebody. From the moment he wakes until he lays his head down each night, he feels this way. However, his obsessive behavior to achieve has not come without a price; it has cost him his marriage, at least momentarily, as he and his wife are separated. It is difficult for him when people complain or criticize him for the amount of time he pours into his employment and work duties. He truly finds peace within the walls of his office. He feels accomplished within those walls.

Gabriel is purposeful and deliberate. His work ethic is second to none. He sets goals and creates plans to achieve those goals. He has transformed his life into a life that he can begin to be proud of, a life that would make others proud. "I have made so many

mistakes. Now, all I can do is try to live a life I can be proud of,” a life that is not riddled with shame or sorrow. The transformation for Gabriel began with a choice. He decided to no longer engage in antisocial behaviors, but rather spend his time in the library. He decided to begin to see what others saw in him. He decided to not get arrested and spend his time behind the bars of a 6 x 8 jail cell. He decided to change his life for the better. He completed his Doctorate of Philosophy degree from a prestigious university and is currently a tenured professor. As life progressed and the dysfunction and heartache from his past fell farther and farther behind him, he slowly began to value himself more and more. He made the calculated decisions that were necessary for him to rise from his circumstance to soar like the Phoenix. He used his internal locus of control and belief that he does have some say in what happens to him.

Gabriel is a fighter. He does not give up, nor does he allow others to decide his destiny or purpose. He decides. Who knows, maybe his resilient characteristics and self-determined qualities were beaten into him before birth; one may even say while he was still in the womb.

Race, poverty, disability, mental health diagnoses, conflict (personal or external), exposure to violence and drugs, living in an unfavorable neighborhood with high crime rates, involvement within the system, lack of parental support and love, abuse, racial discrimination, mother's low educational level, teacher inadequacies, lack of academic support, and family secrecy are all risk factors identified by the participants in the study. However, the participants also identified resiliency factors that led to their success. Resiliency factors the participants cited included love, support, hope, the belief in a higher power, people who believed in them and their abilities (even when they did not

believe in themselves), an internal locus of control, a high self-concept, high self-esteem, self-determination, exposure to art and beauty, meaningful connections (friend and family), post-secondary training, positive experiences outside the home, opportunities, resources, acceptance of self and past, self-advocacy, training, motivation, and a refusal to give-up. It is important to note that each participant did not experience every risk factor or resiliency factor listed. This is a compilation of participant responses.

The stories that were portrayed in this study was not of complete despair and hopelessness. In fact, it was quite the contrary. These were stories of hope, action, and accomplishment. Even though the lives lived by each participant were different, they shared a commonality in their refusal to give up and settle for what their circumstances said was their destiny. The participants created their own destiny. They used the tools, skills, and purposeful planning to create a life that made them proud. They determined the most suitable and deliberate path to change the trajectory of their life. They were purposeful and deliberate in their decision-making and goal-setting. Even though they did not share all of the same resiliency and self-determination factors or qualities, they did what worked for them. They have examined their lives and found what works and what does not. They have struggled and stumbled along the way, but they refused to give up. They have allowed the fire to burn them, consume them, and eventually rebirth them into the beautiful, once broken, vibrant, driven men they are today.

Implications for Practice

This study will add to the very limited number of research studies associated with risk and resiliency. This study will extend the research to include multiple risk factors and the investigation of resiliency factors. The phenomenon of resiliency spans across

several educational and psychological domains. This study cited specific risk factors and resiliency factors, as identified by the participants. The study provided detailed, specific information that could benefit the lives of children and youth now. The research presented could provide the information and tools necessary for educators to become hope dealers. The study listed specific qualities of a hope dealer. This could be used to create educator training sessions. The study went on to examine suggestions and additional awareness that provided specific ideas, themes, and things to avoid when working with all children and youth. This information could also be used to develop programs for educators to advance their knowledge in this area. The information from this study would benefit many educators, parents, and other school personnel. Currently, the racial tension within this country is rising. This study provided insight into racial and social injustice.

By examining the data and results presented, researchers and educators can increase their knowledge of quality of life outcomes for children and youth at risk. The participants provided meaningful data and information that could be used to support improvement in program development and the need for improvement in the educational and juvenile justice systems. The findings of this study could also transfer to parent training workshops.

In order to combat antisocial behaviors, there is a need to increase the number of programs available for children and youth at risk. Teachers and other school personnel may benefit from being trained to effectively implement positive behavior interventions and support programs. Educators could also benefit from the implementation of behavior intervention plans and their purpose. By providing meaningful opportunities in education

and employment, the likelihood that children and youth will engage in antisocial behaviors or delinquent activities decreases. This study revealed that additional programs may offer additional support and training for families, not just within the school system, but the community as well. Additional opportunities and resources for family support should be regularly linked to families.

Suggestions for Future Research

Additional research must be conducted regarding Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs and an individual's ability to advance to higher stages of the hierarchy, when lower levels have not been successfully met. According to Maslow (1943), the levels within the hierarchy are not fluid, meaning one must successfully reach self-actualization. That, however, was not the case for either participant in this study. Both participants reached levels of self-actualization without having met even the most rudimentary levels. Additional research in this area is needed. It would offer additional benefits to understand the fluid transition of children and youth who have not met the basic levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. A study that focuses specifically on how children and youth move to higher levels of this motivational theory without successfully reaching the rudimentary levels is needed.

Research should also be conducted in program development for children and youth at risk in various systems. This includes the juvenile justice system and the educational system. It would benefit the field of education and psychology to continue additional research examining children and youth with multiple risk factors and the impact those risk factors had on their life growing-up. A replicated study with additional participants would extend the knowledge and understanding in this area. It would

provide benefit to extend the research to include additional studies regarding assumptions made regarding children and youth of color. Lastly, Gabriel did not have a strong relationship with his parents until later in life and never experienced family warmth and cohesion, yet he was successful. A study that sought participants who did not have warmth and family cohesion growing up, yet still were successful and lived a high quality of life is needed. A replication of this study would also be beneficial to identify additional resiliency and self-determination factors that may not have been identified within the literature. Lastly, the field of education would benefit from additional research in the relationships between the various systems within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the study were identified. First, it is important to take into consideration the stories told came from the perspective of the participants. Outside sources were not used in this study. Outside sources would have offered additional insight and perspective to the stories being reported by the participants. Another limitation to address is the number of risks that were identified. To be included in the study, the participants were self-identified as being at risk growing-up with at least four risk factors present, however, the weight of the risk factors were not taken into account. For example, a child living in poverty and struggling to eat may be a greater risk than gender. The last limitation of the study provides insight and awareness for educators, policy-makers, and parents, but does not provide the specific steps or program development tools needed to create or improve programs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine four or more biological and environmental risk factors that were combated with resiliency factors and self-determination qualities that lead to participant success. Risk factors identified by were: racial discrimination or injustice, poverty, disability, mental health diagnoses, conflict (personal or external), exposure to violence and drugs, living in a neighborhood with high crime rates, constant relocation of homes and schools, involvement within the judicial system, lack of parental support and family cohesion, physical abuse, teacher abuse and neglect, lack of academic support, and family secrecy. The study also presented resiliency factors, some of which were not identified within the literature. The resiliency factors identified by the participants were: a) exposure to art and beauty; (b) support and belief from a caring adult; (c) making connections; (d) completing post-secondary education; (e) belief in a higher power; (f) acceptance of self; and (g) self-determination. The study also listed three limitations: (a) personal perspective of the participants, (b) weight of the risk factors, and (c) specific steps were not provided to improve programs for children and youth at risk. Future research was also discussed. This study offers hope, direction, and insight into improving the quality of life for children and youth at risk. By using the literature previously reported and the additional information provided by the participants, change is possible. When working with children or youth at risk, we must become hope dealers in their dark world. We must seek the light, no matter how dim or hidden it is within all children. After all, according to Charles, "For those of us who chose this important work, hope is mandatory. Because we cannot give what we do not possess.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
AND CONSENT FORMS



Institutional Review Board

DATE: July 22, 2016

TO: Heather Beam

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [932876-2] Stretched but Not Broken: A Multiple-Case Study Analysis of Risk and Resiliency

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: July 22, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: July 22, 2020

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Hello Heather,

Thank you for the requested modifications. Your IRB application is approved and good luck with this important research.

Sincerely,

Nancy White, PhD, IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.



Informed Consent for Participation in Research

University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: Stretched but Not Broken: A Multiple-Case Study Analysis of Risk and Resiliency

Researcher: Heather D. Beam, Doctoral Candidate School of Special Education

Phone Contact: 303.880.8462

e-mail: beam4028@bears.unco.edu

Research Advisor: Tracy Mueller, Ph. D, BCBA-D e-mail: tracy.mueller@unco.edu

Phone Contact: 970.351.1664

The purpose of this research study is to explore risk factors and how they may or may not have related to resiliency factors in the lives of two participants. This information can be used to inform the field of special education, general education, and psychology about the phenomenon of resiliency. You are invited to participate in this research project because you expressed an interest and met the criteria to be included.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If at any time during the research study you wish to withdraw, you may do so. During this study, you will be asked to discuss sensitive, potentially traumatic experiences that occurred in your life. If any interview or conversation becomes too difficult; we will discontinue the interview or conversation for a later date or not revisit the topic again.

The study involves five major components: a demographic survey, interviews, personal and public records, artifacts, potential outside sources, participant journal, and researcher journal/log. First, I will ask you to complete a brief demographic survey through a link provided by Qualtrics. This survey will ask basic questions pertaining to demographic information (gender, age, birthdate, location of birthplace, ethnicity, highest level of education completed, household composition, marital status, professional or employment status, and dependents). Three, 2-hour long interviews will be conducted discussing cultural experiences, risk factors, school and community experiences, relationships, and resiliency factors. These interviews can take place over several days (depending on your preference) and may exceed 10 hours total. I will also ask you to identify any outside sources that could potentially be interviewed to offer me additional information, perspective, or insight into your past. Interviewing outside sources will be

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_____ (participant initials here)

dependent on availability and willingness to participate. This interview will be less than one hour in length.

Next, I will ask you to produce artifacts or documents that may be beneficial to this study. These may include any public documents (such as: police reports, arrest records, court transcripts, agency documents, etc.), personal documents (such as: Individualized Education Programs, grade reports, office referrals, expulsion records, journals, letters, calendars, travel logs, medical records, etc.), and/or additional artifacts (such as: books, artwork, newspaper clippings, personal websites, photo albums, videos, recorded school performances, recorded extra curricular activities or sports performances). These artifacts and documents will provide additional information, clarification, and insight regarding experiences you had. Lastly, you will be asked to keep a journal throughout this research study. The journal may include information you failed to mention and remembered at a later date; an “ah-ha” moment of discovery that was constructed throughout the process, feelings or memories that may have been purposefully forgotten or suppressed, questions that may arise throughout the process, and anything the participants deem worthy. This journal will also include several writing prompts for further analysis. Example of writing prompts may include: My favorite memory; My worst memory: If I could go back to one day in time, it would be (etc.).

All information gathered will be kept confidential and your name will not be used when sharing information or reporting data. The interviews will be recorded for the purpose of allowing me to correctly report the information, however, all data will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked room or under digital passcode protection. The data will be destroyed after 5 years.

Due to sensitivity of the information you will be disclosing and the potential risk or discomfort factors it may cause; you will be provided with the number to a local crisis prevention center. It is important to note, that I am a mandated reporter and if information gathered from you is detrimental to your personal safety or the safety of others, appropriate authorities will be contacted. A direct referral will be made to authorities for cutting or other self-injurious behaviors, inability to control emotions and reports of feeling unsafe, suicidal or homicidal ideations, or personal request. At the end of each interview, I will debrief with you asking you to rate your sense of safety. You will be asked to rate “how safe you feel” based on a scale from 1 to 5 (1- needing outside support or crisis protocol; 5- feeling safe and unaffected in a negative way by the interview).

You will also benefit directly from participating in this study by gaining personal knowledge and insight into your past. Your stories will benefit the field of special education, psychology, and education by providing data and descriptive-rich text about the phenomenon of resiliency.

Please feel free to contact me via phone or e-mail if you have any questions or concerns about the study. If you would like to participate in the study, read the passage below. Thank you for assisting me in my study.

Sincerely,
Heather D. Beam

page 2 of 3

_____ (participant initials here)

Participant's Signature Date

Researcher's Signature Date

Participation is voluntary, and you may to decide to withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not interfere with any benefits you may be entitled to. Having read the above and having had the opportunity to ask questions, please provide the requested information if you would like to participate in the study. Please retain a copy of this form for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please Sherry May, IRB Administrator, in the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80630; 970-351-1910.

APPENDIX B**POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT DRAFT EMAIL**

Hello.

My name is Heather Beam. I am currently finishing my coursework at the University of Northern Colorado in the Special Education PhD program. My area of research focus involves students with behavioral challenges. Prior to beginning my doctoral journey, I was an Emotional Support Teacher for 8 years. I saw firsthand the struggles, hardships, educational obstacles, and everyday risks that negatively impacted these students. But throughout my coursework, I realized that risks do not only impact students with disabilities; risks impact most children and youth in some capacity. According to research, students at risk and students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders experience similar dismal outcomes and poor quality of life. But not for all. Some rise-up and overcome. I want to study that resiliency.

I had reached out to professional contacts and colleagues to recruit potential participants for my research study. Your name was given to me by _____ as someone I should contact. We believe you would be an excellent resource for me to talk with regarding risk and resiliency.

I know you are very busy, but I would greatly appreciate any time you could spend talking with me about my study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Heather Beam M.A.

Ph.D. Student
University of Northern Colorado
School of Special Education
beam4028@bears.unco.edu

APPENDIX C

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Heading: Stretched but not Broken: A Multi-Case Study Analysis on Risk and Resiliency

Instructions: I would like to learn more about your experiences growing up. During this interview, please provide as much detailed information as you can about the questions being asked and experiences you may have had relating those questions.

Thank You Statement: Thank you for taking the time to talk with me and allowing me into your life.

Questions Asked:

Describe your birthplace.

Describe your family and situation (family dynamic) growing-up.

Describe your elementary, middle, and high school school experience.

Describe the relationships you had with adults growing-up.

Describe your relationship with peers and friends within the community.

Did you have anyone in your life growing-up that believed in you? Describe this person or persons and your relationship.

Describe your birthdays and holidays growing-up.

Describe your overall lived experience growing-up with multiple risk factors as a child.

What does the word resiliency mean to you?

What factors contributed to your resiliency?

What is self-determination?

What experiences do you associate with self-determination?

APPENDIX D
RISK AND RESILIENCY THEMES,
PARTICIPANT 1

Risk Themes:

Poverty

Feast of Famine

Fight Club

Project Living

Disability

Race

Racial Discrimination

Failure of Systems

Family Dynamic

Divorced Parents

Within Family Conflict

Constant Relocation

Resiliency Themes:

Exposure to Art and Beauty

Hope Dealers

Making Connections

Post-Secondary Education

Belief in a Higher Power

Self-Determination

Refusal to Give Up

APPENDIX E
RISK AND RESILIENCY THEMES,
PARTICIPANT 2

Risk Themes:

Exposure to guns, violence, and drugs

Family Secrecy

Poverty

Engagement in Antisocial Behaviors

Mental Health Diagnoses

Suicide Attempts

Resiliency Themes:

Belief in Me

Teachers

Parents

Post-Secondary Education

Belief in a Higher Power

Self-Determination

Motivated

Planned and purposeful